

China Policy Study Group

BROADSHEET

Sponsors: Dr Joseph Needham FRS, Prof Cyril Offord FRS, Prof Joan Robinson, Prof George Thomson

DOING WHAT HAS TO BE DONE

All over China a mass revolutionary upsurge is in evidence. Workers, peasants and soldiers appear happy, united and resolute as they tackle urgent tasks in the Party, the state, the economy and the struggle against imperialism.

It could have been otherwise. During 1976 Marxist-Leninists and other friends of China had watched anxiously as the working class faced the most severe political and ideological tests at the very time when unprecedented natural disasters added to the irreparable loss of Chairman Mao and four other great revolutionary leaders. Then there followed moves within the CPC to eliminate the younger successors in whose revolutionary credentials Mao, Chou and the masses had confidence, and put wrong policies in command. The outcome could have been a disaster for the Chinese working class and its allies, as well as for the vast majority outside China. In the resulting confusion and near-anarchy, as Hua Kuo-feng in his 25 December speech (at the Second National Conference on Learning from Tachai) showed the CPC Central Committee realized, China's ability to get the revolution back on to the correct course was momentous for the world revolution:

'filled with pride of victory, the Chinese people declare to the whole world: we have stood the severe test. Under the guidance of Chairman Mao's revolutionary line, our Party has won, the proletariat has won, the people have won, the bright socialist China has won!'

Better prospects for the world revolution

It is momentous from the viewpoint of the majority, the workers and peasants for whom the imperialist order is intolerable—their revolutionary organizations and activities proscribed whenever they become effective, their leaders in prison or in hiding or, under revisionist influence, betraying them—because every real step they take anywhere towards national liberation, socialist revolution and self-reliant development of the productive forces significantly alters the prospects for mankind. They could ill afford to have their main anti-imperialist bastion, socialist China, undermined.

A few at the centre of authority of the proletariat's political party and its socialist government there had indeed begun to abandon some of its most strategic positions, e.g., the mass campaigns to follow the revolutionary example of the Taching workers and to build Tachai-type counties throughout China by 1980, and the practice of democratic centralism insisted upon by Mao. Consequently, as Chen Yung-kuei, the well-known "peasant" vice-premier, reported at the Learning from Tachai Conference, over a decade of achievement was nearly sabotaged: grain production was disrupted, and fell, in six provinces; and in Wenchow prefecture in the southeast of Chekiang province (where "the four" had been very active) the socialist base had actually disintegrated, and new rich peasants were running black-markets just opposite imperialist-held Taiwan! This outcome indicated the class interests served by the campaigns the four waged. However, the CPC's timely action saved the working class from having to fight to overthrow a new despotism, in which the authority of the proletarian dictatorship, and anti-capitalist rhetoric, would have been used to

humiliate, terrorize and imprison good Communists, and restore the kind of poverty and insecurity which had been abolished. Now the Chinese people, greatly relieved, are getting down to the tasks indicated in Hua's speech: deepening the mass movement to expose and criticize the four—the year's central task; strengthening the CPC as the proletarian vanguard and holding province-level people's congresses; deepening the revolutionary mass movements in socialist construction; and increasing mass study of Marxist theory.

As long as the proletariat's struggle against the bourgeoisie intensifies, people everywhere engaged in the struggle against imperialism and reaction and for the abolition of all classes can be more confident than ever of ultimate victory. But this will be achieved only if outside China, too, the necessary work is done, correctly. For the proletariat already in power in a country, tackling its socialist tasks in the present world situation, Mao's teaching and example, and those of his precursors, together with the Communist experience in Russia after 1917 and China after 1949, are proving valuable. Lenin and Mao showed how essential for Communists proletarian discipline was, and the proletarian world outlook, and how dangerous the petty bourgeoisie's outlook and influence were. A clique of leading cadres, turning to sectarian use the resources and powers entrusted to its members for revolutionary work, can substitute anarchism for Marxism, and end up turning the guns away from revisionism and imperialism towards the proletarian revolutionary leadership, splitting the working class and its Party, and oppressing the masses.

In most of the world, however, the bourgeoisie's rotten and parasitical existence is still prolonged. The working class can end it only by struggling against 'leaders' and traditions which made it abandon its historical role as the leading class and substitute class collaboration for class struggle. The conscientious study of Marxist works, including those of Mao, with specific tasks in mind, cannot be confined to an elite. It has to be a working class activity. The more complex and fierce its struggle against the bourgeois class, the more important it is to know thoroughly and make effective use of Marxist theory to solve problems as they arise. These already arise in the practice of seriously preparing in every country to build a correct revolutionary Party based on the working class.

Finally, the connection between subjection to imperialism, chronic crises leading to massive unemployment, inflation, war, backward technology, etc., and toleration of imperialist-bourgeois rule must be made clear. Only revolution will develop the productive forces beyond present limits.

As Hua's speech indicates, a post-Mao collective leadership in China has helped the people to pass a hard test, and to advance through class struggle to the period of stability and unity that Mao envisaged. But study of Chinese developments would be academic for others, if they had no sense of urgency about identifying and correcting the things within the 'left' which are obstacles to an active united front, under working class leadership, against imperialism.

EARLY CLASS STRUGGLES IN THE USSR

Charles Bettelheim's book, *Les Luttes de Classes en URSS*, has at last been published in English as *Class Struggles in the USSR — First Period: 1917-23* (Monthly Review Press, price \$18.95 and Harvester Press, London, price £12.50). In view of the importance of the work we are now printing a general survey of the ground it covers.

* * *

As the scientific theory of revolution, Marxism-Leninism belongs to all in our epoch who genuinely want socialist revolution. The test of its truth, as with all scientific theory, is in its practice, i.e. the firm grasp of Marxist-Leninist principles and their correct application to concrete conditions.

Charles Bettelheim's book, *Class Struggles in the USSR* is the first part of a major work on the Soviet Union since 1917. It is concerned, not simply with specific lessons to be learnt from the experience of the struggling, young socialist Russia, but also with formulating the relationship between these experiences and development of Marxism-Leninism as the only correct theoretical tool for revolutionaries.

Briefly, Bettelheim's thesis is that the roots of revisionism, which led to the overthrow of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the restoration of bourgeois production and social relations in the Soviet Union, can be traced back to economic ideas and practices within the early Bolshevik Party and state apparatus, which remained unchecked in the main after Lenin's death in April 1924.

Basic to this thesis are three considerations linking the specific lessons to be learnt from the theoretical and practical errors of the Bolshevik Party with the universal principles of Marxism-Leninism:

- the relationship between the Soviet Union's early struggle for socialism and Marxist principles based on previous scientific knowledge;
- the relationship between the Soviet Union's experience and the development of revolution throughout the world in a historical context, i.e. the Soviet Union as the first proletarian state;
- the role played by the Soviet Union in relation to the development of Marxist-Leninist theory.

Class Struggle

Bettelheim starts with class struggle, correctly viewing emerging economism within Marxist movements as a group of ideas which can be identified with a certain class view. Historically bound up with the development of the European labour movement from 1880 to 1914, economism within Russia is traceable to the Mensheviks and to trade union leaders within the Bolshevik Party itself.

Economism identifies the building of socialism with the fastest possible development of productive forces. It considers productive forces and not class struggle as the driving force of history. It asserts conformity between productive forces and productive relations, and so is non-dialectical, failing to recognise the possibility of contradiction between these two elements of the economic base which continue to exist throughout the period of the socialist transformation of society. Further, economism attributes a negative role to the proletariat and masses — they sit back and accept the 'laws' of socialist production.

These were the dominant views of the Bolshevik Party as a whole. Bettelheim examines the social foundations of these ideas and their meaning for the Soviet Union in practice.

In essence, writes Bettelheim, the October Revolution was a world historic change made possible by:

... new relations of forces between classes which the October insurrection revealed, at the same time as it helped

to consolidate this, for power is precisely a relationship between classes and not an 'object' which is 'seized'.

And he adds:

The October Revolution was unlike all previous revolutions ... by virtue of the fact that it was carried through under the guidance of proletarian ideas. The Bolshevik Party was the organised carrier of these ideas and it was this that enabled the Russian proletariat to make itself the dominant class.

The Party served as the instrument of the dictatorship of the proletariat as long as it continued to be the carrier of proletarian ideology and practice — practice being the decisive condition because bourgeois labour parties (as in Britain) can have a working-class base without upholding proletarian ideology and practice.

War Communism

Imperialist and White Russian counter-revolution was an obstacle to the new proletarian state transforming the bourgeois relations of production into socialist ones. In order to fight such better equipped forces, Lenin saw that the period of War Communism had to be one of state capitalism under the proletariat's dictatorship.

At first workers, rather than the centre, controlled the factories but the influence of worker communists was so slight and scattered and petty bourgeois ideas so strong, that factory administration was centralised to maintain production. Bourgeois specialists were reinstated and given higher salaries and freedom from worker control in technical matters. The continuation of bourgeois practices and relations of production allowed bourgeois elements to penetrate the state administration more easily. By the end of War Communism such elements had even managed to penetrate the Bolshevik Party.

Yet the courage and initiative of the workers throughout this period was shown time and again. The forces of counter-revolution were defeated; the masses took direct action against those who used their privileges to amass wealth through a black market system. They introduced Communist Saturdays throughout 1918-21, spontaneously working for nothing to aid the struggle against counter-revolution. Lenin proclaimed such efforts to be the 'new shoots of socialism' which should be nurtured, but they were neglected and their meaning lost when Saturday labour was enforced.

Lenin saw that the period of War Communism had only shaken capitalist relations of production, the next task was to transform these bourgeois relations into socialist ones.

New production relations

In discussing the situation faced by the Soviet Union in 1921, Bettelheim constantly links Lenin's analysis with Marx's.

Marx showed that inevitably, and independent of their will, men enter into definite production relations in the course of the social production of their means of existence; and that the specific form taken by social production, which is the production of life's requirements, is the result of previous class struggle. The division of labour and the instruments of labour indicate the level of development reached in production — that is the material conditions of society and the level of class struggle.

The nature of classes in relation to the social division of labour was taken up by Lenin in *A Great Beginning* (Collected Works, Vol 29, p. 421):

Classes are large groups of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relations (in most cases fixed and formulated by law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organisation of labour, and consequently by the dimensions of the share of social wealth they dispose and the mode of acquiring it (*our emphasis*).

Bettelheim pinpoints three major considerations in understanding these analyses. Firstly, the relations of distribution are only a result of the relations of production. They can help reveal the nature of class relations, but in themselves cannot explain them. Secondly, the 'fixing' by law of certain relations to the means of production may 'formulate' these relations but the latter exist independently of the law. In fact the law may disguise the real nature of such relations, e.g. state-owned means of production in capitalist society in reality means that they are part of the capitalist class's collective property.

Thirdly, classes are distinguished by the relations of their members to the means of production and the role they play in the 'social organisation of labour'.

The means of production may change hands without a corresponding change in the social organisation of labour—the bourgeoisie though expropriated may still hold their places in the social order. Writes Bettelheim:

All those who in the system of social production and reproduction, occupy a place corresponding to that of the bourgeoisie, and who in that system develop *bourgeois social practices* despite the existence of the dictatorship of the proletariat, constitute a bourgeoisie.

Thus, when the proletariat establishes its rule and takes factories into state ownership, it only acquires the possibility of revolutionising the real production process and causing new socialist relations of production to appear, with a new social division of labour and new productive forces. Therefore socialism is not the abolition of capitalist production relations by decree but the struggle to transform and reconstruct these relations—a transitional period. Money, prices, wages and profits disappear only through the transformation of the old production relations.

As long as bourgeois elements persist in various social relations, then the bourgeoisie and proletariat remain in a class relationship. While they so exist, the bourgeoisie can reverse the revolutionary struggle to transform production relations into socialist ones (by sabotage, counter-revolution or penetration of industry and the state). Only the transformation of the old bourgeois relations will gradually cause the bourgeoisie as a class to disappear. It is precisely for this reason that Lenin wrote in *Economics and Politics in the Era of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat* (Collected Works, Vol. 30, pp 114-115):

Classes cannot be abolished at one stroke. And classes still remain and will remain in the era of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The dictatorship will become unnecessary when classes disappear. Without the dictatorship of the proletariat they will not disappear. . . . The class struggle does not disappear under the dictatorship of the proletariat; it merely assumes different forms.

Lenin said that during the period of transition to communism, a battle would be fought out between bourgeoisie and proletariat, the former 'which has been defeated but not destroyed' and the latter, 'which has been born but is still very feeble'.

Lenin saw clearly that the immediate task after the end of War Communism would be the consolidation of the dictatorship of the proletariat in order to wage a struggle against the bourgeoisie and transform production relations. But if this was the picture as Lenin saw it, was it translated into practice by the Bolshevik Party? We have already noted that the period of War Communism was also a chance for members of the old bourgeoisie to penetrate the state apparatus. This and the question of the peasants were vital issues which emphasised discrepancies between Lenin's views and the practice of the Party.

Peasant-worker alliance

With the outbreak of revolution in 1917, the majority of the peasantry had no difficulty in identifying landlords, church and Tsarist state as their oppressors. The threat of a White Russian victory and the restoration of the landlords was sufficient to bind the peasants into some form of alliance with the industrial proletariat. Nevertheless, the relationship held deep contradic-

tions which came to the fore during the period of War Communism and posed many problems for the Bolsheviks.

Unlike China, where Mao's strategy was to establish revolutionary communist bases among the peasantry, very little Bolshevik influence had been established in the Russian countryside before 1917. There had not been enough Party-trained cadres to serve towns and countryside equally well, and the peasantry, which was petty bourgeois in character, came under the influence of the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries.

The Decree of 26 October, 1917, placed all private land at the disposal of district committees and peasant soviets. By 1919, writes Bettelheim, the majority of the land had been given out to peasants for individual cultivation. However, the pre-revolutionary centre of village organisation, the MIR, continued to be dominant. Though landlords had largely been removed, the Kulaks or rich peasants formed the nucleus of a new rural bourgeoisie, and dominated social relations of production, mixing cultivation with commercial activities. In this they were joined by a large number of the middle peasants—those who had been able to survive on their own land and perhaps avoid wage labour before the Revolution. The Decree did not break down these old class relations and the absence of strong party organisation maintained isolation from the industrial proletariat, and so inadvertently encouraged petty bourgeois individualism.

Lenin's April Theses of 1918 directed the Bolshevik Party to organising the poor peasants and rural wage labourers by placing poor peasants in direct positions of power within peasant communities. But the poor peasantry, lacking the proletarian outlook, was unable to maintain its power and resist the middle peasants—a numerically larger group. This led Lenin to put forward a further task in March 1919—the integration of the middle peasants into a socialist system, while levelling blows at rich peasant domination on the land.

Strategy

At the 8th Party Congress, Lenin put forward four principles for the Party to follow in relation to the middle peasants:

- coercion was not the answer;
- prolonged education was necessary;
- to learn from the middle peasants themselves how to bring about integration;
- not to give orders.

These principles were accepted but only partly practiced.

Throughout War Communism the level of agricultural production fell. Between 1911 and 1913 grain production averaged 72.5 million metric tons per year, but by 1920 it had fallen to less than 32m metric tons. This was due in part to the general disruption of war, but more importantly it reflected the social contradictions between town and country, peasant and worker. As the towns were then unable to contribute anything to the countryside, the petty bourgeois mentality of the peasants led them to give nothing to the towns and to produce only for themselves. The Bolsheviks had to adopt requisitioning to maintain the towns which strained relations between the peasantry and proletariat even further, to the point of revolts.

By contrast, the working class under Mao, while learning from the Bolsheviks, conceived a different strategy: it fought a People's War with the co-operation of the peasantry, though China's structural conditions were different. Lenin urged the Party to analyse its experience with the peasantry since 1917, to reach a correct political line and satisfy peasant demands. This led to the Decree of 22 May, 1922, which while recognising the existence of the MIR sought to transform it to conformity with soviet power through land associations.

Lenin had begun to work out a new political line in relation to the peasants, recognising the rural masses as the true ally of the proletariat, not simply in the democratic stage of the revolution, but in the struggle for socialism. But it was a political line which also struck at the Bolshevik Party. At the Eleventh Party Congress in April 1922, Lenin declared:

The central feature of the situation now is that the vanguard must not shirk the work of educating itself, of remould-

the countryside, which understanding would have enabled class struggle in the countryside to be correctly directed. Consequently the rich peasants continued to dominate the MIR and land associations. This discrepancy in the Party was related to the whole question of democratic centralism, relations between the Party and the masses, and between the Party and the state.

Democratic centralism

After 1917, the Bolshevik Party allowed parties and publications to continue if they accepted Soviet power and agreed to carry on political struggle within the Soviets. Lenin recognised the mass base of many of these organisations and felt that their errors could be corrected in practice; as the Bolshevik Party was proved correct, the organisations and the people they represented would come closer to the Bolsheviks' view. But this attempt to grant democratic parties a place in political relations failed, writes Bettelheim. Civil War led many of these groups into counter-revolution, in an attempt to overthrow proletarian power by means of subversive agitation. This in turn was fostered by the mistakes of the Bolshevik Party which often preferred methods of bourgeois repression to those of ideological struggle. This method of dealing with critics meant the Bolsheviks never had to reply and it hindered the development of revolutionary thinking among many in the Party.

The decline in the role of the Soviets between 1918 and 1921 meant less opportunity for workers and peasants to criticise and check the corps of state officials. In turn, the state administrative machine gradually became independent of the Party and government. The Eighth Party Congress of March 1919 attempted to adjust this situation with the formation of a new People's Commissariat for the Control of the State, but achieved little. Again this was due to growing bourgeois influence within the state apparatus throughout War Communism.

The small size of the Bolshevik Party before the revolution, and the death of Party members during the counter-revolutionary struggle was over-compensated by a too rapid growth of Party membership, with the result that it had too few tried and tested communists. The rich peasants used the situation to control the rural soviets. In the rural areas, Party members tended to run peasant administrative organisations as well as Party Committees, instead of relying on the masses. Consequently there was no check on the Party at a local level and a weighty bureaucratic machine emerged, that was easily misdirected.

New Economic Policy

By the close of 1922, Lenin saw that the New Economic Policy to replace the measures of War Communism could no longer be simply a 'stop-gap' to win the support of the peasants, but that it had to be the foundation of a strong worker-peasant alliance in order to provide a mass base for the struggle against bourgeois ideas and practices, to transform relations of production into socialist ones.

But first, Lenin had to wage unrelenting struggle against economism and bourgeois practices within the Bolshevik Party itself. Many members had come to see the stringent measures of War Communism, such as food requisitioning, as the basis of socialist production. The Cheka (and later the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs) set up to deal with counter-revolution, ignored restraints on its power and directed itself at protesting middle peasants. Gradually it stifled free opinion and the development of initiative in the Party, until it was the reverse of what Lenin had envisaged.

In *Instructions from the Council for Labour and Defence to Local Soviet Bodies*, Lenin urged control by the masses over state apparatuses and over the Communists themselves. He advocated the establishment of worker-peasant associations, with workers visiting rural areas. He spoke elsewhere of the need for the masses to shake off 'bureaucratic' or 'serf' culture, being imposed by many communists from above as a substitute for real proletarian culture coming from the workers.

But increasingly, after Lenin's death, the NEP was viewed as a set of economic measures forced on the Party by the attitude of the peasants, which could be repudiated when circumstances were suitable — not the worker-peasant alliance envisaged by Lenin.

For Lenin, the failures of the period of War Communism were ones of political strategy. The Party had attempted to replace capitalist methods of production and distribution by means of 'decrees' from above, instead of relying on the masses and learning from them how to lay siege from below. The NEP was a recognition by the Party of the existence of deep social contradictions within Russia, but it was only Lenin who attempted a thorough analysis of these contradictions. The bulk of the Party remained greatly influenced by mechanistic formulations. Lenin's thinking was so much ahead of the Party because he alone went back to the basic principles established by Marx and Engels and applied them dialectically to concrete changing conditions.

Revisionism

Bettelheim's book is an objective analysis of the early development of post-revolutionary Russia in terms of Marxist principles established prior to the revolution, and the development of Lenin's thought in relation to concrete conditions and changing social contradictions after the initial overthrow of the bourgeoisie.

It is this which marks Lenin and the Bolsheviks off from the revisionists who took control of the Soviet Union after Stalin's death. It would be non-dialectical to see revisionism, the principal contradiction facing the revolutionary movement today, as without a historical social base. For this reason Bettelheim has returned to the birth of the Russian Revolution as the first stage in explaining the emergence of revisionism.

At the same time, we cannot help but compare the development in post-revolutionary Russia with the revolutionary struggles in China. The political strategies which Lenin arrived at before his death were ones which ensured the success of the Chinese revolution in its early stages and the continuing consolidation of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Mao struggled for many years against the mechanistic Marxist formulations which members of the Chinese Communist Party inherited from the Third International and which not only delayed the Chinese revolution for many years but threatened the existence of the Party in China.

The Bolshevik Party's post-revolutionary weakness in theory, the errors of some of its strategies and tactics, reflected weaknesses in the Party dating from its pre-revolutionary period. It is for this reason that Marxist-Leninists facing the monumental task of party-building in Europe must return to Lenin's writings. Here also lies the merit of Bettelheim's book — not in providing answers to the problems posed by the early experience of the Soviet Union, but in emphasising that the answers lie in scientific Marxism-Leninism. Throughout he makes clear his view that an example of its successful use is the practice of the workers and peasants of China, under the leadership of Mao Tse-tung and the Chinese Communist Party.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES

SURFACE MAIL	SEALED	OPEN
U.K.:	£2.00	
U.S., Canada, Europe, China,		
Hong Kong, Japan, Aus., N.Z.:	£2.85 (\$8.60)	£1.80 (\$6.00)
All other countries:	£2.00	£1.25
AIR MAIL		
U.S., Canada, Hong Kong:	£3.85 (\$11.20)	£2.50 (\$7.85)
China, Japan, Aus., N.Z.:	£4.40	£2.85
All other countries:	£2.70	£1.75

No air mail rates to Europe.

U.K. ISSN 0067-2052.