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# China's Cultural Revolution and the Fall of Lin Biao

written by Sam Marcy

February 1, 2023

*Sam Marcy, a leading Marxist thinker and fighter of the second half of the 20th century, died 25 years ago on Feb. 1, 1998. To mark the occasion, Struggle-La Lucha is publishing a selection of Marcy's articles that demonstrate the breadth and depth of his analysis and strategic thought on behalf of the workers and oppressed, while also providing insight into today's struggles.*

## **Editor's introduction from 'China 1977: End of the Revolutionary Mao Era'**

"The Cultural Revolution and the Fall of Lin Biao" was written by Sam Marcy in August, 1972, after the appearance of the official version of the death and purge of Lin Biao. This event signaled a struggle over policy in the highest levels of the Chinese leadership, particularly over the Nixon visit and the rapprochement with U.S. imperialism.

The suppression of the Left in China begins with the fall of Lin Biao and Chen Boda. These articles offer a broad historical overview of the Cultural Revolution — the blocking of capitalist restoration and the safeguarding of the new social relations established by the Chinese Revolution of 1949 and deepened by the Great Leap

Forward and the Commune movement of 1958-59.

Sam Marcy makes extensive use of Engels' analysis of earlier great revolutions to show how, the Cultural Revolution grew from historical necessity but that once that historical task was fulfilled in China, the base of the revolutionary left was eroded and the ideas of "storming the heavens" and creating a new Paris Commune-type of state were jettisoned. Subsequent events have confirmed this analysis.



Red Guards march in Beijing, October 1966.

## Part 1

August 4, 1972: The public confirmation of the tragic end of Lin Biao and some of his

collaborators ends a momentous inner struggle over the future course of the Chinese Revolution and, in particular, of China's foreign policy. The defeat of Lin Biao, Chen Boda, Huang Yongsheng, Wu Faxian and others means that the Chinese Revolution has, to a considerable degree, run its course. From now on, the word is stability at home at the expense of revolutionary policy abroad.

Lin Biao, it will be remembered, was the author of the theory of encircling the imperialist powers — the “cities” — with global guerrilla war. Whether the theory was right or wrong, it had a revolutionary perspective in foreign affairs. As has become evident in the last few years, Chairman Mao and his supporters devised a different foreign policy. Theirs is symbolized by the invitation accorded Nixon to visit Peking and the accommodation that the Chinese leaders have been developing with the U.S.

The Chinese Revolution, however, is by no means finished. It has been the longest, most protracted, and, and in many respects, the profoundest social upheaval in history. It spans well over half a century and is full of the most remarkable revolutionary feats. It is no wonder that so many of its leaders have become genuinely legendary figures.

### **Effect of international situation**

At each stage of its development the Chinese Revolution was profoundly influenced by the nature of the international situation. The Chinese Revolution caught fire on the basis of the conflagration, which commenced with the October Revolution in 1917. The false policies of Stalin inhibited and protracted the character of the Chinese Revolution. The 1927 defeat of the Revolution and Stalin's promotion of the theory of the block of four classes, which meant subordination to the Kuomintang, retarded the development of the Chinese Revolution. It was Mao's resistance to Stalin's policies that, in the long run, enabled him to save and fortify the revolution.

But again, the attempt of Japanese militarism to colonize China, in turn, served as a spur to the revolution. The preoccupation of U.S., British, and French imperialism with the struggle against Hitler for a time had a favorable effect on developments for the Chinese Revolution. Finally, the victory of the Soviet Union in the war and the defeat of the Japanese imperialists helped tremendously to pave the way for the victory of the Chinese Revolution in 1949.

Unquestionably China is again being profoundly affected by the international situation. Faced with the threat of U.S. and Japanese imperialism — a threat which daily demonstrates itself in the genocidal aggression against a socialist ally on its very doorstep — and the hostility of the Soviet bureaucracy on the other hand, Chairman Mao and his followers have decided to come to terms, in large measure, with the U.S.

### **Cultural Revolution blocked capitalist restoration**

The ouster of the Lin-Chen grouping also signifies the end of that phase of the Chinese Revolution, which has become known to the world as the Great Cultural Revolution. The lasting significance of the Cultural Revolution is that it reversed a tidal wave of bourgeois reaction and set back a process of development that would have ended up in capitalist restoration.

The Lin-Chen grouping can, with qualification, be called the radical or left faction, which was in alliance with Chairman Mao and his supporters during the Cultural Revolution. Together they led the struggle against Liu Shaoqi, who then represented the neo-bourgeois restorationist movement. The defeat of Liu Shaoqi cleared the road for the commencement in earnest of the socialist transformation of China. Naturally, not all the claims made for the Cultural Revolution are valid. Certainly, there has been a great deal of exaggeration. But none can deny that, in essence, the Cultural Revolution marked a turning point in the historical evolution of China.

It prevented, at its barest minimum, capitalist restoration and ushered in a new stage in the building of a socialist society in China. Of course, no revolution is ever accomplished without a great deal of excess, without serious setbacks and errors. Once the Cultural Revolution was launched, it involved huge masses of people and set forces in motion that could not be controlled, even under the best of circumstances.

To some observers on this continent, the Cultural Revolution reduced itself to a mere factional dispute between Chairman Mao and his supporters, Lin, Chen, and others, against Liu Shaoqi and his formidable right-wing forces. In the view of these observers, such a dispute should have been carried out by literary and polemical methods in the classical style in which Lenin polemicized against his opponents in the Bolshevik party. Of course, winning a revolutionary victory with polemics alone is more desirable than a violent struggle.

But what if the character of the adversary and the historical context in which the struggle is opened up, both at home and abroad, makes this impossible? What if the struggle for a neo-bourgeois restorationist course has already been started and has already taken on flesh and blood in leading cadres of the party and the mass organizations? What if this grouping has, in fact, already reached such dimensions that practically all the significant political currents of the imperialist bourgeoisie are already aware of it and are, in fact, applauding and egging it on?

What if the weight of the entire Soviet Union, through its leadership, particularly in the case of Kosygin and Brezhnev, is openly supporting the neo-restorationist elements? What if, in the given historical context, there is no other way but to openly appeal to the party and to the masses to commence the struggle against the right-wing restorationists?

### **Class interests versus legal norms**

From the point of view of pure formal procedure, the Cultural Revolution may have been a violation of democratic centralist principles, but only if we forget that the party as a whole was already shattered by the course of events: deep incursions had already been made into the body-politic of Chinese society by the Liu Shaoqi forces. Marxism teaches that where fundamental class interests are involved, class interests must not be subordinated to purely formal or legalistic norms. To make the outcome of the class struggle dependent on formal procedures at the expense of class interests is the height of folly.

Certainly, it would have been preferable to have a literary and polemical debate end in a victorious decision by a party congress. But in the case of the Cultural Revolution, the struggle had spilled over from the party ranks and from the bourgeois intelligentsia into the general mass of the population before the discussion could get under way — assuming it ever could have been done that way in the first place.

At any rate, once the struggle started, the only correct position for progressive and revolutionary workers throughout the world was to support the proponents of the Cultural Revolution. All the more so because in a revolution, just as in a workers' strike, the first and most important element to consider is the determination of which side to support. In the course of a strike, there may be any number of formal violations of the democratic rights of those who promote crossing of the picket line, but as long as the strike is on, every worker is duty-bound to support it.

It was quite clear during the entire course of the Cultural Revolution that the bourgeoisie and the Soviet bureaucracy were openly supporting Liu Shaoqi and the restorationists. There is no question that the Soviet leadership would prefer a bourgeois restorationist regime over a revolutionary socialist regime, especially if the bourgeois restorationists would be on friendly terms with the Soviet bureaucracy and retain the governmental and party facade of "socialism."

## Belated charges

Is the elimination of Lin Biao to be regarded in the same way as the ouster of Liu Shaoqi? By no means.

The neo-restorationist tendency in China has made itself quite evident, so much so that even foreign observers could see its slow but sure development. It was a formidable force. The struggle that was fought by Chairman Mao and his supporters was an open revolutionary struggle. It is an incontestable fact that Chairman Mao openly appealed to the masses to participate in the struggle. Events soon demonstrated that the masses vigorously responded to the call and overwhelmingly supported it. It was particularly evident in the tremendous enthusiasm exhibited by the youth. This had worldwide repercussions in the movement of the youth all over the world.

The recent indictment against Lin Biao charges that he “attempted a coup d’etat and tried to assassinate Mao Zedong.” After the plot was foiled, it is said, “he fled on September 12 toward the Soviet Union in a plane which crashed over the People’s Republic of Mongolia.” It is also charged that “he undertook anti-Party activities in a planned, premeditated way with a well-determined program with the aim of taking over power, usurping the leadership of the party, the government and the army.” But, “Mao Zedong unmasked his plot and blocked his maneuver. Mao Zedong made efforts to recover him, but Lin Biao did not change his perverse nature one iota.”

So reads the first official confirmation from China of the many rumors which have circulated in the imperialist press for many months, rumors which were based on leaks from Chinese officials to the capitalist world.

The dimensions of the “plot” indicate it could scarcely have taken place in secrecy. The very fact that the Chinese leadership waited so long to divulge it lends itself to extreme incredulity. And the fact that so many rumors could be floating in many



capitalist countries while the mass of the people at home was not at all informed about the “plot” completely differentiates this type of struggle from that launched in the Cultural Revolution.

During the Cultural Revolution, Chairman Mao and the leadership confined themselves to enlisting the revolutionary support of the masses. It was the restorationists who maintained contact with and gave leaks to the imperialist bourgeoisie. But in the present case, the very fact that Chairman Mao himself first gave the news to the world through Ceylonese Prime Minister Bandaranaike and French Foreign Minister Schuman, leaders of bourgeois states, speaks volumes in itself.

### **Accommodation with U.S. is real answer**

There is no way to verify any of the allegations concerning the bizarre plot of Lin Biao. Even if we take everything at face value, the allegations in themselves are internally contradictory. The only truth that emerges from the statement issued by the Chinese Embassy in Algiers is that Lin opposed “the revolutionary foreign policy worked out by him (Mao Zedong).” But the essence of this “revolutionary foreign policy” is pointedly illustrated by the invitation to Nixon and the pursuit of an accommodation with U.S. imperialism.

The indictment against Lin and the others smacks of a police version of a great historical event. If Lin Biao was opposed to “the revolutionary foreign policy” — that is to an accommodation with the U.S. — it doesn’t necessarily follow that he is a Soviet revisionist and on such friendly terms with the Soviet Union as to be able to flee there. Rather, this opposition appears to verify the existence of a progressive opposition to the new foreign policy followed by the CPC.

If speculation about this opposition is rampant, the CPC leaders have only themselves to blame. It is not likely that the party and the state in China are so weak



that they could not possibly bring the nature of this dispute to the attention of the party and the public, that is, to bring the masses into the struggle. Was it not really fear of the masses, or fear of the response the masses would have to the new foreign policy that made the CPC leaders keep everything secret so that only the bourgeoisie in the West and the revisionists in the Soviet Union knew about it?

The ouster of Lin bears a remarkable resemblance to Stalin's purge of the Red Army general, Tukhachevsky, et al. They were executed in secret and it was only afterwards that Stalin was able to make a deal with Hitler — the Stalin-Hitler pact. But even Stalin did not tell the then-French Premier Daladier about the executions and ouster of the generals before at least informing the Soviet public.

Lin's ouster also bears a strange resemblance to Khrushchev's elimination of the Molotov-Kaganovich group from the Central Committee on grounds that are again similar to the hints that the CPC is making about Lin Biao. Molotov and Kaganovich, two of the oldest members of the Bolshevik party and two of Stalin's closest supporters, were indicted by Khrushchev on grounds that they were opposed to peaceful coexistence with the West.

The Western imperialist press showed unconcealed glee at the expulsion of Molotov and Kaganovich. All those who were following events in the Soviet Union knew that Stalin, as well as Kaganovich and Molotov, who was Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union for a long time, had been preaching and practicing peaceful coexistence for years. The indictment had no basis in fact. The real issue was that Khrushchev was taking a course in foreign affairs which was so far to the right — so much further than Stalin had gone — that they, in a measure, opposed it.

The fundamental turn in foreign policy initiated by Mao is the very type of turn which Mao so vehemently and correctly fought against in Khrushchev — the turn towards peaceful coexistence, a phrase which symbolizes abandonment of the revolutionary struggle abroad, support of the nationalist bourgeoisie in

underdeveloped countries, and friendship with the imperialist West, particularly with the U.S. Moreover, the turn comes at a time that could scarcely hurt the world struggle more, when the beleaguered Vietnamese people are spilling their blood to get the U.S. imperialists off their backs.

### **Frank appeal to masses or secrecy**

The CPC was duty-bound to present its position frankly and publicly to the masses — not a year after it all happened, and not through the mouths of Bandaranaike and Schuman, but through party documents and party discussion. Lin, as well as his collaborators and allies, are not just a few accidental individuals. They constituted an entire stratum in the leadership of the party and the revolution. Lin, as everybody knows, was considered to be the successor to Mao. In fact, his succession was even put into the constitution. To remove a leader who is constitutionally destined to succeed Mao without informing the masses, let alone obtaining their approval, is a sharp break from the earlier revolutionary practice of the CPC.

We draw a sharp line between support for the Cultural Revolution and support for unverified, unfounded, and concocted fabrications against Lin Biao. Even assuming that Chairman Mao and his supporters are correct in their charges, it is also clear by now, according to Chairman Mao's own words, that Lin opposed the turn to peaceful coexistence with the imperialist bourgeoisie.

Any attempt to apologize for the handling of the Lin Biao ouster will not hold water. Even assuming that it was not possible to openly conduct a struggle over foreign policy, it points up a tremendous weakness in the present political structure of People's China. Even if we were to agree that it was not possible to conduct an open struggle, the Chinese Revolution is by now strong enough to call a weakness by its right name, rather than to embellish it by calling it a virtue.

At the present time, the U.S. ruling class is most eagerly seeking an accommodation

with People's China because it hopes that the CPC leadership will help it out of the abysmal military and diplomatic crisis in which it finds itself. Vietnam is, of course, at the very heart of the U.S. crisis. The capitalist media, too, is taking its cue from the needs of U.S. imperialist strategy. In contrast to the way the media handled the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution — which they maligned and misrepresented — they are very discreetly handling the Lin Biao affair.

### **Engels on revolution: Analogy with two tendencies in Cultural Revolution**

“All revolutions of modern times,” wrote Engels, “beginning with the great English revolution of the seventeenth century, showed (certain) features which appeared inseparable from every revolutionary struggle. They appeared applicable, also, to the struggles of the proletariat for its emancipation.”

What are these features?

“As a rule,” Engels goes on, “after the first great success, the victorious minority [here Engels speaks of the bourgeoisie which is a minority in their revolution — S.M.] became divided; one half was pleased with what had been gained, the other wanted to go still further, and put forward new demands, which to a certain extent at least, were also in the real or apparent interests of the great mass of the people.

“In individual cases these more radical demands were realized, but often only for a moment; the more moderate party again gained the upper hand, and what had eventually been won was wholly or partly lost again; the vanquished shrieked of treachery, or ascribed their defeat to accident. But, in truth, the position was mainly this: the achievements of the first victory were only safeguarded by the second victory of the more radical party; this having been attained, and with it, what was necessary for the moment, the radicals and their achievements vanished once more from the stage.”

“The achievement of the first victory” in China, the ouster of Chiang Kai-Shek, and the destruction of the bourgeois-landlord state machine, “was only safeguarded,” according to Engels’ analysis, “by the second victory,” the Cultural Revolution. “This having been attained, and, with it, what was necessary for the moment, the radicals and their achievements vanished once more from the stage.” This is what happened to the left faction in the Cultural Revolution.

One part of the leadership of the Cultural Revolution was, in the words of Engels, “pleased with what had been gained,” the other section of the leadership, Lin, Chen Boda, and others, “wanted to go still further, and put forward new demands, which to a certain extent, at least, were also in the real or apparent interests of the great mass of the people.”

Many radical demands were made during the Cultural Revolution, some were wild ones, but on the whole, they were healthy. “In individual cases, these more radical demands were realized.” But, “the more moderate party again gained the upper hand and what eventually had been won was wholly or partly lost again; the vanquished,” whom Mao now calls ultra-lefts, “cry treachery or ascribe their defeat to accident, where in truth their position was mainly this: the achievements of the first victory were only safeguarded by the second victory of the more radical party.”

What does this mean? It means that the real lasting achievements of the Cultural Revolution were not the idealistic and occasionally ultra-revolutionary proposals made by the more radical elements in the Cultural Revolution, of whom there were many, especially among the youth. The real achievement was the safeguarding of the new property relations, of blocking the road to capitalist restoration. That could “only have been done with the aid of the more radical party” leaders, as Engels says. “This, however, having been attained, and with it what was necessary for the moment,” — the stabilization of the new class relations in China — “the radicals and their achievements vanished once more from the stage.

This really explains the elimination of the Lin Biao-Chen Boda group. "Their real work was done." Their participation and leadership in the Cultural Revolution helped block capitalist restoration and to safeguard the new property relations established by the revolution.

A proletarian revolution, however, differs, among other things, from a bourgeois revolution, in that a proletarian revolution organically tends in the direction of worldwide proletarian revolution. It also needs a revolutionary worldwide perspective for its further socialist development. A bourgeois revolution, on the other hand, is nationalistic in character and subordinates everything to the material interests of the national bourgeoisie.

Peaceful coexistence and accommodation with the West is what Mao proposed as the new foreign policy. This is what the "radical faction," as Engels would call it, rejected and opposed. They were vanquished as earlier opponents of peaceful accommodation with the West were vanquished in the long period following Lenin's death in the Soviet Union.

But the decay of the worldwide system of imperialism daily brings in its train economic, social, and political catastrophes for the masses as well as genocidal imperialist wars. This makes the worldwide proletarian revolution all the more imperative and inevitable, and peaceful accommodation with the West a reactionary utopia.

Source: [Marxists Internet Archive](https://www.marxists.org/lin-biao/)



Mao Zedong and Lin Biao.

## Part 2

August 25, 1972: No social revolution has ever coincided with the conception entertained by the ideologists of its time or its leading participants. Probably the Russian Revolution comes closest to conceptions that were held by its principal leaders. So many misconceptions of the Chinese Revolution prevailed that years after the triumph of the Revolution and the ouster of Chiang Kai-Shek, the class character of the Chinese Revolution was still shrouded in confusion.

Just as the West European social democrats and the Mensheviks in Czarist Russia could not believe that a proletarian revolution was possible in a backward country overwhelmed by a huge preponderance of the peasantry and an ill-developed bourgeoisie, so Western scholars and Marxists to boot, went even further in the case of China and even denied that a proletarian revolution had taken place. They

advanced substantially the same erroneous theories as their colleagues in the earlier era and compounded them.

The long years in which the Chinese Red Army, led by the CPC was conducting the struggle against the bourgeois-landlord regime of Chiang Kai-Shek was characterized as agrarian in its class nature. The CPC itself, regardless of its advocacy of Marxism-Leninism, they explained, was merely promoting an agrarian revolution. This view was particularly rampant in the United States and vigorously pushed by the liberal bourgeoisie, including some of the highest-ranking State Department officials, not to speak of the influential liberal publicists such as Owen Lattimore and others.

Some organizations which proclaimed themselves Marxists were particularly stubborn in promoting this view, and even the CP leaders in this country, undoubtedly getting their cue from the Soviet leaders while expressing solidarity with a fraternal party, nonetheless conveyed the impression that they, too, in a large measure, regarded it as basically an agrarian revolution successfully carried out. Whether this objectively reflected the arrogance implicit in the attitude of an imperialist ruling class toward a formerly colonial country, only history will be able to confirm. It is at least as likely that the reservations of the Western CP leaders, generally, reflected the fear of the Soviet bureaucracy of the consequences that a proletarian revolution in China would entail in the struggle for leadership over the Communist movement and of the world working class.

As we have seen, the Chinese Revolution can be divided into two great phases. The first one — we are still using the words of Engels — “displaced one definite class rule by another” — in this case the ouster of the bourgeois-landlord class from power and the establishment of what was in essence a Proletarian Dictatorship. But this victorious revolution, like all previous victorious revolutions (at least in European history), became endangered by restorationist elements. What was needed



historically, was a second, supplementary revolution, in order to fortify, consolidate, and safeguard the fundamental accomplishment of the first revolution, the new class dictatorship. Hence the Cultural Revolution.

In the minds of its participants, it might have been conceived as an entirely new revolution, a revolution that had far loftier objectives than the mere safeguarding and securing of new property relations which had already been won more than a decade ago. But the subjective desires of the participants and the objective historical result, while not completely at variance, certainly did not conform with reality as it has unfolded.

### **Historical parallels**

What was the historical mission of the Jacobin dictatorship? It was to clear the road for the rule of the French bourgeoisie. In France, more than anywhere else, feudalism had been extinguished, cut root and branch, by the Revolution. Yet the bourgeoisie did not, until late in the nineteenth century, hold exclusive political power. It, again and again, fell back to sharing it with other class formations. Even more so in England. The bourgeoisie there never held undivided sway.

“Even after the victory of 1832,” says Engels, “the bourgeoisie left the landed aristocracy in almost exclusive possession of the leading government offices.” It took Bismarck to unify Germany. He swept away the feudal obstructions to the development of German capitalism. He himself was, of course, a junker, and it was the junker feudal landed aristocracy that dominated Germany. Indeed the German bourgeoisie did not rule directly until the Weimar Republic (after World War I).

The basic reason why it is possible for the bourgeoisie to share power with segments of the older feudal classes, such as the aristocracy, is, of course, that they are both possessing classes, both exploiting classes, and they share a common hostility to the exploited. Their interests, nevertheless, are antagonistic.

This is equally well demonstrated by the Civil War in the United States. What was the historic mission of the North's struggle against the South? In order to arrive at a conclusion, we ought to view the entire period of the Civil War and Reconstruction as two phases, two great historical turning points, just as in the Chinese Revolution.

What was the objective of the struggle? The Northern ruling class and the Southern ruling class, as we said, were both possessing, oppressing, and exploiting classes. But the North based itself in and had its origin and development in the modern capitalist mode of production, which is based on the private ownership of the means of production and on wage labor.

The Southern ruling class was also an exploiting, oppressing, possessing class no more avaricious than the Northern ruling class. It, too, based itself on the private ownership of the means of production but on chattel (slave) labor, not on wage labor. Slavery in the U.S. was an integral part of the bourgeois mode of production in the system of commodity production.

But whereas the North based itself on the modern capitalist industrial form of wage exploitation ( "free labor" ), the South was based wholly on slave labor. The two systems were economically incompatible. A struggle between them became inevitable because the slave system could not adequately compete with the wage system of exploitation and was doomed to destruction.

In the minds of its progressive participants, the struggle was between "freedom and slavery." But the struggle of the Northern bourgeoisie against the slave-owning aristocracy was not out of any regard for freedom as such but was pursued because the slave system of exploitation was inhibiting the expansion of the modern capitalist system of wage slavery, capitalist production, and accumulation.

Four years of Civil War proved inadequate to firmly establish the capitalist wage system and the economic framework necessary for its functioning or to completely

root out the remnants of chattel slavery which later took the form of a feudal type of peasant-landlord relationship on the land (peonage). This tended to reduce the mass of the emancipated slaves to second-degree citizenship, devoid of the rights of emancipated wage labor in the North.

The period in history known as Reconstruction was a great effort by the Radical Republicans to bring about full freedom ("free labor"), full political equality for all (all males). This was the second phase of the revolution. It was historically needed, not as it was conceived in the minds of many who participated in it, to bring about full political equality of all citizens, but merely to secure, as Engels would say, "safeguard, the achievements of the first revolution."

The historic mission of the second revolution was to complete the destruction of chattel slavery, to destroy the power of the former slave-owning aristocracy, and to safeguard the revolution against any restoration.

Having achieved that, the conservative wing of the second revolution "was satisfied." The other wing, the Radical Republicans, which wanted to go further and bring about complete equality in political life, "vanished from the scene." Finally, the revolution ended in the shameless episode of the betrayal of 1877, which gave the Southern ruling class complete sway over the emancipated Black masses. The Southern ruling class was rearmed to protect its newly regained power.

Full political rights to the Black masses, as the bourgeoisie saw it, were not necessary for the functioning of their capitalist industrial system of exploitation. The maintenance of the Black masses in a subjugated and politically expropriated status served the Northern ruling class' ability to expand capitalist accumulation but only in alliance and partnership with the Southern ruling class.

As can be seen, the Northern capitalist class made an accommodation with the Southern ruling class with whom it shared power rather than to leave them

powerless by a continuation of the revolutionary struggle. To this very day, Northern capitalists share power with their Southern colleagues because of, among other reasons, the compromise that they made a century ago, which smoothed the way for capitalist expansion and accumulation and the ultimate conversion of the competitive stage of capitalism into monopoly capitalist imperialism.

Therein lies the origin of the super-exploitation of the Black masses and the reason why the Northern bourgeoisie did not fully emancipate the Black people. Only a proletarian revolution can fully emancipate all the oppressed, Black and white.

### **Sharing of power between hostile classes**

As we have seen, the bourgeoisie as a class has not always been able to rule exclusively without sharing power in a coalition with other classes or their representative factions. It has been able to rule exclusively only since the late nineteenth century. Only the North American bourgeoisie has held exclusive power — but only because feudalism was unknown on this continent. The settlers who ventured to the shores of the new world were not confronted with an entrenched feudal social order.

How different it was with the establishment of the two great socialist states, the Soviet Union and China. In both countries, there was a huge preponderance of peasant masses, an ill-developed bourgeoisie that had not bequeathed the necessary industrial and technological framework to enable the proletariat to commence an easy transition to socialism. In both countries, the legacy that the former possessing classes left was one of backwardness in industry, in technique, in education, and practically all fields of social development.

Moreover, an imperialist bourgeoisie, which had survived numerous social catastrophes and attempted proletarian revolutions (in Europe at least), still dominated over the major portion of the human race. Its industrial, technological,

and military power stood, and still stands, as the greatest threat to the socialist development of the USSR and China, other socialist countries, and the liberation movements.

### **Basic historical factors behind Soviet foreign policy regression**

Almost a quarter of a century after the Chinese Revolution and more than half a century since the October Socialist Revolution, the factors of industrial backwardness, preponderance of a huge peasantry, and the strengthening and revival of the imperialist system after the Second World War are still the basic factors that account for the eagerness, particularly on the part of the Soviet and Chinese leadership, to make an accommodation with the imperialists and renounce revolutionary internationalism.

There are those who see the regressive policy of both the Soviet Union and China as emanating almost exclusively from treachery and conspiracy. Others attribute it solely to mistakes in policy, the victory of reactionary over revolutionary leaders and the absence of proletarian democracy. Even taking all this into account, these policies can only be understood in the light of the broader perspective of objective circumstances of which they undoubtedly are the result.

However, if we view the problem in the light of half a century of experiences and in the light of the earlier experience of the bourgeoisie in the struggle against opponent possessing classes, we see that at certain stages in its development, as a ruling class, they were forced at various times and under varying circumstances to share power with opponent possessing classes. We see now that it is also characteristic of proletarian dictatorships established in backward countries.

The same tendency toward accommodation evidenced by the bourgeoisie before it attained full, exclusive political power is also common to the governing groups representing the socialist countries. There is however a fundamental difference

between the objective historical result obtained by the bourgeoisie as against that obtained by the governing leadership in the USSR and China.

The alliance that the bourgeoisie made with the older class formations, such as the landed aristocracy, had thus indubitable advantage which enabled it ultimately to conquer the feudal classes and take them completely in tow. The feudal system is a basically static system. The bourgeois system is dynamic. The bourgeoisie must constantly revolutionize its methods of production, speed development, improve technology, and adapt itself to the changing needs of the capitalist market. This is the law of life for the bourgeoisie.

The development of the productive forces in the imperialist epoch is, of course, retarded if compared with what a social system will do, but within the framework of capitalist production, the bourgeoisie continues the pursuit, with breakneck speed; of the development of technology. The feudal classes were not only static but they based their existence, as Marx pointed out as early as the Communist Manifesto, on the preservation of the old methods of production.

The bourgeoisie bases itself on constantly revolutionizing the method of production. The old mode of feudal production (or chattel slavery as it existed in the United States) having been destroyed, the bourgeoisie by the mere automatic processes of capitalist production and the blind forces of the market was ultimately able to reduce all previous social classes to its sway. Thus, elements of the landed aristocracy in Britain ultimately became bourgeois industrialists.

The bourgeoisie for a long time used a feudal monarchy and was able to convert it into a bourgeois monarchy. And the former parties of the feudal classes were absorbed into the bourgeois political system and became bulwarks of reaction on behalf of the bourgeois ruling class against revolutionary threats by the proletariat and oppressed peoples.

## **Difference between bourgeois and socialist systems**

The socialist system, at least in its initial formative stages, does not develop automatically; by its very nature, it has to be consciously planned and organized. And in this respect, it differs vitally from the bourgeois mode of production which is regulated by blind economic forces.

Because the first two great socialist proletarian revolutions took place not in the industrialized capitalist countries, but in underdeveloped countries, they faced some of the same problems that the early bourgeoisie faced in its struggle as a nascent ruling class.

Every political upheaval at the summit of governmental leadership is a symptom of social disturbance below.

An attempted coup, such as is attributed to Lin Biao, can only be a reflection of serious instability in the social and political relations between the basic classes in contemporary Chinese society.

According to the official statement issued by the Chinese Embassy in Algiers on Lin Biao, the explanation for Lin Biao engaging in a plot to assassinate Chairman Mao and seize power through a coup can be understood in a large measure from (1) "his underhanded nature" (2) "he was a two-faced man" who in reality was opposed to the "revolutionary foreign policy of Mao," and (3) "did not change his perverse nature one iota."

Acceptance of such an explanation for an enormous historical event does violence to history itself, especially if one examines the array of leaders involved.

These include: Lin Biao, the Defense Minister, Politburo member, and military leader since the early Thirties; Chen Boda, a member of the standing committee of the Politburo, a leader of the Cultural Revolution and for many years Mao's personal



secretary; Huang Yongsheng, former chief of the general staff of the armed forces; Wu Faxian, commander of the air force; Li Tsopeng, deputy chief of staff and political commissar of the navy; Chiu Huitso, deputy chief of staff of the army and head of the logistics department; Yeh Chun, a member of the party Politburo and director of the administrative office of the party military affairs committee; and Lin Ligu, Lin Biao's son who was deputy director of the air force operations department.

Such a conception brings us back to pre-Marxist notions of history where good men and evil fought plots and counterplots and where the reign of the arbitrary was the supreme rule of history.

But Marx's development of the materialist conception of history demonstrates conclusively that all political phenomena have a class base. It is especially true of political events of such enormous historical import as this elimination of an entire stratum of leadership. They not only were most prominent during the Cultural Revolution, but some of them spent their entire lifetime in the midst of the leadership of the CPC throughout the course of the Chinese Revolution.

Lenin wrote on December 24, 1922, in one of his last letters, regarding "grave differences in our party" which might cause a split. He went on to say: "Our party relies on two classes (workers and peasants) and therefore its instability would be possible and its downfall inevitable if there were no agreement between those two classes. In that event this or that measure, and generally all talk about the stability of our Central Committee, would be futile. No measures of any kind could prevent a split in such a case. But I hope that this is too remote a future and too improbable an event to talk about."

## **Collectivization in China and the Soviet Union**

Lenin wrote this, of course, before collectivization in the Soviet Union took place.

But even a collectivized peasantry is by no means a proletarian class. Collectivization sets the framework, and the socialist future depends on a multitude of factors in which a thoroughgoing industrialization and rationalization based on the most modern technique is most essential. The gap between rural life and life in the city is a great factor. It cannot be easily overcome even under the best of conditions.

The political denouement of the Lin-Chen grouping is the objective result of the instability of class relations in China, following upon the heels of the Cultural Revolution. Of course, they are immeasurably more stable than the relations in any of the bourgeois countries. The political crisis resulting in the Lin-Chen ouster reflects the true dimensions of this instability, and of Chairman Mao's quest for a resolution of it by fundamental changes in the foreign policy.

The extraordinary degree to which the Chinese peasantry was receptive to the revolutionary propaganda of the CPC and the PLA is often attributed solely to the tactics and strategy pursued by the leadership. This, of course, was very important and decisive.

But what is often lost sight of are the objective conditions that enabled the masses to respond to a revolutionary call to arms from a Marxist-Leninist party.

The Chinese peasantry, unlike peasants in Western Europe or in other semicolonial countries, had a great deal more in common with the Chinese proletariat. As Engels says in *The Peasant Wars in Germany*, concerning events more than four hundred years ago, "the German peasant of that time had this in common with the modern proletariat: that his share in products of the work was limited to a subsistence minimum necessary for his maintenance." (International Publishers, 1926)

The protracted character of the Chinese Revolution and the ruthless war upon the Chinese people conducted by the Japanese imperialists, which had caused such

unspeakable havoc, economic dislocation, ruination and destruction of lives and property, reduced the bulk of the Chinese peasantry, not only to the level of subsistence of the Chinese proletariat, but way below it, making the peasant far more susceptible to the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeois landlord regime.

The dictatorship of the proletariat has the economic and political problem of how to share, not only the work of socialist construction, but the distribution of the income between the classes, the workers, the peasants and all intermediate strata of the population.

Moreover, there is still the bourgeois intelligentsia, which, although shorn of its power, has not been destroyed but in the process of being reeducated, necessarily plays a key, if not central role in the economic, industrial, scientific and other phases of life.

More than in any other socialist country, the gap between the privileged and the ordinary worker or peasant has been narrowed and material inequality reduced, certainly by comparison with the Soviet Union. But the social contradictions continue, and are exacerbated, among other things, by the ever-increasing need of scientific and technological resources diverted for defense needs, which consume no small portion of the fruits of socialist construction.

Collectivization in China has made truly remarkable accomplishments. This is accounted for particularly by the participation of the masses, and the enthusiasm it evoked in the course of such a radical transformation. It took place without pushing, in fact avoiding, the type of material incentives which break up the solidarity of the masses, which was the practice in the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the peasantry as a class is distinguished from the urban proletariat.

Both China and the Soviet Union have had to resort to huge purchases of wheat from the imperialist countries. This is only one aspect of an internal contradiction in

socialist countries which manifests itself in the form of some dependence on the West. Some of the more sophisticated technology developed in the capitalist countries is needed for socialist construction both in the USSR and in China. This is another aspect of dependency.

Finally, the productive forces, which are restricted by the character of having national states in the socialist bloc, with just bare economic ties between the countries, and lacking the necessary comradely economic cooperation, is another drawback.

The socialist camp, economically speaking so far as China and the Soviet Union go, is merely a potential. Great power chauvinism shown by the Soviet leaders since the death of Lenin in relation to the other socialist countries has alienated them, forced each to seek its “own” road to socialist construction, which, from the point of view of Marxism, is a reversion to anachronistic national self-sufficiency in the socialist camp.

### **COMECON and socialist cooperation**

Although the Soviet Union has somewhat relaxed its rigid dominant economic control over COMECON (which is the USSR’s answer to the imperialist Common Market) in Eastern Europe, it is nothing like the necessary socialist cooperation between socialist countries which respect each other’s sovereignty and are all pledged to socialist construction for the common good of all.

Romania is a classic example of a small socialist country that ordinarily has everything to gain by economic cooperation with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries in a common bloc or socialist federation. Ceaucescu’s half-turn to the West can only be explained on the basis of the Soviet leaders’ shabby treatment of the People’s Republic of Romania. What the Soviet Union tried to do or force upon Romania was the kind of division of labor in COMECON which would leave Romania

underdeveloped, economically deformed, and an appendage to Soviet needs rather than on the basis of the common needs of all the socialist countries.

The PRR has no fundamental political differences with the Soviet leaders and its overtures to the West are based strictly on economic considerations.

### **Lin Biao case flows from combination of historical forces**

These then are some of the fundamental factors that lie behind the latest phase of developments in both China and the Soviet Union.

The Lin Biao affair must be seen in that historical perspective, as China's and the Soviet Union's eagerness to make an accommodation, some sort of more or less stable detente, with the imperialist West at the expense of the Vietnamese people and the world revolution flows from the constellation of historical forces.

Any number of erroneous conclusions can be drawn from this, especially in this land of classic rabid anticommunism. In a recent issue of the New York Review of Books, the well-known liberal publicist I.F. Stone, writing about the capitulation of both China and the USSR on the Haiphong crisis, said, "Brezhnev and Zhou Enlai have become the running dogs of the U.S. imperialists."

Certainly, the conduct of the Chinese and Soviet leaders in the Haiphong crisis can evoke an easy protest and utter disgust. I.F. Stone is angry at the Nixon administration for its imperialist brinkmanship and is frustrated, as are millions of others throughout the world, that neither the Soviet nor the Chinese leaders should pick up the challenge (not necessarily in a nuclear confrontation). Stone's characterization of the leadership of China and the Soviet Union cannot, however, be taken for a serious appraisal. Stone will take comfort from his frustration in joining the McGovern campaign.

Revolutionary Marxists cannot for long afford the luxury of pessimism. The need is

to chart a course for the revolutionary struggle against imperialism based upon an accurate appraisal of the position and orientation of the Soviet and Chinese leaders as well as the domestic situation.

## **Two types of accommodation**

The Soviet leaders (and the Chinese leaders to a lesser extent) have renounced the perspective of world revolution and have abandoned the liberation struggle. But by no means have they galloped into the arms of imperialist policy and stabilized their relations with the U.S. on the basis of carrying out Washington's orders.

Such mistaken conclusions have been made with regard to the Soviet Union in the late thirties during the Stalin-Hitler pact period which swung an entire generation back into the camp of social democracy.

Regardless of any and all attempts at accommodation, the two social systems — that of the imperialist system and the socialist system prevalent in the Soviet Union and China — are diametrically opposed to each other and are based on antagonistic class structures.

Any accommodation, any secret arrangements that have been made can only be of a temporary character. They will, of course, hurt the world movement. They are not however like the accommodations and alliances made between the bourgeoisie and the feudal classes or between the North and the South in the United States.

The accommodations made between those classes were viable accommodations because the bourgeoisie, by virtue of the automatic processes of capitalist production, was able to assimilate whatever class fragments of the feudal classes were left into the bourgeois order of society and actually strengthen the system against the exploited classes. There was a common denominator between those classes. They were both possessing, exploiting social formations and had a common

hostility to the oppressed.

It is otherwise with the socialist states. The class differences between them and the bourgeoisie are of an utterly irreconcilable character. Neither system can long endure, as Lenin so well said in 1921, without there being a funeral for one or the other.

The fundamental basis for the revival of the capitalist system of exploitation, as particularly evidenced following the Second World War, lies in the fact that contrary to Marx's original prognosis, the socialist revolution came first not where conditions were most favorable for the development of socialist society, but where the imperialist system was weakest. The failure to overthrow the capitalist system in Western Europe, aside from fundamentally false policies, indicates that the task of proletarian revolution is an immeasurably more difficult one than had been conceived prior to World War I.

On the other hand, the imperialist system in the epoch of its general decline cannot go on without enormous economic crises, political catastrophes, counter-revolutionary coups, subversion of socialist countries, and the prosecution of imperialist wars. This alone makes the proletarian revolution necessary and inevitable.

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