

OPEN LETTER TO U.S. COMMUNISTS WHO SUPPORT THE STRUGGLE
IN CHINA AGAINST WANG, CHANG, CHIANG, AND YAO

Pacific Collective (M-L)

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[Handwritten signature]

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Soon after the arrests of the so-called "gang of four" and Hua Kuo-feng's election to the chairmanships of the Central Committee and the Military Commission of the Communist Party of China, many U.S. communist organizations accepted the victors' report of the struggle and congratulated the Party and the Chinese people on their triumph. Most of the organizations which did so continue to publish as truth the official accounts of the events surrounding this battle in the class struggle (including the Communist Party (M-L) (formerly October League), Workers' Congress, August Twenty-Ninth Movement, I Wor Kuen, and New Voice Organization), although one (Marxist-Leninist Organizing Committee) ^{practically} soon eliminated mention of China from its press, and the League for Proletarian Revolution seems to have done the same recently.

Hopefully the return of Teng Hsiao-peng, a man we all believed to be a capitalist-roader, as Party vice chairman, army chief of staff, and holder of other posts will prompt a re-evaluation of the policy of parroting Peking Review, a policy which should be cast aside for at least four reasons.

The first is the fact that at the time these organizations lauded the attack on the "gang of four," no one outside China could know whose representatives had won this particular victory in the long struggle between ... advocates of the socialist and capitalist roads in China. Surely it is possible for bourgeois agents to win a temporary victory. Surely they are as capable as the representatives of the proletariat of claiming that Mao wrote, "With you in charge, I am at ease," calling for taking class struggle as the key link and continuing the criticism of Teng Hsiao-peng, publishing Chairman Mao's works, and promising adherence to Mao's line. It is wishful thinking, pure subjectivism, to assume that those who are willing to display Mao Tse-tung's embalmed body under glass would never do the same with his thought.

no [Accordingly, the rush to praise Chairman Hua and the Central Committee he heads was a totally unjustified "interference" in China's internal affairs. Rank and file Party members and the Chinese people must, in Chairman Mao's words, "go into the whys and wherefores of anything" and "use their own heads" in analyzing the complicated situation before them (Mao, "Rectify the Party's Style of Work"). But how can they fail to be influenced by a press full of congratulatory messages from Marxist-Leninist parties and organizations all over the world?

not the point to make.
Centrism [About half the messages reprinted in Peking Review handled the matter correctly. They congratulated Chairman Hua on his appointments, wished him well, etc., without expressing an opinion on the question of his line versus that of Wang, Chang, Chiang, and Yao. The messages from the leaders of the Korean, Albanian, Romanian, Vietnamese, and Laotian parties all avoided

the subject, presumably because they lacked knowledge on which to base an opinion.

Third, those organizations which accept the current official Chinese line must put forth a massive self-criticism for their previous reporting on events in China and for their interpretations of Chairman Mao's line on class struggle under socialism and other questions. For we have now been told repeatedly that

with the mass media under their control, the "gang of four" spread a host of revisionist fallacies, trampled on the fundamental principles of Marxism at will and tampered with or distorted Chairman Mao's proletarian revolutionary line and his various principles and policies.

Quote highlight
 (Peking Review, 1977, No. 1, p. 38.) Peking Review, the main source of U.S. communist reporting on Chinese lines and events, consists of translated reprints from those same mass media which the "gang of four" allegedly filled with revisionism! To be consistent, therefore, these groups must repudiate their entire previous line on Chinese politics and point out the errors in their own work which followed from accepting the "gang of four's" revised Marxism.

✓ Moreover, they will have to explain that the errors came from uncritically accepting the facts and the lines put forward in the Chinese press. But when they do that, how will they justify their present uncritical reliance on the same source?!

Which?
 The fourth reason to end that reliance is the substance of the struggle in China itself. It may be a long time before we know whether the arrested leaders and their followers in the main served the bourgeoisie or the proletariat. Certainly some of the purported exposures of the group's actions would be hard to fabricate. But the campaign against them leaves a nagging question unanswered and presents mounting evidence of a right line within the present leadership.

The nagging question: why was the so-called "gang of four" permitted to wreak havoc in China for so long? We are told that for several years they usurped high posts, sabotaged production, vilified large numbers of leading cadres at all levels (including Premier Chou En-lai), tampered with and suppressed Mao's directives, and badly confused the masses in matters of ideology and political line. Instead of removal from their posts and a mass campaign against their line, we are told that all that happened before Chairman Mao's death was an ineffective series of practically private criticisms from Mao (P.R. 1977, No. 3: 27-31).

There is a convenient answer to this question, in the form of an alleged quotation from Mao: "If this [the problem of the "four"] is not settled in the first half of this year [1975], it should be settled in the second half; if not this year, then next year; if not next year, then the year after"

(ibid., p. 29). This is either a forgery, a quotation taken from a totally different context, or a grave error on the part of an aging leader. "Maybe tomorrow" is a terrible policy for dealing with class enemies who are attacking and confusing the working masses daily, and we doubt that it would have been Mao's. If it was, the present leadership should be criticizing itself for not struggling against it, instead of claiming that they have been following Mao's correct instructions.

—The evidence of a turn to the right:

(1) For months it was hard to see what erroneous lines the "four" were accused of promoting because the criticism focused on their personal conduct and particular alleged crimes. This was a conscious policy: current leadership decided not to openly struggle for its own line until the "four" were personally discredited:

. . . [I]t is necessary. . . to continue in the first stage to expose and criticize the "gang of four's" conspiracy to usurp Party and state power and at the same time penetratingly expose and repudiate their counter-revolutionary features and their criminal personal histories. Later on, it is necessary to stress the repudiation of the ultra-Right essence of the counter-revolutionary revisionist line of the "gang of four" and its manifestations in various spheres, and to thoroughly denounce and discredit them theoretically in the fields of philosophy, political economy, and scientific socialism. . . . [This last] is a long-term task.

(P.R. 1977, 17: 39.) Only leaders who fear that the masses will not find that the leaders' line is in the people's interests will need to first turn the tide of public opinion in their favor and against their opponents through such exposures, before struggling for the correctness of their line and the incorrectness of that of the "gang of four."

(2) The proletariat can be led to disaster if it falls prey to opportunist leadership, whether "left" in form or right. It must be able to recognize and struggle against both. The indictment against the "gang of four" reads like a catalogue of "left" deviations: anarchism and disruption in politics and production; idealist denial of the role of production in building socialism; dogmatism and belittling the role of practice in the relationship between theory and practice; and split-tism and treating contradictions among the people as contradictions with the enemy, including encouraging unjustified use of force. Despite what, if true, was rampant "left" opportunism, the "four" are labeled revisionists and ultra-rightists. But revisionism and openly right lines downplay the class struggle in favor of an overemphasis on stability, unity, and

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The error has been promoted with another new "quotation" from Mao: "[O]ppose revisionism which includes empiricism and dogmatism. Both revise Marxism-Leninism." Until now, Marxists considered revisionism the revision of fundamental principles to support right lines negating the class struggle, as opposed to the (usually "left") error of dogmatic application of unaltered earlier statements without regard to conditions, time, and place. What happened to the Mao who wrote,

Both dogmatism and revisionism run counter to Marxism. . . . It is dogmatism to approach Marxism from a metaphysical point of view and to regard it as something rigid. It is revisionism to negate the basic principles of Marxism and to negate its universal truth.

(Mao, Selected Readings, p. 496.)

Calling "left" opportunists rightists and revisionists can only (1) make it artificially easy to attack Wang, Chang, Chiang, and Yao by identifying them with the main enemies that mass movements since the Cultural Revolution have been aimed at, and (2) ideologically disarm Party members and the people in the struggle to identify and oppose true right deviations. In fact, despite early promises to continue the campaign to criticize Teng Hsiao-peng, there has not been a word about the real right danger since the "gang's" ouster, either in the course of Teng's return or in any other context.

This has been formalized in the strategic policy decision on "grasping the key link in managing the affairs of the country well." This is explained as: "In the course of the acute struggle between the two classes, achieving stability and unity in our country, consolidating the dictatorship of the proletariat and bringing about great order across the land. . . ." But the means for carrying out the class struggle to bring about all this stability and order has been reduced to "thoroughly expose and criticize the 'gang of four'" (P.R. 1977, 10: 13). Criticism of true right lines would not fit into this framework, for the targets would not be associated with the "gang of four," and the struggle would disrupt, for the present, stability within the enterprise or party or state units whose leadership had to be criticized.

Again, we do not hold that the "gang of four" represented a correct line rather than a "left" form of attempts at capitalist restoration--we don't know. But the campaign against them is being carried out in a manner that could only cover the Rightists in the Party.

(3) The new line on the relation between grasping revolution and promoting production is eclectic and confused. Though full of statements about the primacy of politics and class

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struggle in holding to the socialist road (generally linked to the need to struggle against the "four"), it is also full of statements which can mislead. Mao taught that the principal contradiction under socialism is that between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Some current articles fail to mention this, while saying that "the basic contradictions in socialist society. . . [are] the contradictions between the relations of production and the productive forces and between the superstructure and the economic base," or note that while contradictions between the people and the enemy do exist, "most" contradictions are among the people (P.R. 1977, 21: 8 and 12: 12).

In line with this, the Chinese are being told that the form which continuing revolution will take is "adjusting the disharmony" between relations of production and productive forces and between the superstructure and the base, and that the reason why class struggle is the key link is the need to resolve the remaining contradictions in these spheres (ibid.). Is "adjusting disharmony" what the 1973 CPC Constitution means when it calls for continued revolution to resolve class contradictions, adding

Such is China's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, a great political revolution carried out under the conditions of socialism by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie and all other exploiting classes to consolidate the dictatorship of the proletariat and prevent capitalist restoration. Revolutions like this will have to be carried out many times in the future.

(10th Nat'l Cong. of the CPC (Documents), p. 62.) Is "adjusting the disharmony" what Chou En-lai meant when he said major two-line struggles, like that against the Lin Piao anti-party clique, "will occur ten, twenty or thirty times, Lin Piaos will appear again. . . ." (Ibid., p. 16.)

Furthermore, the fact that the ultimate triumph of socialism requires a firm base of modern socialist production is stated at times in a way that suggests that the growth of production can be relied on to spur revolution (P.R. 1977, 19: 24-25). The "theory of productive forces," which this comes perilously close to, is presented as if it were an undisguised plan to develop the productive forces under the capitalist system instead of the socialist one, a presentation that does not arm the masses to recognize and oppose the theory (P.R. 1977, 2:12). Both the "decisive role of the productive forces" and "revolution as the principal aspect" are eclectically presented one after another. There is no explanation that one is primary in moving society to periods of revolution, while the other is primary during those periods (P.R. 1976, 48: 12).

Incredibly, socialism's superiority to capitalism has been

stated solely as its capacity for faster economic growth, with no mention of the end of economic exploitation and political oppression of the working masses (P.R. 1977, 19: 24).

(4) The question of the role of intellectuals (educated people doing mainly mental work) in socialist society has been answered in a one-sided and non-Marxist way (P.R. 1977, 23: 12-14). The Party of Labor of Albania has pointed to several significant factors in the social position, conditions of work, and nature of work of intellectuals under both capitalism and socialism which create tendencies toward disdain for the masses, idealism, belittling the class struggle, and individualism (Albania Today, 9-10/75, pp. 16-23). The analysis is similar to several passages in Lenin about intellectuals and is the basis for the PLA's and Mao's strong emphasis on the continuing struggle to remold the outlook of the intellectuals through study and participation in productive labor and class struggle. The question is critical, because these are the people who teach the children, write the newspapers, manage the economic enterprises, etc.

The recent Chinese article on intellectuals cited above does mention the need for remolding because bourgeois ideas will crop up while classes still exist. But it one-sidedly emphasizes the value of the intellectuals, omitting any deeper analysis of the contradictions of their class position and thus providing no basis for understanding the nature of the struggle that must be waged. Instead there is the proposition that since the majority of intellectuals were revolutionary under the old society, "how can they be otherwise now that they are living in New China." It should be obvious to any Marxist that not every stratum which, because of its interests, opposed reactionary semi-feudal, comprador, bureaucrat-capitalist rule automatically favors the dictatorship of the proletariat. The true answer to the rhetorical question about what factors can give rise to opportunism among intellectuals under socialism is too complex to go into here, but it can be found in the Albanian article (see also Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 7, pp. 267, 322-24).

We want to mention a number of other points which we cannot go into more fully here because of space limitations. (5) An article criticizing the "gang of four's" allegedly isolationist line on the relationship between self-reliance and "making things foreign serve China" one-sidedly fails to explain the dangers of forsaking self-reliance. Moreover, it says nothing about how to tell when foreign trade passes from "making foreign things serve China" to dependency (P.R. 1977, 28: 9-11).

(6) Several articles distort the relationship between leaders and the masses, one-sidedly stressing obedience to the Party Central Committee while omitting reference to the need to decide independently whether the leadership is correct and to go against the tide if it is not; treating the appointment of Hua as if that alone is a guarantee that China will not change its colors; and presenting his appointment as being (correctly) the decision of one man (Mao) (P.R. 1976, 45: 8; 47: 8, and 49: 8-10).

(7) An article opposing an alleged "anti-empiricist" campaign by the "four" neglects to state that empiricism and a bourgeois-democratic outlook could be a problem with some veteran cadres. The article considers it a sufficient indictment to say that the "four" opposed experienced veterans; it fails to address the question of whether those veterans still uphold the correct line (P.R. 1976, 50: 13-15). (8) The "gang's" alleged attacks on Chou En-lai were not reflected in the Peking Reviews we have read in the past (unless you accept the present claim that they meant "Chou" when they said "Confucius," P.R. 1977, 16: 29) and certainly not in Chiang Ch'ing's interviews with Roxanne Witke, where the Premier was spoken of as a consistent ally (Witke, Comrade Chiang Ch'ing (Little, Brown: Boston, 1977)). (9) Finally, we fail to see how the supposedly forged last words of Chairman Mao, "Act according to the principles laid down," could serve a revisionist clique (see P.R. 1976, 52: 8-12 & 32).

Besides studying these documents, those who would take a stand on what is happening in China should read Yao Wen-yuan's supposedly "anti-party" (P.R. 1976, 50: 13) article, "On the Social Basis of the Lin Piao Anti-Party Clique" and Chang Chun-Chiao's "On Exercising All-Round Dictatorship Over the Bourgeoisie" (P.R. 1975, 10: 5 and 14: 5). We believe that they are good expositions of the teachings of Marx, Lenin, and Mao on the dictatorship of the proletariat and raise doubts about some of the charges levelled against their authors.

(This letter was written before the documents from the recent 11th Party Congress were available. Obviously they, too, should be studied, particularly the revisions in the CPC constitution.)

In sum, the class struggle continues in China, and nothing in Marxism-Leninism permits communists to assume that the proletariat will suffer no temporary setbacks. Those outside China who so firmly support Chairman Hua Kuo-feng, and now presumably Teng Hsiao-peng, exhibit a "follower" mentality that would have permitted them to waltz down the path of revisionism in the arms of Khrushchev 20 years ago. The only difference now is that no Chinese revisionist would dare launch an open attack on Mao as the Khrushchevites did on Stalin. This difference only makes the situation more complicated and reemphasizes the need to "use our own heads," because a turn to the right would be less obvious.

Anyone with some knowledge of Mao Tse-tung's relationship with the Comintern knows that he would be the last to want U.S. communists to uncritically accept every word emanating from Peking, even while he was alive. Now that there is mounting evidence of a right line among CPC leadership, it is especially important to stop echoing Peking Review. On the one hand, the practice will confuse U.S. communists ideologically. On the other, it helps confer legitimacy on Chinese leaders who should

win mass support on the basis of their own line and practice or not at all. (This last effect reached its extreme in the disgraceful exchange of endorsements between CPC leadership and that of the CP(M-L), formerly the October League, during Chairman Klonsky's recent visit to China. Neither party knows enough about the divided movement in the other's country to be handing out seals of approval.)

The fact that the campaign against Wang, Chang, Chiang, and Yao is apparently being used to promote a right line "saddens us" but does not dishearten us. The Chinese people have both the theory and the experience that they need in order to see whose interests the present leaders will serve, and to know what to do if it is not the proletariat and their peasant allies. If there has been a temporary victory for either the Right or for centrists opening the way for the Right, we think it will be short-lived.

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