

Mass Organizations and Socialism in China

A Preliminary Analysis of the Cultural Revolution Experience^{*}

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(A draft for discussion)

Abstract:

The emergence of numerous independent mass organizations across China during the first years of the Cultural Revolution was Mao's critical innovation in socialist governance. It enabled the working class and its allies to supervise the existing power structure at all levels of society and defend its socialist nature. The emergence of these independent mass organizations greatly enhanced socialist democracy, i.e. a democracy based on the supremacy of the proletarian class interest. The existence of these independent mass organizations severely constrained the freedom of people in society with authority, that is, the Communist Party officials. The effect of disbanding the independent mass organizations after the formation of the revolutionary committees, in retrospect, was to "disarm" the working class. It enabled the rise to power of the capitalist roaders (Party officials who pushed for capitalism), and allowed them to consolidate their power without much organized resistance. Since the capitalist roaders were able to twist the doctrine of "following the leadership of the Party" into the "unchallenged leadership of the Party" and push for capitalism, we must reexamine the doctrine. Towards that end, we must understand the difference between democracy and freedom under capitalism with that under socialism. We must understand the roots of pluralism and a multiparty system under capitalism verses the roots of unitary Party leadership and democratic centralism under socialism, from the perspective of political economy. We must also understand the relationships between proletarian dictatorship, Party leadership, and independent mass organizations under socialism. I will try to articulate some of my preliminary thoughts on these issues, and contribute to the ongoing debates and summations over the Cultural Revolution experience.

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Independent Mass Organizations during the Cultural Revolution

The emergence and spread of numerous independent mass organizations across China during the first few years of the Cultural Revolution was one of the most significant innovations in structure of governance under socialism. It enabled the working class and its allies (i.e. the working people) to supervise the existing power structure at all levels of society and defend its socialist nature. These mass organizations were not only the well known Red Guards in the schools, but also worker and peasant groups in factories and in the countryside. The overwhelming majority of the working people in China participated in one of these organizations. Revolutionary leaders like Mao supported and encouraged their formation and growth. They became one of the main political forces that revolutionary leaders relied upon in their struggle with the capitalist roaders in the Party*. These independent mass organizations rebelled against the status quo. They held rallies, mass meetings, demonstrations, and wrote “Big Character Posters”† denouncing various Party and government officials for their anti-socialist tendencies. They cranked out newspapers and fliers that were being circulated widely around the country. This was a new form of “free press” that spread more widely than the “Big Character Posters” style of free expression contained within each enterprise or institution. The independent mass organizations posed an incredible challenge to the existing power structure in factories, communes, schools, and other social institutions. Later, they also seized power in their work units and local governments.

The birth of independent mass organizations came as a result of a series of struggles by the revolutionaries, led by Mao, to combat the emergence of an elite new ruling class in China. It becomes clear that before the Cultural Revolution Mao and other revolutionary leaders did not

* These were the Party officials that exercised their authority to serve the interests of a few instead of the interests of the working people as a whole.

† Chinese characters writing with brush pen on approximately 3x4 feet thin poster papers plastered on walls or billboards.

“grossly over estimate” the severity of the class struggle in China, as the mouthpiece of Deng’s government claimed. If there was any error in their estimation, it was their unfounded faith in the ability of the Party to self-correct, self-supervise, and overcome the corruptive nature of being a ruling party without a viable “loyal opposition”.

Capitalist roaders were determined to carry out their political line by all means necessary. This was done openly, underground, from the right, or masqueraded as “ultra-left”. Their purpose was to fend off the struggle of the working people, led by Mao and other revolutionaries, against their bourgeois reactionary line. For example, Deng was able to use his position in the Party to vastly expand the targets of the 1957 anti-rightist campaign as a way to shield the Party elite from criticism during the Party’s rectification campaign. The socialist education campaign meant to root out the capitalist roaders in the Party in the early 1960’s, was also turned into a campaign against misconducts or transgressions of the ordinary people by party leaders like Liu Shaoqi. Meanwhile, Party cadres’ participation in manual labor, advocated by Mao, became a photo opportunity for many bureaucrats, while workers participation in management became mere tokens in many factories. By the mid 1960’s, it became clear that none of the efforts by Mao and the other revolutionaries were able to turn the tide of capitalist mentality in any fundamental way.

As a student of the time, I witnessed that many of my teachers looked down upon the working people. They warned us to study hard, or face the risk of going back to the farm and hoeing fields for the rest of our lives. Children who came from worker and peasant families were discriminated against through entrance exams that favored the offspring of the old ruling class and party elites. The healthcare system served mostly the interest of the better-off urban dwellers. Peasants, who made up 80% of the Chinese population, were often treated as second class

citizens. Factory management tended to treat workers as hired hands rather than as equals under socialist principles. Art and literature were dominated by characters and stories of the old ruling class instead of the working people. In other words, the predominance of capitalism one sees in China today had sprouted at that time.

The Cultural Revolution was Mao's last desperate attempt to combat the power of the capitalist roaders that had begun to engulf the Party. He realized that only by relying on the masses could there be any chance of defeating the capitalist roaders' attacks on socialism. However, there was incredible resistance among the Party officials towards the Cultural Revolution. Most of them were incapable of grasping the danger that elitism posed to the socialist revolution. Few of them understood the importance, nor felt the need to have the masses challenge the Party leadership directly in organized forms. Party officialdom instinctively protected their vested interest, and opposed supervision by the ordinary people.

It becomes clear that if socialism is ultimately in the interest of the working people, and if socialism is ultimately enabling working people to run society, then, only the working people can be relied upon in the end to defend it. Their strong sense of ownership in socialism was demonstrated by their incredible enthusiasm in organizing their own mass organizations, by their energetic debates about the future of Chinese socialism, and by their deep concern about which party officials were capitalist roaders.

However, soon after various levels of Party and governmental offices were paralyzed, divisions between different mass organizations, and fighting within each, boiled to the surface. Many of the rebel leaders exhibited the typical petty-bourgeoisie mentality of self-centeredness and self-importance. They were quick to exaggerate others' mistakes and slow to make self-criticisms. They would rather be a "big fish in a small pond" than to unite with others for a bigger cause.

Some personal scores were settled in the name of revolutionary principles, often resorting to violence. The leaders of the mass organizations began to divorce from the masses faster than the Party officials that they just replaced.

Factionalism between the mass organizations reflected, to a degree, the struggle over lines and between cliques within the Communist Party, and led China to the verge of a civil war. To prevent further chaos and civil war, and to focus the Cultural Revolution on the task at hand, Mao and other revolutionary leaders called for the unity of various mass organizations to promote the formation of a new form of political power – Revolutionary Committees. These were composed of Party cadres, army representatives, and leaders from various mass organizations.

Soon after the formation of the Revolutionary Committees, all independent mass organizations were disbanded in the name of working class unity. In retrospect, it seems that this move may not have been the best move. At the time, it seemed the mass organizations were creating more trouble than good for the progress of the Cultural Revolution. However, with nearly 30 years of hindsight, the conclusion may be different. Within each Revolutionary Committee, the party cadres had the backing of the party organization, and the representatives of the army had the backing of the army organization. However, once the independent mass organizations were disbanded, the leaders of these organizations lost their base. The majority of them were given ceremonial posts, and their opinions carried little weight. The disbanding of mass organizations eliminated opposition for people in authority, foreshadowing the rise of the capitalist roaders to power.

The above conclusion is based on the observation that, from then on, there has been no organized force to supervise, question, or challenge the Party leadership and its policies at all levels. This

effectively disarmed the working class. When capitalist roaders like Deng orchestrated a coup and took power in China, the working people had no organizations to rely upon to fight effectively against his marching order towards capitalism. Although popular democratic rights, like the right to strike and the right to put up “Big Character Posters”, were incorporated into the new Constitution during the Cultural Revolution, these rights were taken away with ease by capitalist roaders, because the lack of organized resistance.

Nevertheless, spontaneous resistance and struggles against the capitalist state machinery have been widespread in the last 30 years. The June 4th massacre was the result of one of the better known clashes. The army that followed the order of the bureaucratic capitalist state shot its way into residential districts of the city. The people in Beijing, mainly the working class, who fed up with the corruption of the Party officials, and were sympathetic to the protesting students, were the main force that confronted the invasion of the army, and paid a heavy price.

In recent years, there have been endless bloody battles of workers defending their factories from privatization and farmers defending their livelihood from land grab against bureaucratic capitalists. However, without the original independent mass organizations formed during the Cultural Revolution, and with newly formed organizations being brutally crushed, peoples protest were no match to the overwhelming force of the state machinery.

On the one hand, the development of capitalism has caused great pain for revolutionaries. On the other hand, it forces us to seek answers for the failure of socialism. Disbanding the independent mass organizations, I believe, was one of the main reasons that the Cultural Revolution failed to prevent the bureaucratic capitalist from developing and pushing capitalism, and the main cause for the failure of socialism in China.

To have a clear theoretical understanding of the issues at hand, and to understand the key role the mass organizations plays in defending socialism, we must understand the difference between democracy and freedom under capitalism with that under socialism. We must understand the roots of pluralism and a multiparty system under capitalism verses the roots of unitary Party leadership and democratic centralism under socialism, from the perspective of political economy. We must also understand the relationships between proletarian dictatorship, Party leadership, and independent mass organizations under socialism. Towards this end, I will try to articulate some of my preliminary thoughts on these issues and contribute to the ongoing debate and summation over the Cultural Revolution experience.

The Difference between Democracy and Freedom under Capitalism and Democracy and Freedom under Socialism

Could Western style democracy be the solution to the failure of socialism in China? It seems to me that those who believe in the affirmative tend to believe that the democratic form of governance is the end as apposed to a means of governing, thus obscuring the class nature of the democratic system under capitalism.

I was a worker for many years, both in socialist China (before Deng came to power), and in capitalist U.S. I have experienced, first hand, the difference between democracies practiced in those two places, and have gained some theoretical insights.

In the U.S., democracy exists outside of working people's lives. We elect mayors and presidents who affect our taxes, but not the bosses we have to work under. Workers are free to quit and be unemployed, but not free to elect their supervisors. Capitalists exercise strict dictatorship within their enterprise. I never knew first hand why people were so scared of their employers until I

came to the U.S. There is no democracy within private enterprise. How to run a business is not up for discussion. Smart managers might seek input from their employees, but only the owners can make the final decisions.

Despite all the talk in the Western press of a totalitarian system of government in China, workers in China were not afraid of their managers, especially during the Cultural Revolution. Since workers livelihoods were guaranteed, it was the managers who feared the workers' criticisms, particularly through the "Big Character Posters". This type of socialist "free press" within each enterprise has been absent in the capitalist West, and was a right in the East that Deng banned immediately after he came to power.

I have learned in my more than 30 years living in the U.S., that one's political influence in a capitalist democracy is proportional to one's wealth. As will be explained later, one person, one vote is simply an illusion. In reality, it is more like one dollar, one vote.

I have also learned the essence of capitalism is the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie (i.e. the supremacy of the interest of capital over all other interests). The most important freedom under capitalism is the freedom of capital (to invest). The highly idolized democracy under capitalism, I found upon closer examination, is only a means to formulate rules of the game for the freedom of capital, by electing people to legislate and enforce the laws.

Democracy and freedom are unity of opposites. Democracy can not limit the freedom of capital under the rule of law, and capital is not free to violate the rule of the law. The two are united for the purpose of defending the rule of capital.

That is why, the more the capitalist state is threatened, the less it will tolerate dissenters. The U.S. has a history of persecuting dissenters. For example, many loyalists fled to Canada after the

War of Independence. During the American Civil War, there were many reports of persecutions of dissenters on both sides. The history of persecution of the Communist in the 1950's, or the McCarthy era, may seem a thing of the past, but has been revised in the form of the current day government monitoring of supporters of Iraqi resistant fighters. Only when dissenters do not threaten the capitalist state will the Western governments show tolerance towards dissent.

In contrast, the essence of socialism is the dictatorship of the proletariat (i.e. the supremacy of the interest of the working class). Compared with hundreds of years of experience of evolving forms of capitalist democracy and freedom, socialist forms of democracy and freedom have been underdeveloped. There are diverse views of it, but some basic features have emerged. Socialist freedoms, as experienced in China, were the freedom of speech represented by the “Great Debates”^{*} and “Big Character Posters”(i.e. 大鸣大放大字报大辩论 ,or DaMing, DaFang, DaZiBao, and, DaBianLuen); the freedom of association represented by the independent mass organizations, and the freedom of movement represented by the “Massive Traveling to Build Contacts”[†] (大串联 or DaChuanLian). These freedoms were the freedoms of the working people to manage all power structures in society. They became a constraint imposed on authority figures. Socialist democracy should also be a means to formulate laws and regulations that governs all sectors of the society, including the rules governing the socialist freedom. The two should also be a unity of opposites. They should be united for the purpose of defending the long term interests of the working people. Granted, the experience so far has been limited in this area, a lot more is needed to explore the structure of socialist democracy and freedom, both theoretically and in practice.

^{*} People would gather spontaneously in factories, communes, schools, street corners, or any open space to talk about or debate over the local or national politics.

[†] People were given free rides to visit their counterparts in other parts of China, to exchange experiences and to build ties with other organizations.

Similar to the case for the capitalist state, when the proletarian state is being threatened, it will not tolerate dissent either. It must crush any counter-revolutionary forces. However, the capitalist roaders often have suppressed the resistance of the working people in the name of suppressing counter-revolutionaries, there by trampling socialist democracy and freedom. This was why Mao raised the issue of correctly identifying and handling the two types of contradictions (i.e., contradictions among the people verses contradictions between us and the enemy).

In the end, only by relying on the masses can the true motive of the people in authority for suppression of others (to defend themselves or to defend socialism) be identified. Whether those people in authority were true or false revolutionary became clear once the masses were engage in the debate.

The Dominant Ideology Controls the Terms of Debate in a Democracy

It should be clear that the terms of debate in a democracy are based on the dominant ideology under each society. The agenda of Western democracy is controlled by the dominant bourgeois ideology. The central point of this ideology is the supremacy of self interest and the freedom for one to pursue one's own interest. Private property, in the sense of the private ownership of the means of production, is sacred, and not up for a vote. Most people under capitalism would not challenge this ideology, because they themselves would like to be a boss, too. As a boss, they would not want others to tell them what to do with their property either.

Capitalism is the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie over all other classes. The capitalist class exercises this political monopoly directly through its control of the police, the military, the court system, in other words, the full power of the state machinery. This is achieved by funding politicians to get elected. But more fundamentally, the control over the state machinery is

achieved through capitalists' influence on people's thinking. This latter is achieved through its control over media, cultural and educational institutions, etc., and through its dominance in the capitalist market place. Cultural or educational institutions that promote anti-capitalist ideology do not attract capital, thus do not have much influence in society.

Just like people who lived under feudal society thought the system of knights and casts were justified, most of the working people who live under capitalism and are under the influence of bourgeois ideology, think the right of capital is justified. They believe that personal property should be the sole domain of that person, even if that property employs hundreds upon thousands of workers. Workers simply want their rights over their own labor power to be respected.

Although the socialist revolution was able to change the political power in Chinese society, the dominating ideology was still non-proletarian. To change the dominant ideology in people's mind takes a long time. It could not be done overnight.

This is because People's ideology is not divorced from their material reality. When labor is a means to earn a living, and not one's "first need", as Marx said, then there will be a struggle or choice within each person; whether or not to place self interest ahead of the interest of the class, consciously or not. Only after mechanization and automation liberates labor from heavy physical work, and only when material and culture needs of people become so plentiful that people no longer have to worry about their basic living needs, can there be the material foundation for labor as one's "first need"*, instead of a means of earning a living. Even at that time, the struggle of whose interest should be placed first will remain. That is because human's limitless desire can conflict with limited resources in the world. However, the proletarian ideology of placing the

* For them to enjoy their jobs, to look forward to work, and to fulfill a sense of purpose in life.

overall class interest above self interest, not only during crises, but in daily life, becomes that much easier for the majority of the people to accept.

My understanding of socialism is more than just a break from the system of private ownership of the means of production. It replaces the supremacy of the capitalist self interest in society with the supremacy of the working class interest. To me that is what dictatorship of the proletariat means. When the dominant ideology in society is the bourgeoisie ideology, Western style democracy necessarily places self interest and local interest of a few at the expense of the global interest of the working class. As a result, it fails to ensure the supremacy of working class interests, i.e. public ownership of the means of production, and the socialist road which seeks to enrich all people together.

Thus, before the proletarian ideology of placing the global interest of the class above all else becomes the dominant ideology, Western style democracy can only lead a newly successful socialist revolution into capitalism. This is because “every body for himself” is consistent with capitalists’ class interest, but not with workers’ class interest. Between socialism and capitalism, only the latter is consistent with “every body for himself”. This is the difficulty that socialism faces with simple democracy before the transformation of the non-proletarian ideology among its people.

So who is being dictated under a dictatorship of the proletariat? Zhou-Enlai in his talk with Bill Hinton in 1971 where I was fortunate to have been, gave an insightful explanation. I do not remember his precise wording, but the idea was that in terms of class relations, under socialism, it was the working class and its allies, the majority in society, dictated over exploitive classes which were the minority. However, he explained, the proletarian ideology in China at that time was a minority ideology, while the non-proletarian ideology was the majority. Thus, in terms of

ideology, the proletarian dictatorship was the minority dictating over the majority. We can see from his explanation why the Cultural Revolution was a “cultural” revolution. We can also see why any high-flown ideas of democracy, without addressing the dominant role of the bourgeois ideology in society, can only be used to serve the interest of the capitalist class.

Given my experiences living under two systems, I fail to see how a two-party or a multiparty system can prevent capitalists from taking power in China. In fact, under the influence of the capitalist ideology, the multiparty system has served the capitalist very well. The U.S. is a prime example of a two-party system that protects the interest of the brutal imperialist capitalist class. Furthermore, the U.S. Congress is known to be “the best that money can buy”.

Simply implementing a multiparty system in China could not resolve the issue of which class will be in power. However, a one party system has failed to maintain socialism in China. So the issue is not a single party versus a multiparty system. These are the forms of a system, not its content.

Democratic Centralism

Fundamentally, a multiparty system and pluralism under capitalism is a reflection of the market competition of private capital onto politics. It is complementary with the plural, multi-centered nature of capital, and the economy based on market competition driven by capital’s self interest. Under capitalism, there is only centralism within each capitalist enterprise, only one-share-one-vote “dollar democracy”, not one-person-one-vote “human democracy”, nor can there be any experience with democracy under centralism.

In contrast, the essence of socialist economics is an economy guided by the overall interest of the working people. It is naturally an economy based on planning. This reflects onto the politics

which is necessarily a system of unified centralized leadership that is directed by the will of the people, i.e. democratic centralism.

Democracy and centralism are a pair of contradictions. They are a unity of opposites. A centralized authority that meets the long term interest of the working people cannot exist without some forms of democracy. However, without a centralized authority guided by the long term interest of the working people, there will not be democracy or freedom of the working people to manage the wealth of society. How to protect the democratic aspect of the democratic centralism and to simultaneously ensure that the centralized authority acts in the long term interest of the working people has been a challenge for socialism. The predominance of bourgeoisie ideology among the people, and its influence among the members of the Party are the main causes of this difficulty.

The Leadership of the Communist Party

Every class needs at least one party to advance its own interest. In the early stage of socialism, before the proletarian ideology of placing the global interest of the class above all else becomes the dominant ideology within the majority of the working people, the dominant role of the Party is essential for working class to be in power. This is because the real political power of the working class is not be just an abstract idea. It needs a physical body to exercise this power. Before the working people learn how to take control of society directly through democratic means, it must have a vanguard party, armed with proletarian ideology, to advance its class interest, and to overcome the dominant bourgeois ideology among its own ranks. Lenin's theory about the relationships between masses, party, and leaders still holds true under socialism.

The key role of the Party under socialism is also demonstrated quite clearly by Chinese socialist transformation of the 1950's. Land reform, the collectivization movement, and the transition of urban capitalist enterprises to state ownership could not have succeeded in China without the strong leadership of the Chinese Communist Party.

Given the key role of the Party under socialism, why was the Party not able to prevent the bureaucratic capitalists from taking over the political power in China, marked by the ascendance of Deng? To answer this question, we need to take a closer look at the structure of governance under socialism.

The Structure of Governance under Socialism

In contrast to those that believe Western style democracy could have been the solution to the failure of socialism in China, there are those that blame the development of capitalism in China mainly on external forces. They blamed people like Deng who snuck his way into the top leadership of the Party and took control of China. They do not look for systematic reasons for the failure of socialism.

I believe we have to look at reasons for the failure of socialism in China beyond people like Deng, and external factors. We need to look carefully for systematic faults in the structure of governance under socialism. This is because people like Deng, who appeared to have impressive credentials (he went through the long march, fought steadfastly against the Nationalist reactionaries and the Japanese imperialists), and yet, were the ones that finally led China on a full steam march towards capitalism. What Deng has demonstrated is that the emergence of capitalist roaders came from within the structure of governance under socialism itself.

There will always be traitors in the ranks of the revolutionaries. We can blame them for our defeat by our enemies, and absolve our responsibilities, or we can face up to our mistakes for failing to guard against them. We have no control over what our enemy does, but we can learn to guard against them better. That is why we have to look within the socialist structure for the failure of socialism to guard against the emergence of capitalist roaders and their rise to power.

Looking at the worldwide communist movement, we also see that:

- a) Only a Leninist party (a party that practices democratic centralism with an army of dedicated and highly disciplined cadres) has proved capable of leading a revolution that overthrows the old exploitive ruling class and establishes a socialist state power, and yet, proved incapable of maintaining the socialist nature of that power beyond the life of the original leaders. The death of the leader often means the death of the revolution.
- b) Not a single socialist country led by a Marxist-Leninist party in the old “socialist camp” was overthrown by outside forces. Yet all of them were more concerned of an external enemy than the threat of capitalism emerging from within the ruling party itself.

Given the experiences of the Cultural Revolution, the current state of the class relationship in China, and the experiences of the communist movement worldwide, revolutionaries are compelled to rethink some of their theories. This rethinking is just the opposite from the rethinking conducted by the official mouthpiece in China. They portray Mao’s greatest contributions to Marxism and Leninism as his “mistake”, while the principles they uphold are the ones that we need to be rethinking.

What are the fundamental structural failures of socialism? Among other reasons for the ability of the capitalist roaders to seize power and later to consolidate this power, the main reasons was the lack of independent mass organizations of the working people outside of the Party.

In my view the significance of independent mass organizations are at least 3 fold:

1. They are critical in supervising the nature of political power at various levels of power structures.
2. They are experimental forms of democracy under socialism.
3. They are training grounds for the working class to master the art of leading the society.

Under socialism, to uphold the democratic principle of democratic centralism is to uphold the mass line*. A key difference between the proletarian democratic centralism and bourgeoisie authoritarian dictatorship is the democratic nature of the former – the practice of the mass line.

Before liberation, the mass line was a self conscience guide to action for the Communist Party. It was a principle practiced under external pressure. Any deviation from it would lead to failure of the revolution. In other words, if the Party was divorced from the people in any way, they would face defeat by the enemy, either in the hands of the Japanese imperialist, or in the hands of the KMT (the Nationalist).

After the liberation, the Party's position totally changed, and the consequence of the Party's divorce from the people was neither immediate nor obvious. Without systematized democracy, the centralized authority can further and further deviate from the masses. Before the Cultural Revolution, the lack of challenge to the political monopoly of the Party was detrimental to the Party's health. The structure of the socialist power which emerged after the liberation was not

* Mao formulated the mass line as: rely on the masses, mobilizing the masses, and organizing the masses, or from the masses and to the masses.

very responsive to the need of the working people (1959-61 famine in some parts of the country was a prime example). Looking back, it was a structure that tended to promote people without firm principles, and people with opportunistic or careerist tendencies, rather than those that were full heartedly dedicated to socialism. It was a structure that was too much top-down, with officials accountable more to their superiors than to the people they lead. It was a structure with weak systematic feedback from below (National People's Congress acted more like a rubber stamp than a force that questioned, challenged, or opposed the decisions of the Party).

Based on the experience of the Cultural Revolution, independent mass organizations were the best insurance for the democratic nature of centralism. Since the independent mass organizations were not a part of the establishment, they were free to challenge those people in authority and supervise their actions.

Neither did Mao's slogan "let a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend" negate the Party's leadership role, nor did the independent mass organizations developed during the Cultural Revolution negate democratic centralism. Similarly, the Party's centralized leadership should not be understood as centralism without democracy, nor understood as the bureaucratic authoritarian dictatorship practiced under Deng.

Just like the unity of opposites between democracy and centralism, the leadership of the Party and the supervision by the independent mass organizations are also unity of opposites. Although leading and being led are opposites; so are supervising and being supervised, but both can be united under the goal of placing the proletarian global interest first.

For example, each production process must be directed under a unified leadership with authority. But this does not mean that the people being led cannot raise criticisms of the leaders. On the contrary, only one person having the say is one of the characteristics of the capitalist mode of

production. On the other hand, democratic supervision of the production management is one of the characteristics of the socialist mode of production.

What is centralism then? I believe it is the discipline to carry out democratically made decisions. In other words, it is the minority obeys the majority decisions (i.e. democracy); it is the lower level subordinating to the higher level authorities (i.e. centralism); it is local interest subordinating to the global interest of the proletariat (i.e. proletarian dictatorship). All of this does not negate the existence of the independent mass organizations.

During the early stage of the People's Republic, working people's political power was not stable. The Party was afraid of anti-socialist elements taking advantage of mass discontent with some key state policies (such as the state grain monopoly, or the residence permit system) to overthrow the new government. It restricted the number and the degree of independence for mass organizations outside of the Party. We should not take these expedient measures suited for the early republic as the cardinal principle of democratic centralism. As the socialist power gets consolidated, the scope of the independent mass organizations should be extended. The day that socialism has finally consolidated its power is the day that nationwide mass organizations will be able to achieve full independence from the Party (but not the other way around).

On the Need for a Counter Balance to the Party

When Deng came to power, what were the four cardinal principles that he actually upheld? He upheld bureaucratic comprador capitalism not socialism. He upheld authoritarian bourgeoisie dictatorship not proletarian dictatorship. He upheld revisionism not Marxism-Leninism. The only principle that he truly upheld was the leadership of the Communist Party. The reason that he was

able to take advantage of this was because it had a direct link to the loophole of the revolutionary theory in the past.

There was the belief among most of the revolutionaries in China which equated the dictatorship of the proletariat with political monopoly of the Communist Party, in exclusion of any organized forces independent of the Party. Mao was very concerned with the danger of lacking oppositions to the Party monopoly. He boldly experimented with forms of a “loyal opposition” under socialism during the Cultural Revolution, but was not able to fully resolve this problem within the few active years that he had.

Although Mao and other revolutionary leaders required that all party cadres have both accountability to the Party’s leadership and accountability to the masses at the same time, the former was clearly codified and the latter was not institutionalized. The Party was not only ineffective in preventing opportunists from entering the Party; it was also not effective in preventing the Party cadres with selfish motives from degenerating into capitalist roaders.

Before liberation in 1949, a party cadre’s chance to rise in the rank in leadership was dictated by the success of the revolution, and by the ability of the Party cadre to win over the people to the socialist cause.

After the revolution, there was no longer an external force to check the activities of the Party cadres. More importantly, the Party was not able to systematize the supervision of the working people over itself.

Mass line was a voluntary policy for each Party committee, some practiced, and others did not, without an institutional guarantee. As a consequence, promotion of personnel resided solely within the Party hierarchy. The masses might be consulted, but had no veto power. This is one of

the main reasons that the revolutionary character of the state power lasted until the death of its leader, and why there were no great successors.

It appears that no great successors of the revolution can emerge without being tempered first by great political turmoil. The storm of the first few years of the Cultural Revolution was too short to have tempered leaders with sufficient experience and prestige. How to develop the successors of the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat has been a major challenge.

It appears that socialism should not be understood as only a transition from capitalism to communism, in terms of the ownership of the means of production and ideology of the people. It also needs to be understood as a transition, in terms of the structure of governance under the proletarian dictatorship, from the monopoly of the political power in the hands of the vanguard party to the direct control of the political power in the hands of the working class itself through democratic means. Otherwise, the absolute power of the Party inevitably leads to the corruption of the Party by capitalist roaders. The lack of opposition outside of the Party was not just dangerous to its health, but fatal. To prevent the capitalist roaders from taking over the Party and seizing control of state power in the first place, or to prevent it from consolidating its power afterwards, revolutionaries need to develop a political structure that promotes the development of a multitude of mass organizations encompassing diverse views under the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Toward this end, the vanguard party needs to consciously build up the ability of the working class to take control of society. Furthermore, it must nurture mass organizations' independence so as to make the trade unions, student associations, etc., become relatively independent political forces, thereby reducing the need for the Party's monopoly step by step.

The goal of maintaining independent mass organizations is to put in practice the idea of holding the Party accountable to the people, make the mass organizations a political counter-balance to the Party, and to play a role of “loyal opposition” under socialism. On the one hand, the Party’s leadership is secured by its control of the army and the governmental apparatus. But the Party must give mass organizations relative independence. The Party’s leadership of the mass organizations can only be through education and through its power of persuasion, but not through its ability to outlaw or dictate.

Although the working class on the whole has the same interest, the influence of the bourgeois ideology over its rank will last for a long time. Under this condition, the opinion of the working class will not be fully unified for some time. The capitalist roaders and anti-socialist elements in society for sure will try to take advantage of the independent mass organizations to mount attacks on socialism. Except for arresting individuals with criminal conducts, the independence of the mass organizations must be maintained.

The said independent mass organizations are not just the trade unions, workers representative congresses, or student associations. These most likely will be controlled by one faction within the people. There should be independent mass organizations outside of the unions, workers representative congresses, or student associations, so that the minority may have a voice. It is through struggle with all kinds of non-proletarian ideology that peoples’ thinking can be changed, that socialism can be consolidated, and that the possibility for the successors of the revolution can be tempered and grow.

Even if anti-socialist elements were able to utilize some of the independent mass organizations to overthrow the socialist power, the working people would still have the Party and other independent mass organizations to struggle against the reactionaries. Thus the reactionary power

will have difficulty consolidating its power. The lack of even the most basic rights, like the right to organize against the bureaucratic capitalist in China today, should show the importance of independent mass organizations.

The Polish Solidarity movement was a good example. The mass organization of the Polish working class was up against the Polish state that had long ago been controlled by the capitalist roaders in the ruling Party. It was also a mass organization that had been used by the bourgeois liberals. Over all, however, the Solidarity was a progressive organization that fought against the bureaucratic capitalist. It initiated a working class movement that pushed for progress in Poland. Similarly, a bit of bourgeois democracy in China today would mean social progress.

The revolutionaries of yesterday would have acted differently, had they known the condition of capitalist development in modern China. 1956 was a turning point in the development of Chinese socialism. The basic task of transforming the economy into a socialist foundation was completed that year. The prestige of the Party was at its peak. However, the Party leaders did not think it was necessary to build and nurture independent mass organizations outside of the Party. It did not see the necessity of starting the transition of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the form of a one party monopoly to direct control by the class. Its leadership roll in various levels of government was increasingly enforced by the state machinery, rather than by the consent of the masses.

Mao and other revolutionary leaders in China have learned the danger of capitalist restoration from the domestic class struggle and the emergence of revisionism in the Soviet Union.

However, for 10 years between 1956 and 1966, Mao and others thought through education and rectification campaigns alone they could rid the Party of increasing elitism, bureaucracy, and opportunism. Their faith in the Party cadres turned out to be disappointing. They thought that the

Party cadres who risked their lives during the revolutionary wars to lead the people in China for their liberation from imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism, would also be devoted to building a socialist society that served the need of the people. They believed this even though the Party had changed its position from fighting for power to being in power. In reality, the party in power cannot supervise itself. That is why Mao relied on the masses to launch the Cultural Revolution.

The experience of the Cultural Revolution showed that it was of vital importance to have organized forces, which also believed in socialism, act as a counter balance to the Party's monopoly power. These forces were needed to defend the democratic nature of centralism, and to provide critical supervision of the nature of political power at various levels of the power structure. If this is true, then why were the mass organizations disbanded after a few years?

There seems to be a few factors that led to this disbandment.

- Revolutionaries within the Party underestimated the importance of independent mass organizations.
- The right to organize was granted by the Party, not earned through struggle.
- Capitalist roaders within the Party vehemently opposed the mass organizations for their ability to challenge the Party's authority and their monopoly of power.
- Overwhelming resentment of Party officials towards mass organizations limited Mao's ability to carry out the Cultural Revolution to the end, coupled with his failing health.
- Ordinary people had not learned sufficiently how to exercise their socialist freedom of association in a responsible, peaceful means that also respected dissenting views. Their organizational immaturity undermined their effectiveness. Typically, one sees that the

mass organizations were plagued with factionalism, intolerance of other organizations, quickness to criticize others, slowness of self examination, and personal rivalry that often resorted to violence. Chaos and disunity during that period made the movement unsustainable.

- Ultimately, it was Mao's reluctant retreat (under the threat of a civil war and the resistance of the conservative forces inside and outside of the Party) to the idea of a centralized leadership of the party (to the exclusion of other independent organizations) that terminated the experiment in independent mass organizations.

This is not a criticism of Mao. To me, the widely publicized mistakes in Mao's old age have turned out to be some of his greatest contributions to Marxism. Nevertheless, one's understanding of socialism can only be deepened through practice. Without the nearly 30 years of socialist experience led by Mao, particularly the Cultural Revolution, and nearly 30 years of capitalist development led by Deng, we cannot fully understand the reason for the failure of socialism in China. In other words, the importance of independent mass organizations cannot be clear without this history.

I realized that I am here free to be a "Monday Morning Quarter Back", and do some "Armchair" theorizing with no material consequence, whereas revolutionary leaders like Mao had to be concerned with the stability of a proletarian state power. In looking back on the nearly 30 years of capitalist development in China, there are some lessons that revolutionaries can learn. Armed with those lessons, we may have a better chance of success in the socialist project in the future. When we stand on the shoulders of great leaders like Mao, we should be able to see a bit farther.

Conclusions

Given that a one-party-rule political structure has failed to sustain socialism, and the Western multiparty system has yet to create a truly socialist state, let alone sustain one, socialism needs a new structure of political power. This new structure should be able to limit or prevent the development of bureaucratic elite so that the future socialist projects can be consolidated. The Cultural Revolution provided a compelling and valuable example of what this new structure of political power might be. This is a structure that nurtures independent mass organizations outside of the Party who also believe in socialism. This new structure represents, perhaps, a rethinking and an addition to Lenin's theory of the Party, under the condition that the Party is in power. Like Mao said, our future is bright, but the path is torturous. If we can summarize the experience of the Cultural Revolution succinctly and learn from it, then we can be more confident in the future success of socialism, and the hope for socialism will be that much brighter.