

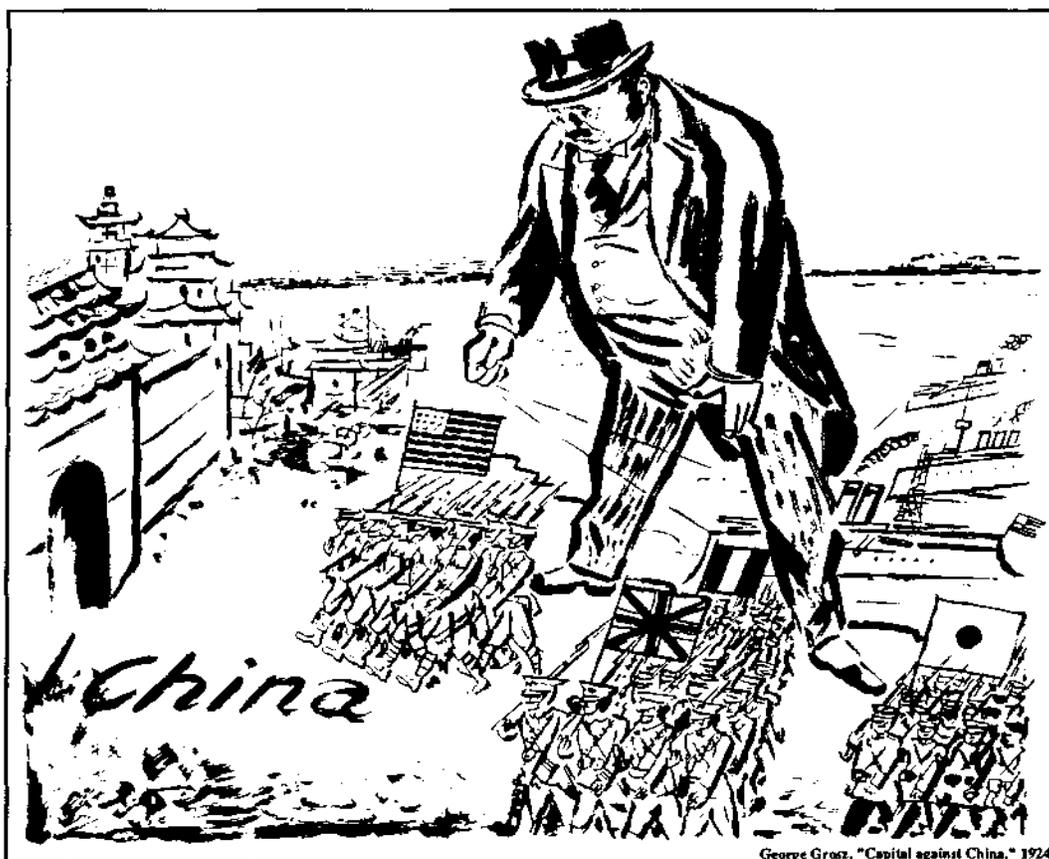
# NOTEBOOKS

*for study and research*

## THE CHINESE REVOLUTION

Pierre Rousset

### Part I: The Second Chinese Revolution and the shaping of the Maoist outlook



# The Chinese Revolution

by Pierre Rousset

## Part I: The Second Chinese revolution and the shaping of the Maoist outlook

### Foreword

The Chinese revolution of 1949 represents one of the most important experiences in the history of twentieth century labor and national liberation movements. It triggered a wide-ranging debate among, and often inside, the various revolutionary currents existing around the world. The lessons of this great revolution still deserve consideration over thirty-five years after its victory.

The following study is meant as a contribution to this necessary discussion. It began as a series of lectures delivered in 1980-1982 at the International Institute for Research and Education. A first draft was published and circulated by the IIRE from 1982 to 1985. The present version is a substantial reworking of that draft and includes new appendices. It makes no claim to being comprehensive. Its sole purpose is to analyze some of the key questions raised by the history of the Chinese revolution.

A first part (published as *NSR* n°2) deals with the 1920s: the Second Chinese revolution, its lessons, the evolution of the Communist movement, the emergence of Maoism and the beginning of the adversary relations which developed between the Chinese CP leadership and the Stalinist Soviet CP leadership.

A second part (to be published as *NSR* n°3) analyzes the 1920s: the formation of the Maoist leadership, the pattern of revolutionary struggles during the Third Chinese revolution, the Anti-Japanese united front and Maoist strategy, and discusses the foundations of the revolutionary regime established in 1949.

These notes have no ambition other than to contribute to an already rich debate. We hope that further essays concerning other periods (notably the period of the People's Republic) and delving further into certain issues (such as a more precise analysis of land ownership and agrarian policies and of the building and functioning of the CCP, for instance), will complement this work.

The publication of these two *Notebooks* is meant first and foremost as an invitation to participate in a discussion. We hope to encourage our readers to join us in a collective effort to research and reflect upon the issues raised by this revolution.

The English-language edition of this *Notebook* includes slight corrections of the original French edition. Wherever possible, we have sought to quote the already published English version of texts and indicate English-language equivalents of the French-language reference books cited. When that was not possible, the footnote indicates the French-language work from which the quote was translated or the reference drawn.

#### Acknowledgements

I wish to thank John Barzman, Aldo Bronzo, Gregor Benton, Daniel Bensai'd, Michel Debourdeau, Daniel Hennery, Roland Lew, Michael Lowy, Herman Pieterse, my father, David Rousset, Fritjoff Tichelman, the students of the IIRE and other friends who, through their critical comments, helped me to rework the initial manuscript. Translated from the French by John Barzman.

Setting the stage:

## A Chronology of modern China

### From the Opium Wars to the foundation of the CCP

The revolutionary struggles that convulsed China from the 1920s to 1950 sprang to a large extent from the major events of the previous century: the trauma of Chinese society under the blows of colonial powers soon to be followed by the imperialist policies of the West and Japan; the overthrow of the imperial dynasty and the dead-end of the Republican revolution of 1911; the great social and economic upheavals that undermined the base of the old order. We have put together a brief descriptive chronology of modern China - from 1839 to 1921, the year the CCP was founded— to suggest or recall this agitated history to our non-specialist readers. A more compressed chronology of the period from 1921 to 1949 is available at the end of Part II (*NSR* n°3.)

### From the Opium Wars to the First Chinese revolution: 1840-1911

**1839-1899: China enters the modern world**, a world of imperialist plunder, social and economic upheavals, revolts and revolutions.

**1839-1842:** First "Opium War" waged by Britain to open the Chinese market to opium produced in British India.

**1842-1849: "Unequal Treaties"** with Britain (Nanking Treaty: 1842-43), France and the United States (1844). Hong Kong becomes a British colony. Five Chinese ports are opened to foreign trade, and territorial "concessions" granted to the Western Powers.

**1850-1864:** The **Taiping Revolt**, a vast egalitarian uprising of the peasantry.

**1856-1860:** The **Second Opium War**, waged by France and Britain, is concluded with the Treaties of Tientsin (1858) and Peking (1860). Russia grabs vast territories in the northwest.

**1860-1865:** Several **"modernization movements"** ripple through Chinese society but remain superficial.

**1885-1894:** Franco-Chinese War (1885) and new **"unequal treaties"** with France and Japan. China recognizes French sovereignty over Vietnam and Portuguese port rights in Macao, and bows before Japanese influence in Korea.

**1885-1894:** New attempts to stabilize and bolster the Chinese state. Western and Japanese capitalisms reach the **imperialist stage**; the noose tightens around China. Imperialist economic penetration increases. Natural calamities and popular uprisings wrack several Chinese provinces.

**1894-1895:** Japan and China clash over Korea. By the Treaty of Shimonoseki, China renounces its suzerain rights over Korea and turns Taiwan and the Penghu (Pescadores) Islands over to Japan.

**1895-1900:** The "carving up" of China: Germany, then the United States, swing into action, close behind Britain, France, Russia and Japan, each trying to establish its own **"zone of influence."** In 1899, the United States imposes the so-called **Open Door policy**, a sort of mutual guarantee insuring the collective domination of China by the Powers. Imperialist economic penetration takes a new leap forward.

**1898-1899:** Failure of the **One Hundred Days Reform**, an attempt by reformist Learned Men, including Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao and Tan Sitong, to modernize the Chinese state.

### ***1900-1911: The crisis of the imperial regime and the revolution of 1911***

**1900-1901: The Boxer revolt.** It is drowned in blood by an international military expedition. Eleven Powers impose a **Protocol** on China designed to weaken the country militarily and financially. In 1900, **Sun Yatsen** plans an uprising but the venture is cut short.

**1901-1911:** Attempts at reform from above fail. Imperialist economic interests grow stronger. A modern industrial sector (factories, railroads, mines, ports and shipping) develops together with a Chinese bourgeoisie, the student milieu and a new intelligentsia. Agitation spreads through the countryside.

**1905:** The defeat of the Russian Empire at the hands of Japan fosters a new rise of national feelings in Asia. Sun Yatsen founds the Sworn League (**Tungmenhui**).

**1907-1911:** Sun Yatsen organizes eight uprisings in the South; all fail.

**1911:** The agony of the imperial regime ends with the **republican revolution of 1911** (the First Chinese revolution). The latter finally breaks out, by surprise, further north (**uprising of Wuchang on October 10, 1911**). After three months of fighting, the Republic of China is proclaimed on **January 1, 1912**. Sun Yatsen is the first president of the government.



From the breakdown of the republican regime to the emergence of the workers movement: 1912-1921

#### **1912-1916: Warlord rule in China**

The republican revolution of 1911 and the Nanking republican government chaired by Sun Yatsen make bourgeois democratic ideals a legitimate cause. The old dynastic system is definitively smashed. This represents a genuine historical **turning point**. But the new regime proves incapable of reuniting the country and imposing its authority. In fact, the **revolution of 1911** opens a period of great political, national and social instability which foreshadows the revolutionary upheavals of the twenties.

As early as **March 1912**, Sun Yatsen is replaced by General Yuan Shikai; the latter gradually imposes a personal dictatorship. The **Guomindang**, established in 1912 as the continuation of Sun Yatsen's Tungmenhui, goes into crisis. By 1913, Sun and many other Guomindang cadres leave the country once again, for exile in Japan.

**Japan** takes advantage of the eclipse of the Western Powers caused by World War One. It presents China with its **"21 Demands,"** a plan designed to transform the country into a Japanese protectorate.

Although these demands cause widespread indignation in China, Yuan signs a treaty with Tokyo on this broad basis in **1915**.

Following Yuan's death in 1916, a parliamentary regime is formally restored. But China has entered the era of the **Warlords:** the army divides and real power is wielded by generals who run the provinces as regional despots.

The **wave of industrialization** spreads and accelerates: rice-processing is mechanized in many new factories and the cotton industry (spinning and weaving) takes off in the coastal regions (particularly Shanghai). The proletariat emerges.

#### **1916-1921: Birth of the Republic of Canton and of the CCP**

China is affected by the various consequences of World War One. The United States and Japan consolidate their influence, with the latter power more and more assuming the role of "policeman of the Far-East," including against the newly-established Bolshevik power in Siberia.

As international conferences discuss the settlement of the war, many social layers assert their national feelings with force: traders, students, intellectuals, manual and white-collar workers in the "concessions"... These feelings grow stronger in 1918 and reach a high pitch in **1919** with the **May Fourth Movement**. One reason is the decision of the Powers seated at the Versailles Peace Conference to reject the demands of the Chinese delegation, and transfer German rights and privileges over Shandong to Japan instead of returning them to China.

Following the collapse of the Second International and the Russian revolution of 1917, the Communist International (Comintern) is founded in 1919 (first congress) and 1920 (second congress). The second congress adopts two resolutions on the national and colonial questions. In September 1920, the first Congress of the Peoples of the East is held in Baku; in 1921, the third congress of the Comintern is held.

The May Fourth Movement gives rise to great **intellectual ferment:** intense discussions are held about the ideals of nationalism, the future of China, tradition and modernization, openness to the world and defense of the Chinese cultural legacy, Enlightenment philosophy, Anarchism, Socialism and many other such issues. The modern organized **labor movement** emerges with the formation of trade unions beginning in 1918. Strikes break out in the industrial centers. The influence of the **Russian revolution** is enhanced by the fact

that it appears as the natural ally of the national liberation movement. Intellectuals such as Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao, who later join the **Chinese Communist movement**, emerge as the foremost representatives of the May Fourth Movement.

The crisis of the central government becomes more acute. Famine breaks out in some rural regions. The **Guomindang** is reorganized in 1919. **In 1920-1921, a new government is established in the Canton region**, in the South, including the Guomindang. Sun Yatsen is once again made President of the Republic. But his regime wields actual power over the surrounding region only. The Warlords still hold most of the country in their grip.

Marxism begins to congeal in China, with the aid of Comintern envoys: one of them, Voitinsky, arrives in China in 1920. In **1921, the Chinese Communist Party** holds its first congress (57 members). Chen Duxiu is elected general secretary of the party. Building trade unions in industry is defined as the party's priority task. Peasant unions led by Communists (Peng Pai) appear in Guangdong province. At the time, Mao Zedong is secretary of the CP in Hunan province.



## Chapter One

### Before Maoism: rise and defeat of the Second Chinese revolution -1921-1935

With the end of World War One, Chinese society was thrown into crisis. This was a deep structural crisis that affected at once the political, economic, social and cultural spheres. Its roots stretched back in time to the decay of the Manchu imperial regime, the encounter with the Western world and its technical superiority, the penetration of international capitalism and the formation of new social classes.<sup>1</sup>

At that point, in late 1918, the course of the Chinese revolution was not yet objectively determined. Several paths towards the conquest of power were conceivable. History was particularly "open-ended" because China stood at the "crossroads" of several historical trends. The social and political correlation of forces between classes on both the national and international levels was very fluid.

As a result, outside a few broad features such as the weight of the national and agrarian questions, the path to revolutionary victory was not yet defined precisely. It was to be determined by the outcome of the great post-World War One struggles —1925-1934— and the Japanese invasion of China in 1937.

The young Chinese Communist movement and the Comintern had to grapple with a broad range of key strategic questions for the first time in life-size during the 1920s. The experiences of China in the 1920s, in particular, illustrated the new social, political and international dialectics of liberation struggles in semi-colonial countries in their full complexity.

Although Mao's writings and activities before 1928 included some notions that later became part of his "thought," Maoism was not born at the same time as the Chinese Communist Party, in the early 1920s. It only really began to take shape in the late 1920s and during the 1930s, when Mao elaborated his overall strategy and won over the real leadership of the Party.

Because of the historical importance of the Second Chinese revolution, many currents, including the Trotskyist, have

---

<sup>1</sup> In particular, see Lucien Bianco, *Les Origines de la révolution chinoise*, Paris: Gallimard, 1967. See also: Jacques Guillermez, *A -History of the Chinese Communist Party 1921-1949*, New York: Random House, 1972; and Jean Chesneaux, Françoise Barbier and Marie-Claude Bergere, *China from the 1911 revolution to Liberation*, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1977, 372p.

usually given particular attention and stress to the study of that experience. By contrast, Maoist currents have generally stressed the study of the Third Chinese revolution. That, indeed, was the Maoist revolution *par excellence*. Yet, the lessons of the former are a useful complement to those of the latter.

In fact, to understand the formation of Maoism, to discuss the paths to national liberation in semi-colonial countries, to analyze the problems of the united front, for these and many other reasons, it is necessary to compare the lessons of these two great revolutions.

The Second Chinese revolution, which culminated in 1926-1927, was preceded by a period of more gradual rise of struggles from 1918 to 1924. We shall therefore deal with these two periods separately, before moving on to the period of ebb of the struggle, from 1928 to 1935.

#### From the foundation of the CCP to 1924: convergence

The early years of Communism in China were dominated by two large questions:

- the proper relationship between the workers' movement and the national movement, and between the CCP and the Guomindang; and
- the proper relationship between the Soviet state and the Canton government, and between the Communist International and the Chinese parties.

These relationships developed at a time when China was in the throes of a mutation. The general situation evolved very rapidly. Full account must be taken of this transformation if one is to understand the problems which the young Communist Party as well as the Comintern envoys faced.

#### **The beginning situation**

Among the salient features of the early 1920s, we should note the following:

- A massive wave of popular and national struggles was rising. This movement was very different from that of the 1911-1912 period. Inside China, social and political forces which had been only marginal, now asserted their strength. Outside China, the geography of the imperialist world had been transformed by the world war. The USSR now existed as an ally of liberation movements, unlike any ally they had known before. A new revolution, not a mere rerun of the First Chinese revolution, was in progress.

- The CCP and organized labor

movement were emerging simultaneously. Both were the direct product of the process of industrialization heralded by the spread of modern rice processing factories in 1900 and cotton spinning and weaving mills in 1915. This young working class had experienced the trauma of being uprooted and savagely exploited. It was entering into struggle and beginning to organize.

The numbers of the working class grew rapidly: one estimate placed its size at 650 000 for all China in the 1915 to 1920 period, and one and a half million in the early 1920s. It was concentrated: in Shanghai in 1923, 57 factories employed between 500 and 1000 workers and another 49 employed over 1000 workers. Nevertheless, despite its concentration, the working class remained an infinitely small minority in the country as a whole: "In 1933, manufacturing industry accounted for only 3% to 6% of the national income. One third of all machines, over 60% of textile production and four fifths of garment output was accounted for by the artisanal sector (...) Only .25% of the active population worked in factories."<sup>2</sup>

The modern workers movement was now, for the first time, in a position to be a direct actor in the events that were about to unfold, but it was not yet in a position to implement in practice its leadership of the national struggles.

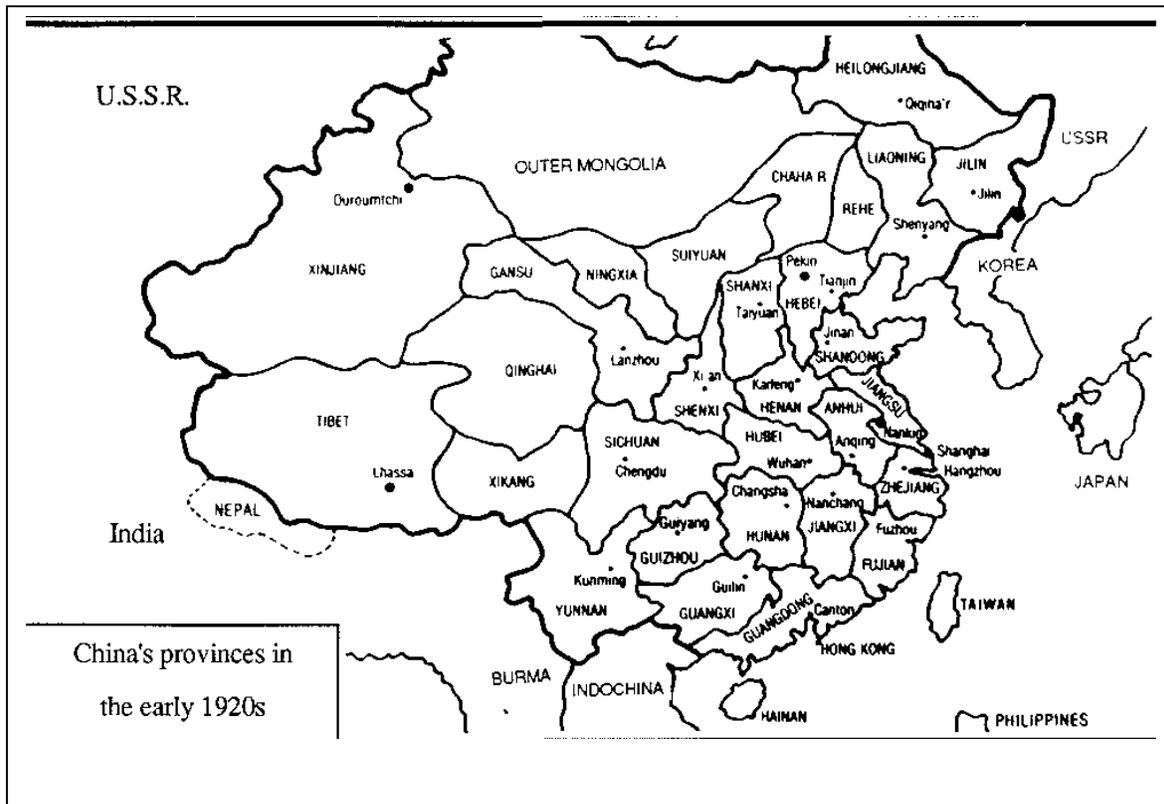
The CCP, for instance, was founded in 1921 with 57 members, almost all intellectuals.

- These limitations were enhanced by the uneven impact of the expansion of the capitalist market and concomitant socio-economic transformation of different parts of China. The vast hinterland had developed much more slowly than the coastal regions, the Yangzi valley and Manchuria. These social transformations were already sufficient to set a new interaction between urban and rural struggles into motion; but this dialectic of country and city was to operate in different ways in the various parts of China.

- Without the peasantry, the proletariat was helpless. The peasantry constituted the overwhelming majority of the population. The land question was at the very heart of the socio-political contradictions. In many regions, the shortage of arable land and the tiny size of land tenures made tensions within the peasantry particularly acute, dividing it into rich, middle and poor peasants. The crisis of the central government further upset the traditional equilibrium of the village. The increasing burden of taxes evoked violent resistance.

---

<sup>2</sup> Roland Lew, *1949: Mao prend le pouvoir*, Brussels: Editions complexes, 1980, p. 85.



Nonetheless, the peasant movement was not united due to different regional circumstances, local traditions and the vastness of the country. Moreover, it was often unstable.

- The acuteness of the national question was striking in this country which had built its unity around an ancient civilization, only to fall to the rank of a semi-colony and see its sovereignty split up among many contenders. The hopes for a Chinese recovery aroused by the republican revolution of 1911 were disappointed. But the national movement remained a tremendous latent force. The reunification of the country and national independence were clearly central demands.

- The social movement expressed itself mainly through the mold of the national movement. This was the crucible in which the class consciousness of the proletariat was being formed. The spirit of ideological unanimity which had been a feature of the national movement had not yet been broken by the experience of the betrayal of a bourgeoisie, too spineless to fight to the end for the national and popular aspirations expressed in the revolution of 1911-1912. This break only occurred in the years from 1925 to 1927.

- The Guomindang, with its base around Canton in the South, was weak, disorganized and divided. But it represented a prestigious national tradition symbolized by Sun Yatsen. This party-government carried on a form of populist propaganda and crystallized the identity of the oppressed nation around its flag, its name and its perspective: to reconquer the unity of the country through a vast military campaign against the Warlords of Central and Northern China, against the Peking government, and thereby, to reconquer China's independence. This theme of "The Northern Expedition" had a strong mobilizing appeal.

- Finally, on the international plane, China's importance grew from year to year. Not least, in the eyes of Moscow, which, beginning in 1923, felt the prospects for revolution had been postponed for a long time in Europe and hoped that the encirclement of the first workers state could be broken or loosened in the Far-East. In this context, it should be noted too that China was one of the countries where World War Two began.

## The events

Meeting at the Washington conference from November 1921 to February 1922, the Powers decided to scale down Japan's status and force it to return Shandong to China. Nevertheless, despite the formal abolition of "zones of influence," imperialist domination of the country continued. Warlord power reached its apex. The political fragmentation of China served the interests of the Powers who demanded controlling rights over Chinese railways in 1923.

With the end of World War One, Western capital and goods flooded the Chinese market again. Chinese industries were thrown into crisis, notably the cotton, rice and oil processing factories, the silk industry and the steel works of the Mid-Yangzi valley and Manchuria.

The Chinese Communist Party expanded its international activities. It sent representatives to the Congress of Toilers of the Far-East, held in Moscow in January 1922; the Guomindang did likewise. Some CCP cadres spent time in France (Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping). It held its second congress in July 1922 (123 members). It attended the yearly congresses of the Comintern.

The workers movement took the initiative with the victorious strike of Hong Kong seamen from January to March 1922. Communist activists were thrust into leadership of many struggles and organizations: among the railroad workers, in the steel industry, arsenals, mines and textile industry. The first National Congress of Labor, which officially represented 300 000 workers met in Canton on May 1, 1922. In February 1923, though, the Warlords brutally suppressed the labor movement in the North; trade unions lost ground there as well as in Central China.

The conflict between Sun Yatsen and the Warlords became acute. In April-May 1922, an attempted military expedition against the North failed; by July, Sun Yatsen was temporarily pushed out of Canton. This was the context in which the Guomindang opened talks with the delegate of the Communist International in China, the Dutchman Henk Sneevliet (Maring).

These talks led to the January 26, 1923, Joint Manifesto of Sun Yatsen and Adolf Joffe, which began as follows:

"Dr. Sun is of the opinion that, because of the nonexistence of conditions favourable to their successful application in China, it is not possible to carry out either Communism or even the Soviet system in China. Mr. Joffe agrees entirely with this view; he is further of the opinion that China's most important and most pressing problems

are the completion of national unification and the attainment of full national independence. With regard to these great tasks, Mr. Joffe has assured Dr. Sun of the Russian people's warmest sympathy for China, and of (their) willingness to lend support."<sup>3</sup>

The Manifesto heralded the beginning of extensive cooperation between the USSR and Canton government. Maring had proposed that the CCP join the Guomindang as early as 1922. Now, Sun Yatsen demanded that the Communists' integration be carried out through individual admissions. Their integration was approved in Moscow and confirmed by the third congress of the Chinese Communist Party in June 1923. At the time, the CCP had 432 members. The basis for the agreement between the two parties was a joint struggle for the reunification of China against the Warlords and imperialist domination.

In June 1923, Michael Borodin, the Soviet political adviser, arrived in China. Chiang Kai-shek went to Moscow. The Guomindang gathered its various institutions in a national confab in January 1924. This convention approved the new international alliance with the USSR, and the new national alliance with the CCP. It elected three Communists, including Li Dazhao, as full members of the Central Committee of the Guomindang, and six others, including Mao, as alternates. Communist militants were accepted as full members of the Guomindang.

Thus, as a vast national and popular movement began unfolding, an alliance was concluded between a faction of the Chinese bourgeoisie organized in the Guomindang and the budding labor movement led by the Communist Party. This alliance took the form of the "united front from within," the "bloc within."

Moscow cooperated closely with the Canton government, but it also signed treaties with the Peking government as well as with Zhang Zuolin, the general in control of Manchuria. Soviet aid played a very important role in strengthening both the nascent Communist movement and the Guomindang: it helped to establish the Whampoa Military Academy (with Chiang Kai-shek and Zhou Enlai); to strengthen the Guomindang's "Propaganda Corps" and organizational apparatus; and to consolidate the Communists' implantation in the trade unions...

---

<sup>3</sup> "Joint Manifesto of Sun Yat-sen and A. A. Joffe," January 26, 1925, in Conrad Brandt, Benjamin Schwartz and John K. Fairbank, eds., *A Documentary History of Chinese Communism*, New York: Atheneum, 1973, p. 70.

## Initial comment on these events

It is clear then that the combined activity of the Comintern and Soviet diplomacy actively contributed to the parallel growth of the CCP and Guomindang between 1923 and 1925. The Guomindang's army, though, was precisely the force that would smash the popular and Communist movement and drown it in blood in 1927. How should one explain this behavior which, in retrospect, seems close to criminal blindness?

In my opinion, it would be wrong to seek the answer primarily in factional terms (Stalinist control over Comintern policy). Moscow's support for both the CCP and Guomindang and the Communists' entry into the nationalist party were decided and implemented before the internal struggles of the Bolshevik Communist Party of the Soviet Union had begun to influence Chinese policy directly. The Guomindang had already been invited to participate in the Congress of the Peoples of the East in 1921. The people who embodied Comintern policy in China in this initial period were not supporters of Stalin. In fact, the most prestigious of them were to become Left Oppositionists: Adolf Joffe and Henk Sneevliet.

Rather than proceeding by analogy with the 1926-1927 period, a better approach is to examine the period from 1921 to 1924 in its own context, taking into account the motivations and orientations which existed at that time.

The second congress of the Comintern had adopted Theses (drafted by Lenin) and Supplementary Theses (drafted by the Indian N. M. Roy), whose general line can be summarized as follows:

- support to all revolutionary liberation movements in the colonies and semi-colonies, even if they were bourgeois movements;
- for an alliance between the national liberation movement and the USSR against imperialism;
- building the organized labor movement and communist parties in these countries;
- the perspective that the national revolution could grow over into a socialist revolution thanks to the activity of the national CPs and to the role of the USSR.

The fact is, it was the existence of the first workers state that opened the Comintern to consider the possibility of a "leap" over the stage of capitalist development without having really settled the issues posed by the analysis of the class formations of the colonial and semicolonial world of that epoch.

Differences had arisen around these issues in the debates held in commissions and plenary sessions. They concerned the evaluation of the importance of the national upsurge in the East, the very principle of support to nationalist movements (an issue around which Lenin and Roy blocked against the Italian Serrati), and the proper place of alliances with bourgeois nationalist forces (with Roy presenting a left critique of Lenin's policy).

But these differences were probably not the main problem. In reality, the general orientation of the two series of Theses, as amended by the commissions and adopted by the congress, were rather clear.<sup>4</sup> What was not, was precisely the real situation prevailing in the colonial and semicolonial countries of that epoch. These societies had had very diverse histories. Each one had been affected by the development of imperialism more or less recently and very unevenly, depending, for instance, on its location. As a result, the social formations to which the Theses applied were very diverse and in the throes of rapid change. The Communist movement only attempted to elaborate a typology of these countries later, at the fourth congress of the Comintern.<sup>5</sup>

Tsarist Russia was not a semicolonial country. The problem Communists faced was therefore a new one. They had to accumulate some knowledge and experiences before proceeding to elaborate their position further. The question "who are our allies, who are our enemies" was not merely an ideological one. It concerned practice: through what social-political force could one promote and implement a line of action at that time? In most of the countries

---

<sup>4</sup> The two series of Theses adopted at the second congress of the Communist International as well as a transcript of the debates of the plenary sessions can be found in *Second Congress of the Communist International, Minutes of the Proceedings*, Vol. 1, London: New Park, 1977. Some aspects of the work of the commissions and the relationship of Lenin and N. M. Roy are documented in Branko Lazitch and Milorad Drachkovitch, *Lenin and the Comintern*, Stanford: Hoover Institute, 1972, chapter 9.

<sup>5</sup> The resolutions of the second and fourth congresses of the Comintern can be found in *Theses, Resolutions and Manifestos of the First Four Congresses of the Third International*, London: Ink Links and Humanities Press, 1980. Unfortunately, this edition does not include the "Supplementary Theses" adopted at the second congress. See also Jane Degras, ed., *The Communist International, 1919-1943*, 3 vols., vol. 1: 1919-1922, London: Frank Cass & Co., 1971.

concerned, the proletariat only existed in embryonic form. In the best of cases, the working class was in the process of formation. The Communist Parties seldom had substantial roots in the masses.

This was the context in which the problem of alliances was posed. The Soviet Republic had to act for the present, that is, to aid the development of the anti-imperialist movement and defend the first workers' state. This was the role of its diplomacy. But it had also to preserve the future by enhancing the formation of the workers, peasant and Communist movements. This was the role of the Comintern. Combining the two was no simple task and the history of Communist international policy in the East is particularly complex.<sup>6</sup>

The Bolsheviks initially grappled with national problems as they related to peoples located in the Russian Empire and across its Southern border, in the Near East, that is the Islamic world. Then, China became the scene of intense Communist activity on several levels at the same time. The Comintern stressed the importance of the alliance with the Guomindang as well as the class role of the CCP, that is providing the working-class and peasant masses with their own organization.<sup>7</sup> But the Soviet envoys, including Joffe, opened diplomatic talks with the Peking government and Warlords. Revolutionary diplomacy and involvement in revolutionary politics combined in the policy of the Comintern representatives, though not without some tensions.

---

<sup>6</sup>See among others Hélène Carrère d'Encausse and Stuart Schram, *Le Marxisme et l'Asie 1853-1964*, Paris: A. Colin, 1965; and E. H. Carr, *A History of Soviet Russia*, 14 volumes, London: Macmillan, 1953 to 1978, and particularly: 3, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, volume 3; 4, *The Interregnum 1923-1924*; 7 and 8, *Socialism in One Country*, volume three, and II; 14, *Foundations of a Planned Economy - 1926-1929*, volume three - III. See also Pierre Frank, *Histoire de l'Internationale Communiste*, tome 1, Paris: La Brèche, 1979.

<sup>7</sup>In particular, at the Congress of the Peoples of the East, Safarov, turning to the Guomindang representatives, stated: "In dealing with you, supporters of the Guomindang, as our allies, friends and comrades, we tell you at the same time, openly and frankly: we support and will continue to support your struggle insofar as it is a nationalist and democratic uprising. But at the same time, we will conduct independently our own Communist work of organizing the masses of the proletariat and semi-proletariat in China." Quoted in Guillermez, *op. cit.*, p.78. [Our translation from the French.-Ed.]

In June 1923, the Manifesto of the third congress of the CCP granted the Guomindang the leadership of the national revolution.<sup>8</sup> But it also asserted that the Communist Party's own function was to lead the workers and peasants within the national struggle. Nevertheless, the Comintern's analysis of the relationship of forces and potential of the Chinese Communists evolved quickly. As early as May 1923, the Comintern announced in a directive on relations between the CCP and Guomindang that "hegemony" in the national revolution should belong to the party of proletariat.<sup>9</sup> This was the orientation approved at the fourth congress of the Communist Party in 1925.

Clearly then, what was at stake in the decision to enter the Guomindang in 1924 was not the implementation of a "Menshevik-Stalinist" orientation of revolution by two historically separated stages: in fact, the Communist movement was to begin to contend for the leadership of the national revolution. At the time, the entry into the Guomindang was a tactical choice which was not perceived as contradictory with this strategic goal.

Henk Sneevliet had been the first to propose that tactic, in 1922. At the time, he ran up against strong opposition inside the CCP. His approach was based on his previous experience in Indonesia: the work conducted inside the Sarekat Islam, a nationalist organization, as early as 1916. In 1935, he would give the following explanation of his orientation: "The loose form of organization of the Sarekat Islam enabled our Indonesian, Javanese and Malayan Social-Democrats to expand their influence rapidly. In fact, this was so extensive that trade unions were organized even inside the army, and this during wartime. You will readily understand then that my attempt to establish this sort of cooperation with the Guomindang in China was based directly on my positive experience

---

<sup>8</sup>This manifesto is reprinted in Brandt, Schwartz and Fairbank, eds., *A Documentary History* .... pp. 71-72.

<sup>9</sup>A previous directive, dated January 13, 1923, stressed the weakness of the Chinese labor movement and consequently the importance of the alliance with the Guomindang. Nonetheless, it warned against the danger of "liquidating" the political and organizational independence of the CCP. A comparison of the two directives brings out the evolution of the Comintern's thinking. See in this regard and for sources: Gregor Benton, "Two Purged Leaders of the Early Chinese Communism (Review Article)," *China Quarterly* 102, June 1985, p. 322, note 22.

in Java."<sup>10</sup>

In this interview, Sneevliet downplayed both his role in the 1920s and the opposition which his proposal aroused in the CCP. In the report he wrote for the Comintern in 1922, he showed little respect for his Chinese comrades.<sup>11</sup> But Sneevliet's goal was not to subordinate the CCP to the Guomindang. Rather, he was seeking a means whereby the CCP could grow from a small propaganda group to an organization with substantial influence among the masses. His 1922 report concluded: "I have suggested to our comrades that they abandon their bar against the Guomindang and initiate their political activities inside the Guomindang, through which one can easily gain access to the workers of the South and to the soldiers. The small group need not renounce its independence; quite the contrary, the comrades should decide together which tactic they will use inside the Guomindang."<sup>12</sup>

The Comintern's policy registered big gains. An international alliance with the Canton government was established. The Communist movement gradually sank roots in the country without thereby endangering the alliance with the Guomindang. The reason this was possible was that a **two-fold convergence of interests** existed during these years: on the one hand, between the needs of Soviet diplomacy and the anti-imperialist dynamic of national struggles in China, and on the other hand, between the Chinese labor movement and the bourgeois components of the national movement.

### ***Rise and defeat of the Second Chinese revolution 1925-1927***

#### **The turn of 1926**

By the end of 1924 and the beginning of 1925, the question of deciding how long this two-fold convergence of interests could be expected to last, was posed with more immediacy. The answer came fast. An upsurge of mass struggles broke out in 1925-1926. By 1926-1927, the problem of the **class content of national**

<sup>10</sup> Henk Sneevliet, "La question chinoise 1920-1923, notes prises par Harold Isaacs lors d'un entretien avec Sneevliet le 19 août 1935," *Cahiers Leon Trotsky* 15, septembre 1983, p. 91.

<sup>11</sup> See the introductory note presenting the Sneevliet 1922 and 1935 documents, *Cahiers Leon Trotsky* 15, septembre 1983, pp. 77-79.

<sup>12</sup> "Extraits du rapport de Maring (Sneevliet) à l'Exécutif de l'IC sur sa mission en Chine (11 juillet 1922)," *Cahiers Leon Trotsky* 15, septembre 1983, p. 88.

**liberation** was posed in concrete terms and the spirit of unanimity which had imbued the national movement until then, shattered.

The period from 1925 to 1927 was thus the decisive turning point.<sup>13</sup> The Chinese Communist movement was forced to face this historic test barely five years after its creation. This was to be a fearsome trial. The party turned to Moscow and the Comintern envoys for aid and guidance. In those days, the sense of worldwide unity of interests and international discipline was strong; the central Comintern leadership did not hesitate to intervene on questions of national tactics; and the leaderships of the Comintern's national sections trusted the prestigious Russian leadership. While this type of functioning was understable in the circumstances of the time, it soon became a source of major problems.

A fierce factional struggle broke out in the Bolshevik Party after Lenin's death as the new bureaucracy asserted its power. By the time of the fifth congress of the Comintern, the Trotskyist opposition was condemned. A process of political and organizational subordination of the Comintern's national affiliates began.

The internal struggles of the Soviet regime were undergoing this qualitative evolution at precisely the moment when the Chinese revolutionary movement needed active internationalist support. As a result, the latter became a stake in the factional struggle, a factional struggle to which it was alien. From then on, the Stalinist faction's Great-Russian bureaucratic outlook was to have a direct influence over the determination of the Comintern's China policy.

This conjunction between the sharpening of class contradictions in China itself and the turning point of factional struggles in the USSR was to be properly disastrous for the Chinese revolution.

#### **The events**

In 1925, the trade-union movement of the Canton region, being protected by new legislation, grew even stronger. Strikes resumed in Shanghai. The fourth congress of the CCP met in February 1925, and voted to put the emphasis on workers' struggle. In May of the same year, at the second National

<sup>13</sup> In addition to the general studies already cited, see: Harold Isaacs, *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution*, 2nd edition, New York: Atheneum, 1968; Benjamin Schwartz, *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao*, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1951; and the documents in Pierre Broue, ed., *La Question chinoise dans l'Internationale communiste*, Paris: EDI, 1976

Congress of Labor, the trade unions announced a membership of 540 000 (Liu Shaoqi was vice-president of the general trade union).

On May 30, 1925, the British police of Shanghai opened fire on demonstrators protesting the assassination of a striking Chinese worker by a Japanese foreman: ten people were killed. This triggered a gigantic anti-imperialist protest movement.

This **May 30th Movement** began in the great industrial metropolis and encompassed workers' unions, student organizations, the Chamber of Commerce (the Chinese big bourgeoisie) and associations of small traders. A general strike spread to productive and commercial firms and educational institutions. At that point, the Chinese big bourgeoisie, fearing the struggle might extend further, urged a compromise, for the organized labor movement was displaying truly remarkable vitality.

Solidarity with the Shanghai strikes was expressed throughout China, from north to south, in the cities; manual workers joined office workers, students and traders to undertake patriotic and anti-imperialist actions. On June 23, 1925, Franco-British forces in Canton opened fire on a demonstration, killing 52 people. This is when the **Canton-Hong Kong strike and boycott movement** began. It was to last fifteen months; it is one of the longest mass strikes in the history of the workers movement.

The content of the strike's demands was anti-imperialist and the Cantonese bourgeoisie supported the movement for a time. But the leadership of the Central Strike Committee, a "second power" in the Canton region, was in the hands of the Communists. Brigades of armed pickets were assigned to watch the shoreline. The movement was nationalist in its goals, proletarian in its dynamic, and popular in its base. For the first time, a direct convergence of urban and rural struggles began to take place.

The Communist Party became a party with genuine mass influence. In 1925-1926, its membership climbed from 1000 to 30 000. The policy of "the united front within" was bearing fruit. But the very success of the popular movement scared growing sectors of the bourgeoisie. Violent factional tensions erupted inside the Guomindang, especially after the death of Sun Yatsen, in March 1925. The right-wing faction of the Guomindang openly asserted its intention to launch a struggle against the Communists.

The Comintern ignored a proposal of Chen Duxiu that would have made the CCP leave the Guomindang to insure its

organizational independence.

The Guomindang left, led by Wang Jingwei, got the upper hand at the party convention held in January 1926. But the right retained the initiative. On **March 20, 1926**, Chiang Kai-shek led a **crackdown in Canton**, proclaimed martial law, disarmed the workers' pickets and arrested many Communists. In May, the Guomindang Executive decided to remove Communists from all positions of leadership. Trade-union activity was subjected to ever tighter restrictions. In October, the army intervened to end the Canton-Hong Kong strike and boycott.

Moscow stuck to the same united front policy despite these conflicts. In March, the sixth plenum of the Executive Committee of the Comintern admitted the Guomindang as a "sympathizing party" and Chiang Kai-shek as an "honorary member" - Trotsky had voted against this in the Political Bureau of the Bolshevik Party. The analysis of the class nature of the Guomindang had always posed problems. Now, as the Chinese bourgeoisie bolstered its positions in the leadership of this party, the Executive Committee of the Comintern chose to define it in particularly optimistic terms:

"The party of Kuomintang, the fundamental core of which acts in alliance with the Chinese Communists, represents a revolutionary bloc of workers, peasants, intelligentsia and urban democracy on the basis of a community of class interests of these strata in the struggle against foreign imperialists and the whole military-feudal order for the independence of the country and for a single revolutionary-democratic government."<sup>14</sup> The resolution openly neglected the danger represented by the right wing of the Guomindang, noting that "some strata of the Chinese big bourgeoisie, which had temporarily grouped round the Kuomintang party, have now moved away from it."<sup>15</sup>

The Comintern rejected the CCP's proposal to constitute left-wing "factions" inside the Guomindang. Borodin retained his post as adviser to Chiang Kai-shek.

The seventh enlarged plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International, which met in November-December 1926, upheld the line advocated by Stalin and Bukharin. While noting that the Chinese big bourgeoisie had made a turn to

---

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Carr, *A History of Soviet Russia*, 8, *Socialism in One Country (1924-1926)*, vol. three, II, p. 765.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Carr, *A History of Soviet Russia*, 14, *Foundations of Planned Economy (1926-1929)*, vol. three, III, p. 703.

the right, the Theses on the Situation in China overflowed with optimism as to the future of the struggle: "at this stage, hegemony over the movement is more and more passing into the hands of the proletariat." The Communist Party must not leave the Guomindang: "The entire development of the Chinese revolution, its nature and perspectives, demand that the Communists remain in the Guomindang and intensify their work in it;" they must "join the Canton government" and "strive to turn the Guomindang into a genuine party of the people" by fighting the right wing "and its attempts to transform the Guomindang into a bourgeois party," by supporting the left wing and addressing the center.<sup>16</sup>

N. M. Roy was sent to China.

Meanwhile, the mass movement continued to spread. The third National Congress of Labor was held in May 1926. This time, the trade unions announced a membership of 1 240 000; by April 1927, the figure was 2 800 000. Trade unions often wielded extensive powers.

The Peasant Unions had begun to emerge in 1924-1926 under the aegis of the Guomindang, with the help of a handful of Communist militants. In March 1926, Mao published his first major essay, "An Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society."<sup>17</sup> In April, the first National Congress of the Peasant Movement met. It claimed one million members, two-thirds of whom were in Guangdong province. In 1927, the CCP influenced approximately ten million peasants.

Mao Zedong worked in the Guomindang for a long time, in accordance with the party line. But the originality of his perspectives emerged more and more on the eve of the confrontations of 1927. He wrote his famous "Report of an investigation into

the peasant movement in Hunan."<sup>18</sup>

This report was praised enthusiastically by Victor Serge, a prominent Left Oppositionist. He wrote: "I have before me a most interesting document about the peasant movement in Hunan. (...) I have read many things on the Chinese revolution. But nowhere have I found more sterling Communist thinking than this unknown young militant's, Mao Tse-Tung's. He uses striking formulas that irresistibly bring to mind Lenin's in 1917-1918. Here are his conclusions (and my own): 'The leadership of the revolutionary movement must be in the hands of the poor. Without the poor, no revolution. To mistrust the poor is to mistrust the revolution; to attack them is to attack the revolution. Their revolutionary measures have infallibly been correct. If the completion of the democratic revolution be represented by the figure ten, then the share of the city and army should be represented by three and that of the peasants who made the revolution in the countryside, by seven.'"

Victor Serge, who wrote this after the debacle, concluded: "Had the leaders of the Chinese revolution been inspired by so clear a conception of the class struggle, countless victories would have been possible. Alas!"<sup>19</sup>

With the launching of the Northern Expedition in July 1926, the mass movement spread throughout the country with even greater force. The rapid advances of the Canton government's army are to be explained by the mass uprisings which accompanied its march. Communist influence inside the army, although still a minority, was substantial in some units, notably the nationalist Fourth Army. In October 1926, the nationalist government moved its seat

---

<sup>16</sup> The text of this resolution is available in Broue, ed., *La Question...*, pp. 65-78. [Our translation from the French.- Ed.]

<sup>17</sup> The *Selected Works* published during Mao's lifetime (vols. 1 to 4) were usually touched up by the author before publication, sometimes very little, sometimes more deeply. The version of the "Analysis..." reproduced in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung, Vol. I, Peking: Foreign Languages, 1975, pp. 1-13*, is one of the documents that was most deeply altered in 1951. This makes the analysis of the evolution of his thought more difficult. We have generally referred back to other translations that respected the original version, notably to the collection of documents in Stuart R. Schram, ed., *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-Tung, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969, pp. 210-214*.

---

<sup>18</sup> Mao, *Selected Works*, I, 1975, pp. 23-62. For excerpts of the original unchanged version, see Schram, ed., *The Political Thought...*, pp. 250-259.

<sup>19</sup> "La lutte des classes dans la révolution chinoise - III," *Clarté* 12, August 15, 1927. Reproduced in Victor Serge, *La révolution chinoise 1927-1929*, Paris: Savelli, 1977, pp. 74-76. At the time, Victor Serge coordinated the international activity of the Left Opposition. The passage to which he refers here, about the respective weight of the cities and countryside, was removed from the official version of Mao's works. The latter, having been accused of having abandoned the "proletarian" line in favor of a "peasant" line, systematically added emphasis to the role of the working class and Communist leadership as he touched up his works throughout the 1950s. Compare the translation of the original version in Schram, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 252, with that published in the *Selected Works*, published in Peking.

from Canton to Wuhan.

The Guomindang right controlled the armed forces through Chiang Kai-shek. It established its headquarters in Nanchang, the capital of Jiangxi province. In early 1927, Chiang Kai-shek allowed the Warlords to repress the popular movement in Central and Northern China. In February, he issued public attacks against the Communists while a first workers' uprising in Shanghai was being smashed.

The showdown inside the national movement between the bourgeois leadership of the Guomindang and the Communist-led mass movement had now begun for all to see. The changing situation caused bewilderment in the CCP, which remained blinded and incapable of initiative. The party, in fact, tightened the noose around its neck. The defeat of the Second Chinese revolution was played out in three dramatic acts.

### **First Act: Shanghai**

On March 21, 1927, an insurrection in Shanghai handed over power to the general trade union and the Communists. The victorious insurgents opened the city to Chiang Kai-shek's army. The latter immediately contacted the local bourgeoisie, the Western imperialist interests and the criminal underworld.

Back in the USSR, despite the warnings issued by the Opposition, Stalin asserted on April 5 that it was impossible for a coup d'etat by Chiang Kai-shek to be successful. On April 12, the massacre began: thousands of worker militants were hunted down and summarily executed by the army and criminal gangs.

### **Second Act: Wuhan**

The leadership of the Guomindang temporarily divided: Wang Jinwei broke with Chiang Kai-shek. Moscow decided to continue to follow the policy of the united front within, this time with the Guomindang left. The CCP followed suit at its fifth congress (April 27-May 11, 1927). The Wang Jinwei government set up its headquarters at Wuhan, from which it controlled Hubei and Hunan provinces. In May, at the eighth plenum of the Communist International, Stalin, deprecating the Opposition, asserted that this government was now the "revolutionary center."

But on June 11, 1927, the Wuhan government clamped down on the workers and peasant movement, launched a witch-hunt against the Communists, and effected a reconciliation with Chiang Kai-shek. In other

regions too, repression came down on the Communists. Zhang Zuolin, for instance, had many leaders, including Li Dazhao, executed. The military governor of Changsha organized a genuine massacre.

On August 1, 1927, units of the nationalist Fourth Army rebelled against the general command; led by Communist or sympathizing officers, notably He Long and Ye Ting, under the direction of Zhou Enlai, the rebellion was known as the Nanchang Uprising. The date became the anniversary of the foundation of the Red Army. In September, a peasant insurrection broke out in Hunan, where Mao was operating. This was known as the Autumn Harvest Uprising. Mao withdrew to the Jinggangshan Mountains astride the border of Hunan and Jiangxi provinces. He was joined there by Zhu De.

Borodin and N. M. Roy returned to the USSR. They were replaced by Lominadze, a trusted henchman of Stalin. In August the Communist Party convened an extraordinary conference. Chen Duxiu was blamed for the defeat. Qu Qiubai was appointed general secretary.

Trotsky and Zinoviev were expelled from the Soviet Communist Party. In the USSR, the Stalinist faction was triumphant.

### **Third Act: Canton**

Faced with the change in the situation, Moscow suddenly decided to organize an insurrection in the South, on December 11, 1927. But the Canton Commune which issued from it was unable to survive, given the terrible defeats already suffered by the national movement in the rest of the country. Once again, ferocious repression was visited on the workers. In 1928, Qu Qiubai was made into the new scapegoat and condemned for "putschism."

### **Initial comment on the events**

Shanghai in February, Wuhan in May, Canton in December: 1927 was the year of the bloody suppression of the Second Chinese revolution. The CCP was left weakened and drained; it is estimated that 38 000 Communists were physically liquidated.

The scope of the defeat was considerable and the lessons to be drawn from it of great importance.

- The events of 1926-1927 cast a glaring light on the role of the bourgeoisie in the liberation struggle.

The lesson is particularly clear because the Chinese bourgeoisie - including its trading, industrial and banking sectors - was at the time one of the most dynamic in

the colonial and semicolonial countries, and the nationalist and populist tradition of the Guomindang still quite vigorous.

The united front did not break down after a major defeat. It was the very success of the struggle that scared the bourgeoisie. It was precisely when the national and social movement was at flood tide that the Guomindang right first, then the entire leadership of this party, turned against its former allies and entered a de-facto block with both the Northern military forces and the imperialist powers, to crush the Communist movement.

In this respect, the lesson of China in 1927 is the same as that of Russia in 1905. Bourgeois leadership is a dead-end for the national democratic revolution. The fact is, such a revolution can only be victorious through a vast mobilization of the masses, which must necessarily involve the activation of the exploited classes. This leads the bourgeoisie to feel its class position is threatened. It therefore prefers that the mass movement be crushed rather than losing control over it. Class identity and solidarity override national identity and solidarity. This is why the bourgeoisie is not and cannot be a strategic ally of the proletariat in the national democratic revolution.

- The experience of the Second Chinese revolution thus highlights the importance of the class nature of the leadership of the national movement, that is the social content of national liberation. But it also sheds light on the possibility and necessity of a class alliance that guarantees majority support for the revolution in a country where the proletariat is a small minority.

What is at stake here is above all the workers and peasant alliance. But one should also note the important role of the revolutionary intelligentsia, of the students, of the semi-proletarian layers of the cities and countryside, as well as of the soldiers and petty officers in a country such as China, living on a war footing. The Second Chinese revolution therefore suggests the outline of the class alliances that can spell victory for the national liberation struggle.

- Nevertheless, the experience of the 1921-1927 period also demonstrates the importance that a united front policy, based on concrete goals, with sectors of the bourgeoisie, in the framework of the national movement, may have.

The crushing of the Second Chinese revolution should not obscure the fact that the Communist movement had to participate in the national movement during that period, and negotiate a fighting alliance with the

Guomindang to do so. No explanation, short of this understanding, can account for the ability of the Communist Party to build itself so rapidly from 1924 to 1926.

Trotsky himself did not challenge the need for such a united front tactic. At the very time he called for the CCP to leave the Guomindang ranks, in 1926, he continued to support the alliance with this party-government in the framework of the Northern Expedition. He upheld this stance with great vigor throughout the 1930s, against ultra-left elements in the Fourth International: "The Eiffelites claim that we have changed our attitude on the Chinese question. That is because the poor fellows have understood nothing of our attitude in 1925-27. We never denied that it was the duty of the Communist Party to participate in the war of the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie of the South against the generals of the North, agents of foreign imperialism. We never denied the necessity of a military bloc between the CP and the Kuomintang. On the contrary, we were the first to propose it. We demanded, however, that the CP maintain its entire political and organizational independence, that is, that during the civil war against the internal agents of imperialism, as in the national war against foreign imperialism, the working class, while remaining in the front lines of the *military* struggle, prepare the *political* overthrow of the bourgeoisie."<sup>20</sup>

In the field of alliances and united fronts, one of the key lessons of the Second Chinese revolution is therefore that one must clearly distinguish strategic goals (the establishment of proletarian leadership, the building of a class bloc for revolution encompassing workers, peasants, semi-proletarians, the pauperized petty-bourgeoisie and the revolutionary intelligentsia) from tactical contingencies which may require, at one point or another, the formation of a bloc with bourgeois political forces; and that, within this bloc, one should find ways to lay the political groundwork for the coming class showdown.

- For the year 1926 was indeed the moment of a fundamental turn: the irruption of the class struggle inside the national movement. The previous period, characterized by a convergence of interests of the various components of the national movement, gave way to major conflict over leadership and orientation of the movement. This turn called for a

---

<sup>20</sup> "On the Sino-Japanese War," September 23, 1937, *Leon Trotsky on China*, edited by R. Block and L. Evans with an introduction by Peng Shu-tse, New York: Monad/Pathfinder, 1976, p. 570.

corresponding policy change by both temporary allies. The Chiang Kai-shek leadership understood this and systematically prepared the anti-Communist onslaught.

The CCP did not. Instead of reorganizing for the coming showdown, in particular, by leaving the Guomindang, it modified its previous united front line in an opportunist direction. It made the Guomindang the only framework in which strategic alliances were to be contracted. CCP policy therefore had to be entirely subordinated to preserving this particular framework of unity, and this, at precisely the moment when the fullest independence of the Communist forces was becoming a matter of life or death. This is the immediate cause of the crushing defeat of 1927.

• This suicidal policy cannot be explained by the interference of unexpected factors. Chiang Kai-shek had already tipped his cards for all to see one full year before Shanghai. The showdown was entirely predictable and was, indeed, predicted: in the USSR by the Opposition, in China by various cadres.

The truth is that it was the Stalinist Soviet leadership which upheld the orientation of the "united front within" against all objections, imparting it with steadily more opportunist content. The Political Bureau of the CCP obviously bears some responsibility for the defeat of 1927. But the party's orientation was determined in Moscow and the Stalinist center saw to it that its line was implemented (even if that meant selecting the Chinese leaders who were to be made into scapegoats once the defeat was consummated).

Thus, the Second Chinese revolution also provides a major example of the consequences that the rise of Stalinism had beyond the borders of the USSR. With the rise of the bureaucracy, behind the smokescreen of revolutionary phraseology, the "Great-Russian standpoint" (that of the Stalinist faction) and state diplomacy (agreements with bourgeois governments) now finally triumphed over internationalism. What had previously been a secondary contradiction (for instance, between state diplomacy and militant internationalism) now became an antagonistic contradiction. What had been dangerous internal methods of operation (for instance, the way Chinese militants "returning from Moscow" were immediately given leadership posts) became a systematic policy aimed at subordinating the national parties to the interests of the Russian bureaucracy.

• This is the context in which one should reexamine the question of the CCP's entry into the Guomindang.

Originally, since the decision was made as part of a revolutionary perspective, what was at stake was not a principled question but a tactical choice. This choice obviously involved more problems in China than it had in Java. When Sneevliet proposed that the CCP enter the Guomindang, the latter was an organization with few real structures. Nevertheless, as he noted himself in 1935, the Chinese bourgeoisie then was much stronger than its Javanese counterpart had been in the 1910s.<sup>21</sup> He does not seem that have grasped the magnitude of this problem in 1922.<sup>22</sup>

The hope of "hegemonizing" the Guomindang as the Sarekat Islam left had been "hegemonized" a few years earlier in Java, was illusory. Communist work inside the Guomindang sooner or later had to lead to a clash with its leadership, a class conflict. Moreover, once inside, leaving such a party was not a measure that could be implemented easily. Had the infant Communist Party been able to sink roots in the national movement, the workers movement and the peasant movement directly, under its own banner, that would have been the better solution by far.

Entering the Guomindang was justifiable only if it actually was the only way for the infant CCP to become a genuine mass party. But then, the withdrawal had to be prepared politically, in such a way that the party could act swiftly when the showdown seemed close. In 1931, Trotsky stated in a letter to the Chinese Left Opposition that "the entrance of the Communist Party into the Kuo-mintang was a mistake from the very beginning. I believe that this must be stated openly - in one or another document - especially since, in this instance, the Russian Opposition to a large extent shares the guilt," as, on this point, it accepted a compromise with the Zinovievists in the framework of the United Opposition of 1926.<sup>23</sup> Yet in 1926, in the first personal documents in which he called for withdrawal from the Guomindang, Trotsky recognized that entry into this party could be justified in the previous period. His argument deserves to be noted: "As far as China is concerned, the solution to the problem of relations between the Communist Party and the Kuomintang differs at different periods of the revolutionary movement. The main criterion for us is not the constant fact

<sup>21</sup>Henk Sneevliet, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

<sup>22</sup>See the manner in which he analyzes the Guomindang in his report to the Executive Committee of the Comintern in 1922, *idem*, pp. 84-85.

<sup>23</sup>"To the Chinese Left Opposition," January 8, 1931, *Leon Trotsky on China*, p. 492.

of national oppression but the changing course of the class struggle, both within Chinese society and along the line of encounter between the classes and parties of China and imperialism."

".... The participation of the CCP in the Kuomintang was perfectly correct in the period when the CCP was a propaganda society which was only preparing itself for future *independent* political activity but which, at the same time, sought to take part in the ongoing national liberation struggle."

But that period was now superseded and the CCP's "immediate political task must now be to fight for direct independent leadership of the awakened working class - not of course in order to remove the working class from the framework of the national-revolutionary struggle, but to assure it the role of not only the most resolute fighter, but also of political leader with hegemony in the struggle of the Chinese masses."<sup>24</sup>

• All these great problems of strategy and tactics would reemerge, in a new context, during the Sino-Japanese war. Although it did so more by a negative than a positive example, the Second Chinese revolution highlighted the irreplaceable role of the party as the class leadership in the liberation struggle, as well as the role of the revolutionary armed forces. This lesson too would decisively influence the fundamental choices that would be made during the Third Chinese revolution.

### **From Jiangxi to Yanan: 1928-1935**

#### **The retreat**

Following the succession of defeats it suffered in 1927, the Chinese revolutionary movement was in full retreat. But the Stalinist leadership in Moscow refused to

---

<sup>24</sup> "The Chinese Communist Party and the Kuomintang," September 27, 1926, *Leon Trotsky on China*, 1976, p. 114. See also his letter to Radek, of August 30, 1926, on p. 111 of the same book. These documents are important because, contrary to other texts of the 1926-1927 period which do not argue for an immediate withdrawal from the Guomintang, they are personal writings. They show that Trotsky was clearly advocating the withdrawal of the CCP from the Guomintang as early as 1926, a fact which many historians had questioned on the basis of the documents of the United Opposition then in their possession. But they also show that Trotsky posed the general problem of participation of a Communist group in a movement such as the Guomintang in far more flexible terms than is implied by his letter of 1931, which refers to a principled question.

recognize the fact: it would have meant admitting to failure at a time when the fight against the Opposition was raging. Factional imperatives won out again: for several years thereafter, the CCP still had to sound the revolutionary counter-offensive. It paid for this policy dearly.

Moscow kept its grip on the Political Bureau of the CCP, but temporarily lost control of the Red armies that were regrouping with Mao in less accessible zones of the South. The tendency struggle that was to dominate the history of the CCP in the 1930s, began to take shape.

From 1928 to 1935, a long civil war pitted the Communist forces against the Guomintang's in South China. In the end, the Red Army had to break out of the encircling White armies and undertake a long retreat that would eventually lead it to Yanan, in the distant Northwest. This was the Long March, during which the Maoist faction gained control of the leadership.

Meanwhile, Japanese pressure on China grew steadily more widespread. War between China and Japan broke out just two years after the arrival of the Communist forces in Yanan.

#### **The events**

*\*1928-1930: the offensive against urban centers*

The Chinese Communist Party held its fifth congress in Moscow, from June 18 to July 11, 1928. Li Lisan became "number one" in the Political Bureau.

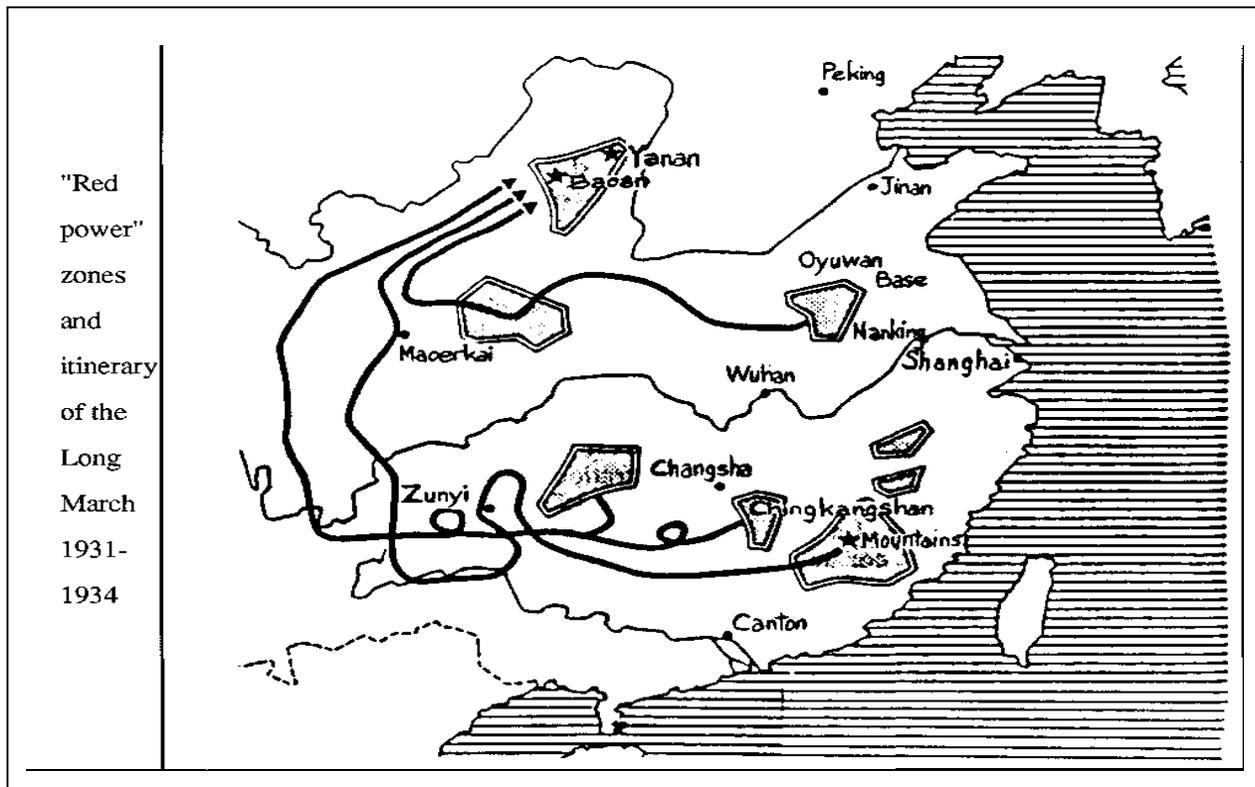
In October, Mao published his essay "Why can China's Red political power exist?"<sup>25</sup> In 1929, the Red Army under Mao and Zhu De marched out of the Jinggangshan Mountains and occupied a part of Jiangxi province: this was the Soviet Republic of Jiangxi.

In the cities, the Guomintang set up "yellow" trade unions. The ranks of the revolutionary workers movement were decimated by repression. In 1929, the fifth Pan-Chinese Congress of Labor met in Moscow.

According to the national leadership of the CCP (and to the Comintern envoys), a new revolutionary situation was maturing. The stated goal was to conquer the three main cities of Central China (Changsha, Wuhan and Nanchang) by combining military offensives and a general strike movement.

---

<sup>25</sup> Mao, *Selected Works*, I, 1975, pp. 63-72; and for brief excerpts of the original version, Schram, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 214-215 and 267ff.



In 1930, the national leadership of the CCP ordered an offensive against the urban centers. The forces of Peng Dehuai occupied the city of Changsha, but were forced to evacuate it soon afterwards. Having regrouped, the combined forces of Peng, Mao and Zhu De then decided to withdraw. In the cities, the situation became more and more difficult. Finally, the Central Committee denounced the ultra-leftism of Li Lisan, the latest scapegoat in the series.

**\*1931: First steps of the Wang Ming leadership**

Wang Ming and his faction, "the 28 Bolsheviks," replaced Li Lisan at the head of the CCP. They had just returned from Moscow where they had been selected by Pavel Mif, as against the majority of Chinese students residing in the Soviet Union, who went over to the anti-bureaucratic opposition.<sup>26</sup> These "28 Bolsheviks" formed the real Stalinist faction inside the CCP. Their power derived from the support they received from Moscow.

<sup>26</sup> On this subject, see Wang Fan-Hsi, *Chinese Revolutionary*, Oxford University Press, 1980. The author of these memoirs was in Russia during the factional struggles there. Having been won over to Trotskyism, he was able to return to China before being victimized, unlike the majority of his comrades, most of whom disappeared during the purges.

In September 1931, Japan invaded Manchuria in what later came to be known as the "Mukden Incident," and turned the region into a protectorate: Manzhouguo.

On November 7, 1931, Mao was elected President of the Soviet Republic of Jiangxi by the first Congress of Soviets held in Juichin. Chiang Kai-shek launched a succession of "extermination campaigns" against the Red zones of Jiangxi: the first in late 1930, the second in May 1931. During the third, in July 1931, Chiang mobilized 300 000 troops but again suffered heavy losses.

**\*1932-1934: Resistance and defeat of the Soviet Republic of Jiangxi**

In January 1932, the Japanese attacked Shanghai and occupied it after a siege of three months.

During the course of 1931-1932, the CCP national leadership left the cities to take refuge in the zones controlled by the Red Army. The leaders of the Opposition (Chen Duxiu, Peng Shuzi) were arrested and condemned by the Guomindang.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Chen Duxiu, the founder of the Communist movement in China, joined the Left Opposition. Concerning Chen Duxiu and his political evolution, see Wang Fan-Hsi, "Chen Duxiu, Father of Chinese Communism," in Gregor Benton, ed., *Wild Lillies, Poisonous Weeds, Dissident Voices from the People's Republic of China*, London: Pluto Press,

After signing an agreement with the Japanese in May 1932, Chiang Kai-shek launched a fourth extermination campaign against all the "Soviet zones" in June of the same year. The Red bases established in populous areas of Henan, Hubei and Anhui provinces had to be abandoned. The Jiangxi zone held out.

In 1933, Japan occupied the Jehol region and moved into Chahar province.

This did not prevent Chiang from signing the "Tanggu Truce" with Tokyo in May 1933. Chinese national emotions were aroused and a rebel nationalist government was formed in Fujian province in November. But the Chinese Communist Party refused to support the rebels, who were crushed by Chiang in January 1934.

---

1982. Issue number 15 of *Cahiers Leon Trotsky*, already cited above, contains a study by Pierre Broue on Chen Duxiu and the Fourth International, as well as the translation of documents by the Chinese leader.

Lee Feigon recently published an overall study of Chen: *Chen Duxiu, Founder of the Chinese Communist Party*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1983.

Peng Shuzi was to become one of the best known Chinese Trotskyist leaders. The first volume of his memoirs has been published in French: Claude Cadart and Cheng Yingxiang, *Mémoires de Peng Shuzi, L'Envol du Communisme en Chine*, Paris: Gallimard, 1983.

Gregor Benton reviewed the latter two books in "Two Purged Leaders of Early Chinese Communism (Review Article)", *China Quarterly* 102, June 1985. A critique of this article, by Claude Cadart and Cheng Yingxiang, "Remarks on a Review of Peng Shuzi's Memoirs," along with a rejoinder by Benton appeared in *China Quarterly* 107, September 1986.

Concerning Chen Duxiu and Peng Shuzi, see also the *Dictionnaire biographique du mouvement ouvrier international. La Chine*, edited by L. Bianco and Y. Chenier, Paris: Editions ouvrières et Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1985, pp. 108-124 and 511-524, respectively. For references to the French-language *Dictionnaire biographique...*, English-language readers can consult the two classics: Donald W. Klein and Anne B. Clark, *Biographic Dictionary of Chinese Communism 1921-1965*, 2 vols., Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971; and L. Boorman, Richard C. Howard, eds., *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China*, 4 vols., New York: Columbia University Press, 1967-1971.

Issue 102 of *China Quarterly* contains an article by Peter Kuhfus, "Chen Duxiu and Leon Trotsky: New Light on then-Relationship."

In the Soviet zone of Jiangxi, a violent conflict pitted the Wang Ming faction (which was invested with the authority of the national leadership) against Mao's local leadership. In January 1934, the Maoists were removed from effective leadership positions. Mao nevertheless formally remained President of the Republic.

The Guomindang launched its fifth extermination campaign in January 1934. Powerful equipment was brought into play in this campaign. The Jiangxi-Fujian Red Base was cut off from the hinterland. The decision to abandon the base was taken in August 1934. The Red Army forced its way through the blockade. In October 1934, the Long March began.

#### **\*1934-1935: From Jiangxi to Yanan**

In January 1935, during the Long March, Mao was elected to the permanent committee of the Political Bureau of the CCP by a session of the Enlarged Political Bureau held in Tsunyi, in Guizhou province. The relationship of forces inside the CCP had been drastically transformed. Zhu De, Peng Dehuai, the "one-eyed general" Liu Bocheng, controlled the main detachments of the Red Army. Zhou Enlai, who had been a member of the previous Political Bureau, threw his lot in with the new leadership team. The factional struggle was far from over, but the Maoist leadership was now in the driver's seat. Wang Ming, however, enjoying the protection of the Stalinist faction, remained one of the vice-presidents of the Comintern.

After many hard-fought battles with the Guomindang and a factional struggle inside the Red Army - against Zhang Guotao this time-, the Communist forces were able to regroup in the Northwest, first in Baoan, then in Yanan, in Shenxi province, which was to become the capital of the new Red zone. This marked the end of the Long March. It was October 1935.

---

*A heroic epic that is now part of legend, the Long March was in the first place a long retreat which led various detachments of the Red Army from their initial bases in South China to Yanan, in the Northwest, far away from the coastal zones that had been at the heart of the political life and social struggles during all these years of revolution and counter-revolution.*

*The geographical, sociological, political and organizational starting point of the Third Chinese revolution was therefore very different from that of the Second.*

*Nonetheless, in many ways, the legacy of the revolutionary struggles of the 1925-1927 period (the period known as the First Revolutionary Civil War) and of the resistance of 1928 to 1937 (the period known as the Second Revolutionary Civil War) conditioned the course of the struggles of the 1937 to 1945 period (the period known as the Anti-Japanese Resistance War) and of the 1946 to 1949 period (the period known as the Third Revolutionary Civil War). This is what must now be analyzed in greater detail to understand the origins of Maoism.*

## Chapter Two

### The legacy of the Second Chinese revolution and the genesis of Maoism

In reviewing the overall course of the Chinese revolution, several authors have tended to understate the impact of the 1927 defeat. Their analysis revolves around the following points:

-The victory of a proletarian revolution under Communist leadership was impossible in China at the time. One need only take into account the class relationship of forces —the marginal size of the proletariat – and the political relationship of forces—the newness of the Communist Party - to realize this.

- Despite the violent polemics they exchanged, Stalin and Trotsky basically agreed on the substance of the matter. Both viewed China through far too "orthodox" and Western conceptions: an insurrectional, urban, working-class revolution, supported by the peasantry and rural uprisings.

- The Maoist project was the only one genuinely adapted to Chinese reality. But this project - protracted people's war in the countryside- stood far outside the framework of any theses put forward in the internal struggles of the Communist Party (Bolshevik) of the USSR and Comintern. Only with Mao's emergence, were the "Chinese road" and genuine Asiatic Marxism finally born.

In their interesting study on Marxism and Asia, Hélène Carrère d'Encausse and Stuart Schram write: "We have already mentioned Trotsky's criticisms of the tactics advocated by the Sixth Congress, which he viewed as a too wide open door to collaboration with the bourgeoisie, despite all the precautions with which the authors had surrounded their resolution. In truth, however, when one looks at this epoch in historical perspective, one is rather struck by the similarities between Trotsky's position and the Comintern's, as it was reaffirmed almost without change from 1928 to 1934. Indeed, its decisions and instructions on the Chinese revolution [excerpted in this selection] display just as pronounced a doctrinaire tendency as Trotsky to apply concepts and slogans fashioned by a European mind in European conditions to a completely alien reality. Priority to the city over the country, vital importance of guaranteeing the hegemony of the "workers" over the peasants, belief in a mass insurrection on the Russian revolution model - all the stereotypes were there. In reality, though, all this was idle talk for the one who was increasingly concentrating real control of the Chinese Communist Party in his hands —

although he would take over its actual leadership only in 1935, during the Long March - was determined to proceed in an altogether different way."<sup>1</sup>

This judgement by Carrère d'Encausse and Schram raises important and substantial problems. This chapter will deal with only some of them; others will be taken up later.

The argument is interesting, then, but as with all retrospective debates, difficult to follow through. Two pitfalls ought to be avoided: the first is an apologetic view of the history that was (defeat was inevitable since it actually happened); the second, an ideologically-motivated rewriting of history in terms of what should have been (with another line, anything was possible). Both approaches end up sterilizing historical and political reflection. The former leads to studying the "Maoist road" independently of the rich legacy of the 1925-1927 period. The latter is its symmetrical counterpoint: it turns the "Maoist road" into a regrettable deviation, since the "genuine" proletarian revolution of the 1920s confirmed the universality of the "Russian road." Both approaches unduly simplify the dialectics of history.

### **The Second Chinese Revolution in Perspective**

I do not claim to have mastered concrete historical knowledge sufficiently to define the real alternatives extant in China in the 1920s. But I think that the following features deserve to be singled out:

- It seems quite unlikely that the Communist movement could have been victorious **throughout the country** in 1927.

Roland Lew, among others, notes that "the workers' defeat in 1927, while owing a lot to the strategy of the men involved, above all to the errors of the Communist Party advised and even led by its Soviet mentor, also flows from the more objective limits of the workers' potential (...) from a too slow maturation in regard to the perils which threatened China."<sup>2</sup>

What then was the relative strength of the class forces operating in China in the 1920s? "An insecure bourgeoisie, overly dependent on imperialism, a proletariat with great promise but still in the process of formation, a peasantry seething with

---

<sup>1</sup> Carrère d'Encausse and Schram, pp. 88-89; also p. 134.

<sup>2</sup> Roland Lew, "La formation du communisme chinois et d'émergence maoïste," in *Les ouvertures du marxisme*, a collection of articles edited by René Galissot, Paris: Syros, 1985, p. 225.

grievances and energy but still harking back to the 'good old days'; a country threatened from the outside by imperialist appetites and gangrened from the inside by the ambitions of multiple competing "Warlords"; not to mention the remains of the old bureaucracy and the numerous landowners determined not to let go of the least bit of their privileges: this was the somber picture of China in the 1920s. In this context, it is easier to understand the objective reasons for the failure of the Second revolution of 1925-1927."<sup>3</sup>

Nonetheless - and Roland Lew does not deny it - **a revolution truly and actually did take place in 1925-1927.** This is proof by fact - in this case, a massive fact: the objective situation had to be ripe at least for that. True, this revolution had its limitations, but it nevertheless represented a crucial moment in the evolution of contemporary China. Its objective limits do not detract from its historical importance.

The Third Chinese revolution - which began in the framework of the anti-Japanese resistance and ended with the victory of 1949 - is another major fact which proves that China was pregnant with a revolution in the 1940s. The point here is that the strengths and weaknesses of this new revolution were, to a large extent, the legacy of the 1920s.

These observations set two boundaries to the field of possibilities. There was revolutionary potential since there was a revolution. But this revolution, whose nature was at once national, agrarian and proletarian, could not easily (or could not yet) give birth to a stable state power of a new class nature.

•Another key consideration is that **the crushing defeat of 1927-1934** was by no means fatal. It was the product of the Communists' blind policy towards the Guomindang and succession of opportunist and ultra-left orientations.

Between the victory of proletarian revolution throughout the country and what actually happened, there was room for several alternative outcomes. The "subjective factor," the line followed by the revolutionary forces during these crucial years, played a decisive role in this respect.

The CCP's line was worked out in Moscow. Hence the importance and attention given to the criticisms levelled by the Left Opposition against Stalinist policy. From the USSR, the Opposition could not put forward a concrete strategic orientation for China! Some Trotskyists may have mistakenly

believed that it could. But whatever strategic hypothesis was retained, in 1926-1927, the Chinese revolutionary movement had to prepare for an imminent confrontation with the Guomindang leadership.

The Opposition, back in the USSR, perceived the vital importance of this question. Its admonitions turned out to have been premonitions of what unfortunately was in store for the Chinese revolution. Stalin, by contrast, denied the most obvious signs until the last minute and after. Worse yet, he repeated the same opportunist error twice (first with Chiang, then with Wang), then swung over to an ultra-left position once the defeat had been consummated.

One cannot lump Trotsky together with Stalin. In the framework of the debate that was held in the USSR and Comintern, the political viewpoint of the Opposition has proved essentially correct. Furthermore, the Stalinist faction was in charge and had the authority; it, therefore, must bear responsibility for the defeat.

•If a complete victory of the revolution was difficult or even impossible to achieve at the time, but the crushing defeat by no means unavoidable, what then could the Second Chinese revolution have produced?

In his discussions with Edgar Snow in 1936-1937, Mao Zedong noted that another policy would not have made it possible to defeat the counterrevolution, but "the Soviets might have got an immense start in the South, and a base in which, afterwards, they would never have been destroyed..."<sup>4</sup>

This issue is a very important one. In the Chinese context of the time, the civil war launched by Chiang Kai-shek in April 1927 led inexorably to a protracted revolutionary confrontation. In these circumstances, there was room for the stabilization of a **territorial dual power situation.** This is not a speculative hypothesis but a historical fact. Despite the magnitude of the defeat endured and the erroneous line pursued, such a situation did emerge. "Red power" appeared in several regions, functioned for seven years in south and central China, and ultimately survived in Yanan, in the northwest.

•This debate on "possible historical alternatives" does not concern only the course of the Second Chinese revolution. For the outcome of the struggles of 1925 to 1934 profoundly affected subsequent events.

The consequences of the defeat suffered by the revolutionary movement should not be underestimated. After the crushing blows of 1927 and the retreat of

---

<sup>3</sup> Idem, p. 227

---

<sup>4</sup> Edgar Snow, *Red Star over China*, Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1972, p. 191.

1935, the Communist movement was but a shadow of what it had been in the urban and rural centers where it was born. By contrast, Chiang Kai-shek's Guomindang was able to impose itself as the new and real nationwide government of China for the first time, becoming by the same token a formidable adversary for the Communists.

Armed with another policy in the 1926-1927 period, the Chinese revolutionary movement could have won far superior geographical, social, political and organizational positions in the subsequent period of dual power. Armed with another policy in the 1928 to 1934 period, it could have consolidated those positions. The Guomindang could not have imposed itself on a national basis. The Chinese Communist Party would then have found itself in a qualitatively more favorable situation when the Japanese invasion and war of national resistance began.

The continuity between the revolutionary struggles of the 1920s and the struggles of the 1930s and 1940s would have been much more direct. Without being overly speculative, one can surmise how different the course of the Third Chinese revolution would have been. Rural warfare would have remained one of its dominant features, but one is entitled to believe that the great metropolises of southern, central and eastern China as well as the urban proletariat would have played a greater role than they did. This would have had very long-term consequences on the evolution of the CCP and Maoism and on the urban base of the new regime after the victory.

All was not possible in 1927. But history retained a certain "openness." The sort of defeat which was inflicted on the workers, peasant and people's movement, the national movement and the Communist Party closed off several paths of development of the revolutionary struggle. Maoism crystallized at a time when the range of "possibilities" had been narrowed considerably. This range of possibilities was reduced even further with the Japanese invasion. This was the framework in which rural people's war took on particularly sharp features.

•The study of the Second Chinese revolution must therefore not be approached from the standpoint of an "all or nothing" alternative. The problems that were posed by that revolution must be thought through again with a longer time perspective in mind. Communist policy must be worked out **for the long haul**.

This is one of the strengths and more interesting aspects of the orientations put

forward by Mao Zedong. Indeed, one of the main features of Mao is to think through the revolutionary perspective for the long run. Mao was probably not aware of this in 1926-1927, when he first manifested his originality. In fact, it seems that Mao still hoped for an early victory in 1930, when he wrote his now famous letter, "A Single Spark Can Start A Prairie Fire," in which he argued for the perspective of conquering Jiangxi, despite the skepticism of a demoralized Party<sup>5</sup> But the analytical elements which he presented at that time were to be reinvested in his subsequent approach. Moreover, this was precisely the issue he grappled with when he studied the conditions for the survival of "Red power" in South China, as early as 1928.

### The Genesis of Maoism

With this point, we come to the actual genesis of Maoism. We also touch directly on the genesis of the instruments of the Maoist revolution, beginning with the revolutionary bases and Red Army. The emergence of these instruments was inextricably linked to the formation of Mao's project.

Mao Zedong was very active in the Guomindang and does not seem to have questioned the entryist policy of the CCP before 1927. In a 1923 article, he even sang the praise of the commercial bourgeoisie's role. Indeed, during the time it took him to write this article, he made the merchants out to be the leading force of the revolution<sup>6</sup> Wang Ming subsequently used this article to denounce his rival as a right-wing and anti-proletarian element.<sup>7</sup> But the analysis of this document by Mao is not easy because it stands in stark contrast with those that preceded and followed it.<sup>8</sup>

At first sight, Mao seems to have stood far to the right of the CCP, because of his extensive involvement in the Guomindang. It seems that he harbored serious illusions about the future of this party. He may have been deeply influenced by his correspondence with a Chinese friend, a founding member of the CCP who then resided in France and had described the

---

<sup>5</sup> Mao Zedong, "A Single Spark Can Start a Prairie Fire," January 5, 1930, *Selected Works*, 1, 1975, pp. 112-128

<sup>6</sup> See Mao Zedong, "The Peking *coup d'etat* and the merchants," July 1923, in Schram, ed., *The political ...*, pp. 206-209.

<sup>7</sup> See Wang Ming's brochure, *Lénine, le léninisme et la révolution chinoise*, Moscow: Editions de l'Agence de Presse Novosti, 1970, p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> See Schram, ed., *The political...*, pp. 40-41.

successes of the Kemalist movement in Turkey with enthusiasm. In a September 1922 article, Cai Hesen called on his "400 million oppressed brothers" to follow the example set by the Turkish people: "Let us rise quickly and incite our revolutionary party [the Guomindang] to lead us to union with Soviet Russia in order to overthrow the oppression of international imperialism in China."<sup>9</sup>

Where there is smoke, there is fire: the official writings of Mao are suspiciously silent about the pre-1926 period. Nonetheless, one must beware of one-sided analyses of Mao's perspectives at the time. He was already a Communist. He was actively engaged in promoting the furthest possible expansion of the national movement, and later, of the peasant movement. He sought to take initiatives and, under the flag of the Guomindang, to undertake revolutionary work among a sector of the masses neglected by the party.

Foremost in Mao's mind at the time was the development of the ongoing struggle in China. This led him to oppose the Comintern's orientation in practice even at that early stage. For instance, together with Chiang Kai-shek, he urged the launching of the Northern Expedition at a time when Moscow had put the brakes on sharply because it was engaged in diplomatic maneuvers in northern and central China.<sup>10</sup>

At any rate, by the time the struggles of 1926 and 1927 broke out, the least that can be said is that neither Mao's activity nor his orientation had much left that deserved the label of rightist.

**1926-1927:  
"All Power to the Peasant Associations!"  
or the revolutionary standpoint**

Mao, who was of peasant stock, renewed contact with the problems of the

rural world in 1926, when he became director of the Institute for the Cadres of the Peasant Movement set up by the Guomindang in Canton. At that point, he took charge of the Communist work among peasants initiated by Peng Pai, the first director of this Institute.

Peng Pai had founded peasant associations in his native district of Haifeng (Guangdong province) as early as 1922. From 1924 to 1927, he was first the provincial leader, then the national leader specialized in rural questions of both the Guomindang and CCP. In late 1927 and early 1928, he led the famous "Soviets of Hailufeng." He was executed by the Guomindang in 1929, in Shanghai.<sup>11</sup>

"Who is our enemy? Who is our friend?" Mao asked in 1926 in his "Analysis of all the classes in Chinese society." He added: "He who does not know how to distinguish his enemies from his friends cannot be a revolutionary, yet at the same time it is not easy to distinguish them." This is an interesting text, marking a transition. It exudes revolutionary fervor, its commitment to Communism is asserted clearly, yet its approach retains very populist and ultra-left elements.

It presents classes and revolutionary processes in almost identical manner whether it is referring to the city or the country, China or Europe: "In any country, wherever it be under the heavens, there are three categories of people: upper, middle and lower. If we analyse things in more detail, there are five categories: big bourgeoisie [*ta tzu-ch'an chieh-chi*], middle bourgeoisie [*chung ch'an chieh-chi*], petty-bourgeoisie, semi-proletariat, and proletariat. ... These five categories of people all have a different economic position and a different class nature. Consequently, they adopt different attitudes toward the revolution, i.e., complete opposition to the revolution, partial opposition to the revolution, neutrality toward the revolution, participation in the revolution, or being the principal force in the revolution."

"The attitude of the various classes in China toward the national revolution is more or less identical with the attitude of the various classes of Western Europe toward the social revolution. This may seem strange, but in reality it is not strange at all. For basically today's revolution is the same everywhere, its goals and its techniques are similar - to overthrow world capitalist imperialism and to unite the exploited peoples and classes to wage war. This is the unique feature that

---

<sup>9</sup> Cai Hesen, "Félicitations à l'occasion de la victoire du Parti nationaliste turc," excerpts of an article published in *Xiangdao*, vol. I, n°3, September 27, 1922, reproduced in Carrère d'Encausse and Schram, *op. cit.*, pp. 299-301; Cai Hesen was to become one of the main leaders of CCP in the 1920s. He was executed by the Guomindang in 1931. We should note that, according to Alain Roux, Cai Hesen opposed those who advocated too close a collaboration with the Guomindang in 1927. See *Dictionnaire biographique du mouvement ouvrier international. La Chine*, pp. 503-511.

<sup>10</sup> See Stuart R. Schram, *Mao Tse-Tung, Political Leaders of the Twentieth Century*, Harmondsworth: Pelikan/Penguin Books, 1967, pp. 87-88.

---

<sup>11</sup> For a biography of Peng Pai, see *Dictionnaire .... La Chine*, pp. 503-511.

distinguishes today's revolution from all other revolutions in history."

And Mao concluded: "Who is our enemy? Who is our friend? We can now answer these questions. All the warlords, bureaucrats, compradors<sup>12</sup>, big landlords, and the reactionary section of the intelligentsia, who constitute what is called the Chinese big bourgeoisie and who are in league with imperialism, are our enemies, our true enemies. The whole of the petty-bourgeoisie, the semi-proletariat, and the proletariat are our friends, our true friends. As to the vacillating middle bourgeoisie, its right wing must be considered our enemy; even if it is not already, it will soon become so. Its left wing may become our friend, but it is not a true friend and we must be constantly on our guard against it. We must not allow it to create confusion in our ranks. How many are our true friends? There are 395 million of them. How many are our true enemies? There are a million of them. How many are there of these people in the middle, who may be either our friends or our enemies? There are four million of them. Even we consider these four million as our enemies, this only adds up to a bloc of barely five million, and a sneeze from 395 million would certainly suffice to blow them down."

"395 million people unite!"<sup>13</sup>

Mao resumed contact with the rural struggle of his native province. In February 1927, he wrote his "Report of an Investigation into the Peasant Movement in Hunan," which elicited the enthusiasm of Victor Serge. He welcomed the peasant revolution and put forward the slogan "All Power to the Peasant Associations!", describing their new-found power in the areas where the authority of the local men of means had been overthrown: "Even trifling matters, such as quarrels between man and wife, have to be settled by the peasant

association. Nothing can be settled in the absence of association representatives. Whatever nonsense the people from the association talk in the meetings is considered sacred. The associations actually dictate in all matters in the countryside, and it is literally true that 'whatever they say, goes.'"

Mao then launched a polemic against those - whether in the Guomindang or CCP— who felt the peasants were going too far: "...But the fact is... that the broad peasant masses have risen to fulfill their historical mission, that the democratic forces in the rural areas have risen to overthrow the rural feudal power. The overthrow of this feudal power is the real objective of the national revolution. (...) Every revolutionary comrade should know that the national revolution requires a profound change in the countryside. The revolution of 1911 did not bring about this change, hence its failure. Now the change is taking place, and this is an important factor necessary for completing the revolution. Every revolutionary comrade must support this change, else he will be taking a counter-revolutionary stand..."

"... True, the peasants do in some ways 'act unreasonably' in the countryside. (...) A revolution is not the same as inviting people to dinner or writing an essay or painting a picture or embroidering a flower; it cannot be anything so refined, so calm and gentle, or so 'mild, kind, courteous, restrained, and magnanimous.'<sup>14</sup> A revolution is an uprising, an act of violence whereby one class overthrows the authority of another. A rural revolution is a revolution in which the peasantry overthrows the authority of the feudal landlord class."

Mao asserted an intransigent radicalism: "The peasantry consists of three sections —the rich peasants, the middle peasants, and the poor peasants... The only group in the countryside that has always put up the bitterest fight is the poor peasants. Throughout the period of underground organization and that of open organization, it was they who fought, who organized, and who did the revolutionary work. They alone are the deadliest enemies of the local bullies and evil gentry and attack their strongholds without the slightest hesitation; they alone are able to carry out the work of destruction." And Mao refers to "the ruling class of poor peasants."<sup>15</sup>

This entire passage was to be either eliminated or revamped in the writings

---

<sup>12</sup> The word *comprador* comes from the Portuguese and means "buyer." In the 19th century, it was used to refer to the Chinese commercial agents or representatives of foreign firms operating in China. Since then, the term was often used more generally to designate all sectors of the bourgeoisie directly linked to international capital.

<sup>13</sup> Mao Zedong, "Analysis of all the classes of Chinese society," February 1926, in Schram, ed., *The political...*, pp. 210-214. These passages were substantially altered in the version of the *Selected Works* published in Peking. In another article, "Analysis of the various classes of the Chinese peasantry and their attitude toward revolution," dated January 1926, Mao analyzed eight social classes, rather than only five; see Schram, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 241-246.

---

<sup>14</sup> This is a reference to the virtues as described by Confucius in *Analects*.

<sup>15</sup> Mao Zedong, "Report of an investigation into the peasant movement in Hunan," Schram, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 250-255.

published in the 1950s. True, it lacks a sense of nuance. Later on, Mao would develop a far more complex set of analyses of the peasantry and revolutionary tasks. But the "Report..." should be read in context. Mao was writing in the fire of the mass mobilizations. He had run up against the cadres of the CCP who knew only too well that nothing would scare the Guomindang leadership more than this popular upsurge spreading like wildfire through the countryside, soon to reach Shanghai.

We find, here too, the sense of initiative, the commitment that was characteristic of Mao. He would become a master in the art of compromise. But he did not subordinate his choices to those made by Moscow. He fanned the flames of agrarian revolution at a time when Stalin was sending his telegram from the USSR urging the Chinese Communists to suspend and moderate peasant movements in order to preserve the alliance with the Guomindang.<sup>16</sup>

The options were clear-cut: either on the side of the local potentates and men of means with the Guomindang leadership, or on the side of the mass uprising. To hesitate meant placing a rope around one's neck. Mao's radicalism in this crucial year, was profoundly revolutionary. It affected, in fact, all planes. The "Report..." includes a chapter devoted to the description of the "Overthrow of clannic authority (the power of the temple, ancestors and elders), religious authority (the power of the patron-spirit of the city, and of local spirits), and masculine authority (the power of the husband)."

Mao denounced "these four types of authority - political authority, clan authority, religious authority, and the authority of the husband— [which] represent the ideology and institution of feudalism and patriarchy; they are the four bonds that have bound the Chinese people, particularly the peasants." While sticking to the theme of the overthrow of marital power, Mao would later rewrite his own articles before they were reissued, removing the original formulas that were later considered too daring: "They also enjoy considerable sexual freedom. Among the poor peasantry, triangular and multilateral relationships are almost universal." The revolution will make possible "the abolition of one-sided notions of chastity."<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the anti-Confucian themes of equality of the sexes and individual freedom recur frequently in the writings of the "young

---

<sup>16</sup> This telegram was dated October 1926. See Schram, *Mao Tse-tung*, Political leaders of the twentieth century, p. 96.

<sup>17</sup> Schram, ed., *The political...*, pp. 257-259.

Mao."<sup>18</sup>

Mao's revolutionary inspiration emerged and asserted itself vigorously in this crucial period. He was not a prisoner of his work in the top spheres of the Guomindang. He was faced directly with the immense potential, the power of a genuine mobilization of the exploited layers, in mass. He integrated the decisive weight of the peasantry in the Chinese world into his thinking.

### **1928: "Why Can China's Red Political Power Exist?" or territorial dual power**

The massacres of Shanghai in April 1927, and Wuhan in July 1927, opened a new period. The change was the occasion of an interesting and revealing misunderstanding between Mao and the party leadership. Relying on mistaken information he had given, Mao sent a letter to the Central Committee on August 20, 1927: "A certain comrade has come to Hunan announcing that a new instruction from the International proposes the immediate establishment of Soviets of workers, peasants, and soldiers in China. On hearing this, I jumped for joy. Objectively, China has long since reached 1917, but formerly everyone held the opinion that we were in 1905(. This has been an extremely great error....(...). As soon as it is established, this political power should rapidly be victorious in the whole country. We hope that the Central Committee will accept the instruction of the International without reservations, and will apply it in Hunan."<sup>19</sup> Mao still hoped for a rapid victory. In this letter, he called for the adoption of the slogan of radical land reform. And he put a final cross over the Guomindang: "We really cannot use the Kuomintang flag. If we do, we will only be defeated again. Formerly,

---

<sup>18</sup> See in particular the series of articles published by Mao in 1919 about the suicide of Miss Chao: "If Miss Chao is dead today, it is because she was solidly enclosed by the three iron nets (society, her own family, the family of her future husband); she sought life in vain and finally was led to seek death...;" see "Miss Chao's suicide," Schram, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 335.

<sup>19</sup> First part of quote from Schram, *Mao Tse-tung*, p. 120; second part from Claude Hudelot, *La Longue Marche*, Paris: Julliard/Collection Archives, 1971, p. 54. The dates of 1905 and 1917 refer to the Russian revolutions, the first a defeat, the second a victory. See also Schram's discussion of the letter in "On the Nature of Mao Tse-tung's 'Deviation' in 1927", *China Quarterly*, April-June 1964, pp. 55-56.

we did not actively seize the leadership of the Kuomintang, and let Wang Ching-wei, Chiang Kai-shek, T'ang Sheng-chih and the others lead it. Now we should let them keep this flag, which is already nothing but a black flag, and we must immediately and resolutely raise the red flag."<sup>20</sup>

The Central Committee categorically ordered Mao to apply the official line: no Soviets, continue to use the flag of the Guomindang and stick to moderate land reform. In fact, the Comintern was already preparing the ultra-left turn of late 1927. But it thought it was still too early to announce it. The Central Committee of the CCP would only formally put forward the new line in November, imparting it with an adventurist twist that would have disastrous consequences.<sup>21</sup> It was one thing to gather the party's military forces in the outlands of various provinces, quite another to call for an insurrection in Canton. Mao was displaying an ultra-left bent at the time. But he had started to pay close attention to military problems and to the armed forces: an uprising had to be prepared seriously. The party leadership, egged on by the Comintern, gambled on the spontaneity of the masses and the power of a succession of mass explosions. It approached the question of war in truly irresponsible terms.

The crushing of the Canton Commune marked the end of 1927. Since the failure of the Autumn Harvest Uprising, Mao had withdrawn to the Jinggangshan Mountains. He was, in fact, only a regional cadre. But he was responsible for forces that had survived the debacle. On October 5, 1928, he presented a resolution to a party conference held in the Hunan-Jiangxi border region.<sup>22</sup> Excerpts of this resolution have come down to us under the title "Why Can China's Red Political Power Exist?"

The resolution presents a first balance sheet of the defeat: "China is in urgent need of a bourgeois-democratic revolution, and this revolution can be completed only under the leadership of the proletariat. Because the proletariat was not firm in asserting its leadership in the revolution of 1926-1927, which started from Guangdong and spread toward the Yangzi River, the *comprador* class, the local bullies and the bad gentry seized hold of it and changed the nature of the revolution. The bourgeois-democratic revolution thus met

with a defeat of historical significance. This defeat was on the whole similar to the defeat of the Russian revolution in 1905...."<sup>23</sup>

The result? An unprecedented situation: "The prolonged existence within a country of one or several small areas under Red political power amid the encirclement of White political power is a phenomenon that has never been found elsewhere in the world."

The causes? "There are peculiar reasons for this unusual phenomenon.... First, it cannot occur in any imperialist country or in any colony under direct imperialist rule, but only in economically backward, semi-colonial China, which is under indirect imperialist rule. For this unusual phenomenon can occur only in conjunction with another unusual condition, namely, the warfare within the White regime."

"The most striking characteristic of semi-colonial China is that, since the first year of the Republic, the various cliques of old and new warlords, supported by the *comprador* class and the landed gentry, have waged incessant, internecine warfare...."

Concerning China's originality "two things can account for its occurrence, namely, China's localized agricultural economy (instead of a unified capitalist economy) and the imperialist policy of division and exploitation by marking off spheres of influence. The prolonged splits and wars within the White regime provide the conditions under which one or several small Red areas can emerge amid the encirclement of the White political power...."<sup>24</sup>

The theses presented by Mao in 1928 were systematized in the next few years.

Peng Dehuai explained to Edgar Snow, in 1936-1937, that the "main reason for partisan warfare in China is economic bankruptcy, and especially rural bankruptcy. (...) Second, partisan warfare has developed because of the backwardness of the hinterland. Lack of communications, roads, railways, and bridges makes it possible for the people to arm and organize."

"Third, although the strategic centres of China are all more or less dominated by the imperialists, this control is uneven and not unified. Between the imperialist spheres of influence there are wide gaps, and in these partisan warfare can quickly develop."

"Fourth, the Great Revolution of 1925-1927 fixed the revolutionary idea in the minds of many, and even after the counter-revolution in 1927 and the killings in the

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Schram, *Mao Tse-tung*, p. 121.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> "The Political Problems and the Tasks of the Border Area Party Organisation," resolution presented to the second Party congress of the Hunan-Jiangxi Border Area.

<sup>23</sup> Schram, ed., *The political...*, p. 214-215.

<sup>24</sup> Schram, ed., *The political...*, p. 277.

cities, many revolutionaries refused to submit, and sought a method of opposition (...) so many revolutionary workers, intellectuals, and peasants returned to the rural districts to lead the peasant insurrections. Intolerable social and economic conditions had created the demand for revolution: it was only necessary to give leadership, form, and objectives to this rural mass movement."<sup>25</sup>

Despite a very unfavorable overall relationship of forces, elements of territorial dual power could be preserved, then consolidated. This was the starting point of the Maoist conception of protracted people's war. The experience of Vietnam and other countries shows that the conditions enumerated by Mao were, too restrictive, at least insofar as one is speaking of the general possibility of a protracted people's war. As it turned out, a country of average size, directly ruled by a single colonial power, was able to sustain a people's resistance war, in many respects unsurpassed in any other country. Nonetheless, it is true that the phenomenon of liberated zones nowhere reached the extension and development that it experienced in China. This was to be one of the particular features of the Third Chinese revolution.

#### **The Red Army and the origin of the mass line**

Another particular feature of this revolution was the close link between the party and revolutionary army. Their relationship can be explained in the first place by the fact that they were forged in the crucible of a common history beginning in the late 1920s. Neither the Communist Party nor the Red Army were built up gradually from small guerrilla nuclei. The Communist Party became a mass party before it undertook armed struggle. It was also already a party that was proletarian in composition: in 1927, 54 percent of its membership were workers. But after the trials of the 1927 to 1935 period, this party was able to survive only thanks to its new base of support: the Red Army.

The Red Army itself was born in the rural and urban uprisings and military rebellions of 1927-1928. In 1934, Mao listed among the four particularities of revolutionary war in China that this was a country "that had experienced the great revolution of 1924-1927," which explains how "the revolutionary war had the opportunity to develop." Further on, he adds that "China has gone through a great

revolution, which has provided us with the seeds of the Red Army, the Chinese Communist Party, which leads the Red Army, and the masses who have participated in the revolution."<sup>26</sup>

It is symptomatic that the forces of the Red Army never concentrated for any extended period in dense jungle zones (China's forested area is particularly small). The remote mountainous regions were only used as temporary refuges. The Communist movement always based itself on inhabited regions. This is the root, the origin of the Maoist conception of guerrilla warfare or partisan war as a people's war. This conception is profoundly different from others which promoted the image of "the jungle soldier" as the prototype of the guerrilla fighter.

Maoism - army and party - was shaped inside a mass Communist movement, in the aftermath of one of the greatest revolutionary experiences. From the start, it was an organized current with mass influence. It was shaped simultaneously, at all levels from the top down, and the new leadership team had to answer complex problems of political, tactical and strategic orientation in the very course of this process. Maoism inherited a long history and deep roots in the reality of the country at birth.

From its birth too, the Maoist movement was physically uprooted by the succession of defeats and retreats that forced it to abandon its original zones of mass influence. The Red Army was composed of refugees. Very early on, it became an itinerant army bringing together working-class and peasant elements and soldiers who survived the rebellions of 1927-1928 (these three components being its political backbone), and prisoners and deserters from the White armies, bandits and rehabilitated lumpen types,<sup>27</sup> new recruits from local areas, usually peasants, sometimes workers - and many children, the "little devils."<sup>28</sup> From its inception, the Red Army was a large mobile political and military body, living in

<sup>26</sup> Schram, ed., *The political...*, p. 277.

<sup>27</sup> Mao allied with bandits and chiefs of secret societies. In the class analysis of the Chinese peasantry he presented in 1926, he displayed this interest in declassed elements such as soldiers, bandits, thieves and prostitutes. See Schram, ed., p. 325.

<sup>28</sup> On this topic, see the reminiscences of Zhu De recounted by Agnes Smedley in *The Great Road, The Life and Times of Chu Teh*, New York-London: Monthly Review, 1972. See also Mao Zedong, "The Struggle in the Ching Kang Mountains," excerpts of a report presented November 25, 1938

<sup>25</sup> Peng Dehuai quoted by Edgar Snow in *Red Star Over China*, pp. 313-314.

symbiosis with the party apparatus, and engaged in a prolonged migration.

This trek led the various corps of the Red Army right across China; in a demonstration of their great adaptability, the central apparatus and armed forces used each halt along the way to reestablish links with the social environment through local activist organizations. The Maoist movement was also a party with nationwide ramifications: a network of guerrilla units, growing out of local mobilizations, the village militias, the Communist cells, a pyramid of leading committees.

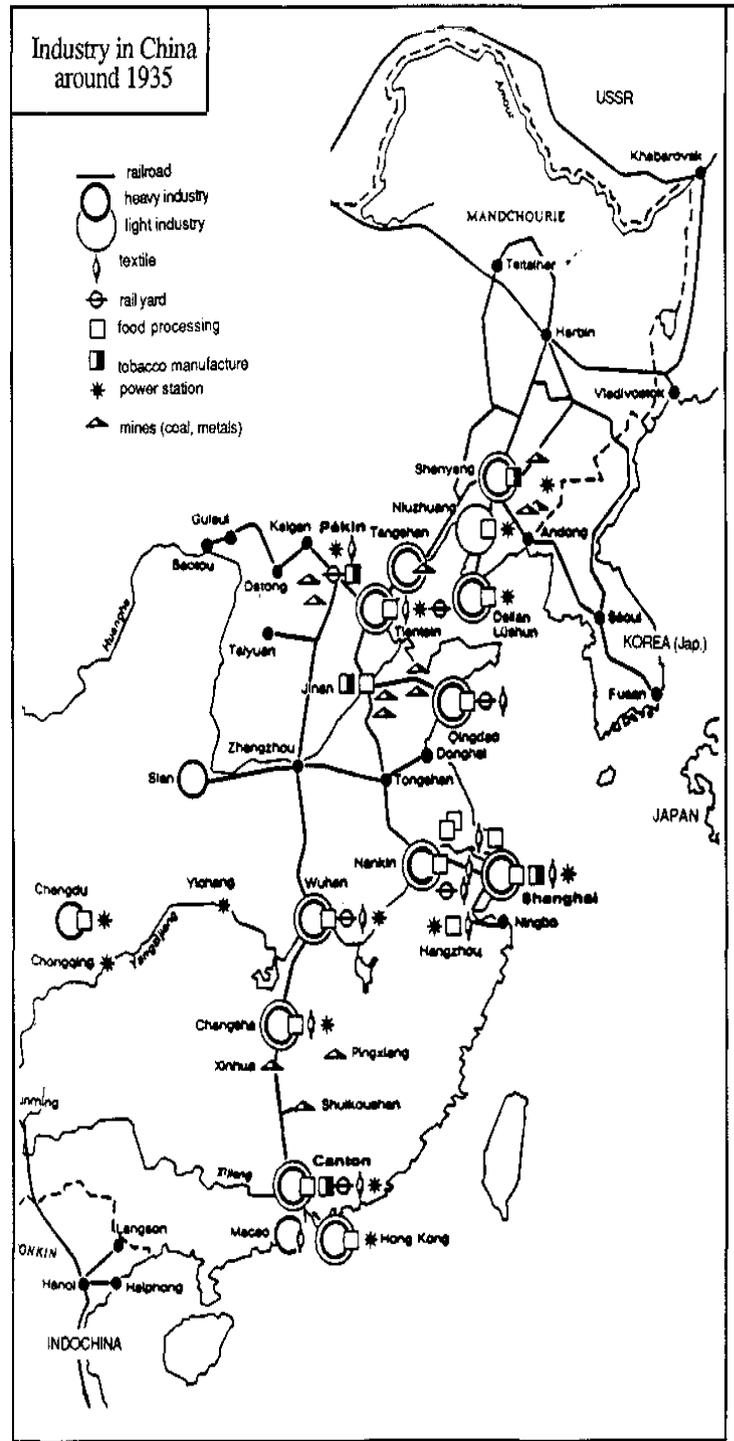
In the course of the revolutionary struggle, the Maoist leadership succeeded in preserving overall unity between the party central apparatus and Red Army on the one hand, and the local units and guerrillas on the other; not to mention the regional structures and the administration of the liberated zones. But a permanent tension between these various poles emerged from the very first years. Maoist methods of functioning were aimed in large part to manage as best they could the contradictions within this unity, by struggling against the symmetrical deviations of ultra-centralism and localism.

Originally too, the Maoist leadership had to homogenize the ranks of the motley army which it inherited. We cannot choose whom we recruit, Mao noted in 1928, we must do with what is available. "Consequently, not only can we not diminish the *elements déclassés* now in our ranks, but it is even difficult to find more for reinforcements. (...) Political training. The Red Army soldiers have generally become class conscious and acquired elementary political knowledge about land distribution, establishment of Soviets, arming the workers and peasants, etc."<sup>29</sup>

Life was very difficult in these heroic days: "Perhaps no one's life is so miserable as that of the Red Army soldiers. Owing to the shortage of funds, each man gets only five cents a day for food (though rice is supplied by local sources); often even this rate is hard to maintain. The common saying of the soldiers, 'Overthrow the capitalists, and eat pumpkin every day' expresses their misery..."<sup>30</sup> Under these circumstances, every military defeat was followed by a string of desertions. The peasants were reluctant to join the army once the land had been distributed.

The Maoist leadership was therefore led very early on to direct its attention to the political mechanisms that could guarantee

the durability of its activities. These included: political and ideological education (already in 1929, Mao attacked "the purely military point of view,"



<sup>29</sup> Schram, ed., *The political...*, p. 269.

<sup>30</sup> Idem, p. 270.

"absolute equalitarianism," "the outlaw mentality," etc),<sup>31</sup> a system of Party commissars, the role of the Communist cells, and democracy inside the army: "The reason the Red Army can sustain itself without being exhausted, in spite of such miserable material conditions and such incessant engagements, is the thoroughness of its democratic practice. The officers do not beat the soldiers; officers and soldiers have the same food and clothing and receive equal treatment; soldiers enjoy freedom of assembly and speech; cumbersome formalities and ceremonies are abolished; the financial administration is absolutely open to [the inspection of] all; and the soldiers' representatives inspect the final accounts.... (...) In China, not only the masses of workers and peasants need democracy, but the army needs it even more urgently."<sup>32</sup>

All these themes foreshadowed the "mass line" which would become one of the distinctive features of Maoism.

First lessons on peasant work

The development of the mass line was also an attempt to answer the problems of activism in the countryside. The Communist movement sprang lasting roots in the peasantry for the first time. The Maoist leadership gradually came to realize the full social and cultural complexity of the rural world. It accumulated a new experience. Its first reforms were extremely radical. From 1929 onwards, successive rectifications were introduced in the land policy during a long process of fine tuning in which the lessons of practical experience mingled with the consequences of the CCP's policy changes and the needs of new political situations. In 1933, Mao published a little essay on the stratification of the peasantry, in which he presented a systematic classification of the landowner, rich peasant, poor peasant and worker.<sup>33</sup> The Maoist leadership gradually came to realize the complexity of the problem posed by the middle peasant in many regions of China.

Mao's rediscovery of the peasantry, in 1926, was therefore only the beginning of a long process. The movement had to learn about the rural world from the inside. In a discussion with representatives of Latin-American parties, in 1956, Mao admitted that

---

<sup>31</sup> "On correcting mistaken ideas in the party," Schram, ed., pp. 272-275; *Selected Works*, I, pp. 105-116.

<sup>32</sup> "The Struggle in the Ching Kang Mountains," Schram, ed., pp. 270-271.

<sup>33</sup> Mao Zedong, "How to differentiate the classes in the rural areas," October 1933, *Selected Works*, I, pp. 137-140.

this was not easy.<sup>34</sup>

"City intellectuals know little about rural affairs and peasant psychology, and they never can solve the peasants' problems in quite the right way. According to our experience, it is only after a long period of time and after we have really become one with the peasants and convinced them that we are fighting in their interest that we can win victory. Don't imagine that the peasants will trust us right away. Don't expect them to trust us the moment we have given them some help...."<sup>35</sup>

At the core of Mao's approach was a class analysis of the rural world and its differentiations. "At first, our Party wasn't successful in its work among the peasants. The intellectuals had a certain air about them, an intellectual air. Therefore, they were unwilling to go to the countryside, which they looked down on. The peasants, for their part, looked askance at the intellectuals. Besides, our Party had not yet found the way to understand the countryside. Later we went there again, we found the way, analysed the various classes in the rural areas and came to understand the peasants' revolutionary demands."

"(...) Many of our comrades looked on the countryside as a plane rather than a solid, that is to say, they did not know how to look at the countryside from the class viewpoint. It was only after they had some grasp of Marxism that they began to adopt the class viewpoint in looking at the countryside. The countryside turned out to be not a plane, but stratified into the rich, the poor and the very poor, into farm labourers, poor peasants, middle peasants, rich peasants and landlords. During this period I made a study of the countryside and opened peasant movement institutes which ran for several terms. Though I knew some Marxism, my understanding of the countryside was not deep."<sup>36</sup>

This class analysis required investigative work in the field, including by Party leaders. "If you are to win over the peasants and rely on them, you must conduct investigations in the rural areas. (...) The principal leaders, such as the general secretary of the Party, should themselves undertake this work and get to know one or two villages; they should try to find the time, for it is well worth the effort. Though there are plenty of sparrows, it is not necessary to dissect every one of

---

<sup>34</sup> Mao Zedong, "Some experiences in our Party's history," September 25, 1956, *Selected Works*, V, Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1977, pp. 325-327.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

them; to dissect one or two is enough. When the general secretary of the Party has investigated one or two villages and knows what's what, he will be able to help his comrades to become acquainted with the villages and get a clear idea of the concrete conditions there. It seems to me that the general secretaries of the Parties in many countries don't attach importance to dissecting one or two 'sparrows'.<sup>37</sup> Class analysis, social investigations, field work by leaders, the study of concrete situations would also become components of the "mass line."

### **The Maoist project emerges**

By the end of the twenties, the Maoist project was taking shape. It would mature further in the subsequent period. But its debt to the experience of the Second revolution, this Chinese 1905 that clarified class relations within the national liberation movement, was clearly visible.

The genesis of the Maoist political project, the creation of its organizational instruments, the development of its methods of functioning, cannot be detached from that major revolutionary experience. The latter enabled Mao to elaborate his initial ideas. The Chinese Communist movement as a whole is the product of this wave of mass mobilizations and class confrontations. Maoism, as an armed revolutionary movement, was constituted in that framework. The Third Chinese revolution did not have to start from zero.

---

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

### Chapter Three

#### Marxism and the East: The Quest for a "Chinese Road"

The history of the Chinese Communist movement is marked by a succession of intense factional struggles touching on all ideological and political, strategic and tactical questions. At the core of these conflicts over orientation lay the attempt to define a "Chinese road" - or Chinese roads -, the relationship of China to the West, of the national liberation struggle to the world revolution, and finally of the CCP to Moscow.

Chinese Communism was born in and out of these debates. It grew out of the May 4th Movement of 1919, a patriotic upsurge directed mainly against Japan, but also against the Chinese government that bowed before the dictates of the Powers. Following the ultimate national humiliation represented by the Versailles Treaty, following this last in a long line of government capitulations, the Chinese intelligentsia asserted its intention to play an active role in bringing about China's recovery. It entered passionate discussions of the possible paths to modernization, of the means to reconquer independence and dignity. The May 4th Movement created the space for a deep anti-traditionalist, anti-Confucian wave which mobilized these radicalized intellectuals.

This new social layer was very sensitive to the crisis of national identity and legitimacy which their country was experiencing. China, with its many-thousand-year history, had been repeatedly humiliated and now stood powerless before the young Western nations. After the failures of the late 19th century attempts at reform and of the republican regime of 1911-1912, the modernist intellectuals sought to analyze the mechanisms that laid the foundation for European power, and turned their attention to Japan, a country in which many Asian radical nationalists had taken refuge.

The Russian example - the revolution of 1917, the Bolshevik theses on the national question, the possibility of an alliance with the Soviet state— only really began to supersede the Japanese model of the Meiji revolution after the 4th of May 1919. That is when the nationalist intelligentsia encountered Communism.

The social milieu which served as a conduit for the penetration of Marxism in the country was precisely these radicalized intellectuals. Although very small, the Chinese intelligentsia was larger than in many other colonial and semi-colonial countries of that epoch; this is part of the

explanation for the rapid take-off of Communism in China.

#### **Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao, or the nationalist traditions of Chinese Communism**

The May 4th Movement had been extensively influenced by *New Youth*, a prestigious review published in Peking. The group of intellectuals who edited this publication had been united around a common humanistic, Westernizing and modernistic outlook for several years. Now, as the political options posed by the situation became clearer, it divided. One wing of *New Youth*, around the philosopher Hu Shi, moved rightward. Another, around Chen Duxiu, moved leftward. In other groups and other cities, similar new political divisions emerged.

Two of the leading figures of the May 4th Movement became founding members of the CCP: Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao. Each embodied a different tradition: the one, Westernizing nationalism; the other, China-centered nationalism. According to Stuart Schram: "Without doing too much violence to the truth, one can say that the former was above all a Westernizer, who turned to nationalism as the most efficient method for modernizing Chinese society, whereas the latter was a nationalist, who saw in the Leninist theory of imperialism a justification for his chauvinistic views."<sup>1</sup>

**Chen Duxiu** is probably the best known figure of the May 4th Movement. At the time, he had already been an activist for many years and was the editor of *New Youth*. Chen has often been presented as the prototypical Westernizer. In fact, "torn between tradition and the wish for radical change, Chen was a complex character whose private and public selves were often at odds. This fiery revolutionary was a scholar of Buddhism, Sanskrit and the etymology of Chinese characters. This scourge of the Chinese family wrote beautiful calligraphy for his ancestral temple. This feminist had sex with several hundred prostitutes and lived openly with his sister-in-law while getting his wife pregnant."<sup>2</sup>

According to Wang Fanxi, who worked with him in 1930-1931, and again in 1938, Chen Duxiu, before the 4th of May 1919, "was among the greatest iconoclasts in the history of human thought; and like all iconoclasts and pioneers, he worked not with a scalpel but with a bulldozer. For him the main thing was to pull down the dilapidated

<sup>1</sup> Schram, ed., "Introduction," *The political...*, p.29.

<sup>2</sup> Gregor Benton, "Two Purged Leaders...", pp.326-327.

house of the past, and this he did to devastating effect." So, "he should properly be called a Westerniser or a radical bourgeois democrat." Chen believed that "democracy and science [were] as the two surgeons capable of saving China."<sup>3</sup>

It was the impact of the Russian revolution and, even more so, of the May 4th Movement that led Chen to change perspectives. On September 20, 1920, he declared himself a Marxist and began to prepare the foundation of the Communist Party, of which he would become the general secretary. Chen did not ignore the peasantry, as has often been claimed, but distrusted it, for the village was the anchorage of Confucianism. Instead, he focused his attention on the cities, as modernizing centers, and on social classes, as revolutionary agents. He was convinced that like democracy and morality, "revolution was the work of saints."

Li Dazhao was also one of the key figures of the May 4th Movement. He and Chen can be considered the senior creators of Chinese Communism. His adherence to Marxism was particularly precocious, since it dates back to 1918. At the time of the May 4th Movement, he was identified as a Westernizer. But he quickly began to display an aggressive China-centered nationalism, counter-posed to the cosmopolitanism of the May 4th tradition and to the internationalism of Chen Duxiu. His hopes lay deep within the resources of inner China and the peasantry.

According to Maurice Meisner, the predominant influence on Mao came from Li Dazhao. Indeed, in Li's outlook, voluntarism, nationalism and populism were part and parcel of the enthusiastic Bolshevism which he professed. This would tend to justify Meisner's contention that there is a kinship between Li's tradition and the Russian Populists<sup>4</sup> on the one hand, and Mao's tradition on the other: "Yet it seems highly likely that Mao's ideas in his formative years were shaped in large measure by the ideas of Li. Li not only introduced Mao to Marxist theory in the winter of 1918-1919, when Mao served as assistant librarian of Peking National University, but he also communicated to Mao his own particular version of Marxism and his chiliastic feelings

on the significance of the October Revolution. Nor is it likely that Mao was uninfluenced by the heretical Populist notions intermingled with Li's Marxist ideas, particularly Li's passionate appeals in 1919 for young intellectuals to leave the cities and devote their energies to the liberation of the peasantry in the countryside"<sup>5</sup> (although Mao himself would only rediscover the rural world in 1925).

One should, of course, not oversimplify this matter. Mao Zedong admitted to having been profoundly influenced by Chen Duxiu: "I went to Shanghai for the second time in 1919. There once more I saw Ch'en Tu-hsiu. I had first met him in Peking, when I was at Peking University, and he had influenced me perhaps more than anyone else. (...) In Shanghai I discussed with Ch'en Tu-hsiu our plans for a League for Reconstruction of Hunan."<sup>6</sup>

Nonetheless, it is undeniable that one can identify similar nationalist, voluntarist and populist ingredients in Mao's and Li's works, in a more intellectual vein in the latter, in a more activist vein in the former. Among the influences that shaped Mao's outlook, one should perhaps also mention that of his friend, Cai Hesen. In a letter to Chen Duxiu, in 1921, Cai put forward quite a Populist-like argument: "China as a whole" being a "proletarian country," because of its international position, the country's economic backwardness had become a positive factor for the Communist fight. Waiting would allow the bourgeoisie time to grow stronger, and postpone the revolutionary reckoning for a long time. One had to seize the present opportunity and dare to move to the offensive. Then, "if we are intelligent and resolute, we will certainly be able to leap over the workers movements of Europe and America in a very short period..."<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Maurice Meisner, *Li Ta-chao and the Origins of Chinese Marxism*, New York: Atheneum, 1979, p. 262. For a critique of Meisner's thesis on the Li-Mao lineage, see the article by Yves Chevrier on Li Dazhao in *Dictionnaire .... La Chine*, pp. 311-318.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted by Edgar Snow, *Red Star...*, pp. 179-180.

<sup>7</sup> "Cai Hesen sur la revolution prolétarienne en Chine," Lettre a Chen Du Xiu, 11 février 1921, in Carrère d'Encausse and Schram, pp. 293-296. Subsequently, Cai Hesen became more orthodox. One cannot help comparing this text of Cai Hesen with the policy pursued by Mao in the late 1950s. During the period of the Great Leap Forward, the goal was to surpass Great Britain - this time, in the field of production - in fifteen years.. Moreover, Mao reverted to the Populist theme of the "blank page": being poor is good, because it pushes one to

---

<sup>3</sup> Wang Faxi, "Chen Duxiu, Father of Chinese Communism," pp.161-162.

<sup>4</sup> On the Russian Populists and the Marxist tradition, see the interesting article by Teodor Shanin, "Late Marx: gods and craftsmen," in *Late Marx and the Russian Road - Marx and the peripheries of capitalism*, T. Shanin ed., London, Melbourne and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983.

## **Orientalization of Marxism and modernization of Chinese thought**

The Chinese Communist intellectuals went to the people. They opened workers' schools and set up proletarian circles, thereby discovering the reality of poverty. They supported the development of trade unions. They went to the countryside, early on in the case of some rare pioneers, later in most cases. The Communist movement sprang roots in Chinese society.

But originally, the CCP was the product of two traditions: that of the Russian revolution (Chinese activists learned Communism, and particularly Leninism, before Marxism), and that of the radical wing of the intelligentsia.

Both legacies were legitimate. The contribution of the Comintern was rich. It guaranteed the initial proletarian identity of the young Communist Party while providing a lively framework for working out the relationship between national liberation and social revolution. The contribution of the intelligentsia was also essential. It supplied cadres, but more importantly it provided the CCP with real Chinese roots. The Communist Party may have been tiny, but it was not some grouplet artificially introduced in the country by a few students returning from the West. From its inception, it was the product of Chinese history, specifically the evolution and differentiation of the national movement.

Despite its extreme weakness then, this young party was promising. Nevertheless grafting Marxism onto Chinese Communism was no easy performance. Introducing the fundamental concepts, political orientation and organizational techniques, as had been done in the USSR and Western Europe, was not enough. For the graft to take, Marxist thought had to assimilate the originality of Chinese society and Chinese thought had to transcribe Marxism into its own mental universe.

How this could be achieved was not self-evident. The Russian revolution contributed to creating a bridge between the West and the East in many fields. For the Russian Marxists had had to work out and define the originality of their own country and revolution. The Russian social formation was very peculiar.<sup>8</sup> The tasks of the

---

turn to revolution; a backward country is good, because it is like a blank page on which one can write down one's project for a new society unobstructed.

<sup>8</sup> On this topic, see in particular Perry Anderson, "Eastern Europe," *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, London: Verso, 1974.

revolutionaries were too. Lenin and Trotsky,<sup>9</sup> each in their own way, on different planes and at different paces, had to analyze the Russian specificity and integrate it into their perspectives for action. This was one of the main reasons why they were able to join forces in a common fight in 1917, despite the bitterness of their old polemics.

After their victory, the Bolsheviks immediately had to deal with the problem of the non-Russian societies that had been part of the Tsarist Empire, as well as with the national struggles unfolding on the borders of the new workers state. They accumulated precious experience on this matter very fast. But the theses and debates of their congresses only convey a pale reflection of the complexity of the questions and difficulties they encountered. Often, the cadres operating in the field were the ones who realized most fully the importance of the issue. This is most obvious in the analyses and writings of Sultan Galiev<sup>10</sup> and Safarov<sup>11</sup>.

---

<sup>9</sup> To claim that Trotsky attempted to superimpose a Western European model for revolution on Russia would be a complete misreading of the evidence. When he elaborated his conception of uneven and combined development in the imperialist epoch and his theory of permanent revolution in 1905, it was precisely to bring out the originality of the Russian process as compared to that of Western Europe. It was Plekhanov and the Mensheviks who believed that Russia could follow the same path of development as the rest of Europe, though perhaps at a faster pace. On this topic, see in particular Michael Lowy, *The Politics of Uneven and Combined Development. The Theory of Permanent Revolution*, London: Verso, 1981.

<sup>10</sup> Sultan Galiev was a Tatar Communist. For a time, Stalin's assistant in the Commissariat for Nationalities, in the USSR, he was denounced by the latter and expelled from the CP(b) in 1923. He has unfortunately left few writings. Sultan Galiev was one of the first to call on the Comintern to turn its attention to the East, not just the West, as one of his articles of 1919 bears witness: "La revolution socialiste de l'Orient," excerpts of which are translated in Carrère d'Encausse and Schram, pp. 239-242. He developed the theme of the "proletarian nationality" in relation to the East and emphasized the need to integrate the Muslim cultural legacy into Communism.

<sup>11</sup> Safarov was sent to Turkestan by Lenin in 1919 to investigate the conflicts pitting the Muslims against the Russians, Communists and non Communists alike. He analyzed the "colonialist" nature of the Russian revolution in this region of Central Asia and the process of revolution in the East. In 1922, he published a book in the USSR outlining the conclusions of his experience. An

But China was neither Russia nor its neighboring Muslim Republics. It was up to the Chinese revolutionaries to analyze the originality of their country, of its social formation, of its cultural formation. They were ill-armed for this task. The tumultuous debates of the May 4th Movement were often most notable for their confusion. More importantly, there was scarcely the time to work these problems out. This was a generation that immediately plunged into the most intense activism and had to face a life-size revolution barely four years afterwards. It was a hyper-active generation that had to complete the intellectual journey of three.

As pointed out by Roland Lew, "when the very young intelligentsia encountered juvenile Bolshevism, its itinerary was so rapid and hurried that one is entitled to speak of a real telescoping of experiences. The point is that what took several generations to work out in the Russian case - three generations from Herzen to Lenin-, and far more in the Western world, namely the process of maturation of civil society, the comparison of different ideas about what changes were necessary, the attempts at social experimentation, all of that occurred in China practically over a single generation"<sup>12</sup>: that of Chen Duxiu.

This task was particularly difficult because the valuable legacy of Marx and Engels on this subject was not widely known, having been overshadowed first by the "orthodoxy" of the Second International, then by that of Stalinism.

Internationalization of Marxism and multilinear history

Marxism has a history.<sup>13</sup> Its formation in the 19th century was a product of capitalist development, of modern class struggles, of the evolution of Western thought; that is, of European history. It became a world phenomenon mainly in the 20th century. But this process of universalization of Marxism operated at several levels and implied its constant enrichment and transformation.

Marxism, the theory of modern revolution, was universalized by imperialism, which created a world market structured by relations of domination, internationalized class struggles, and therefore laid the basis for the encounter of the national liberation

movement and social revolution.

Marxism, with its historical and materialist method, was faced with variegated social formations very different from the European societies where its analytical categories were initially elaborated. Marxism, the philosophy, entered into cultural universes which expressed a line of development other than the European, which had risen in combination with its own unique social-economic history from Ancient Greece to Christianity on the one hand, and scientific thought on the other.

Marxism, the politics of the proletariat, had to adapt its strategic and tactical tools to profoundly new revolutionary processes.

This process of internationalization of Marxism had been initiated during Marx and Engels' lifetime. Marx used the concept of Asiatic mode of production. In the *Grundrisse*, while preparing the writing of *Capital*, he began to integrate a whole series of analytical categories concerning non-European societies.

The political implications of this empirical research and theoretical reflexion were spelled out first in relation to Russia. Marx established relations with Populist activists and theoreticians. He discussed the possibility of an early socialist revolution in the Tsarist Empire and the potential role of the rural commune. Urged to clarify his substantial position by the first Russian Marxists who felt the founder of the doctrine was displaying heterodox and opportunistic attitudes towards the Populists, Marx answered forthrightly that, in *Capital*, he had restricted the "historically inevitable" character of capitalist development to Western Europe only.<sup>14</sup>

Marx vigorously protested against those who would "transform my historical sketch of the genesis of capitalism in Western Europe into a historico-philosophical theory of the general course fatally imposed on all peoples, whatever the historical circumstances in which they find themselves placed. (...) By studying each of these developments separately, and then comparing them, one may easily discover the key to this phenomenon [their dissimilarity]. But success will never come with the master-key of a general historico-philosophical theory, whose supreme virtue consists of being supra-historical."<sup>15</sup> Likewise, Engels

---

excerpt is published as "L'Orient et le communisme," in Carrère d'Encausse and Schram, pp. 242-245.

<sup>12</sup> Roland Lew, "La formation...", pp. 229-230.

<sup>13</sup> See Ernest Mandel, "The place of Marxism in history," *Notebooks for Research and Study*, number 1, Paris: International Institute for Research and Education, 1986.

---

<sup>14</sup> Karl Marx, "Reply to Vera Zasulich," March 8, 1881, in T. Shanin, ed., *Late Marx...*, p. 124.

<sup>15</sup> Karl Marx, "A letter to Otechestvennye Zapiski," (Translated from French original "Réponse a Mikhailovski,"), November 1877, in T. Shanin, ed., *Late Marx...*, p. 136.

warned against a mechanistic version of Marxism that was already gaining ground in the late 19th century.<sup>16</sup>

Marx and Engels' research was leading them to a multilinear conception of world history. The succession of modes of production which occurred in Europe, need not necessarily recur in other regions. Marx and Engels thus pioneered a very important field of investigation.

### **Stalinist monolithism versus Chinese Marxism**

In the mid-1920s, the CCP had several assets that facilitated its quest for the "Chinese road."

Wide-ranging debates were maturing in the Comintern. Marx and Engels' methodological contribution was being unearthed. After being forgotten, erased from the memory of those whom it concerned most (the Russian Marxists of the late 19th century), Marx's correspondence on the "Russian road" was discovered.<sup>17</sup> A major debate on the Asiatic mode of production got under way in the Soviet Union.

In China itself, as the development of

mass struggles revealed fully the meaning of the question of the class content of liberation, the CCP was able to draw on the sources of the contemporary national liberation movement, as personified by Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao.

With Chen, it could find an openness to the world and scientific thought, a radical critique of tradition, the meaning of the role of the individual in democracy, all essential elements for a cultural revolution in China. But these features did not lead him to lessen the importance of national feelings. In this respect, it is interesting to review the evolution of his judgement on the Boxer rebellion of 1899-1900.

In 1918, when he was not yet a Marxist, Chen condemned the Boxers and their superstitions in very violent terms.<sup>18</sup> In 1924, having become a Communist, he defended them vigorously: "The Boxers constitute an important fact in the history of China. In reality, they are no less important than the revolution of 1911. (...) We all have our own experience of the barbarism of the Boxers, their retrograde and superstitious character.... [Nonetheless,] if we read the diplomatic and commercial history of China over the last 80 years, we cannot refuse to recognize that the Boxer question was the great and tragic prelude to the history of the Chinese national revolution."<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand, Li's China-centered nationalism expressed a healthy revolt against the worship of all that was Western. He protested against the arrogance of the White, the Christian: "Europeans feel that, with regard to their culture, nothing can be added to Christianity; as for their view of the world, according to them only the world of the Whites exists. According to the Frenchman Theodore Jouffroy (...), only Christianity is progressive, transforms itself ceaselessly and can adapt to the tendencies of today's world."<sup>20</sup>

The upgrading of Chinese culture was a necessary element of the "national resurrection" which Li Dazhao called forth.

<sup>18</sup> Chen Duxiu, "Le Monument a Von Ketteler," excerpts of an article written in 1918, in Carrère d'Encausse and Schram, pp. 289-291.

<sup>19</sup> Chen Duxiu, "Deux idées erronées que nous avons au sujet des Boxers," excerpt of an article written in 1924, in Carrère d'Encausse and Schram, pp. 310-312.

<sup>20</sup> Li Dazhao, "The racial question," excerpts of the notes taken by an auditor during a lecture of Li Dazhao to the Peking students' political club, May 13, 1924, in Carrère d'Encausse and Schram, p.305. During that conference, Li announced that class wars and race wars would combine on a world scale.

<sup>16</sup> Towards the end of his life, Engels wrote many letters to fight a narrowly economic and mechanistic interpretation of historical determinism. In this respect, Engels' entreaties even had a certain self-critical tone: "Marx and I are ourselves partly to blame for the fact that the younger people sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due. We had to emphasise the main principle *vis-a-vis* our adversaries, who denied it, and we had not always the time, the place or the opportunity to give their due to the other elements involved in the interaction. But when it came to presenting a section of history, that is, to making a practical application, it was a different matter and there, no error was permissible.

Unfortunately, however, it happens only too often that people think they have fully understood a new theory and can apply it without more ado from the moment they have assimilated its main principles, and even those not always correctly. And I cannot exempt many of the more recent "Marxists" from this reproach, for the most amazing rubbish has been produced in this quarter, too....". From "Engels to J. Bloch in Konigsberg," September 21, 1890, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, Volume Three, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977, pp. 488-489.

<sup>17</sup> David Ryazanov, "The discovery of the drafts," in Shanin ed., *Late Marx ...*, pp. 127-133. Ryazanov was then the director of the prestigious Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute in Moscow. In 1924, he published four drafts of Marx's letter to Vera Zasulich which he had found in 1911.

The anti-imperialist struggle had to be waged on that terrain too, not just on the economic and political fields. China had to reclaim its own identity, denied by the proselytizing assertions of the Christian West. The cultural revolution had to find national roots. To penetrate the rural world, the Communist movement had to learn to speak its language, to grasp its mental images and fantasies. The idea of democracy was imported. Mass democracy, to be operational, had to discover Chinese political and cultural sources.

Faced with a major revolutionary experience, the young Communist Party had the opportunity to fuse these national and international inputs, and give rise to a particularly rich Chinese Marxism.

But, in this field too, the rise of Stalinism in the USSR was to profoundly modify the parameters of the problem. Henceforth, there was to be one and only one ultimate source of authority in the Communist movement: that of Moscow. Political monolithism became one of the touchstones of the Stalinist era. This monolithism was extended to theoretical and historical thought: only the unilinear view of world history could justify the authority of the Single Center. The debate on the Asiatic mode of production was smothered, Marx revised, the use of the concept banned. Marxist research in this field only experienced a genuine new take-off in the 1960s, thanks to de-Stalinization, the accumulation of new data and the development of national liberation struggles.<sup>21</sup>

But in the late 1920s, the Chinese Communists were no longer allowed to reflect freely on the originality of the history of their country as compared to Europe's - or on the originality of European history as compared to that of other regions of the world, for that matter. Orthodoxy demanded it; however, their desire to defend China

against the derogatory accusation of immobilism and secular stagnation found in Marx's writings, also motivated their definition of their country's past as feudalism.

The condemnation of Chen Duxiu and the transformation of the internal life of the CCP

At the same time, a profound change took place in the internal life of the CCP. Following the disaster of 1927, Moscow wished to avoid that an analysis of the reasons of the defeat should bring the real responsibilities to light. The authority of the Single Center could not be jeopardized. A scapegoat had to be found: it was Chen Duxiu, who was expelled forthwith from the leadership, the same year.

While not denying his own responsibility, Chen Duxiu rejected, in a thoroughly dignified letter, the role which the Stalinist faction wished him to assume.<sup>22</sup> Expelled from the party in 1929, he produced a public explanation: "Since I contributed with my comrades to founding the Chinese Communist Party in 1920, I have always faithfully applied the opportunist policy of the leaders of the Communist International: Stalin, Zinoviev, Bukharin and others, which led the Chinese revolution to a shameful and sad failure. Although I worked relentlessly, night and day, my demerits are still greater than my merits."<sup>23</sup>

Chen had opposed the policy of entryism in the Guomintang from the start. At each major turn of the situation, he had posed the problem of the independence of the CCP. For instance, he had demanded that the CCP quit the Guomintang at the Central Committee of October 1925. But he ran up against the veto of the Comintern representative. "I had to take into account the opinion of the majority of our Central Committee and also observe international discipline: I therefore did not maintain my position firmly."<sup>24</sup>

1926 represents "a most critical period. (...) This was the moment when the proletariat declared formally, through our intermediary, that it surrendered to the bourgeoisie, and wished to follow it and subordinate itself to it. (...) From then on the Party (...) began to slide into opportunism. After the coup d'etat of March 20, I stated in my report to the Comintern my personal opinion that our cooperation with the Guomintang should be cooperation not from

---

<sup>21</sup> On this topic, see: T. Shanin, *Late Marx and the Russian Road*; Marian Sawer, "The Asiatic Mode of Production and Contemporary Marxism," in S. Avineri, ed., *Varieties of Marxism*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977; Perry Anderson, "Appendix B," *Lineages of the Absolutist State*; Maurice Godelier, "Preface," in *Textes Choisis de Marx, Engels, Lénine, Sur les sociétés precapitalistes*, Paris: Editions sociales, 1978; Ernest Mandel, *La Formation de la pensée économique de Karl Marx*, Paris: Maspero, 1982, chapter 8; Eric Hobsbawm, "Preface" to *Karl Marx, Precapitalist Economic Formations*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1964.

---

<sup>22</sup> Chen Duxiu, "Lettre a tous les membres du Parti communiste chinois," December 10, 1929, in Broue, ed., *La question chinoise...*, pp. 441-465.

<sup>23</sup> Idem, p.441.

<sup>24</sup> Idem, p.443.

the inside but cooperation from the outside. (...) In reply to this report, Bukharin gave an article to *Pravda* criticizing severely my opinion. (...) Once again, and still for the same reasons, I had to give in."<sup>25</sup>

Chen, then, repeatedly demanded a change of policy. And, repeatedly, he accepted to implement discipline in practice. That is his exact responsibility in the defeat of 1927. It is a heavy one: "I sank deeply into the opportunist atmosphere of the Comintern; I became unconsciously the instrument of Stalin's small organization; I could not deepen my own culture; I could save neither the party nor the revolution. For all this, myself and my comrades must be held responsible. The present Central Committee says: 'You try to shift the responsibility for the failure on the shoulders of the Comintern in order to avoid your own responsibility.' This statement is ridiculous. No one can be forever denied the right to criticize opportunism from on high and call for a return to Marxism and Leninism, on the grounds that he himself committed opportunist faults. At the same time, no one can avoid responsibility for having implemented an opportunist policy on the grounds that it came from on high. (...) We must recognize very frankly and objectively that all the opportunist policies, the past as well as the present, have come from the Comintern. It must bear responsibility for them. The young Communist Party could not have built theories and set any policy on its own, but the leading organ of the Party must bear responsibility for the blind execution of the opportunist policy of the Comintern. (...) I strongly contributed to these erroneous policies by abiding by them."<sup>26</sup>

With the expulsion of Chen Duxiu, the internal life of the Party was impoverished. Chen did not accept the principle of monolithism. "He even let non-Marxists and anarchists join the Party," Gregor Benton notes. "Under his leadership different points of view vied rather freely, and though the outcome of this discussion was settled largely in Moscow, it was some time before the Chinese Party was transformed completely along Russian lines."

"Even Mao Zedong recognized that under Chen Duxiu the Party was 'rather lively', though he could not omit the ritual denunciation of Chen's 'bourgeois thought' (in reality the political line forced on Chen by his Comintern advisers). In 1959, Mao said: 'When we founded the Party, those who joined it were all young people who had taken part in or come under the influence of

the 'May Fourth' movement. After the October Revolution, when Lenin was still alive, when the class struggle was acute, and before Stalin had come to power, they too were lively. The source of Chen Duxiu-ism is the Social-Democratic parties overseas and the bourgeoisie at home. Generally speaking there was no dogmatism in this period, despite the mistakes of Chen Duxiu-ism."<sup>27</sup>

Thereafter, Moscow imposed conformity to dogma and brandished the threat of excommunication. Open political debate became impossible. Differences, even real ones, had to be expressed in devious ways, through a coded language. The internal life of the party was profoundly factionalized. The international Stalinist center gradually placed its own henchmen at the head of the Chinese Party. Qu Qiubai - who replaced Chen Duxiu in 1927 - and Li Lisan - the former's successor in 1928— also were made into scapegoats.

Qu Qiubai was made to foot the bill for the adventure of the Canton Commune, decided by Stalin. In 1930, the trial of "Li Lisanism" was opened. Li Lisan's sin consisted in having applied the ultra-left line decided in Moscow, from 1928 to 1930, with ultra-left enthusiasm and disastrous consequences. The Stalinist Center wished to mete out an exemplary condemnation. But despite the presence of Pavel Mif, the new Comintern envoy, the CCP leadership, among whom sat Zhou Enlai, was content to issue a moderate condemnation, invoking the weight of objective circumstances. Worse yet, Li Lisan defended himself and noted that the Chinese were in a better position to understand their country than the Russians.<sup>28</sup>

The Comintern decided that further prosecution of the Li Lisan case was needed, under its own direct jurisdiction. Li was summoned to Moscow for an investigation. He was to remain in the USSR until 1945. His place was quickly filled by Chinese students returning from Moscow: Wang Ming (Chen Shaoyu) and Bo Gu (Qin Bangxian).

### **On the eve of the Mao Zedong vs. Wang Ming fight**

With the arrival of the "28 Bolsheviks" - as the students who had just returned from the USSR were ironically dubbed - Stalin hoped to strengthen his grip on the apparatus of the Chinese Party.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Gregor Benton, "Chinese Communism and Democracy before 1949," *New Left Review* 148, November-December 1984, p. 59.

<sup>28</sup> See Stuart Schram, *Mao Tse-tung*, pp. 146-150.

<sup>29</sup> Still more ironic was Mao's nickname for them: "the 28 and a half Bolsheviks." This was a mocking

---

<sup>25</sup> *Idem*, pp. 445-446.

<sup>26</sup> *Idem*, pp. 451-452.

Wang Ming, Bo Gu, and the other "internationalists" had no history and no base of their own in China; this made them all the more dependent on Moscow. Their only real experience was that of the factional struggle inside the CP(b) of the USSR and the Comintern. They were the real Stalinists of the CCP.

Fidelity to Moscow had become the chief criterion for selection of members of national Political Bureaus. As emphasized by Wang Fanxi, "Wang Ming's coup d'etat was not the mistaken action of an isolated individual, but one element in a more general process of Stalinization that was touching all sections of the Comintern."<sup>30</sup> The Soviet bureaucracy turned the Comintern into an instrument of its international policy. It sought to politically and organizationally subordinate the national parties. It trained their cadres in that perspective.

Thus, the Political Bureau of the Chinese Communist Party was recomposed according to Moscow's demands in 1931. The "28 Bolsheviks" received the support of the Comintern. Nevertheless, they did not control the totality of the CCP apparatus. They had to try and tighten their grip on a party which had been severely weakened by defeat, but which already stood on a very rich history. The CCP was not born Stalinist. Subordinating it tightly to Moscow was to be one of the main stakes in the tendency struggles that pitted Wang Ming against Mao in the 1930s and 1940s.

From Shanghai, where the national leadership operated underground, the Wang Ming faction could not impose its authority over the Communist forces in Jiangxi in practice. The decisive showdown between the official Political Bureau and the regional leadership headed by Mao was postponed to 1935.

In fact, it seems that until 1934 Moscow did not see Mao Zedong in an unfavorable light.<sup>31</sup> Mao had opposed Li Lisan when the time to do so had come. He had not defended Chen Duxiu, to whom, by his own admission, he owed so much: he had

---

reference to the fact that this new Great Leader had been able to recruit only 27 other people in the USSR, although he was aided by Pavel Mif and although there were a few hundred Chinese students temporarily residing in Russia. Concerning the political evolution of the Chinese colony in the USSR, see Wang Fanxi, *Chinese Revolutionary*.

<sup>30</sup> Wang Fanxi, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

<sup>31</sup> See Benjamin Yang, "The Zunyi Conference as One Step in Mao's Rise to Power: A Survey of Historical Studies of the Chinese Communist Party," *China Quarterly* 106, June 1986, p. 254.

joined the pack and howled with the wolves.<sup>32</sup>

Mao had his own reasons to criticize the first general secretary of the Party and, probably, to avoid reopening the dossier of the Second Chinese revolution. Moreover, being involved in a fierce faction struggle inside the CCP, he wished to avoid a direct clash with Stalin.

Mao, of course, could not have been unaware of Moscow's real role in 1927. In 1936, when he drew a balance sheet of that defeat for Edgar Snow, he did not spare the Comintern envoys. True, "Mao placed the greatest blame on Chen Tu'hsiu whose 'wavering opportunism deprived the party of decisive leadership and a direct line of its own at a moment when further compromise clearly meant catastrophe.'" But, after Chen, the man he held directly responsible was Borodin, the chief Russian political adviser, who, according to Mao, "'stood just a little to the right of Chen Tu'hsiu... and was ready to do everything to please the bourgeoisie, even to the disarming of the workers, when he finally ordered.'" Roy, the Indian delegate of the Comintern, "'stood a little to the left of both Chen and Borodin, but he only stood.' He 'could talk,' according to Mao, 'and he talked too much without offering any method of realization.'"<sup>33</sup>

In a retrospective article of the very official *People's Daily*, dated December 27, 1979, Wang Ming's entire career, from the 1920s onwards, is attributed to the support he enjoyed from Moscow and the Comintern. "Wang Ming," the author notes, "spent over 30 of his adult years in Russia, but only a dozen years in China." The article quotes a statement by Mao in 1971: "Having the support from the Third International, they [the 28 Bolsheviks] seized the Party [in 1931] for four long years."<sup>34</sup>

Wang Ming was no kinder to Mao. He concluded that "the most difficult, the most complex and the longest struggle was that

---

<sup>32</sup> Chen Duxiu was defamed by the Maoist leadership and, for a long time, Chinese historians were either silent on his role or identified him as the arch-traitor. As a result, Li Dazhao, who was brought down by repression in 1927, became the only officially recognized senior creator of Chinese Communism. Only recently has Chen Duxiu been historically and politically rehabilitated in China.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Edgar Snow, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

<sup>34</sup> Wang Jiexiang, "Recalling Comrade Mao Zedong's struggle against Wang Ming's opportunist line," posthumous work revised by Zhu Zhongli. Translated into English in *Summary of World Broadcast*, British Broadcasting Corporation, FE/6321/BII/3 to 11, January 17, 1980.

which the Communists, the Leninist internationalists [that is the 28 Bolsheviks] have waged and are waging against Mao Zedong's anti-Leninist, anti-socialist, pan-Chinese nationalist and bourgeois careerist ideas and activities."<sup>35</sup>

The conflict between the Mao and Wang Ming factions dominates the political history of the CCP during the 1930s and 1940s. Maoism was shaped in the framework of this internal fight, as it was shaped in the framework of the partisan war launched first against the Guomindang, then against the Japanese forces.

Mao now searched quite explicitly for a "Chinese road." He did so in a new national and international context: the very unfavorable relationship of forces growing out of the defeats of 1927 to 1934 in China; the overwhelming weight of the Soviet bureaucracy in the international Communist movement; and very soon, the march towards World War Two. This particular historical conjuncture was to leave a deep imprint on Maoism.

---

<sup>35</sup> Wang Ming, *Lénine, le leninisme et la révolution chinoise*, pp. 9-10.

# Notebooks for Study and Research

Number 2 – January 1987

In the “studies” series

## The Chinese Revolution

Pierre Rousset

### Part I: The Second Chinese Revolution and the shaping of the Maoist Outlook

Contents:

Presentation

Setting the stage: a chronology of modern China from the Opium Wars to the foundation of the CCP

Chapter One: 1921-1935 – Before Maoism: rise and defeat of the Second Chinese revolution

Chapter Two: The legacy of the Second Chinese revolution and the genesis of Maoism

Chapter Three: Marxism and the East – The quest for a “Chinese Road”

Maps: China’s provinces – Industrial China in 1935 – The Long March

**Pierre Rousset** was born in 1946. He has been involved in the fight for socialism since the 1960s, and participated in many campaigns of solidarity with national liberation struggles, particularly those of the peoples of Indochina and other Southeast Asian countries. He has produced several studies on Vietnam, including two books, *Le Parti communiste vietnamien* (Paris: Maspero, 1975) and *Nationalisme et Communisme au Vietnam* (Paris: Galilee, 1978), and an essay, "The Peculiarities of Vietnamese Communism," published in *The Stalinist Legacy* (Tariq Ali, ed., Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984). He has traveled extensively in East Asia and regularly contributes articles on the region to several periodicals. He is a collaborator of the International Institute for Research and Education.



