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Notes on the Polemic with the Chinese Communists

Published: *Realidad* Vol 3 No 3 Sept-October 1964 pp44-69 [Spanish language bi-monthly cultural and political review of the Communist Party of Spain]

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The polemic begun by the Chinese Communist Party within the international communist movement has entered upon its second phase.

The first phase was predominantly characterized by an ideological and political discussion of a number of decisive questions, such as war and peace, peaceful coexistence, the different ways of the socialist revolution, the role of national liberation movements, etc.

In that first phase, the Chinese texts cited the 81-party resolution approved in Moscow in 1960; and made a show of defending it against the revisions committed by the other parties... The polemic presented itself, at least in part, as the clash between different interpretations of one and the same document.

This phase has been left behind.

The de facto opening of the second phase was the publication in the summer of 1963 of the 25 points of the CCP, which represented a programmatic platform and a political line which are in opposition to the 81-party Declaration of 1960. The typical aspect of this second phase is that the 25 points are used, not to pursue the discussion among the parties, but, rather, to provoke, in every possible way, schisms in the parties. In some of their recent articles, the Chinese **communists** openly call for the creation of schismatic groups and fractions within the other parties; in practical matters, by using demagogic arguments, which, in some cases, take hold among untrained young people, manipulating large sums of money, recruiting primarily politically degenerate elements, renegades from the workers' movement, etc., they are striving to constitute groups of that type, which are already functioning in various countries.

What is the theoretical and historical foundation of the Chinese

positions, particularly in the second phase of the polemic, in these efforts to split the communist parties?

The following notes, without claiming in any way to treat it profoundly and completely, sketch three aspects of this problem.

I. Rehabilitation of the cult of personality

This is a question on which the Chinese have made a 180-degree turn.

In 1956, shortly after the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, Liu Chao Shi declared, at the Eighth Congress of the CCP (the last one to be held!):

"The Twentieth Congress of the CPSU constitutes a great political event of worldwide importance."

And, as one of the great merits of that Congress, he noted that it had "denounced the cult of personality and its serious consequences within the party" ([Note]: Report of Liu Chao Shi, Cahiers du Communisme [Communist Notebooks], page 66).

At that same Eighth Congress, Den Shiao Pin, Secretary General of the CCP, declared:

"The Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union has made convincing clarifications about the enormous importance of the unshakeable observance of the principle of collective leadership, and of the struggle against the cult of personality. These explanations have exercised enormous influence, not only on the CPSU, but also on the other Communist Parties of all the countries in the world..."

"One of the most important merits of the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union is to have made clear the serious and fatal consequences to which the deification of the personality can lead" ([Note]: Report on the Bylaws of the CCP, Peking, 1956, pages 66 and 74).

In an article in Renmin Ribao, "Once Again, Concerning the Historical Experience of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat," published in December 1956 by decision of the Politburo of the CCP, it is stated:

"In the last period of his life, the continuous victories and praises went to his head, and, in his methods of thought, Stalin partially, but seriously, departed from dialectical materialism, and sank into subjectivism. He believed in his own wisdom and authority, refused to pay serious attention to the research and

study of various genuinely complex situations, refused to listen seriously to the opinions of the comrades and the voice of the masses, and, as a result, certain political directives and measures taken by him were in conflict with the real objective situation, and, for a long period, he frequently put into practice these mistaken directives and measures, it having been impossible to correct his mistakes in good time.

"The Communist Party of the Soviet Union has now taken steps designed to correct the errors committed by Stalin, and to liquidate the consequences of these errors, and is achieving success in this task. The Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union has demonstrated tremendous decisiveness and boldness with regard to the elimination of the Stalin cult, in publicizing the seriousness of Stalin's errors, and in liquidating their consequences. Throughout the whole world, Marxists-Leninists, and those who sympathize with the cause of communism, are supporting the efforts of the CPSU designed to correct the errors, and hope that these efforts by the Soviet comrades will be crowned with complete success. It is entirely obvious that, insofar as Stalin's errors are not errors of little weight, they cannot be corrected in a single morning. To do so, it is necessary to work over a relatively long period of time, and an effort of scrupulous ideological education is indispensable."

Today, the Chinese are saying very different things. In spite of the tediousness of this method, it is necessary to copy some passages from the most recent Chinese documents:

"At the Twentieth Congress, comrade Khrushchev repudiated Stalin completely... These attacks by Khrushchev against Stalin are the greatest insult which can be offered to the Soviet people, the CPSU, the Soviet Army, the greatest insult which can be offered to the international communist movement, to the revolutionary peoples, and to Marxism-Leninism" ([Note]: "On the Question of Stalin," Renmin Ribao, Peking Information, 30 September 1963, pages 18 and 21).

"The series of events transpiring since the Twentieth Congress shows how serious have been the consequences of the total repudiation of Stalin by the leadership of the CPSU... The revisionist line of the leadership of the CPSU began precisely with the Twentieth Congress" ([Note]: Id., page 22).

In the same article, there is the additional statement that "under the pretext of the struggle against the cult of personality" there is an attempt to "misrepresent the party of the proletariat, to misrepresent the dictatorship of the proletariat, to misrepresent the socialist system" ([Note]: Id., page 23).

From these quotations (which we could cite ad nauseam, since the protest against the denunciation of the cult of personality is a leit-motif of the Chinese documents of recent months), emerges a conclusion of particular seriousness for Marxist intellectuals -- the conclusion that, in the face of the impetus for renewal, springing from the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, once praised and now repudiated by the Chinese communists, they extol, demand, and are trying to impose a return to the methods of the cult of personality. A return, not in China -- where these methods have never fallen out of use -- but in the broad framework of the international communist movement, from whose midst these methods (with their concomitants of dogmatism and sectarianism) have been largely eliminated, as a result of the harsh struggle which has been carried on over the last eight years.

In the field of Marxist theory, the vicious methods of the cult meant, as has now repeatedly been made clear, that only one personality, Stalin, could introduce new theses, new concepts, in the domain of Marxism-Leninism. The entire theoretical activity of the communist movement was in bondage, shackled by the monstrous privilege arrogated to Stalin of being himself above all, the one to say the last word.

Today, the situation is totally different. What is the method being followed in the development of Marxist-Leninist theory? Without wishing to define facts which are still in movement, which are being tried out in the practice of the political and ideological struggle, it can, nevertheless, be said that Marxist theory is being developed through the experiences and contributions of the aggregate of the various communist parties. Through the activity of its militants, and, more specifically, through its organizations of leadership and of other comrades, concretely dedicated to the ideological tasks, each party contributes to a greater or lesser degree to stating, studying, or resolving new theoretical problems. The lively clash between these or those theoretical elaborations with objective realities, with the necessities of the revolutionary struggle, permit the party to incorporate in its line, in its orientation, in its political and ideological struggle, new ideas elaborated within itself; or, on the other hand, to reject whatever there may be of the false, the incorrect, the negative, in the work done by particular comrades.

In that process, an essential concern is the unremitting defense of Marxist principles -- a defense which, in order to be authentic, may not depart from a dialectical development which will permit (as Lenin did vis-à-vis Marx) the enrichment of the ideological arsenal of Marxism by means of the new concepts which are a reflection of the new objective realities of today's world; of this world which, since Lenin's time, has undergone the gigantic transformations such as the creation of the world socialist system and the fabulous increase in man's dominion over nature, symbolized in the use of atomic energy and the ascent to the cosmos.

The task of developing Marxist theory has an international character; it falls to the aggregate of the communist parties. Hence the enormous value, in this concrete aspect, of relations among the parties in the different forms which exist today: bilateral meetings, collective discussions among parties facing common problems, the editing of the international journal, and, above all, the conferences of the international communist movement, like those of 1957 and 1960 in Moscow, which serve to confront, gather together, and shape, in documents of general applicability, the most essential, the most vital aspects of experience and of the multifaceted, diversified theoretical work carried on by all the parties.

With the liquidation of the cult of personality and the application of these methods -- independently of the difficulties which are to be expected, and which arise in certain aspects -- Marxist thought has received a revivifying impulse; in recent years, it has made unquestioned progress; it is carrying on an infinitely more effective struggle against bourgeois ideology.

But the Chinese theoreticians do not see things this way. For them, all these great instances of progress, which invigorate Marxism, which de-dogmatize it, are a degeneration.

They think that what happened before with Stalin must vigorously continue today. With one important difference: what Stalin represented then, Mao Tse Tung represents, or ought to represent, today. The replacement of the cult of Stalin by the cult of Mao -- this is the novelty put forward by the Chinese.

Does anyone regard this estimate of the situation as exaggerated? Let us look at the facts: no one can deny that in the Chinese documents the leaders of the principal communist parties of the world, beginning with the CPSU, are charged with revisionism, reformism, etc. At the same time, the role of Mao Tse Tung is unequivocally defined in the terms indicated above. Here are some samples:

"In speaking of Marx, Lenin said: everything that human society has created, Marx thought out anew in a critical spirit, without leaving anything in the shadows. Everything that human thought has created, he thought through again, he filtered it through the sieve of criticism, and verified it in the workers' movement... This is true for Lenin, as it is for Engels and for Stalin. It is equally true for Mao Tse Tung" ([Note]: The Combat Assignments for Workers in Philosophy and the Social Sciences, Tcheou Yang, Peking Information, 6 January 1964, pages 28 and 24).

"We must take Mao Tse Tung's thought as the guide for our action..." ([Note]: The Combat Assignments for Workers in

Philosophy and the Social Sciences, Tcheou Yang, Peking Information, 6 January 1964, pages 28 and 24).

"Socialist education must be guided by the thought of Mao Tse Tung... Educating the workers firmly in the thought of Mao Tse Tung is how they will get a better understanding of the fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism" ([Note]: The Socialist Education of the Workers, Kou Ta-Chouen, Peking Information, 30 March 1964, pages 9 and 10).

In the Chinese review Sintaiian Juntai, the following appeared:

"The ideas of Mao Tse Tung are a creative development of Marxism-Leninism in a new period of history. This creative development has not only a specific meaning for the Chinese revolution, but a general meaning for the current epoch of the world revolution. We can say with complete justification that the ideas of Mao Tse Tung are the Marxism-Leninism of socialist revolutions and of the building of socialism" ([Note]: Quoted in the review Komunist, No 15, Moscow, October 1963, page 44).

The application of the cult of personality methods is reflected not only in the above quotations, but in the very internal structure of the Chinese documents. I disregard many particularly lamentable aspects of those documents, such as the insults, the indiscriminate and unjustified name-calling, the continual, dishonest use of data, the distorted quotations, etc. I consider another aspect of the problem as such more serious.

Those documents are replete with quotations from Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, etc. The excessive use of quotations may become tiresome, pedantic, boring. Nevertheless, the number is a secondary matter. What is important is the role of these quotations in the context of the argument of a document. And the Chinese manipulate and use those quotations with a method, in the context of a mode of reasoning, which is incompatible with Marxism.

Wherein does this incompatibility lie? The following comparisons may contribute to clarify matters: if it were a discussion among Catholics, whose doctrine is based on dogmas emanating from God and of eternal verity, above and beyond time and space, the Chinese mode of reasoning would be perfect. But the whole point is that it is not a discussion among Catholics, but among Marxists.

The pattern followed by all the arguments that appear in the Chinese documents, whether it is a question of peace or of the ways of the transition to socialism, or of any other of the matters under debate, is the following:

First, they seek a quotation from Marx or from Engels or from

Lenin. Preferably not one, but several. Then they seek a statement from some text of the CPSU, or from a Khrushchev speech, or the words of some other communist leader, which, in one way or another, does not coincide with the former quotations. And they draw their conclusion: the doctrine of the masters has been betrayed, Marxism has been violated, here we have abhorrent revisionism, heterodoxy...

Let us take, for example, the article published in Renmin Ribao under the title "The Proletarian Revolution and Khrushchev's Revisionism" (eighth reply to the letter of the Central Committee of the CPSU) ([Note]: Peking Information, 6 April 1964). In it are abundantly reproduced the stupendous criticisms written by Lenin against the reformist positions of Bernstein and Kautsky. Then they take a few phrases of Khrushchev's, in which he refers to the peaceful way, the parliamentary struggle, etc. And now it remains but to hurl against Khrushchev the same adjectives that Lenin used against the Bernsteinians, to say that Khrushchev is as bad as they are, is worse than they are, etc., etc. Generally, Khrushchev's phrases are twisted in a coarse and crude manner; the quotations of his words are mutilated. But, I repeat, this is secondary. The important thing is that this method of reasoning in itself is incompatible with Marxism. The correctness of the current position of a political line for today cannot depend, for a Marxist, on its agreement or disagreement with a passage from a phrase written by Marx a hundred years ago, or by Lenin fifty years ago.

I repeat: if our principles were dogmas, if the writings of our masters were the "Word of God," the Gospel which, by definition, must be eternally true, above and beyond all changes occurring in the mundane world, in such a case the mode of reasoning of the Chinese leaders would be proper.

But Marxism is something else. It is science, it is antidogma, it is a materialist and dialectical conception of the world; consequently, it establishes, as the supreme criterion of truth, practice, practice as it changes, as it moves; and it requires ideas to change as a function of the changes occurring in objective reality, that reality of which ideas are the reflection, and which, at the same time, ideas must seize in order to be able to contribute to modifying it, to transforming it.

For this reason, Marxist quotations — contrary to what occurs with Catholic dogmas — are of no use if applied outside the context of concrete reality.

Lenin wrote: "the living soul of Marxism is concrete analysis of concrete situations."

This phrase encompasses a great deal. Without such analysis, Marxism loses that umbilical cord which unites it with the reality which surrounds it. It loses its living soul. It ceases to be Marxism.

It is into this greivous error that the Chinese leaders have fallen. The very thing that leaps to the eye in their documents is, alongside the superabundant quotations, the lack of analysis. In hundreds and hundreds of pages, there is not even an attempt to make a concrete analysis of the current world situation, of the new relationship of forces, of the new scientific and technological discoveries, of what a thermonuclear war would mean today; there is nothing resembling a concrete analysis of the situation in France or in Italy or in Spain... Nevertheless, without such an analysis they claim to expound Marxist truth and to be able to condemn those who do not obey them.

To ignore concrete analysis and to operate on the basis of quotations means an incapacity to reason in accordance with Marxist principles. It means a fall into dogmatism.

Not content with this, the Chinese leaders start off from there to launch themselves into a veritable "witch hunt." Having established — through the very peculiar method which we have just described — that the policy of this or that party is capitulationist or revisionist, they pass on to the following stage:

"Since in their policies they have applied a line of betrayal of socialism and of capitulation to imperialism, it is part of the very logic of things that they betray the position of the proletariat in the field of philosophy" ([Note]: The Combat Assignments for Workers in Philosophy and the Social Sciences, Tseou Yang, Peking Information, 6 January 1964, page 18 [the emphasis is mine - M.A.]).

Such a priori reasoning, smacking of scholasticism, is marvelously convenient. With no need to adduce any documentary proof, any concrete analysis of the ideological positions of the parties being attacked, these are censured in the very next line for having replaced "the dialectical materialism of the proletariat with the pragmatic bourgeois philosophy of imperialism" ([Note]: Op. cit.).

And so, here we are converted into devotees of pragmatism!

But that is not the only example of the circular a priori reasoning of the Chinese:

"Since the representatives of modern revisionism are basically pragmatists in their attitude toward truth and objective laws, it is natural that they should have a great disdain for theories" ([Note]: Op. cit. - the emphasis is mine - M.A.).

The purpose of this cascade of anathema is obvious: by stigmatizing all others as pragmatists, reformists, etc., the Chinese are left as the sole guardians of the Marxist "tablets of the law"; and these

"tablets of the law" in their concept, are untouchable, or, rather, can be touched only by one special and unique personality -- yesterday Stalin, today Mao Tse Tung -- to whose whims all who claim to be Marxists-Leninists must submit.

We see, then, that there is a direct connection between the enthronement of the Mao cult and the efforts by the Chinese to split the other parties. The challenge issued by the Chinese to the other parties is the equivalent, in a certain sense, of saying: either you accept the re-establishment of the cult of personality, today personified in Mao Tse Tung, or you are not Marxists; and, consequently, we are going to do everything possible to break up those non-Marxist parties, and to create new parties which will embrace exclusively those who accept this Chinese form of Marxism, based on the cult of Mao Tse Tung. The methods of the cult of personality are employed with an openly nationalistic bias contrary to the principles of proletarian internationalism.

The communist parties give a firm and steadfast response to this posture, in order to defend their unity and frustrate those attempts at splitting them, which can only serve the purposes of imperialism. At the same time, there arises a question which is of concern to many, and which we cannot evade:

How is it possible for a party like the Chinese, with such a glorious revolutionary history, at that great turning point in the development of the communist movement represented by the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, to demonstrate a total incapacity to overcome the anti-Marxist methods of the cult of personality, and, on the contrary, to aspire to rehabilitate those methods, and establish, with what are clearly nationalistic purposes, a sort of Chinese Marxism? The indispensable elements for a complete reply to this question are not available today. But this is not a sufficient reason for us not to try to examine certain facets of the problem, in the light of facts which are within the reach of anyone.

II. Contradictions concerning contradiction

The works of Mao Tse Tung on ideological themes are an interesting field of research, for they throw light on the form in which Marxism became known and propagated in China. The study of these works discloses serious deficiencies in Mao's presentation of some of the fundamental ideas of Marxism-Leninism. To approach this question in an article such as this is an extremely risky matter, since it involves reducing to almost telegraphic terms arguments which would require extensive analysis. Nevertheless, the notes that follow may be useful, if they provide a stimulus for thinking about these problems in greater depth. Let us briefly recall some of the ideological background against which the spread of Marxism took place in China. It is very different from that system of the capitalist countries, not only of Europe, but of Latin America, as well, where the ideas of the French revolution played an

extraordinary role during the nineteenth century.

According to the Chinese historian Li Chu, the most noteworthy feature of Chinese history is the following:

"In China there lived Confucius, whose ideas exercised a great influence over a period of more than a thousand years, and played a preponderant role in the formation of the Chinese national character, whereas in Europe there was no personality which can be compared with Confucius" ([Note]: Article in Reinain Ribes, 8 July 1961).

As we all know, in the philosophy of Confucianism reality is frozen in immutable categories. One of Confucius's most famous phrases is the following: "The sovereign must be sovereign; the subject, subject; the father, the father; the son, the son." It is impossible to go further in the negation of dialectics.

This ageold force of the ideas of Confucianism represented an objective difficulty for the complete assimilation of dialectical materialism, and for it to become the dominant ideology.

Moreover, the spread of Marxist ideas in China began only very recently, that is, after the Socialist Revolution in Russia. The primary vehicles for its diffusion, particularly during the 40's, in which it began to achieve an extraordinary breadth, were the works of Mao Tse Tung, in some of which he tried to sum up in simplified, popularized form the basic philosophical concepts of Marxism. Let us take, for example, his work On Contradiction, written in 1937. This is a pamphlet of fifty-seven pages, but it is represented in the documents of the Chinese party as a "complete, profound and easily accessible exposition...of the ideology of Marxism-Leninism" ([Note]: Hu Chiao-Mu, 30 Years of the Communist Party of China, Peking 1958, page 53).

Unfortunately, the content of this work does not deserve such praise. In it, the Marxist concept of dialectic is not merely simplified, but truncated and mutilated. For example, the essential law of the dialectic, the so-called "negation of negation," is erased, obliterated, in the work of Mao Tse Tung. This is no secondary matter; what is at stake is not that the exposition should be more or less complete or systematic. This elimination affects the very substance of the Marxist concept of the dialectic.

Mao Tse Tung says, following the Marxist classics, that contradiction is simultaneously the identity and opposition of opposites. But how does he explain this problem? On the one hand, he says that there is identity between the two aspects of contradiction, because one of them cannot exist independently of the other, and, on the other hand, there is identity between them because, under certain conditions, one of the aspects tends "to transform itself into the other, to assume the

position occupied by the opposite aspect."

And Mao Tse Tung gives the following example:

"It is well known that during the course of the revolution, the proletariat, from being the dominated class, became transformed into the dominant class, and that the bourgeoisie, formerly dominant, became dominated, assuming the position of its opposite" ([Note]: Mao Tse Tung, On Contradiction, Peking 1959, page 44).

Here is where the error bursts out, the insufficiency and mutilation which the Marxist concept of dialectics suffers in the work we are analysing. It is, in fact, an elemental truth that, with the triumph of the socialist revolution, the bourgeoisie does not proceed to take the place of the proletariat; and the proletariat does not proceed to take the place of the bourgeoisie. What is lacking in Mao Tse Tung's exposition is that the key idea of the solution of contradictions, the development (of nature, of society, of thought) does not come about through the simple triumph of one aspect of the contradiction over the other; it is not a development in, so to speak, a pendulum of movement, in which today element A places itself above an element B, below, and tomorrow element B will be above an element A, below; it is, rather, in Engels's words, a spiral movement, by virtue of which the solution of some contradictions causes new contradictions to arise, always at a higher level, in a progressive advance from the simple to the complex, from the lower to the higher.

Or, going back to the example of the socialist revolution: this signifies the defeat of the bourgeoisie and the triumph of the proletariat, which becomes the ruling class. But it becomes it in a new form, at a higher stage of human development: upon defeating the bourgeoisie, "negating" the bourgeoisie, the proletariat at the same time that it triumphs negates itself. In its triumph lies the germ of its own negation. That which engenders the socialist revolution is a society without classes (or, from this point of view, without a bourgeois class and without a working class), a society which has its own specific contradictions, but contradictions of a higher order, qualitatively different from those of bourgeois society.

What is serious is that it is precisely the facts which Mao Tse Tung eliminates, or, at any rate, obscures in his analysis of contradiction, which explains the emergence of the new.

This conception of dialectics, in which the birth of the new is relegated to the background, in which the "spiral line" of development is ignored, creates a fertile field for the flowering of dogmatic currents, a tendency to repeat old formulas and quotations; not to see new phenomena which arise in real life; to seek to place new realities -- as if in a straightjacket -- into old categories, which are losing, or have lost, any real force...

Let us go on to another point: repeating the well-known Marxist thesis, Mao Tse Tung indicates that in every contradiction there is a principal element, which plays a determining role, and another, secondary one. But the, for the Marxist thesis, according to which not only the principal factor acts on the secondary one, but also the secondary one acts on the principal one, Mao Tse Tung substitutes another, different thesis. He says that, on certain occasions, the principal factor becomes the secondary one, and the secondary factor becomes the principal one.

And, in applying this thesis, he reaches the conclusion that, on certain occasions, the factor which plays the principal and decisive role is not the productive forces, but, rather, the relations of production; not practice, but theory; not the foundation, but the superstructure ([Note]: Id., page 40).

"When the productive forces," he adds, "cannot develop unless the relations of production change, the change in the relations of production plays the principal and decisive role" ([Note]: Id., page 40).

This argument is false, inasmuch as the triumph of the revolution (a change in the relations of production) signifies precisely the triumph of the productive forces, which defeat the old relations of production. This constitutes the most conclusive proof that the decisive role is played by the productive forces.

The triumph of the socialist revolution is the triumph of the proletariat (which is the incarnation of the new productive forces) over the bourgeoisie (which is the incarnation of the old relations of production).

But Mao Tse Tung goes even further. He writes:

"When, as Lenin put it, 'without a revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary action,' the creation and advocacy of revolutionary theory plays the principal and decisive role. When a certain job (whatever it may be) is to be done, but there is, as yet, no directive, method, plan or policy defining how to do it, then the principal and decisive role is played by the elaboration of the directive, method, plan or policy" ([Note]: Id., page 40).

Mao Tse Tung's error consists here of substituting one problem for another. That theories, directives, methods play an essential role, no one can dispute. But the point is that, in order to be effective, in order to be able to speed up the development of history, theories, directives or methods must correspond to objective reality. They must be, so to speak, the subjective moulding of an objective reality; consequently, they are never the primary factor, but the secondary. If this

does not occur, if they do not correspond to that objective context, those theories, directives and methods are condemned to failure, no matter how much insistence and ardor is used to propagate them. Communist utopias have existed for many centuries. Communism can only exist in our epoch, as a function, in the last analysis, of the degree of development achieved by the productive forces.

To emphasize (as Mao does) the decisive role of doctrines, slogans, methods, and, on the other hand, to ignore the internal link which must connect them to the concrete reality in which they have to operate, is tantamount to distorting the Marxist concept of the relation between the objective and the subjective. It is from here that, so to speak, the other wing of the Chinese deviations emanates: the subjectivism, the tendency to underestimate objective factors and exalt the subjective factors to the maximum. This manifests itself in slogans which are ultrarevolutionary, adventuristic, and divorced from the real situation; in the tendency to extol violent revolution in all cases as a general law, without taking concrete conditions into account.

Let us proceed to another point: that dealing with fundamental contradiction.

Before going on, we ought to distinguish concretely the concept of principal contradiction from that of a contradiction located in the foreground. To do this, let us take the example of Spanish society today: the principal contradiction (as in every capitalist society) places the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in opposition to each other. From this emerges the great historic choice (the victory of socialism), and also the leadership role of the proletariat in all contemporary social progress. But that principal contradiction is not the one which is today situated in the foreground. This latter is the one which opposes to the Franco dictatorship the people, the aggregate of the antimonopolistic strata and classes; it is a contradiction conditioned in part by superstructural, political, more or less fleeting factors; it influences tactics, the ways and forms which may be assumed by the development of history.

With these two concepts clarified, let us go back to Mao's work. He writes:

"In the process of development of a complex thing, many contradictions exist; among these, one is necessarily the principal contradiction, whose existence and development determine or influence the existence and development of the rest. For example, in capitalist society the two opposing forces in contradiction, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, form the principal contradiction ... In semicolonial countries like China, the relationship between the principal contradiction and the secondary contradictions constitutes a complex problem" ([Note]: Pages 32 and 33).

Then Mao Tse Tung gives several examples.

If an act of imperialist aggression takes place, the principal contradiction is between the country attacked and imperialism. And all the other class contradictions within that country become secondary. Thus, during the Opium War in 1840, and again during the war against Japan from 1931 to 1945, the principal contradiction was the same -- between China, as the country attacked, and imperialism, as the aggressor. Mao Tse Tung adds: "in another situation, the relative positions of contradictions undergo a change" ([Note]: Id., page 33).

If there is no external aggression, "the internal contradictions become especially sharp" ([Note]: Id., page 33).

This may be reflected in the outbreak of revolutionary wars or "in the civil wars between the various reactionary ruling blocs in the semi-colonial countries, as well" ([Note]: Id., page 34).

In these thoughts of Mao Tse Tung, the very concept of principal contradiction becomes hazy and disappears. It mingles and becomes confused with that contradiction which may momentarily be situated in the foreground. The result is that the principal contradiction is no longer determined by the objective laws of social development, by the class struggle during a given stage of history, but it is determined in a more or less arbitrary manner, on the basis of tactical convenience, of more or less transitory, or even accidental facts -- aggression by a foreign country, the attitude of this or that warlord, etc.

We can see, now, to what extent Mao Tse Tung's concepts are divorced from, separated from what is basic, the center of the Marxist conception of history and of politics: class relations, the laws of the class struggle.

We have an interesting example of the conceptual confusion on the subject of the principal contradiction in the 25 points of the Chinese Communist Party, appearing in its letter of 14 June 1963, and which it seeks to impose as the new line on the international communist movement. In point 3, we read:

"What are the fundamental contradictions of today's world? Marxists-Leninists have always considered them to be the following: the contradiction between the socialist camp and the imperialist camp. -- The contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in capitalist countries. -- The contradiction between imperialist countries and between monopolistic groups."

The first thing that strikes us is that the Chinese comrades are forgetting a cardinal rule, formulated in the following terms by Mao Tse Tung: "In studying a complex process in which more than two

contradictions exist, we must do our utmost to discover its principal contradiction" ([Note]: Id., page 35).

By defining as fundamental not one, but four contradictions, the CCP leader abolishes the primordial, priority position held by the contradiction between the socialist camp and the capitalist camp (the international expression of the contradiction between proletariat and bourgeoisie). The result is the blurring, and even the obliteration of a basic, fundamental thesis of the 1960 Declaration by the 81 parties, to the effect that "the principal feature of our epoch consists in the fact that the world socialist system is becoming a decisive factor in the development of human society."

The Chinese leaders' intention to play down the role of the socialist system, and, generally speaking, of the proletariat, in the current stage of history, becomes even more clear in the eighth point of their letter of 14 June 1963, which states:

"The various contradictions of the contemporary world converge in the vast regions of Asia, Africa and Latin America." It goes on to say that these regions "constitute today the principal storm center of the world revolution..."

On this same point, the Chinese comrades explain that the revolutionary cause of the world proletariat depends on the denouement of the struggle in the former colonial areas. The reverse of this statement does not appear in the CCP document. This means that, in speaking of the necessary alliance of the socialist system, the working class movement and the national liberation, the Chinese, in fact, give the priority position in the vanguard of that alliance, as the axis and support for the whole revolutionary process, not to the socialist system, but to the national liberation movements.

From confusion about the concept of fundamental contradiction, we have come to the de facto negation of Marxism's basic theory on the historic role of the proletariat as the class called upon to bury the old society and build the new.

Let us avoid drawing conclusions from such a partial examination, and such a summary one. Let us limit ourselves to putting on the carpet the question of whether the shortcomings in Mao Tse Tung's theoretical work (failure to understand some of the decisive phases of dialectics; a tendency to dogmatize Marxism and to undervalue analysis of concrete situations; a propensity to underestimate objective factors and exaggerate subjective factors, along with the power of slogans, etc.) may not have created a favorable situation for the emergence of the very injurious positions into which the leaders of the CCP have now fallen.

III. Rightist roots of leftism

Can this emergence, or establishment, of conceptions which are not completely Marxist be attributed to only one person? What roots does it have?

To answer this question would require an investigation into the history and characteristics of the CCP, a task which goes far beyond the goals of the present article. We shall, therefore, limit ourselves to sketching certain aspects of which might be an analysis of this subject.

Mao Tse Tung was appointed to the head of the leadership of the CCP in January 1935, at the extraordinary meeting of the Dyani Politburo, that is to say, during one of the first stages of the historic Long March of the Chinese revolutionary troops. The new leadership took the place of a group described as "leftist," which considered that the fulcrum of Party activity ought to be the cities, the working class.

Confronted with this conception, Mao Tse Tung firmly and boldly defended the thesis that, in China, the revolution ought to be a peasant revolution, that there should be a peasant war, that the villages ought to encircle the cities.

The exploitation of the gigantic revolutionary potential within the Chinese peasant masses was one of Mao Tse Tung's great virtues.

In 1939, in the pamphlet "On the Appearance of the Magazine The Communist", Mao Tse Tung wrote:

"The Party was now able to coordinate, directly or indirectly, the armed struggle on the national scale with the struggle of the workers, with the struggle of the peasants -- which is the most important -- with the struggle of youth, with the struggle of women..." ([Note]: Published in Peking in 1957, in Spanish, pages 16-17).

Much later, in the CCP Central Committee resolution of April 1945, the following extreme statement was made:

"Work in the village must play the principal role in the Chinese revolutionary movement, and work in the cities an auxiliary role" ([Note]: Pamphlet, "Our Study and the Present Situation," Peking, 1961, page 56).

In several places in his works, Mao Tse Tung insists on the necessity of subordinating everything to the armed struggle of the peasant masses.

History, the facts -- more powerful than any preconceived thesis

-- have demonstrated that, under China's conditions, the tactic of relying on the armed struggle of the peasant masses was the right one. With that tactic, the CCP triumphed, it took power, even though we must take into account other factors which contributed to its victory, such as the important assistance of the USSR, which assumed even greater proportions after the defeat of Japan.

Now, that specific historic road travelled by the CCP, the fact that it took form and developed precisely during a struggle in the course of which "the villages encircled the cities," could not but have a decisive influence on the internal social composition of that Party. The consequence has been that, within the CCP, there is an overwhelming majority of peasants, with a relatively small number of workers, not only among the rank-and-file, but among the leaders.

Den Siao Pin's report to the Eighth Congress states that, out of 10.7 million militants (90 percent of whom joined in 1945, and 60 percent after 1950, that is, after the victory), there were: 14 percent workers, 69 percent peasants, 12 percent intellectuals, and 5 percent of miscellaneous origin.

[Note]: Op. cit., Peking, 1956, page 84. Simply for the information, with no desire to make oversimplified comparisons, it might be useful to indicate the social composition of the Spanish Communist Party in March 1937, in the midst of the war against Fascism, when, particularly in the People's Army, huge numbers of peasants had joined the Party's ranks. At that time, it was made up as follows: 35 percent industrial workers, 25 percent agricultural workers (or, altogether, 60 percent workers), 30 percent peasants, 6 percent from the middle classes, and 3 percent intellectuals and representatives of the liberal professions.

To attribute these percentages exclusively to China's economic and social structure would be false; there was in China, even in the first third of this century, a very numerous proletariat. In his work, The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party, written in 1939, Mao Tse Tung wrote that in the cities there were then 12 million wage-earning workers, 3 million of whom were in modern industries. Therefore, the determining factor for the above percentages is to be found in the specific historical road travelled by the Chinese **communists**.

For a long period, the leadership of the CCP was aware that the presence within the party of a crushing majority of peasants involved a serious risk that Marxist ideology might be diluted by infiltrations of petty bourgeois concepts. In spite of the fact that it is too long, we feel it is useful to introduce here part of the resolution approved by the CCP Central Committee in April 1945:

"Semicolonial and semifeudal China is a country with an

exceedingly numerous petty bourgeoisie. Not only is our Party surrounded externally by this enormous social stratum; but the Party itself is composed of members, the immense majority of whom are of petty bourgeois origin, because great quantities of petty bourgeois revolutionary democrats are seeking the ranks of the proletariat, now that the possibility of establishing a strong petty bourgeois party in China is out of the question, due to the great victory of Marxism-Leninism throughout the world since the October Revolution, due to the social and political conditions existing in China, and due particularly to the historical development of the Kuomintang and of the Communist Party. On the other hand, in view of China's economic conditions, even the masses of the workers and Party members of worker origin may easily become covered with petty bourgeois mold. Consequently, it is inevitable, and ought not to be cause for surprise, that the various tinges of petty bourgeois ideology are frequently reflected in our Party" ([Note]: Mao Tse Tung, Our Study and the Current Situation, Peking, 1961, pages 80-81).

"Party members with a petty bourgeois revolutionary spirit enter it organizationally, but not ideologically, or, at any rate, not completely, and are habitually liberals, reformists, anarchists, followers of Blanqui, etc., under the mantle of Marxism-Leninism; and, consequently, they are incapable of leading to victory not only the future communist movement, but even the present movement of the new democracy. Unless the proletarians in the vanguard firmly maintain a clear-cut line of demarcation between Marxism-Leninism and the outmoded ideology of the Party members of petty bourgeois origin, unless they educate them severely but patiently and correctly, and unless they struggle against that outmoded ideology, then not only will it be impossible to overcome that petty bourgeois ideology, but the petty bourgeois elements will indubitably insist on changing the characteristics of the Party, the characteristics of the vanguard of the proletariat according to their own image and appearance, and on seizing control of the Party, thus prejudicing the cause of the Party and of the people. The more contact the petty bourgeois stratum surrounding the Party, the greater the numbers of Party members of petty bourgeois origin, the more strict will the Party's vigilance have to be over the purity of its ranks, the ranks of the detachment of the vanguard and of the proletariat..." ([Note]: Id., pages 82-83).

The resolution adds the following, on the subject of ideological conceptions typical of the petty bourgeois:

"The manner of thinking of the petty bourgeois manifests itself basically in his subjectivism and unilateral approach to problems; that is, instead of starting from an objective and

complete estimate of the correlation of class forces, the petty bourgeois elements regard as realities their subjective desires, their impressions, and vain words, they take a single one of the aspects of reality for their totality, the part for the whole, one tree for the forest. The way of thinking of these petty bourgeois intellectuals, who are aloof from the practical process of production, tends to be characterized by their dogmatism, as has been stated earlier, since these people have only bookish, and not practical knowledge... Many typical petty bourgeois revolutionaries long for a quick victory for the revolution, which will radically change their present situation; consequently, they lack the patience required for the prolonged effort of the revolutionary struggle, they are keenly interested in 'leftist' revolutionary phrases and slogans, and in their feelings and their acts they easily fall into the sectarianism of closed doors, and into adventurism" ([Note]: Id., pages 83-84).

Almost three years later, at the December 1947 meeting of the Plenum of the Central Committee, when already the CCP held power over broad areas of the country, the danger was more serious; it was emphasized by Mao Tse Tung in the following terms:

"Actually, many landholders, rich peasants and declassed elements have taken advantage of the opportunity to infiltrate the Party. In the rural areas, they dominate many organizations of the Party and of the administration, they offend and oppress the people, and falsify the policy of the Party" ([Note]: The Present Situation and Our Tasks, Paris, page 11).

With the triumph of the revolution, it was impossible for that danger, so clearly identified in 1945, to disappear. To some extent, the conquest of power by the Party, the fact of its becoming the government party, increased the danger of petty bourgeois pressures.

It would have been logical, in that new situation, to heighten vigilance on that front. Nevertheless, just the opposite happened. In the resolutions and documents of the CCP, there is a complete disappearance of concern for the danger which might be represented by the crushing weight of the petty bourgeoisie within its own ranks. The problem, so sharply perceived in 1945, fades away.

And this is not all. Even after the seizure of power, there was no serious effort to define and reinforce the physiognomy of the Party as the Party of the working class, or to root it firmly in the principal centers of the Chinese proletariat. Den Siao Pin's report to the Eighth Congress, while recognizing that there were no more than 14 percent of workers in the Party, said:

"...for some time, no one was concerned with recruiting new

members among the industrial workers" ([Note]: Op. cit., page 91).

Objectively speaking, such attitudes as these could not but facilitate the increase of petty bourgeois influences within the Party. A summary examination -- based exclusively on published documents -- of the CCF's evolution at this stage indicates that the rise of its disagreements with the majority of the communist parties coincided precisely with the brusque change in its political line, a change which occurred without any decision by the competent organizations of the Party, without the holding of a congress (typical of the methods of the cult of personality); and a change which reflects that tendency towards subjectivism, adventurism and impetuosity so clearly described in the 1945 resolution as typical of petty bourgeois ideology.

An example of this change of course was the hasty creation of the "communes," a policy which, after its total failure, the Chinese communists have, in fact, had to abandon in recent times.

The establishment of "communes" on a large scale was decided upon at an enlarged meeting of the CCF Politburo held in August 1958 at Peitaiho; three months before, in May, there had been held the second session of the Eighth Party Congress, but this had taken no decisions with respect to "communes."

The resolution of the sixth session of the CCF Central Committee, in December 1958, states that the "communes" had

"shown the people...the way for the gradual transition from the socialist principle 'to each according to his work,' to the communist principle 'to each according to his needs'" ([Note]: Documents of the sixth plenary meeting of the CCF Central Committee, Peking, 1959, page 15).

And it even stated:

"It is certainly not fitting to neglect, or even to prevent, the course of this development, relegating communism to the distant future" ([Note]: Id., page 24).

It is obvious, therefore, that the intention was, by means of these "communes," to undertake the transition to communism by using as the vanguard force, not the working class, but the peasants. They were trying to initiate the transition to communism in the rural areas, whereas there continued to be even capitalist, or semicapitalist, forms in the cities and in part of industry and commerce.

In this idea of initiating the transition to communism by setting up in the countryside more or less egalitarian forms of distribution (at the cost of killing economic stimulus among the peasants), without a

powerful industrial base capable of insuring abundance, just as in the so-called line of the "great leap forward," which demanded exorbitant economic advances without taking the objective possibilities into account, there came to the surface subjectivist traits, contrary to the very essence of Marxist concepts, but typical, on the one hand, of petty bourgeois ideology, in all its various manifestations.

The predominance of these currents in the leadership of the CCP provoked the outbreak within it of a sharp and violent internal struggle. The Chinese leaders do not speak much about it, but there are facts which cannot be hidden.

An important time to consider is the year 1959.

In December 1958, the sixth session of the Central Committee was held. It was the period of the greatest illusions. The countryside was being turned into "communes" at an accelerated pace. Industry was in the midst of the "great leap forward." For 1959, steel production was set at double that of 1958...

At that Plenum, Mao Tse Tung's retirement as President of the Republic was accepted, so that he could dedicate himself, among other things, to "the development of Marxist-Leninist theory."

Eight months later, in August 1959, the eighth session of the Central Committee was held. But the picture had changed greatly. The already published 1958 production figures were modified (with the excuse that they had been exaggerated), as were the planning figures for 1959. Between what had been announced for 1959 in December 1958 and what was stipulated by the Plenum in August 1959, the shrinkage was brutal. For example:

18 million tons of steel had been promised; this was reduced to 12 million.

525 million tons of grain had been promised; this was reduced to 275 million.

5 million tons of cotton had been promised; this was reduced to 2.3 million tons.

These reductions, we repeat, are only those emerging from a comparison between the Central Committee resolution of December 1958 and those of August 1959.

At the same time, the August 1959 Plenum repeated that the policy of the "great leap forward" was entirely correct, and launched a furious attack against the so-called "rightists."

What were they accused of?

Of criticizing the policy of the "great leap forward" and of the "communes," by saying they were precipitate, illusory, unreal measures, inspired by subjectivism and petty bourgeois fanaticism. Everything appears to indicate that these were communists who had a more objective, more serene, more acute vision of the situation and of the policy which could and should be followed.

Radical, brutal methods of elimination were used against these comrades, beginning mostly in 1959. Many of them, including at least one member of the Politburo, were discharged, exiled, jailed...

The liquidation of a broad sector of communist comrades, many of them combat veterans tempered in many years of revolutionary struggle, was one of the internal preconditions for the adoption by the CCP on the internal plane of a path which estranges them from the aggregate of communist parties.

We do not wish to draw conclusions about such a complex problem on the basis of the points we have sketched so succinctly. Our intention is a more modest one: to show evidence that the ultraleftist verbal positions of the CCP have rightist, petty bourgeois roots; that because of a number of historical causes, the petty bourgeois currents have exercised extraordinary influence in the Party, and that, in the most recent period, they have become accentuated, and have played an important role in facilitating the process of estranging the CCP from the principles of Marxism-Leninism.

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