

On Class Struggles in China During the Mao Era

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Abstract

To decipher the laws of class struggle under the dictatorship of the proletariat, it is necessary to investigate thoroughly the specific forms of those struggles in China at every stage of the Mao era, especially during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR).

From these observations one finds, in essence, that the history of class struggle in new China since 1949 is a history of the process whereby capitalist roaders (a phrase coined by Mao in 1965, denoting Party persons in authority taking the capitalist road) emerged, proliferated, expanded their reach and eventually took over the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the Chinese State. It was also a process through which revolutionaries conceived, deepened and matured their understanding of the danger capitalist roaders constituted while confronting them.

The process can be divided into four stages. The first was the period from 1949 to 1956 where it accomplished the socialist transformation. At the same time, it gave birth to capitalist roaders through the establishment of bureaucratic privileges. The second stage was the intense struggle from 1957 to 1962 over explorations of the road to socialist development. This was a gradual process whereby revolutionaries grasped the true nature of capitalist roaders and the grave danger they posed. The third stage was the 4-year preparation phase before the GPCR where the struggle over a socialist versus capitalist road erupted openly. The fourth stage was the decisive battle between revolutionaries and capitalist roaders during the 10-year period of the GPCR starting from 1966. The complexity of the class struggle that emerged was unpatrolled in human history.

Throughout its various stages, the laws of class struggle seemed to display the following characteristics:

First, although the main form of class struggle during the period of proletarian dictatorship was that of the struggle between revolutionaries and revisionists (i.e. capitalist roaders) over a socialist versus capitalist road as the aim within the Party, it was disguised by two-line struggles over means.

Second, on the question of how to both distinguish and deal correctly the two kinds of contradictions, i.e. those between the people and their enemies versus those within the people's camp, two polar opposite targets, lines and policies were advocated both within and outside of the Party. One tried to "convince others by reason" and believed in "learning from past mistakes to avoid future ones, and curing the disease to save the patient." The other tried "conquest by force of arms," and believed in "ruthless struggle and merciless blows."

Third, factionalism is the Achilles heel of the working class. Primarily among those less advanced members of the vanguard who were unintentional capitalist roaders, factionalism within the working class was the key that caused the tragic demise of the GPCR.

Thus, it is clear that class struggle has its laws. While class membership might not be fixed, each class tries to fight on its terms and ways; all are constantly exploring and trying to sum up their particular experiences. As long as the conditions for capitalism are not completely eliminated, that is, as long as humanity's most fundamental activity for substance production remains the main means of livelihood for most workers rather than their voluntary pursuit, or their "life's prime want" as Marx eloquently put it, then the means of production (such as buildings and machinery) has the possibility of becoming capital, a tool for enslaving living labor. The managers who were entrusted to coordinate the production of social wealth have the possibility of becoming a new class, a formation that actually controls the social wealth, and a capitalist production relation can thus be

materialized.

The working class must transform itself as it changes the world. The task of changing the world cannot be achieved without the leading role of the working-class vanguard in storming its enemies' bulwarks, while self-transformation is primarily reflected in the vanguard's self-rectification. This vanguard does not fall from the sky. Instead, it emerges amid struggles and is tempered by struggle. Therefore, the key to whether the working class can change the world depends on whether its vanguard can undertake self-rectification.

Prohibiting bureaucratic privileges and adhering to the mass supervision of the proletarian vanguard are fundamental measures to inhibit the formation of an alien class stratum and to prevent the restoration of capitalist relations of production. These are the eternal core principles of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.

While part I of this paper goes through the four stages of class struggle during the Mao era, part II tries to give this experience a theoretical summary.

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Chronology of some key events during the Mao era

Events	Dates
Land reform	1950
War to Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea	1950-1953
Wage reform	1953-1955
Rectification Movement	1957
Anti-Rightist Movement	1957
Great Leap Forward	1958
Lushan Conference	1959
Three Years of Difficulties	1959-1961
Seven-Thousand Cadre Meeting	1962
Socialist Education Movement	1963-1966
Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution	1966-1976

List of the main characters during the Mao era

Name	Chinese	Highest Standing	up to date
Bo Yibo	薄一波	politburo alternate, deputy premier	Aug. 1966
Chen Boda	陈伯达	politburo standing	Sep. 1970
Chen Yun	陈云	deputy chairman	Aug. 1966
Deng Xiaoping	邓小平	secretary-general	Aug. 1966
Deng Zihui	邓子恢	central committee, deputy premier	Sep. 1962
Gao Gang	高岗	politburo, deputy chairman PRC	Feb. 1954
Jiang Qing	江青	politburo	Oct. 1976
Lin Biao	林彪	deputy chairman, defense minister	Sep. 1971
Liu Shaoqi	刘少奇	deputy chairman, Chairman PRC	Aug. 1966
Mao Zedong	毛泽东	chairman	Sep. 1976
Peng Dehuai	彭德怀	politburo standing, defense minister	Sep. 1959
Peng Zhen	彭真	politburo, mayor of Beijing	Aug. 1966
Wang Hongwen	王洪文	deputy chairman	Oct. 1976
Wang Renzhong	王任重	alternate central committee	Aug. 1966
Zhang Chunqiao	张春桥	politburo standing	Oct. 1976
Zhou Enlai	周恩来	deputy chairman, premier	Jan. 1976

Preface

For the working classes of the world, the outbreak of the GPCR a half-century ago was, after the Paris Commune and the October Revolution, the third milestone on the road to emancipation.

Marx and Engels identified the Paris Commune as an example of the dictatorship of the proletariat. However, it would have been premature for them to put forward any specific approach whereby the proletariat could seize state power and bring its dictatorship into effect successfully.

Lenin, in exploring the means through which the proletariat could seize state power, soon realized they who had nothing, yet sought to overthrow the highly organized capitalists with their vast political, economic, military and cultural advantages, could do nothing other than build their own highly centralized vanguard party that was unified under the principle of democratic centralism. It is only through this vanguard that the proletariat could gain political, economic, military and cultural advantages by the sheer magnitude of its population.

Stalin upheld Lenin's principle of Party-building, and tried, at least subjectively, to defend the dictatorship of the proletariat by keeping the country's means of production under the ownership of the people¹ as a whole. However, he was not able to address the tough question of how to prevent victorious revolutionaries from becoming new oppressors.

After leading the Chinese people to complete the new "bourgeois" democratic revolution² in 1949 and the socialist transformation in 1956, Mao — as a thoroughgoing Marxist-Leninist — astutely perceived the existence of two types of contradictions in a socialist society. Aware of the crucial need to prevent revolutionaries from becoming oppressors, he soon realized the imminent danger of the dictatorship of the proletariat transforming into its opposite, especially after seeing what had happened in many other countries in the "socialist camp." Based on a series of concrete explorations and practices aimed at combating and preventing revisionism, he put forward the theory of "continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat."

However, historical materialism believes that theory can only come after practice. Although Mao had tremendous foresight, he was not a prophet; he could not foresee the emergence of capitalist roaders. His understanding of capitalist roaders derived mainly from his struggles with them, and it was only through such struggles that his understanding matured. By the time the proletarian revolutionaries under Mao's leadership finally comprehended the grave danger capitalist roaders constituted, the latter had become a strong, firmly entrenched force. If not for the threat posed by these increasingly powerful capitalist roaders, revolutionaries in the communist movement would not have been able to gain a sufficient understanding of the phenomenon these roaders represented.

It was under these circumstances the GPCR broke out.

Half a century has since passed, and the GPCR can clearly be seen as a great and heroic struggle between the Chinese working class who had obtained state power, and the hidden, newly emerged capitalist class. Their struggle over a capitalist or socialist road forward for China after the 1949 revolution was camouflaged as a two-line struggle between revolutionaries over the correct or the best means to build socialism. Although the GPCR was short-lived, its spirit, in common with that of the Paris Commune and of the October Revolution, is eternal.

¹ Here the concept of "the people" is as defined by Mao, i.e. during "the period of building socialism, the classes, strata and social groups which favor, support and work for the cause of socialist construction all come within the category of the people, while the social forces and groups which resist the socialist revolution and are hostile to or sabotage socialist construction are all enemies of the people." See https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_58.htm

² The "new democratic revolution" in China refers to the anti-feudal and anti-imperialist revolution led by the working class, i.e. the CPC; in contrast to the "old democratic revolution" that was led by the capitalists. In either case, the nature of the revolution was still "bourgeois." See Mao's work "On New Democracy" for a more in-depth analysis, as in https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_26.htm

I. The many stages of class struggle in China during the Mao era

In the Mao era, the class struggle inside and outside the Communist Party of China was interrelated, as were the struggles within the upper echelons and at the grassroots of the Party. There were scrambles for power and privilege among emerging bourgeois (i.e. capitalist) elements within the Party, and also struggles over which road forward (i.e. the two-road battle) between revolutionaries and capitalist roaders. Even those who turned out to be capitalist roaders, most of them did not initially have the conscious determination to go against the socialist road. Similarly, revolutionaries did not always correctly distinguish and deal with these two distinct contradictions. Therefore, one could not easily discern between capitalist roaders and revolutionaries within the Party.

The proletarian revolution has always been carried out by people laden with baggage from the old society. The revolution is thus inevitably a dual process that changes not only the world but also transforms the revolutionaries themselves. To accomplish this, any true revolutionary must unite the majority of the revolutionary force and the masses. Rather than “persecute” them, Mao and other revolutionary leaders tried time and again to transform the vanguard of the working class, i.e. members of the Party and leading cadres at all levels (themselves included), and propel the whole Party onto the revolutionary path while simultaneously carrying out the struggle to transform the world.

In retrospect, the capitalist roader phenomenon that emerged within the vanguard of the working class was inevitable. After the founding of new China, certain Party persons in authority enjoyed bureaucratic privileges and perks³ and were defensive about supervision by the masses. To develop the economy, they followed — whether habitually, instinctively, or subconsciously — capitalist logic. Through this logic, they strive for more accumulation under their control and saw material incentives as essential to promote production by the masses. Thus, they misunderstood the goal of socialism and failed to acknowledge the enthusiasm socialism inspired in the masses. Such people could be classified as unintentional capitalist roaders. Although subjectively they wanted to change the world and be a part of the revolutionary process, they nevertheless inherited certain ideologies and wrong understandings of socialism by the class society from which they came. The conflict between them and the masses, however, should be considered non-antagonistic, or as a contradiction among the people within the revolutionary movement.

The purpose of movements like the Socialist Education Movement and the GPCR had been to educate Party leaders at all levels that had unintentionally made capitalist roader mistakes, and help them change their orientations. The actual effect, however, was to change many people in authority, especially the upper echelon of the Party leadership, from unintentional capitalist roaders to diehard capitalist roaders with acute class consciousness. Diehard capitalist roaders were those revisionists in authority who staunchly defended their bureaucratic privileges and firmly opposed any accountability to the mass.

In hindsight, the history of class struggle in the Mao era is a history of the process by which capitalist roaders emerged, proliferated, expanded their reach, and eventually took over the Party and the State. But it was also a process whereby revolutionaries conceived, deepened and matured their understanding of the nature and the danger posed by capitalist roaders.

The process can be divided into four stages. The first was the socialist transformation period from 1949 to 1956, during which the working class and its Party carried out struggles against both open and hidden forces of the capitalist class. The main feature of this stage was the collectivization of

³ Instead of to each “according to the amount of labor performed”, as formulated by Lenin in *State and Revolution*, bureaucratic privileges linked pay scale and individual economic well-being of party and government officials to their ranks within the leadership hierarchy. In other words, higher pay was received for greater “responsibility.” For a more in-depth analysis of bureaucratic privileges, see *On the Relationship Between the Working Class And Its Party Under Socialism* by Fred Engst,

<http://www.bannedthought.net/China/MaoEra/GPCR/Recent/OnRelationshipBetweenWorkingClassAndItsParty-Engst-150207.pdf>

agriculture and the nationalization of industries. At the same time, however, it gave birth to capitalist roaders through the establishment of bureaucratic privileges. The second stage was the intense struggle from 1957 to 1962 over explorations of the road to socialist development. Its main feature was the gradual process whereby revolutionaries realized the true nature of capitalist roaders and the grave danger they posed after going through a flip from the Rectification Campaign to the Anti-Rightist Movement, the Great Leap Forward, and the ensuing Three Years of Difficulties. The third stage was a 4-year preparation phase for the GPCR. The main feature of this period was the struggle that erupted openly in China over the socialist versus capitalist roads when capitalist roaders were openly designated as targets of the Socialist Education Movement, and their “left in form, right in essence” counterattack. The fourth stage was the decisive battle between revolutionaries and capitalist roaders during the 10-year of the GPCR. The complexity of the class struggle that emerged was unpatrolled in human history.

Stage 1. The struggle over socialist transformation (1949-1956)

During this period, the class struggle in China had two fronts. On the one front, it was an open struggle against overthrown landlords in the countryside, the bureaucratic capitalists in cities and the nationalist capitalists who had been part of the united front during the new "bourgeois" democratic revolution period, as well as that of the Korean War against U.S. imperialism. On the other front, it was a struggle against capitalist worldviews within the Party.

As early as 1939, Mao said in *The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party*⁴ “The new democratic revolution clears the way for capitalism on the one hand and creates the prerequisites for socialism on the other.” Since the “democratic revolution clears the way for capitalism,” its spontaneous tendency will appear in all possible ways, independent of human will.

Not all the people who joined the Party were committed communists. The "bourgeois" democratic revolutionaries (in contrast to the true communists) in the Party were relatively staunch anti-imperialists, anti-feudalists and anti-bureaucrat capitalists. They joined the new democratic revolution before 1949 because they could see the old "bourgeois" democratic revolution led by Sun Yat-sen was a dead end. However, their theory on socialism ended with government intervention in the economy, which was in line with one of Sun Yat-sen's, “The Three People's Principles,” (or sometimes is translated as “nationalism, democracy and the livelihood of the people”)⁵ i.e. restrained capitalism. They did not understand the full meaning of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which safeguards the means of production as owned by the people as a whole.

Since its founding in 1949, new China had faced the issue of which road to take. This struggle occurred on several fronts. Among them, whether or not to “consolidate the new democracy”⁶ as Liu Shaoqi proposed, was one; whether or not to tax state-owned and private-owned companies at an “equal” rate as proposed by Bo Yibo, was another; and whether or not to push forward the campaign for farm cooperatives was yet another. The latter debate, however, was the fiercest and lasted the longest. It revealed the ideological understanding of a great number of Party leaders at all levels had remained at the stage of the new "bourgeois" democratic revolution. These leaders had an instinctive resistance to the socialist revolution, for it entailed shaking the very foundations of private enterprise.

After the Land Reform, peasants at the grassroots level were allocated parcels of land from landlords, but livestock and large farm tools could not easily be divided and shared out. The inevitable solution was to form mutual-aid teams. New contradictions occurred: peasants helped each other during slack periods, but each family tended to take care of their own in the busy harvest

⁴ https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_23.htm

⁵ More on this see https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_55.htm

⁶ Ibid., and since the “New Democracy” is only a stepping-stone towards socialism, “consolidation” makes no sense.

season. The solution was either to re-concentrate farming tools in individual households and re-polarize the countryside, or to upgrade the mutual-aid teams to cooperatives. The former meant peasants would sooner or later lose ownership of their land, hence the nullification of the Land Reform. Only the latter solution could prevent recurrence of the historical circles of dynastic change after each peasant rebellion, and prevent the Land Reform doubling as a regime-changing sham. One reflection of this struggle at the grassroots was the question of whether Party members could hire workers, and whether cooperatives should be given a try in some villages.

Mao, standing on the side of the proletariat, gave full support to revolutionaries in the Party (such as the Shanxi Provincial Party Committee, which proposed cooperative experiments in 1950), and socialist enthusiasm that was apparent among the poor and lower-middle peasants. To deal with Party cadres who were unwilling to go beyond the new "bourgeois" democratic revolution (which was only anti-imperialism and anti-feudalism, but not socialism), Mao and others broke through many roadblocks they laid and through passionate persuasion, led the whole Party to its completion of the socialist transformation in 1956.

Resistance against cooperatives came initially from Liu Shaoqi and Bo Yibo, who were heads of the Northern Bureau of the Party, and later from Deng Zihui, who was mainly responsible for the Party's rural work. Back then, Liu Shaoqi advocated the line of initially pushing forward rich peasants' development. Paraphrasing the idiom "fatten the pig before slaughter", he argued that after the rich peasant economy had developed to a certain level it would then be time for "the state to collectivize by decree and confiscate their properties."⁷ This was in line with his belief that mechanization should necessarily precede collectivization. After cooperatives proliferated, Deng Zihui thought they had developed too fast and had begun to threaten rich peasants' interests, so he gave orders to dissolve hundreds of thousands of them.⁸

Meanwhile, after the establishment of New China in 1949, the proletarian vanguard changed status, from the Party leading the revolutionary struggle to the Party in power. By then, however, not all members of the vanguard were equally advanced. Some joined the revolution to change society, while others wanted more of a change in regime. Although the latter made great contributions to the new "bourgeois" democratic revolution, they cared most about their prestige after the founding of the new Republic. Therefore, power struggles inevitably broke out among the "bourgeois" democratic revolutionaries in the Party, notably the Gao Gang case. Gao Gang (a leader of the northeastern region of China) represented the contempt a large number of cadres from the "Red Zone" (Red Army-controlled areas during the revolutionary wars) felt for cadres from the "White Zone" (underground Nationalist-controlled areas)⁹. He looked down upon people who had not directed any military battles, criticized Liu Shaoqi for having risen to the top by "giving speeches," was unforgiving of his mistakes, launched factional fights and advocated the slogan "those that fought in wars, should chair in peace." Gao Gang lost his fight with Liu Shaoqi within the Party, and eventually committed suicide in 1954.

At that time, it was not at all easy to perceive the true nature of those struggles.

⁷ Tao Lujia (陶鲁笏), *A High-Level Argument at the Beginning of the Nation's Foundation* (2009) (in Chinese).<http://www.ftchinese.com/story/001027938?page=1>

⁸ Du Runsheng (杜润生) recalled in one of his memories of Mao Zedong, "He had called Liu Shaoqi, Peng Dehuai, and Deng Zihui together for a talk, and criticized them for not being enthusiastic about socialism, warning them not to make that mistake in 1953. Mao mentioned this several times, and Peng Dehuai also made some self-criticisms during his speech at the Sixth Plenary Session of the 7th CPC Central Committee." See excerpts (in Chinese) from Du Runsheng, *I met with Chairman Mao Zedong several times in the early 1950s*.
http://news.youth.cn/gn/201510/t20151009_7188961_1.htm

Also see MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution, volume 1: contradictions Among the People 1956-1957*, New York: Columbia University Press; 1974. According to him, on p. 19, the number of collectives that were dissolved was 20,000 out of 670,000 collectives instead of "hundreds of thousands".

⁹ The dichotomy can also be understood as conflicts between the civilian leaders vs. military leaders in the Party.

The fight against capitalist worldviews was not only reflected in the struggle over collectivization and opposition to factionalism within the Party but also manifested in other areas. For example, should China follow the Soviet or Western model of economic and cultural development? Or should it chart an independent road forward based on Chinese conditions? Mao's writings "On the Ten Major Relationships"¹⁰ and his critique of the movie "The Life of Wu Xun"¹¹ were all attempts in the latter direction, as were the debates over the "General Line of Socialist Construction" and his opposition to the so-called "Opposition to Rash Advances" campaign.

Later generations tend to jump to the conclusion that the deaths from hunger during the Three Years of Difficulties are attributable to the debates over the "General Line of Socialist Construction", arguments over the "Opposition to Rash Advances" campaign in 1956 and the Great Leap Forward in 1958. They thus commit the fallacy of causation and do not discern the differences between managers and strategists. Managers like Zhou Enlai and Chen Yun tended to focus on keeping things in balance. In contrast, Mao, as a strategist, stressed the need to leapfrog in building socialism.¹²

During the Mao era, in order to consolidate the dictatorship of the proletariat, rapid industrialization was needed in order to change China's poor and backward state without further delay. This, therefore, required mobilizing the masses to carry out production and reconstruction and overcoming imbalances through the people's productive enthusiasm.¹³ Those "bourgeois" democratic revolutionaries in the Party advocated a steady process of industrialization that relied on experts, and whose organization and industrial production arrangements depended on bureaucrats. In their view, laborers needed to do no more than obey and cooperate, and they regarded the aim of socialism as empowering the people to be their own masters as an empty slogan. This was the true nature of the struggle over "Opposition to Rash Advances."

In retrospect, people tend to notice the struggles that were apparent at that time, while ignoring another incident of far-reaching significance. This was the reform of the cadre wage system that began in 1955. The institutionalization of bureaucratic ranks, with a more than 10:1 wage differential between the top and 24th grades — on top of associated perks and privileges — reflected profound corrosion of the capitalist ideology within the proletarian vanguard. It abandoned the system of in-kind fixed living allowances for cadres that had been in practice since the Yan'an Period for a hierarchical wage system whereby cadres could endure "feast or famine" conditions depending on promotions or demotions¹⁴. This violated one of the cardinal principles of the Paris Commune, i.e. limiting the official's pay to that of skilled workers. It moreover provided a fertile ground for the proliferation of capitalist roaders.

It was the establishment of this system of income tied to hierarchical ranks, rather than past contributions, educations, or experiences, etc. that brought bureaucratic privileges into being. Office positions began to be sought after, and that leads to the formation of a class strata as well. Based on the idea of "curing the disease to save the patient," a Party official who had committed political

¹⁰ https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_51.htm

¹¹ https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_15.htm

¹² Similarly, Deng Xiaoping who, based on the strategic need to consolidate political power upon taking over in the early 1980s, lavishly and purposefully handed over funds to Party leaders at all levels and intellectuals to spend in order to win popular support for his policies. He was not overly concerned about the inflation this would inevitably cause later on, for he was confident by then tanks could be used if need be to deal with any resistance from the people, and use them he did.

¹³ This was similar to the debates, for example, over whether to rely solely on regular armies or on the People's War in the fight against Japanese aggression during WWII.

¹⁴ The equalitarian in-kind fixed living allowances for cadres were unsustainable after the revolution when the standard of living was to increase. For one, people's needs can be vastly different. Also, most people who join the revolution were to fight against oppression, but not necessarily signed-up for an equalitarian society. Furthermore, the existence of a large number of intellectuals and lower-level government officials from the old regime need to work for the new society, and they will not go along with an equalitarian system of pay. The social "norm" is more pay for more contribution, more education, or more experience, etc. This is the so-called "bourgeois rights" that Marx addressed in his *Critique of the Gotha Program*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/ch01.htm>.

errors or errors of line could generally make self-criticisms and be forgiven. However, anyone who talked back to or offended his or her leader, or disobeyed orders from above, risked demotion and the loss of his or her job, which meant disastrous consequences for them and their entire family. Therefore, “rather be wrong politically than organizationally” became the life philosophy of those "bourgeois" democratic revolutionaries at that time.

Therefore, although the socialist transformation of agriculture, industry, and commerce was accomplished by 1956, it also provided material conditions for certain "bourgeois" democratic revolutionaries in the Party to become capitalist roaders. Unfortunately, most Party cadres were unaware of this. Mao had repeatedly shown his favor for the earlier system of fixed living allowances for cadres. He was also dissatisfied with the institutionalization of bureaucratic and military ranks, as expressed in his refusal to accept the military rank of Generalissimo. As a minority under democratic centralism, however, he was not able to find any workable way out of this, other than to wait and see what could come through exploration and practice.

Stage 2. Struggles over which kind of socialism to build (1956-1962)

After the completion of the socialist transformation in 1956, the question of what kind of socialism to build came to ahead. At that time, new social conflicts were appearing. Internationally, there were the uprisings in Poland and Hungary, and Khrushchev's secret denunciation of Stalin at the 20th Congress of the CPSU. Domestically, tens of thousands of workers and students were on strike, and even some were rioting,¹⁵ all of which reflected an acute sense of alienation from the bureaucracy by the people, and their instinctive resistance to it. Confronted with this situation, many Party cadres handled the people's dissatisfaction in the same way they dealt with class enemies; by regarding them as “a handful” of bad elements who instigated the riots.

To get a firm grasp on the complex situation both internationally and domestically, Mao felt an intense need to devote more time to study and to train other leaders to shoulder the responsibilities of leadership. He delegated the day-to-day running of the country and the Party to a group of first-line leaders that included Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping, on the understanding he would step in only when necessary.¹⁶

Through his investigations, Mao became acutely aware of the two distinct types of contradictions bearing different characteristics that existed in a socialist society, i.e. those between the people and their enemies versus those within the people's camp. He warned Party cadres, “The large-scale, turbulent class struggles of the masses characteristic of times of revolution have in the main come to an end, but the class struggle is by no means entirely over.”¹⁷ He repeatedly urged leaders at all levels not to treat contradictions among the people as contradictions between the people and their enemies. Instead, he advocated, “Let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools of thought contend,” as a means to address debates with different opinions among the people. He sought through the Rectification Campaign to overcome the growingly bureaucratic style of work within the Party. As quoted: “Our aim is to create a political situation in which we have both centralism and democracy, both discipline and freedom, both unity of will and personal ease of mind and liveliness, and thus to promote our socialist revolution and socialist construction, make it easier to overcome difficulties, build a modern industry and modern agriculture more rapidly and make our Party and state more secure and better able to weather storm and stress. The general subject here is the correct handling of contradictions among the people and those between ourselves and the enemy. The

¹⁵ *The Biography of Mao Zedong*, Central Party Literature Press; 2003, p. 612 (in Chinese).

¹⁶ Mao raised this idea in a politburo meeting after Stalin's death in 1953, but not much was implemented until the 8th party congress of CPC in 1956. See *The Biography of Mao Zedong*, Central Party Literature Press; 2003, p. 278 (in Chinese). Another reference is MacFarquhar *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, 1 cited above p. 105.

¹⁷ Mao Zedong, *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People*, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_58.htm

method is to seek truth from facts and follow the mass line.”¹⁸ One can apprehend much of Mao’s vision by this statement alone.

At that time, Mao began to study questions mentors like Marx and Lenin hadn’t considered, and which Stalin only noticed a bit towards the end of his life but found no solutions. *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People* elevated Mao Zedong Thought to Maoism. While MZT was the application of Marxism-Leninism to Chinese conditions, Maoism deals with how to continue the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat.

1. The class struggle in 1957: The flip from the Rectification Campaign to the Anti-Rightist Movement, the formation of a class stratum and the birth of capitalist roaders

As for how to both correctly differentiate and handle these two distinct contradictions, the actual struggle was much more complex than Mao had imagined. Consequently, he could do no more than exploring it through practice. During this period, due to the rise of capitalist roaders, he took certain detours and experienced setbacks in many instances. Among them, perhaps the biggest was the struggle in 1957 whereby the Rectification Campaign became the Anti-Rightist Movement.

In dealing with events like the Hungarian uprising in 1956, whether to overcome bureaucratic tendencies within the Party and to resolve contradictions among the people through rectification, or to suppress and cover up those contradictions by scapegoating, these two different approaches proved the most fundamental disagreement between revolutionaries and those top Party leaders who were soon-to-be capitalist roaders.¹⁹

Faced with increasingly acute social contradictions, Mao’s initial prescription was to go all-out in pushing forward the Rectification Campaign²⁰ in the Party and around the country. However, as the campaign deepened over time, the masses’ criticism of bureaucrats within the Party became ever sharper. Some bureaucrats and those "bourgeois" democratic revolutionaries within the Party who were keen to “reap the fruits of the revolution,” therefore, became increasingly uneasy. Their instinctive reaction was to demand retaliation. Meanwhile, the old capitalists in society and its representatives in intellectual circles took this opportunity to attack the leadership of the Party, the proletarian dictatorship, and the socialist system. This provided an extremely convenient pretext for the Party bureaucrats’ counterattack.

In hindsight, true rightists would not have been able to overturn socialism at that time; they had no control over the army or the media and had no mass base either. Their challenge, therefore, could easily have been resolved through a slight counter-strike. However, those soon-to-be capitalist roaders among top Party officials took advantage of these rightist attacks to grossly exaggerate the danger, blowing these challenges totally out of proportion, and fanning the flames of rage by acting like the sky was about to fall.

May 14, 1957, was the turning point. That morning, Mao remarked on a sheaf of documents that he forwarded to a few top Party officials: “Our Party will be destroyed without Rectification.”²¹ On the evenings of May 14 and 16, however, the top echelon of the Party had two back-to-back expended Politburo meetings that arrived at the opposite conclusion. The official *Mao Zedong Biography* does

¹⁸ Mao Zedong, *The Situation in the Summer of 1957*, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_66.htm

¹⁹ MacFarquhar *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, 1 gave a very insightful contrast in Ch. 12 between Mao, Zhou Enlai vs. Liu Shaoqi, Peng Zhen on their respective responses to the Hungarian crisis. Mao and Zhou stress the internal factors while Liu and Peng stressed the role that the imperialists played.

²⁰ It was also known as the “Hundred Flowers Campaign”, see for example MacFarquhar R. *The Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Chinese Intellectuals*. New York: Praeger; 1966.

²¹ *The Biography of Mao Zedong*, same as the above, p. 689.

not elaborate on this, but one can easily perceive it from a before and after comparison of the two-day meetings. Top Party officials were infuriated with the Rectification Campaign. They exaggerated beyond all bounds the extent of the rightist attack, overturned Mao's judgment and reached a contrary conclusion that the Party will be destroyed if Rectification continues. Thus, the Rectification Campaign came to a screeching halt, and the movement around the country took a U-turn and was redirected into the Anti-Rightist Movement.

At the beginning of the counter-attack against the rightists, Mao was extremely worried, thinking he might have misjudged terribly. As recorded in the *Mao Zedong Biography*: "On those tensest days, he sent people almost daily to Peking University, Tsinghua University, Beijing Normal University, Renmin University of China and so on to read big-character posters. He asked his office staff, 'Do you or do you not think that the rule of the Communist Party in the country is solid?' He was terribly anxious at that time. Later when he recalled that period, he said, 'I was constantly anxious, especially at the end of last May, when the rightist attacked. I then had meals and worked in bed, and would read those materials all day. Most were highly critical of us.'"²²

A week or two later, Mao recovered and gained a firmer grasp of the situation. Mao believed in striking back at the rightist ideologically, as seen by his writings that followed,²³ but not physical punishment or persecution for backward ideas that one might have. Furthermore, he found the rightists were not all that fearsome and was confident they could not overturn the system. More than a month later, in his directive to the party on June 29, he estimated there were just a few thousand right-wing intellectuals around the nation. He also stressed: "For those who have only right-wing remarks but no right-wing actions, they should be distinguished from those far-rightists who have both speech and action (many people have historical misdeeds). When criticizing the former, to take a reasonable and humane attitude, don't rashly label them as rightists."²⁴

It took many years, however, for Mao to realize to what extent the Rectification Campaign had been hijacked by the Anti-Rightist Movement. As the Party's Secretary-General who presided the Anti-Rightist campaign, Deng Xiaoping was able to achieve a hundred-fold expansion of the right-wing population to over 550,000.²⁵ People thereafter were generally afraid of telling the truth and the disastrous consequences therein, such as the "exaggeration and boasting" in 1958 and consequent deaths from starvation during the 3 difficult years that followed.

It now appears that by using the Anti-Rightist struggle, the new capitalists not only defeated challenges from the old capitalists but also put all revolutionaries who disagreed with them on the line. Mao was trapped in a defensive situation. His voice became the loneliest among top Party officials. His idea on how to correctly handle contradictions among the people was utterly ignored, and democratic centralism restricted him from openly voicing his dissatisfaction with the target, the line, and the policies of the Anti-Rightist Movement.²⁶

Mao tried on many occasions to limit the scope of the Anti-Rightist Movement but had no effect. On June 8, he drafted a directive on the Anti-Rightist Movement in which he said: "If all goes well, a month or so will see the whole process through and we can then switch to inner-Party rectification,

²² Ibid., p. 696.

²³ For example, on July 9th, 1957, Mao gave a speech in Shanghai titled: *Muster Our Forces To Repulse The Rightists' Wild Attacks*, see https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_63.htm

²⁴ *Chronicle of Mao Zedong*, Vol. 3, Central Party Literature Press; 2013, p. 181 (in Chinese), The original words are: "As for the population of the Rightists and extreme Rightists, counting people who could be singled out for criticism in areas such as thirty or forty universities and colleges as well as tens of institutions in Beijing, there are about four hundred people or so, while nationally, there are about four thousand people."

²⁵ R. MacFarquhar & J. Fairbank (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 14: The People's Republic, Part 1: The Emergence of Revolutionary China, 1949–1965*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1987, p. 139.

²⁶ As recounted by Qi Benyu (戚本禹), Mao's spirit was unusually down in the summer of 1957, burdened by deep thoughts. *Memoirs of Qi Benyu* (I), China Cultural Revolution History Press; April 2016, Chapter 7 (in Chinese).

which will proceed like 'a gentle breeze and a mild rain'.²⁷ A month later on July 8, he made another speech in Shanghai, again expressing the hope the Anti-Rightist Movement would be wrapped up within a month or so: "The nature of this struggle is primarily political. At the next stage of the struggle, it will mainly be ideological, which should be conducted like 'a gentle breeze and a mild rain'. I see past July, and by August it should return to 'gentle breeze and mild rain'.²⁸

Mao's desire to get back to the Rectification Movement showed he was worried about the Party's degeneration, but top Party officials were more concerned about the Party's downfall. In the socialist period, before there was any clear understanding of the true nature of capitalist roaders, separating and correctly handling these two distinct contradictions was no easy task.

On the surface, the capitalists had been ferreted out and defeated due to the Anti-Rightist Movement. The proletarian dictatorship seemed more consolidated than ever, and the system of private enterprise had been quashed. In reality, however, through the Anti-Rightist Movement, whether consciously or not, "bourgeois" democratic revolutionaries inside the Party became capitalist roaders. By suppressing any criticisms from the people, they declared to the world mass supervision was no good, bureaucratic privilege was just, critical opinions should be crushed, and no "tiger's backside" should be touched. From then on, the system whereby revolutionaries were accountable to both the Party and to the people was abandoned. In its place, promotions of officials were based on their accountability only to leaders above. As a result, as people celebrated the "success" of the Anti-Rightist Movement, a time bomb had been planted in the body of the proletarian vanguard and a class stratum independent of the proletariat emerged. At that time, two necessary conditions for the existence of capitalist roaders had been fulfilled: the establishment of bureaucratic privileges and the prohibition of mass supervision. The "success" of the Anti-Rightist Movement, therefore, became in effect the celebration of the birth of capitalist roaders, and "the Party's leadership" might no longer represent that of the proletarian vanguard.

Intentional or not, the flip from the Rectification Campaign to the Anti-Rightist Movement was, in reality, a struggle between revolutionaries and capitalist roaders. The mass movement during the GPCR was the continuation of the Rectification Campaign.²⁹ The anti-people suppression on June 4, 1989, however, exposed its true class nature in the personage of Deng, who presided the Anti-Rightist Movement of that time. No matter how those in power branded thyself, the question "Is our aim to protect or suppress the people?" that Mao angrily asked at the beginning of the GPCR highlighted the fundamental divide between revolutionaries and capitalist roaders.

If simply venting grievances about one's leader can be labeled as anti-Party and anti-socialist, then this kind of "socialism" will not be what the great masses of the people will struggle for. As it happened, the Anti-Rightist Movement treated the masses of the people who were not initially against socialism but held certain grievances against their leaders at various levels as class enemies. This in turn forced the majority of them to side with the true Rightists. It also labeled frank but not always perfect revolutionaries within the Party who dared speak the truth and go against false leadership as "Rightists."

In retrospect, the point of the Rectification Campaign was to guard against the degeneration of the Party. Thus, the movement's spearhead was aimed upward in the Party. Processed according to the theory "a fish begins to rot from the head down," the movement first tried to solve ideological issues within the Party, especially those concerning senior figures. The line was to trust the masses, to rely on the masses and to mobilize the masses by way of a mass movement to air all views and to write big-character posters. This method was intended, through criticism and self-criticism, to achieve the

²⁷ *Muster Our Forces to Repulse the Rightists' Wild Attacks* https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_63.htm

²⁸ *Chronicle of Mao Zedong* Vol. 3, p. 188 (in Chinese). However, after seeing what happened to those that dared to criticize local Party leadership in the hostile Anti-Rightist Movement, going back to Rectification is not possible.

²⁹ This is evident even by Western China watchers, such as MacFarquhar who viewed the origin of the cultural revolution begins in that period by titling this book as such.

goal of uniting the majority rather than to “strike with one blow” those that made mistakes. This was modeled after the Yan’an Rectification Movement that started in 1942, under the principle, “Learn from past mistakes to avoid future ones, and cure the disease to save the patient.” This was what Mao stressed repeatedly in a series of speeches and instructions when he pushed forward the Rectification Campaign.

The point of the Anti-Rightist Movement, however, was to defend the holders of power within the Party, as manifested by Liu Shaoqi’s speech on May 25th where he warned the danger of workers joining with the students in the Rectification Campaign, “then we won’t be able to stand our ground.”³⁰ Therefore, the spearhead was aimed downward and outside of the Party. Its policy was top-down manipulation of the masses, and its method was a polar opposite to that of the Yan’an Rectification Movement. Under the principle of “ruthless struggle and merciless blows,” the Party leaders used mudslinging, character assassination, name-calling, fabrications, and many other dirty tricks to putdown anyone who criticized them. Most of those eventually classified as "Rightist" lost some or all perks and pay, and had to live on a meager subsistence wage. The effect was the destruction of any democracy in and outside of the Party, and the serious fusion of two distinct contradictions, i.e. those among the people and those with their enemies.

Thus, in reality, the Anti-Rightist Movement was the newborn capitalist roaders’ first shot at trying to shift the main target of struggle. By covering one tendency with another, it became the model by which to protect the few by cracking down on a large portion of the masses. Therefore, the Anti-Rightist Movement seriously misdirected the enthusiasm of the masses. It is clear now the so-called “success” of the Anti-Rightist Movement was of little value, but instead caused profound harm during the rest of the Mao era and could not be excused simply by casting it as a mistake of “broadening the targets.”

Superficially, the “broadening the targets mistake” of the Anti-Rightist Movement was comparable to those similarly named during the Campaign to Eliminate Counterrevolutionaries within the Red Army³¹ and during the Rectification Movement in Yan’an to save “those who took false steps in life.”³² However, the Anti-Rightist Movement was fundamentally different from the “broadening of targets mistakes” of the previous movements. The people who had previously committed these errors were revolutionaries who wanted to make revolution. Their mistakes were ideological in nature. As such, they were a part of the two-line struggle, i.e. the different means, approaches or methods through which revolutionaries pushed forward the revolution.

The “broadening of the targets” of the Anti-Rightist Movement, led by Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, proved not to be a simple mistake caused by a wrong ideology. The Anti-Rightist Movement was generally supported by the officialdom of the Party because it provided an excuse for those eager to “take the spoils of the revolution” and to consolidate their positions. This was a part of the socialist vs. capitalist road dispute, i.e. the struggle over the aims and goals of the revolution, reflected in whether or not the masses of people have the right to be masters of society. It was a classic case of “left” in form, reactionary in deed.

A pattern thus began to emerge. The struggles over the aim of the revolution are being covered up as struggles over the means to push forward the revolution. We will see this repeatedly later on.

³⁰ MacFarquhar *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, 1, p. 221.

³¹ For example, the father of the Chinese President Xi: "By his own account, he was within four days of being executed when Mao Zedong arrived on the scene and ordered Xi and his comrades released." See (in Chinese) <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/85037/85038/7880593.html>. There were many similar incidents in which some revolutionaries were mistakenly identified as spies and were executed. For lack of better English source, see for example https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Futian_incident and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xi_Zhongxun

³² During the rectification campaign, many people were purged, kept in custody, censored, mentally and physically tortured, and occasionally executed. See (in Chinese) <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/64164/4415996.html>

2. The class struggle during the Great Leap Forward and the People's Commune Movement: the role of capitalist roaders

The Great Leap Forward was launched perhaps to counter the dampening impact of the Anti-Rightist Movement on the economy and to release the masses' enthusiasm for socialism. This brought to light the main benefit of collectivization — the capacity to build reservoirs and dams — which led to the campaign for People's Communes.

Meanwhile, after the “success” of the Anti-Rightist Movement, those "bourgeois" democratic revolutionaries were ready to contend for power. They had become capitalist roaders with deeply embedded private enterprise mentalities — subconsciously or otherwise — driven by the greed that was inherent in their core values. How to parcel up the fruits of revolution for personal advantage and seize the lion's share thus became the basis of their power struggle.

At the same time, many true revolutionaries made mistakes. Examples include unrealistic steel and grain production targets,³³ and the popularization of village communal kitchens³⁴. All of this gave those Party bureaucrats, having transformed from "bourgeois" democratic revolutionaries into capitalist roaders, the leverage to wreak havoc, such as the “communist wind”³⁵ that expanded each collective accounting unit from a few dozen families to the level of townships or even counties.

Unrealistically high production targets were the ploys, executed through “exaggeration and boasting” and aimed specifically at raising ones' political prestige. The “communist wind” enabled bureaucrats to control more social wealth and, through communal kitchens, to loot the fruits of peasant's labor, even when there was a shortage of grain. As peasant meals in communal kitchens were free before the shortage began, high ranking cadres in cities believed they were entitled to privileged supplies, more so after the shortage hit.

On the one hand, after terminating the Rectification Campaign, the “success” of the Anti-Rightist Movement greatly enhanced the prestige and power of capitalist roaders within the Party while Mao's voices were often ignored. On the other hand, due to the contempt cadres from the "Red Zone" displayed for cadres from the "White Zone", as exemplified in the case of Gao Gang, civilian cadres like Liu Shaoqi felt compelled to ramp up ostensible economic successes in order to consolidate their position within the Party. Liu consequently expressed his expectation the national economy “probably needs to go through several decisive battles to surmount the hump and gain a decisive victory, like the three major campaigns during the War of Liberation.”³⁶

Contemporary readers need to know the historical context of mistakes the true revolutionaries made in setting up high production targets, as well as the source of the “exaggeration and boasting.” At the time, China was under incredible pressure to industrialize. On the one hand, to defend its national independence and to assist a brotherly nation's anti-imperialist struggle, dirt-poor and known as the “Sick Man of East Asia,” China achieved a draw with the arrogant overlord of the world after WWII in Korea, itself a staggering achievement. However, on the other hand, China's backward industrial base made the cost of waging the War to Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea exorbitant. Industrialization, therefore, was vital for China to avoid hegemonic bullying, on top of the need to arise from poverty, and to liberate its peasants who constituted the overwhelming majority of the population from backbreaking manual labor. As peasants represented the bulk of China's population, the country's primitive accumulation of industrialization relied heavily on them. Hence the more

³³ The target for steel was as high as 12 million tons, doubling from the year before. See R. MacFarquhar & J. Fairbank (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of China*, 14, p367.

³⁴ See for example Peking Review, No. 36, 8 September 1959, <https://www.marxists.org/subject/china/peking-review/1959/PR1959-36b.htm>

³⁵ The “communist wind” refers to a phenomenon in the countryside where egalitarianism prevailed and manpower and material resources were transferred arbitrarily in disregard of the collectives to which they belonged, or from one level of ownership to another, in the name of communism.

³⁶ Liu Shaoqi, *Speech in the Meeting for Nanjing Party Members and Cadres*, Sep. 27, 1958 (in Chinese).

grain peasants can turn over, the faster China's industrialization could progress. Thus, with the gradual introduction of 156 Soviet aid projects,³⁷ the demand for grain grew rapidly along with the rapid pace of industrialization. The more grain a leader could raise or purchase, therefore, the bigger his or her contribution was to China's industrialization, and the more prestige within the Party he or she gained. This was the objective condition behind high production targets and was an important factor in the drive for "exaggeration and boasting."

Consequently, a strange phenomenon spread throughout the country. Those with authority in the Party, including Liu, who had previously opposed cooperatives now seemed to find them a more convenient way of exacting grain from the peasants. Motivated by potential political prestige, they pushed hard for rash communization. Leaders around the country competed with each other unrealistically over the pace and extent of communization, to a point where certain top leaders proposed patently absurd ideas. Liu, for instance, suggested military regimentation of cooperatives whereby men and women slept in separate dormitories.³⁸ Mindful that peasants might be unwilling to share their wealth once they prospered, the best time to march towards communism, according to Liu's proposal, was while they were still poor.³⁹ Chen Boda suggested abolishing the commodity economy, i.e. markets. Carried away, perhaps, by the huge achievements and successes during the 10 years after liberation, these bureaucrats went from one extreme to the other. As the main exponents of the widespread "exaggeration and boasting," these bureaucrats fabricated "fake news" in Chinese media about bumper harvests, often inflating actual output more than tenfold. Under the guidance of philosophical idealism and the world outlook of universal harmony, they pushed the "communist wind" even further.

Under the "get rich by promotion" system in place among bureaucrats, combined with the tragic ends of so many dismissed cadres after the Anti-Rightist Movement, any cadres or individuals among the masses who dared expose "exaggeration and boasting" by sticking to the facts faced serious consequences. The phenomenon of officials at all levels concealing the truth from those above and below became rampant. It eventually became apparent that the higher up the official, the further away from reality their information was. Consequently, Mao had no choice but to send his trusted followers and office staffs, including bodyguards, to the grassroots to obtain factual data.⁴⁰

By the summer of 1958, Mao and other revolutionaries were aware matters had taken a serious turn. They consequently opposed high production targets and instructed the press to publish more down-to-earth, realistic reports.⁴¹ They also held meetings with high-level leaders in efforts to correct certain misguided tendencies and elements of the "communist wind." However, there was at that time a dearth of true revolutionaries within the Party who dared speak the truth. Most officials, such as Chen Yun, were wise and took care to cover their backs. Aware these high production targets were unrealistic, they nevertheless defended them to avoid being labeled as Rightists during key meetings. Even so, it was relatively easy for revolutionaries to correct high production targets, but it took them longer to truly recognize and acknowledge the "communist wind" in full. Adjustments to the communal kitchen system, moreover, did not take place until three years later.⁴²

During the spring of 1959, to curb the spread of "exaggerations and boasting" and the "communist

³⁷ R. MacFarquhar & J. Fairbank (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of China*, 14, p. 158.

³⁸ *Comrade Liu Shaoqi Inspects Cities and Villages in Jiangsu Province*, (People's Daily, September 30, 1958) (in Chinese).

³⁹ In November 1958, Mao Zedong said at the Wuchang Meeting: according to the opinions of Shaoqi and Peng Zhen, it is better to implement (communism) while people are poor, because otherwise, it will be harder to do so. See Xu Quanxing, *Theories and Practice in Mao Zedong's Late Time*, China Main Encyclopedia Press; 1993, p. 187 & 189 (in Chinese).

⁴⁰ See *Memoirs of Qi Benyu* (I), Chapter 9.

⁴¹ Wu Lengxi (吴冷西), *Recalling Chairman Mao – Several Fragments of Significant Historical Events I Experiences by Myself*, Xinhua Press; 1995, Chapters 5 & 7 (in Chinese).

⁴² It was at a meeting in Beijing on June 12, 1961, where Mao explicitly rejected the communal kitchen. See <https://www.marxists.org/chinese/maozedong/1968/5-009.htm> (in Chinese).

wind”, Mao, as Chairman of the Party, bypassed those first-line leaders by sending a circular on April 29 directly to all six layers of Party organizations (regions, provinces, prefectures, counties, communes, and), right down to grassroots cadres in collectives, instructing them to disregard unrealistic demands from above. This caused outrage among certain local leaders. For example, the provincial Party "boss" in Sichuan went so far as to refuse to forward Mao's letter to lower levels in the province.⁴³

3. Debates during the Lushan conference in 1959

During the Anti-Rightist Movement, whether or not they were from the "Red Zone", capitalist roaders within the Party were all on the same page. However, having defeated attacks from rightists outside the Party, it was inevitable those within it should start contending for power and prestige.

The original intent of the Lushan Meeting was to criticize the mistakes of “exaggeration and boasting,” and to overcome the naiveté of the leftists’ “communist wind.”⁴⁴

The Lushan Meeting was slated for only two weeks originally. Peng Dehuai, then the defense minister, wrote a letter to Mao just before the closure of the meeting. He was not happy to end the meeting without anyone being held responsible for the mistakes in 1958.

For this reason, the conference was extended for another two weeks. Heated debate and often shouting matches between Peng and his supporters versus the first-line leadership ensued. All of those “crazy” behaviors during the Great Leap Forward undoubtedly formed the basis of Peng's charge of “petty-bourgeois frenzy” against those first-line leaders. Instead of "curing the disease to save the patient", however, the Peng-led, battle-tested capitalist roaders took advantage of the shortcomings and errors exposed during the Great Leap Forward to embark on a damning critique of the less seasoned Liu Shaoqi-led capitalist roaders and other first-line leaders.

To watch Liu's faction make fools of themselves, Peng made no comments whatsoever on any of the numerous central committee meetings, from those during the Great Leap Forward through the one just before the Lushan Meeting, in which mistakes were being identified one by one and steps were taken to overcome them. He then tried to reap prestige at their expense during the Lushan Meeting, and this caused considerable anger among revolutionaries led by Mao.

Opposition to the People's Communes was the underlying motive of these capitalist roaders. This set them apart from Mao, who constantly sought to preserve the superiority of the communes, as well as to protect the peasants' enthusiasm for labor, which was later formalized in collectives as the “Three levels of ownership with the work team as the base.”⁴⁵ As open opposition to the People's Communes was not advisable, Peng's group instead claimed it was their rash implementation that had caused the difficulties of the Great Leap Forward.

It's ironic that while Peng was opposing the Great Leap Forward and the People's Commune within the Party, outside of it both the U.S. imperialists and the Soviet revisionists were simultaneously trashing the Great Leap Forward, the People's Communes and the General Line of Socialist Construction, all of which added fuel to the revolutionaries' anger at Peng.

Although Liu Shaoqi flip-flopped from right to left, from his opposition to cooperatives in the early 1950s to his push for the "communist wind" in 1958, he continued to conceal his true colors as a capitalist roader. On such questions as to whether or not to mobilize the People's Communes, whether or not to carry forward mass movements, as well as how to treat shortcomings and errors

⁴³ See, for example, *Memoirs of Qi Benyu* (I), Chapter 13.

⁴⁴ See, for example, MacFarquhar *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, 2, p. 191

⁴⁵ Mao had stressed the distinction of 3 levels of ownership (township size commune, village size brigade, and dozen family size work team) for peasants in early 1959, and it was later formulated as the Party's policy by 1962. See Mao's *Speech At Cheng-chow* https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-8/mswv8_27.htm

committed during a mass movement, Liu's defense during the Lushan Meeting was well-clothed in Marxist-Leninist rhetoric. This was in stark contrast to his attitude at the beginning of the GPCR. Therefore, the leader whom Peng opposed at that time was not Liu the capitalist roader, but one who on the surface was a revolutionary who supported cooperatives.

Reviewing the Lushan Meeting more than half a century later, it seems to feature elements of contention for power among capitalist roaders and the struggle between capitalist roaders and revolutionaries over China's road forward. Mao, in hindsight, regarded the struggle that had occurred at the Lushan Meeting as a class struggle. However, at the time, Mao saw it mainly as a reflection of the class struggle in society in the realm of ideology, and not as a direct attack by the newly emerged capitalists on the proletariat.

4. The class struggle during the Three Years of Difficulties (1959-1961)

Peng Dehuai interrupted the Lushan meeting halfway through by challenging the authority of first-line leaders and rejecting the Three Red Banners.⁴⁶ Unfortunately, however, this struggle between the two cliques of capitalist roaders at the Lushan Meeting made the “exaggeration and boasting” and “communist wind” even more rampant.⁴⁷ Instead of overcoming these, after Peng was removed as Defense Minister,⁴⁸ the second wave of Anti-Rightist Movement targeting people like Peng in the Party ensued.

This coincided with three consecutive years of large-scale natural disasters and repayment of the Korean War debt to the Soviet Union. The superimposition of all three resulted in the Three Years of Difficulties when people died of hunger and starvation. It was surely the most tragic incident in the history of the new Republic. Being clear about its cause is a key to understanding the class struggle between the proletariat and capitalists, as well as the struggle between the socialist and capitalist roads in China.

Right-wing propaganda ascribed the gross death toll during the Three Years of Difficulties to abnormal deaths, ignoring the fact the relatively high average death rate of 1.8 percent⁴⁹ (i.e. 1.6 percent, 2.5 percent, and 1.4 percent each year, in contrast to 1.2 percent in 1958) was still lower than the normal death rate of 2.2 percent over the same period in India.⁵⁰ What's more, the same level of natural disasters in other developing countries would have caused even worse famines and higher deaths. However, the absence of nutrition and consequent decline in immunity due to famine caused a death toll way above what would normally be expected in a socialist country. Based on semi-official statistics, around 10 million abnormal deaths occurred during those three years,⁵¹ concentrated in Henan, Anhui, Shandong and Sichuan provinces among others. These were the provinces where “exaggeration and boasting” and “communist wind” were most prevalent during the Great Leap Forward. The local effect of these disasters can barely be comprehended.

⁴⁶ The Three Red Banners are: the general line for socialist construction, the great leap forward and the people's commune. See <http://www.massline.org/PekingReview/PR1963/PR1963-40.pdf>

⁴⁷ Mao commented on Mar. 5, 1961: “Before the Lushan meeting, our understanding of the situation was relatively clear, but it was not clear after the Lushan meeting. Because the anti-rightwing campaign after the Lushan meeting, those that tell the truth, talk about difficulties, talk about existing problems, talk about objective actual situations, etc., were considered to be rightwing. The result was an air that doesn't dare to tell the truth. On the contrary, there was another kind of atmosphere, which was not practical. For example, Henan's original grain output was only 24 billion kilograms, and they said that there were more than 40 billion kilograms. All of which was due to the anti-rightwing campaign.” *Chronicle of Mao Zedong* Vol. 4, p. 547 (in Chinese).

⁴⁸ His membership in the politburo was intact. He was invited to all meetings but refused to participate in any of them.

⁴⁹ National Bureau of Statistics of China, <http://www.stats.gov.cn/>

⁵⁰ Unlike the Chinese data, the death rate data from India is a bit too smooth. See World Bank data: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.CDRT.IN?locations=IN>

⁵¹ *Literature Review of the Toll of Abnormal Deaths in the Three Years of Difficulty* in National History Net http://www.hprc.org.cn/gsyj/jjs/rkzyyhj/200909/t20090905_29888.html (in Chinese).

The main leaders, such as Wu Zhipu of Henan and Zeng Xisheng of Anhui, were so obsessed with their prestige in the Party they ignored severe natural disasters in their provinces and, with total disregard for the lives of the people living there, falsified production figures presented to the central government. When peasants had no extra grain to hand over, leaders demanded their feed grain — and even seeds — to meet the quota based on bumper harvests they had falsely reported, in the belief that peasants were hoarding grain. When real famine struck, they blocked news to protect their reputations and prevented residents from leaving to find food elsewhere. When the truth was exposed, they made scapegoats out of the hundreds of thousands of cadres in their production team by placing them under arrest.⁵² Yet these “fascists” who owed such an enormous debt of blood were vindicated in the 1980s after Deng Xiaoping came to power.

Aside from individual responsibilities, one must address the question of why it was so difficult to stop the “exaggeration and boasting” and “communist wind,” why certain people bragged and lied to gain political leverage and, through the “communist wind,” grab the wealth that belonged to the people. In the final analysis, the capitalist roaders were a group of people who, in the interests of few individuals or small groups, exercised their power to control socialized production and distribution. Whether they were called “bosses” or “Party secretaries” made no difference. It thus became clear that the core value of these people who join the revolution was national socialism, not communism. The conclusion Mao reached on May 14, 1957, “Our Party will be destroyed without Rectification”, was therefore correct. This was the root cause of the Three Years of Difficulties and starvation, not the Great Leap Forward nor the People's Commune. Only by recognizing the nature of the capitalist roaders can one understand why they so ruthlessly pushed forward the “exaggeration and boasting” and the “communist wind.”

At that time, however, Mao did not believe taking the capitalist road was the actual intent of those top Party leaders. At first, he thought the problem lay in a lack of understanding of the laws of economics in a socialist society, and so tried to act as a guide by studying Stalin's works on economic issues in the Soviet Union. After the Lushan Meeting, he seemed to see the main problem lay in a lack of investigation, and hence called on leaders at all levels to find an area at the grassroots in which to carry out thorough investigations. Right through to the Seven Thousand Cadres Conference, he still thought the lack of democratic centralism within the Party was the fundamental reason for the troubles. It is therefore clear Mao was not inclined to dismiss those that have wronged, but always tried to find ways to overcome difficulties by educating and uniting with the people who he thought had made mistakes.

Stage 3. Struggles on whether capitalists were inside the Party and spearheading up or down (1962-1966)

This was the preparatory stage for the GPCR.

The Seven Thousand Cadres Conference,⁵³ held around Spring Festival in 1962, attempted to summarize lessons to be learned from the Three Years of Difficulties. Capitalist roaders, lead by Liu Shaoqi, believed it had been caused by the premature establishment of the People's Communes (as was Peng's charge during the Lushan conference!). He was compelled to make a self-criticism, but not for the role he played in “exaggeration and boasting,” nor for so strongly pushing the “communist wind.” Instead, he diverted this “self-criticism” to the Central Committee that he represented. The focus of the debate during the conference was on whether to rely on the collective economy or on individual effort to overcome the difficulties. Although the Three Red Banners were confirmed at the meeting, in its aftermath those capitalist roaders who had earlier opposed

⁵² Zhang Shufan (张树藩), *Xinyang Incident: a Sad History Lesson*, Bainianchao journal v.6 1998, <http://mall.cnki.net/magazine/Article/BNCH199806006.htm> (in Chinese).

⁵³ Attended by Party leaders around the country from county level and up.

cooperatives still managed to use the Three Years of Difficulties to negate cooperatives, and to push for privatization to overcome the difficulties.

Although it was glaringly obvious the disasters were caused by these leaders' part in "exaggeration and boasting" and the "communist wind," they nevertheless insisted on using the "privatization drive" to resolve them. In advocating the use of capitalist logic to build socialism, the true intent of these capitalist roaders was finally exposed beyond all doubts. If the "privatization drive" was the ultimate means of overcoming difficulties, where then did that leave the superiority of socialism? It became obvious the easy access to peasants' grain,⁵⁴ which a larger commune provided, was the main reason those capitalist roaders pushed for the "communist wind." It was thus the appearance of the "privatization drive" that forced Mao to acknowledge the challenges constituted by these capitalist roaders. Realizing there was a danger of splitting the Party⁵⁵ he reminded the people "never to forget the class struggle," and went on to mobilize the Socialist Education Movement, i.e. the "Four Clean-ups" Movement.⁵⁶

To give guidance on how to carry out the Socialist Education Movement the Central Committee sent out a sequence of contradictory directories, i.e. the initial "First Ten Points," the "Later Ten Points," and finally the "Twenty-Three Points." The focuses of the debates were on targeting ringleaders at the top or small potatoes at the bottom; mainly pursuing those capitalist roaders within the Party or landlords, rich peasants, counter-revolutionaries, bad elements and Rightists outside the party; specifically pinpointing capitalist roaders as the main target of the campaign or just "corrupt officials."

To highlight what exactly constituted the socialist road, based on concrete conditions and drawn from experience at the grassroots, in 1963, Mao put forward the slogans, "In industry, learn from Daqing; in agriculture, learn from Dazhai," which were in sharp contrast to the "profit in command" in industry and "privatization drive" in agriculture the capitalist roaders proposed.

However, to "guide" the Socialist Education Movement and avoid the two-road battle head-on, Liu Shaoqi sent his wife Wang Guangmei to work in a local village, and later summarized the "Taoyuan Experience," which was the model of attacking many as a way to protect a few. Unauthorized by the Central Committee, this document was spread throughout the country. This model, whereby everyone was "guilty until proven innocent," brought endless suffering to grassroots cadres. It foreshadowed the "down with everything" trend during the GPCR.

Stage 4. Mass movements and counterattacks during the GPCR (1966-1976)

The GPCR—when for the first time in human history the great masses of the people explored extensively how to exert their rights as masters of society on a full, thoroughgoing scale—was inevitably an extremely complicated political movement. Its complexity had been foreshadowed by the flip from the Rectification Campaign to the Anti-Rightist Movement of 1957. As the most widely participated political movement that encompassed schools, factories, mines, farms and institutions throughout China, all kinds of political forces and ideologies were necessarily expressed doggedly

⁵⁴ Mao concluded that: "We made mistakes at work, engage in a 'five winds', high procurement, several big pushes. It seems that our mistakes were mainly commandism (give arbitrary and impracticable instructions), high procurement." *Chronicle of Mao Zedong* Vol. 5, p. 129 (in Chinese).

⁵⁵ Mao warned a group of high-level Party cadres on Aug. 5, 1962, about the privatization of agriculture: "It is said that the people's commune to collapse sixty percent, leaving forty percent. Others say to dispense them all and be privatized, agricultural production can be recovered in four years. Those that have already been privatized, don't force it back. After half a year or a year, once people have seen that polarization has occurred, then this problem is solved. It is okay to allow a few to ten percentages of privatization, for 90% are still in the collectives! I don't agree if all or mostly privatized. If you do that, the party will split." Ibid.

⁵⁶ The official title of the moment was called the "Socialist Education Movement", but since there were four specific goals concerning the movement people often refer it as the "Four Clean-ups Movement."

during the GPCR. For example, was the thread that advocated toppling socialism weaved within or outside of the Party? Was it better to rely on and mobilize the masses, or to “chaperone” the masses to resolve the problems under socialism?

The main thrust of the mass movement during the GPCR was a repudiation of the target, the line, and the policies of the Anti-Rightist Movement, yet those capitalist roaders perniciously adhered to them throughout. The end of the GPCR triggered an avalanche of so-called “scar” literature condemning the practices of the Mao era. In reality, however, the practices it mainly condemned were those of capitalist roaders, who purposefully fused two different types of contradictions. After those capitalist roaders came to power, they turned around and blamed the crimes they had committed during the GPCR on the GPCR itself, while at the same time expressing great “sympathy” for those elites they had suppressed during it.

Therefore, even under the dictatorship of the proletariat, the class struggle has its laws. It could not be dictated by any “master” design, however eloquent it might be. Mao and other revolutionaries could only make the best of the situation. An unexpected explosion of factionalism within the working class on top of stubborn resistance by capitalist roaders considerably altered the cards held in the hands of the revolutionaries, so to speak. Although bureaucratic privileges — whereby promotion brought higher pay and perks while demotion had the reverse effect — were abolished during the GPCR, this reform came a bit too late, for the class stratum had already been formed. The burst of factionalism that almost spiraled out of control underlined the immaturity of the working class, and the determined resistance of the capitalist roaders exposed the extent of degeneration within the vanguard. These were the two fundamental reasons for the tragic demise of GPCR.

Owing to limitations of space and the availability of materials, this article can make only a preliminary sketch or outline of the GPCR, but certain laws of class struggle do emerge.

1. Mobilization for the GPCR: The "May 16 Circular"

Given that the Socialist Education Movement failed to address the core question of which road was being promoted by leaders at all levels, it became clear a top-down approach to resolving this issue was impossible. In the end, the task of distinguishing among those in authority between revolutionaries and capitalist roaders, as well as between diehard revisionists and unintentional capitalist roaders within the Party, could only be achieved by relying on, trusting in and mobilizing the masses. By then it had become clear many leading positions at all levels of the Party, government and army were occupied by capitalist roaders of various shades. To avoid a repeat of the flip from the Rectification Campaign to the Anti-Rightist Movement of 1957, Mao had to unite with most of the Party cadres, especially Politburo members; on the other hand, he needed to push forward the agenda of the GPCR by taking advantage of the contradictions among capitalist roaders to fight those roaders one at a time.

Therefore, besides the Four Clean-ups Movement, revolutionaries also carried out a massive movement to repudiate the feudalism, capitalism, and revisionism that had long pervaded the nation’s culture and art — in particular, the opera *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office* was cited as a target of criticism.⁵⁷ Capitalist roader Peng Zhen, a past master of mudslinging and character assassinations when combating his opponents, became prominent at that time. He drafted the so-called “February Outline”⁵⁸ for the Central Committee which restricted repudiation of culture and art to academic discussions, to suppress the participation of the masses in that movement.

Under pressure from revolutionaries, capitalist roaders within the Party could not openly advocate the capitalist road. In May 1966, the top Party leaders in Beijing held an enlarged meeting of the

⁵⁷ See MacFarquhar *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, 2 for more background on this play, starting on p. 207.

⁵⁸ See Ch. 1 of MacFarquhar, R., & Schoenhals, M., *Mao's last revolution*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press; 2006.

Politburo under Mao's directives from Shanghai. They passed unanimously the "May 16 Circular" which criticized the "February Outline" where the latter tried to limit the movement to only academics, and so officially launched the GPCR. However, a contest, as in the Rectification Campaign vs. the Anti-Rightist Movement in 1957, was inevitable.

2. Arousing or suppressing the masses

Although the May 16 Circular had been released, exactly how to arouse the masses remained a challenge. At the end of May, a big-character poster written by a group of teachers headed by Nie Yuanzi of the Department of Philosophy criticizing the Peking University Party Committee drew Mao's attention. After given order to publicize in radio broadcasts and the press, people in higher education and other institutions began to follow suit and criticize certain mistakes their particular leaders had made. Under the guise of "strengthening the Party's leadership" Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping hastily dispatched a set of new work teams to all colleges and universities to replace the previous ones from the Four Clean-ups movement. At that time, criticizing capitalist roaders had been superseded by the slogan "Sweep away all monsters and demons!" after the eponymously titled People's Daily editorial of June 1, 1966. During the 50 plus days from early June to mid-July, a repeat of the 1957 Anti-Rightist Movement took place. In Beijing alone, tens of thousands of teachers and students in various Beijing universities and colleges were labeled as "Rightist" or "active counter-revolutionaries." When Mao returned to Beijing in mid-July, he asked angrily: "Who suppressed the students' movement? Only the Northern warlords. Those who suppress the student movement will not have a good end!" He then added: "The fundamental difference between the Communist Party and the Nationalist Party is whether to protect or to suppress the people!" He launched a critique of the "bourgeois reactionary line"⁵⁹ by Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping for suppressing the mass movements.

Also, at the end of May — inspired by the May 16 Circular — a group of students from the Tsinghua University Affiliated High School secretly organized the first group of Red Guards. These children of high-ranking officials had experienced severe conflicts with the work team responsible for their school. Their rebellious spirit soon spread to other schools in Beijing, where groups of Red Guards rapidly sprang up. Because it was the children of high-ranking officials who had first organized these Red Guards, the people in power did not initially oppose them. The Red Guards at the Tsinghua University Affiliated High School wrote a letter to Mao at the end of July and received his conditional support.

Mao was against top-down social engineering. Instead, he respected the initiative and creativity of the masses. He saw in the Red Guards an energetic and spontaneous mass organization outside the ruling Party bureaucracy that had huge potential. He accordingly insisted on meeting with millions of Red Guards throughout the country on eight occasions within a few months. This pushed the Red Guard movement forward to the whole country on a grand and spectacular scale. Through the Red Guards' massive networking effort, facilitated by free train travel to anywhere in China to fan the "flames" of the GPCR nationwide, the local Party organs' monopoly on information and authority was broken or diffused throughout China. This greatly encouraged the masses to participate widely and deeply in the struggles of the GPCR through self-education and self-emancipation.

While the revolutionary masses were engrossed in the GPCR and the release of a torrent of "free expression of opinions and big-character posters," the capitalist roaders continued to guard their backs. To show what "true revolutionaries" they were, and so divert the main target of struggle away from them, they advocated the slogan, "Crush the dying enemy."⁶⁰ They then instructed the Public Security Bureau in cities to provide addresses of people the government had classified as

⁵⁹ In hindsight, this is a misnomer. A line can be right or wrong, but not revolutionary or reactionary. A better phrase might be "bourgeois reactionary objectives."

⁶⁰ The literal translation is "relentlessly beating a drowning dog."

“capitalists, landlords, rich peasants, counter-revolutionaries, bad elements and rightists” to certain loyalist Red Guards⁶¹ and mass organizations. Fired by that slogan, those zealots then ransacked the homes of these people, and even massacred some families, so instigating the bloody “Red August.”⁶²

3. Seizing power: The January storm

As the waves of mass movement surged, the GPCR began to expand from schools to factories and mines. Gradually, certain workers began to question their local leaders through big-character posters. However, unlike students and intellectuals, most of the workers at that time trusted and treasured the new regime, and many felt a strong sense of gratitude. They did not realize the importance of defending their right to be masters of their affairs, and so doubted the motivation of those workers who had dared criticize their leaders. These rebel workers were consequently suppressed by their work units through massive posters opposing them, and so being aware of the importance of becoming organized.

In November 1966, a group of Beijing Red Guards organized a southern expedition to Shanghai. Some of them were instrumental in helping their fellow rebel workers to form the Shanghai Workers Revolutionary Rebels General Headquarters. The leadership of the Shanghai Municipal Party Committee rejected the invitation to participate in the founding conference of the Worker’s Headquarters. Fearing repercussions from the establishment, nearly 10,000 rebel workers opted to redress injustices in Beijing and so boarded various trains heading north. They were stopped immediately, however, and one group became stranded in a small station called Anting near Shanghai. Some workers then intercepted other north-bound trains, causing a temporary blockage of the main north-south rail artery which alerted the central government. Zhang Chunqiao was charged with dealing with the incident. After remonstrating with almost 10,000 agitated rebel workers who have gathered in Anting for over 16 hours amid freezing drizzle to convince them to return to Shanghai, Zhang realized agreeing to these workers' demands was the only way of resolving the matter. The sole alternative was to call in the army. The moment of truth that tests a revolutionary had arrived! Zhang said later he could not believe there were so many counter-revolutionaries among Shanghai workers. Given that he couldn’t get approval from the Central Committee ahead of time, and despite the risk of ruining his political future, Zhang acceded to the workers' demands and endorsed the Shanghai Workers Revolutionary Rebels General Headquarters. After shifting the responsibility for the whole incident onto the Shanghai Municipal Party Committee, he received the workers' support and the crisis was resolved. From then on, Zhang Chunqiao became a thorn in the side of those diehard capitalist roaders and walked a perilous tightrope between the two irreconcilable factions.

After the incident, Mao praised Zhang Chunqiao's decision. This triggered serious resentment from the Shanghai Party Committee, which decided to form its loyalist group, the "Scarlet Army", to fight against the rebels. In the belief that by making matters worse they could force the Party Central to capitulate. The group incited workers in key industries, such as in rail dispatch departments and dockworkers, to leave their jobs and travel to Beijing, as the rebels had previously tried to do. In this way, they threatened the stoppages of Shanghai’s power, water, and transportation.⁶³ This overt demonstration of the irresponsibility of the people in authority in disregarding the dire consequences of such drastic action angered the rebels. To ensure the progress of the GPCR and the wellbeing of the people in Shanghai, therefore, the rebels established the so-called “Front Line Headquarters of

⁶¹ Loyalist is a term used widely during the GPCR to refer to individuals or organizations that defended local party or government officials.

⁶² See *Memoirs of Qi Benyu* (II), *ibid.*, Chapter 11 & 12, also Li Xun (李逊), *Age of the Revolutionary Rebel: Draft of Shanghai Cultural Revolution Movement History*, Oxford University Press; 2015, Chapter 4 (in Chinese).

⁶³ Li Xun, *ibid.*, Chapter 14.

Grasping Revolution and Promoting Production”, which took over the administrative departments of the municipal government. Mao was keenly aware that this signified the seizing of power, and the “January Storm” thus began.

4. The Eruption of factionalism: full-scale civil war looms

Although governmental powers in other localities and chains of command in factories and mines elsewhere were considerably constrained by the radical actions of student Red Guards and rebelling workers, those in power did not handle the GPCR the same way as the Shanghai Party Committee did — that is to say, by simply throwing up their hands. The rebels’ seizure of power in those places, therefore, was far less straightforward. Faced with tidal waves of mass movements, local power holders nationwide quickly built up loyalist organizations to combat rebel groups. The latter, meanwhile, was consumed by factional infighting and consequently splintered rather than united in their struggle against the capitalist roaders. This made their seizure of power increasingly complicated, and factions in many places gradually resorted to armed conflict on a growing scale.

Behind those armed conflicts were not only provocations by local power holders, such as the so-called “Million Heroes” Wuhan loyalists, who carried out armed repression of rebels in the spring of 1967,⁶⁴ but also the deep-rooted petty-bourgeoisie factionalism that existed among the broad masses of the people,⁶⁵ evident in the “Hundred-day War”⁶⁶ between Tsinghua’s “Jinggang Mountain” and “April Fourteen” factions.⁶⁷

Most local power holders were doubtless capitalist roaders of various shades, but not to the extent of being diehards. They instinctively enjoyed their privileges and resented supervision by the masses. Thinking of themselves as true revolutionaries fully committed to hard work, they were suspicious of people who opposed them and suspected their motives for doing so. They may even have believed their opponents to be class enemies, thus justifying their merciless use of the instruments of dictatorship when dealing with their political enemies. To guard their personal interests, they completely disregarded the need to correctly identify and handle two distinct types of contradictions. All this reflected petty-bourgeoisie factionalism within the Party, which, combined with that among the masses, created fertile ground for armed conflicts around the country. Instead of a grand unity among rebels in seizing political power, therefore, matters evolved rapidly, nearly becoming a full-scale civil war.

In hindsight, having achieved mobilization of the masses, factionalism was the next biggest stumbling block to the GPCR’s progress. The emergence of loyalists and their use of violence to crush any rebels daring to criticize leaders underlined the immaturity of the proletariat. The actions of such loyalists, therefore, directly deprived the proletariat of its right to be masters of society.

The contrast between the two representative cities is quite revealing. Both Shanghai and Wuhan were big industrial cities. In Shanghai, workers were mostly multi-generational, with a long tradition of revolutionary struggle. Workers from Wuhan, on the other hand, were mostly first-generation industrial workers with pronounced petty-bourgeoisie characteristics, as revealed during the struggle to seize power. For example, the “Workers General Headquarters” in Wuhan mainly comprised of workers from large-scale heavy industrial enterprises, who looked down on the “General Headquarters of Rebel Workers,” whose main associations were with workers from small and

⁶⁴ For more detail on this, see Wang Shaoguang (王绍光), *Failure of Charisma: Cultural Revolution in Wuhan*, Oxford University Press; July 13, 1995, and Ch. 12 of MacFarquhar, R., & Schoenhals, M., (2006). *Mao’s last revolution*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

⁶⁵ Here, attributing the term factionalism to “petty-bourgeoisie” is only to stresses the class nature of factionalism, for it necessarily reflects bourgeois or petty-bourgeois class interests. Since only class warfare reflects proletarian class interest, any attempt to assert “proletarian” factionalism is futile.

⁶⁶ W. Hinton, *Hundred Day War*, Monthly Review Press; 1972.

⁶⁷ Xu Aijing (许爱晶), *Tsinghua KuaiDafu*, China Cultural Revolution History Press; 2011, Chapter 19 (in Chinese).

medium-scale light industries.⁶⁸ As a result, all attempts by rebel workers in Wuhan to seize power failed due to a lack of solidarity, which provided opportunities for loyalist counterattacks. This phenomenon was not evident in Shanghai. The workers there were staunchly opposed to factionalism from the very beginning. For example, the rebel leader Wang Hongwen insisted any loyalist workers that changed their stance should be allowed to join the rebel ranks and be absorbed.⁶⁹ Wuhan rebels, in contrast, were comparatively slow to mature.

Not only the workers but also the cadres in the two cities were strikingly different. Both Zhang Chunqiao and Wang Renzhong⁷⁰ were deputy heads of the Central Cultural Revolution Group⁷¹, yet their conduct was quite the opposite. The former was steadfastly opposed to factionalism among the workers, while the latter was a master at inciting workers to fight among themselves. There was in Shanghai a large number of cadres at all levels, such as Ma Tianshui, who presided over Shanghai industries and supported the rebels. In Wuhan, meanwhile, there were great numbers of cadres at all levels who stubbornly resisted the GPCR and any rebels, as represented by Commander Chen Zaidao of the Wuhan Military Region and Governor Zhang Tixue of Hubei Province. The world-renowned July 20, 1967 Incident (where a group of soldiers stormed the compound in which Mao resided in Wuhan at the time and kidnaped one representative dispatched from the Party Central to overcome factional arm conflicts there) reflected just how strong resistance among cadres at all levels of the local Party, government and the military was.⁷²

5. Combating factionalism: the formation of Revolutionary Committees

During the period from the struggle to seize power at the beginning of 1967 to the opening of the 9th Party Congress in April 1969, revolutionaries concentrated all their energy on taming the wildfire of factionalism and preventing its escalation to full-scale civil war. By promoting the “three-in-one” Revolutionary Committees, which were composed of representatives of mass organizations, representatives of the army who were in the “Supporting-the-Left” team⁷³ and certain cadres who were no longer sidelined — and after strenuous arm-twisting to amalgamate various rebel factions — reconstruction of local Party and government institutions was outwardly accomplished. This was instrumental in calming factional infighting and armed conflicts throughout the country.

Faced with factionalism among the people that inevitably crop up in any mass movement, capitalist roaders and proletarian revolutionaries adopted fundamentally different approaches. Capitalist roaders were good at manipulating the masses. They pushed forward those groups who suited their purposes but showed no mercy in suppressing those who did not. The relentless armed conflicts that occurred in so many places were the direct result of this approach. Revolutionaries, by contrast, tried all means possible to empower the masses. Rather than exert overt repression, they encouraged those who were fighting on the correct side and criticized, educated and tried to persuade those who were on the wrong side.

It was perhaps the armed conflict in Shanxi Province that lasted the longest of any around the country. The cause of it was the long-lasting dispute between the “General Liaison Office of the Red Rebels” headed by Liu Geping, director of the Shanxi Revolutionary Committee, and the “Liaison Office of the Red Rebels” headed by Zhang Riqing, deputy director of the Shanxi Revolutionary

⁶⁸ Wang Shaoguang, *Failure of Charisma: Cultural Revolution in Wuhan*, Chapter 4.

⁶⁹ See Li Xun, *ibid.*, Chapter 14.

⁷⁰ More on him, see Ch. 4 of MacFarquhar, R., & Schoenhals, M., *Mao's last revolution*.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Xu Hailiang (徐海亮), *Documentation of Wuhan July 20th Incident*, China Cultural Communication Press; 2010 (in Chinese).

⁷³ On March 19, 1967, the Central Military Commission (CMC) of China issued the decision on concentrating its forces on the tasks of supporting the left, supporting agriculture, supporting industry, military takeover and military training (hereinafter referred to as the decision of “three supports and two militaries”). More on this, see Ch. 10 of MacFarquhar, R., & Schoenhals, M., *Mao's last revolution*.

Committee and second political commissar of the Shanxi Military Region. The former tended to support the rebels, while the latter was more behind the conservatives. Borrowing Wu Si's analysis: "The thing about factions is that, once formed, they have a life and drive of their own. The original cause becomes muted and of little importance. No matter what differences there might be on the surface between each side's views or slogans, each has become a tangible object that influences the position, interest, prospect and even life and death of a group of living people. From afar, we can see two opposite groups vying with each other, and neither one gives an inch. The bigger the threat from the other side and the more lives lost, the more united it becomes. The more united, the more powerful it becomes, and the bigger the threat it becomes to the other side. This will lead the threatened side to be more united and thus more powerful. A vicious circle is thus formed, which could be called independent of man's will."⁷⁴ Eventually, the Party Central had no choice but to replace the two deadlocked principal leaders, and put an end to more than two years of armed conflicts.

To overcome factionalism, after the 9th Party Congress in 1969 the Party Central Committee launched the nationwide movement to "Purify the Class Ranks" and arrested people who were allegedly involved in the "May 16 Group."⁷⁵ In 1970, it again directed a "One-Strike, Three-Anti Campaign" (strike counter-revolutionary elements, anti-graft and embezzlement, anti-profiteering and anti-extravagance and waste). However, as in all bureaucracies, there were ways of getting around any policy directed from above. Those capitalist roaders, both diehard and unintentional, took the opportunity after regaining their official positions within the Revolutionary Committees to turn the movement's spearhead against the rebels who had previously opposed them. In the vengeful counterattack they launched, groups of rebel leaders were arrested, jailed on various pretexts, and some even executed on the spot.

6. Partisan politics: the Lin Biao incident

The advent of the Lin Biao Incident⁷⁶ dealt a near-fatal blow to revolutionaries. There is no doubt the GPCR could not have been carried out without the support of the military, i.e. the instrument of state violence. Exactly which class, which line and which road such an instrument of state violence stood for in the two-line struggles and two-road battles within the Party was always the most crucial question. The Lin Biao Incident exposed the Achilles' heel of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Compared with the capitalist roader mistakes that leaders and cadres at all levels of Party and government organs generally made, those evident in the bureaucratic privileges within the army were the most serious, and subject to the least supervision by the masses. The military was hence the most likely bastion of capitalist roaders. The July 20 Incident in 1967 had revealed the strong resistance among the military to the GPCR, while the Lin Biao Incident exposed the degree of antagonism towards it among top military commanders.

Military generals like Lin Biao tolerated and even welcomed attacks on Party and government leaders like Liu Shaoqi, who had no combat experience. This was especially the case after a large number of army representatives joined the "three-in-one" Revolutionary Committees, and military commanders entered organs of powers in the Party and government at all levels — all of which made the 9th Party Congress resembled a summit of a "military regime." What's the next step became the focus of arguments between revolutionaries and capitalist roaders of all shades. Diehard

⁷⁴ Wu Si (吴思), *Chen Yonggui: Mao Zedong's Peasant* <http://tydao.com/suwu/zhuanji/chenyonggui/033.htm> (in Chinese).

⁷⁵ See "MAY 16th ULTRA-LEFT GROUP" under <http://www.massline.org/Dictionary/MA.htm>

⁷⁶ (林彪) replaced Peng Dehuai as the defense minister in 1959 and became the deputy chairmen before his plane crashed and burned in Mongolia while attempting to escape to the USSR on Sep. 13, 1971, after his son tried to assassinate Mao. More on the Lin Biao incident, see Ch. 19 of MacFarquhar, R., & Schoenhals, M., *Mao's last revolution*

capitalist roaders, represented by Lin Biao, thought of the GPCR as no more than a movement through which to change leaders. Of the three stated missions of the GPCR: to “struggle, criticize and change,” they thought of “change” in the context of a change of dynasties. They hence advocated restoring the former system without changes other than personals, as they neither opposed bureaucratic privileges nor accepted supervision by the masses, and were even hostile to the idea of continuing the revolution. All this became evident in the struggles over the contents of the political report of the 9th Party Congress, in the struggles over whether or not to restore the position of Presidency, and in the Outline of Project 571.⁷⁷

7. The impasse between capitalist roaders and revolutionaries

The strength of the revolutionaries had been substantially weakened by persistent factionalism and armed conflicts around the country, and the Lin Biao Incident was another grave blow. The top priority at this point was to strengthen unity among the left, focus on the main contradictions, to avoid battling against attacks from all sides and win over the large group of cadres and intellectuals who had made capitalist roader mistakes but were willing to mend their ways.

Instead, through the “Criticism of Lin Biao and Confucius” campaign, many revolutionaries made mistakes borne of leftist naiveté by taking the “Anti-Rightist” approach to such fields as economics, culture, and education. For example, upon encountering different opinions on economic policies, as well as shortcomings and mistakes in literary works, they exaggerated others’ mistakes and almost stooped to the level of mud-slinging, character assassination, and name-calling when dealing with people who disagreed with them. This behavior effectively isolated the revolutionary ranks.

Mao consequently criticized the four top leaders, who became known as the “Gang of Four.” Although Shanghai led the nation in all areas of work, the revolutionaries who came from Shanghai, such as Wang Hongwen, lacked experience governing the country. When confronted with battle-tested army generals, they could summon little clout.

Since the purpose of GPCR was not to “persecute people” but to educate them, there was no reason not to restore cadres like Deng Xiaoping — who was talented, capable and had sworn “never to reverse the verdict” on the GPCR — to their work. This was the background of Deng Xiaoping's comeback.

Soon after Deng was reappointed to a leading position, he began gradually to undermine the fruits of the GPCR under all kinds of pretexts. He marginalized those cadres who supported the GPCR and those rebel representatives who emerged during the GPCR, repossessed the power that had been previously taken and restored old leading groups around the country without first holding mass discussions and getting the approval of the people. In the name of combating factionalism, he targeted “those who persisted in making factional demands.” “Replace, repudiate or denounce them as needed”⁷⁸ was his battle cry when restoring the old order.

At that time, Deng Xiaoping's insidiously duplicitous propensity to say one thing and mean another had been somewhat exposed. Although he vigorously promoted economic development as the key to everything, he refused to learn about or promote the national best practices based in Shanghai.⁷⁹

In response to the counterattacks of diehard capitalist roaders represented by Deng, revolutionaries launched a feeble “Oppose Right Deviation and Reversal of Past Verdicts” campaign, whose apparent vigor was strictly superficial. Although Deng was once more removed from office, due to fatigue from factional infighting, the sentiments of the Party, the army and the people had been

⁷⁷ Ibid. Then number 571 reads “wu qi yi” in Chinese. It pronounced the same as an armed rebellion.

⁷⁸ Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping, Volume 2, Beijing: People’s Publishing House; 1994, p. 9.

⁷⁹ For example, after regaining power a decade later, he summarily terminated the Shanghai-centered and Wang Hongwen-led large passenger airplane project Y-10 to negate entirely all the achievements of the GPCR and those in Shanghai, even though this delayed China's technological aircraft manufacturing progress by decades.

swayed by capitalist roaders. Unintentional capitalist roaders, moreover, sided almost completely with the diehards of that camp. Revolutionaries were thus trapped in unprecedented isolation, as amply demonstrated by the April 5 Incident in 1976 over the traditional Memorial Day activities after Zhou Enlai's death.

8. Victory for the capitalist roaders

Less than a month after Mao's death, diehard capitalist roaders launched a coup and the dictatorship of the proletariat was “smashed in one fell swoop.” Large numbers of revolutionaries around the country were arrested. However, due to stiff opposition from the working class — notably the people's almost nationwide resistance in 1989 — it took the new ruling capitalist class more than 20 years to complete China's capitalist reconstruction, guided by the theory of “crossing the river by feeling the stones.”

Over the past four decades, the authorities have either grossly distorted or sealed off the true history of the GPCR. They blame the monstrous crimes committed by anti-GPCR forces on the GPCR itself. This is as ridiculous as blaming the crimes of the Nanjing Massacre on the Anti-Japanese War. According to their logic, if not for the GPCR there would have been no “Elimination of the Four Stereotypes”⁸⁰ movement, or widespread factional armed conflicts. Similarly, therefore, without the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, which is to say, if the Chinese people had been willing to be conquered by Japanese imperialists, then the Japanese would not have needed to waste guns and bullets on the massacre of Chinese people in Nanjing. However, where there is oppression, there is bound to be resistance, which inevitably leads to more repression. Blaming oppressors' crimes on those that dare to rebel is confound right and wrong and standing the truth on its head.

The same is true of the GPCR. When revolutionaries sought to arouse the masses as a whole, capitalist roaders would incite groups of Red Guards headed by princelings to ransack people's homes and smash antique cultural relics; and when revolutionaries supported rebels in taking over the power of capitalist roaders, the latter would provoke factional conflicts among the masses. Capitalist roaders committed multiple misdeeds during the GPCR, yet got away with murder in its aftermath. Wielding full control over the media, they blamed all wrongdoings on the GPCR itself. Today, the children and relatives of those who were killed or whose property was confiscated during the GPCR, as well as of the rebels who were imprisoned in its wake and falsely charged with all kinds of crimes, expect justice. They want those responsible to be held accountable for their crimes. They moreover demand a clear report of what really happened during the GPCR, of who instigated factional armed conflicts and ordered, for example, “smash and grab” raids. As the true history of the GPCR is a source of trouble and worry to the current authorities, however, they continue to stick to the “staying with generalities rather than digging for details” approach to covering up their crimes. The reason why the GPCR is still a forbidden topic underlines precisely the authorities' studied avoidance of the truth of the matter.

9. Analysis of the demise of GPCR

Since the diehard capitalist roaders came to power, the dictatorship of the proletariat has been overthrown and capitalism restored. The GPCR thus fell short of its expected goal. In this sense, it failed.

As to the reasons for its failure, rather than pinpointing the mistakes the revolutionaries made, theorists who emphasize "objective-factors" believe it was due to the capitalists' superior strength, the dominance of small-scale production, the existence of bourgeois rights and the three main

⁸⁰ See Ch. 6 of MacFarquhar, R., & Schoenhals, M., *Mao's last revolution*.

differences (cities versus the countryside, industry versus agriculture, and intellectual versus manual labor), the imperialist blockade and others.

All these were true. However, revolutionaries must also consider the subjective factors of the failure of the GPCR.

First, revolutionaries were late in recognizing capitalist roaders;⁸¹ therefore, they did not advocate measures in time to prevent their emergence. For example, revolutionaries neither abolished bureaucratic privileges nor implemented effective supervision by the masses before the GPCR, and most notably failed to prevent events like the flip from the Rectification Campaign to the Anti-Rightist Movement in 1957.

Second, during the GPCR the delineation of power between local authorities and mass organizations was not clear. Therefore, two inevitable “mistakes” were made during the GPCR: one was to stage a revolution without the leadership of the local Party Committees (although the masses could not otherwise have been mobilized); the other was to dissolve all mass organizations except that in Shanghai (but a full-scale civil war would have erupted otherwise). These inevitable “mistakes” were unique to the first GPCR, due entirely to the lack of experiences.

Third, the most fundamental problem was the rash of factionalism. That is to say, the immaturity of the proletariat was the key to the GPCR’s tragic demise. On the surface, the direct cause of the overturn of the GPCR was due to capitalist roaders who usurped the Party’s leadership and seized state power. It was they who gradually transformed after 1949 into diehard capitalist roaders. However, the key as to why revolutionaries were not able to prevent this outcome during the GPCR lies in the factionalism among the rank-and-file of the working class. A large section of the working masses, Party members and cadres possessed certain class-consciousness yet were plagued by their particular petty-bourgeois factionalism. All too often they did not proceed from class interests, which created abundant scope for diehard capitalist roaders to foment troubles.

Shanghai’s achievements during the GPCR were the greatest throughout the country, and the city was the least factional. Shanghai workers were also the only ones who considered using arms to resist the 1976 coup. However, it was in any event impossible for the majority of Shanghai workers to predict their destinies when the capitalist roaders came into power, and consequently not possible for them to take such a risk by rebelling.

In other places, factionalism made difficult any objective analysis of class interests. Official appointments tended to be based on cronyism rather than merit. It thus became harder to distinguish between the two distinct contradictions. As a result, gross exaggerations, mud-slinging, character assassination, name-calling, fabrications, and many other dirty tricks might be used against factional opponents, i.e. treating them as enemies. It was thus impossible to unite the people while factionalism reigned.

To unite, there must be constraints on all sides. The aspirations and interests of all parties must be considered; laying equal blame on all parties or glossing over differences cannot resolve factionalism. Rather criticism and self-criticism, as in the Yan’an Rectification Movement, is the only feasible approach to building solidarity. Only through a consensus of understanding can unity be achieved. Therefore, people should be allowed to make mistakes and have the opportunity to correct them. Of course, this is more easily said than done. In this regard, the Anti-Rightist Movement set a devastating precedent.

After all, most capitalist roaders were not diehard capitalist roaders. Subjectively speaking, they did defend the dictatorship of the proletariat. However, because of the deviations of understanding, they accorded little importance to supervision by the masses. Influenced by a deeply embedded mentality

⁸¹ Stalin was partially responsible for this. He had the chance but failed to recognize capitalist roaders while he was alive. Without the Soviet experiences, however, it would have taken Mao much longer to see the problem. In that sense, the Soviet experience was a valuable lesson on what not to do.

of private enterprise, they instinctively tried to safeguard their bureaucratic privileges. Such unintentional capitalist roaders provoked most of the factional armed conflicts as a result of inappropriate handling of contradictions among the people. Furthermore, the contradictions between revolutionaries and these unintentional capitalist roaders, if handled correctly, could have been considered contradictions among the people.

It is obvious food can only be eaten one bite at a time, battles can only be fought one after another and problems ought to be resolved one by one according to relative importance or urgency. Similarly, the proletarian revolutionaries needed to consider how to unite and educate the majority of the cadres and masses. They could not launch attacks in all directions. Those rebels and the “Gang of Four” who failed to see this made left-leaning mistakes of casting the net of their attacks too wide. This could be seen clearly from Mao's handling of the July 20 Incident. While Lin Biao wanted to use this case to “make a fuss”, Mao tried repeatedly to save those cadres who had made mistakes.⁸²

All of these factors combined made the demise of the first GPCR inevitable, even if Mao had lived 20 years longer or more.

10. Remarks on a few key figures

A summary of the GPCR must surely include evaluations of certain key figures, among which the most important and most controversial are undoubtedly “The Gang of Four” and Zhou Enlai.

“The Gang of Four”

The so-called “Gang of Four:” Wang Hongwen, Zhang Chunqiao, Jiang Qing and Yao Wenyuan, were brave proletarian fighters. Their contributions to the revolutionary cause far outweighed their shortcomings and mistakes. Yet for the last 40 years or more, capitalists within and outside China that monopolize public opinion have ganged up and, through rumors and slander, carried out frenzied attacks on this group. Their abuse of Jiang Qing and the defamation of her character, in particular, have diminished and retarded the status of women in China for decades. It is hard, even today, for women to hold their heads high on political issues.

However, attacks from class enemies should not be used as a basis on which to hinder later generations from making realistic analyses of the mistakes such revolutionaries made, just as heated battles on the front line during the anti-Japanese war did not prevent the Yan'an Rectification Movement.

According to the existing literature and materials, on the one hand, Jiang Qing's strengths were distinctive. They were manifested in the immortal model operas, in her firm support for rebels during the GPCR and her sharp criticism of capitalist roaders. However, on the other hand, one of Jiang Qing's biggest shortcomings was her failure to unite with people who made mistakes. She neither distinguished precisely nor handled very well the two types of contradictions (for example, at the later stage of the GPCR she voiced excessively strong critiques of many works of art, and often grossly exaggerated their mistakes). She also made enemies of too many people, and so isolated the left. Such shortcomings generally existed among the left. (For instance, Zhang Chunqiao did not get along and unite with other great revolutionaries like Chen Yonggui.)⁸³

Further analysis shows that among the four, other than Zhang Chunqiao, who was a true and tested proletarian revolutionary based on his independent action during the 1966 Anting Incident, the other

⁸² See Xu Hailiang, same as above.

⁸³ Zhang Huaiying (张怀英), *Dazhai's-ChenYonggui! -- My Thinking and Memory*, China Cultural Communication Press; 2013, Chapter 6 (in Chinese).

members of the group could only be counted as brave fighters under the leadership of Mao. Before their arrest, they had not been similarly tested according to their independent actions.

Zhou Enlai

Although Zhou Enlai was a revolutionary with extraordinary capabilities, he lacked a clear vision of socialism beyond the fundamentals. He was a typical example of those who excel in immersing themselves in task-oriented hard work. As the Chinese metaphor has it, he was one of those good at pulling a cart forward with his head down, but not at raising his head and watching the road ahead. In the history of new China, those far-reaching hierarchical systems such as the “urban-rural dual structure” and the “get rich by promotion and stricken poor by demotion” mode of wage payment were partially institutionalized by people like Zhou. They were good at dealing with the specific tasks at hand but lacked political foresight and enough consideration of the long-term consequences, as well as side effects, of those systematic designs.

In the course of the two-line struggles within the Party, Zhou often failed to gain a clear understanding and made numerous mistakes. However, at the same time, he was exceedingly faithful, open and aboveboard. He corrected his mistakes as soon as he became aware of them and never engaged in intrigues.

While the GPCR was inseparable from Zhou's full support, a fact that has been repeatedly pointed out by certain rightists, he was often a half-beat off in comprehending Mao's theory of Continuing the Revolution under the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. This was the basis on which certain capitalists with Chinese characteristics attempted to separate Mao and Zhou. It was also at the root of certain leftists' laying the blame on Zhou for the demise of the GPCR.

However, unlike most of the top leaders in the Party who have proven to be unintentional capitalist roaders or worse, Zhou was a conscious revolutionary. He was against bureaucratic privileges for the most part and a strong advocate of supervision by the masses. He believed in and relied upon the people's enthusiasm for socialism. However, preoccupied as he was with the excessive details specifically relating to running the country, he neither excelled at nor had the time for theoretical studies. Therefore, he couldn't become a mentor to the revolution.

If he and “The Gang of Four” experienced any contradictions, they would have been similar to those between Zhou and Mao. There were contradictions among comrades, concerning the different means and struggles over different lines among revolutionaries on how to push forward the socialist revolution. They were thus to be expected, and it would be surprising if matters had been otherwise.

A summary of the class struggle in the Mao era

There were two key events in the early Mao era that shaped the nature of the class struggle in China.

The first was the institution of pay according to ranks in the bureaucracy starting from 1955. The second was the flip from the Rectification Campaign to the Anti-Rightist Movement in 1957.

The harm that the institutionalization of income tied to bureaucratic and military ranks inflicted on socialism was profound. It was not due solely to the denial of the unsustainable system of fixed living allowances for cadres, for people's needs can be vastly different. Nor was its failure to abolish the inevitable ranking differentials in the socialist period, for the negation of income differential based on contributions, education or seniority was unobtainable, at least at that time. The fundamental damage it caused was reflected in the failure to segregate an individual's political status from his or her economic standing. Because one can “get rich by promotion and stricken poor by demotion,” this poisonous system of distribution according to “rank,” “position,” “responsibility” or “power” rather than work, severely corroded struggles inside the Party.

The flip from the Rectification Campaign to the Anti-Rightist Movement was more or less an attempt by the capitalist roaders to protect their newfound privileges.

The persistent “exaggeration and boasting” as well as the “communist wind,” despite repeated prohibitions during 1958-1960, and the cover-ups from top-level authorities of the deaths from starvation by local Party bureaucrats that occurred during the Three Years of Difficulties can all be traced back to these two events.

Thus, the nature of the class struggle and the inner-Party struggle before 1949 were vastly different from those after.

Beginning with the collective movement, we see that the two-road battles about aims were repeatedly being disguised as two-line struggles among revolutionaries about means to advance socialism. This is evident from the Anti-Rightist Movement in 1957 to the “exaggeration and boasting” in 1958 to the “Taoyuan Experience” in 1964. In the summer of 1966, to suppress leftist teachers and students in universities and colleges who were critical of the Party Committees, Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping sent work teams to denounce them as “Rightists.” When that failed, they pushed for the bloody “Red August” in 1966. Later in 1969, the followers of Liu and Deng pushed for the “One Strike Three Antis Campaign,” and then the “May 16” witch-hunt in 1970. Ten years after coming to power, Deng Xiaoping used right-wing students’ demand for “Westernization” as a pretext for suppressing the people with tanks. All of these bear an ostensibly “left” facade. However, it was those very people who, once they got into power, began to accuse revolutionaries of being “ultra-leftists.”

From all of these actions, a pattern emerged. Capitalist roaders among top Party leaders consistently used attacks on the right as excuses to suppress the revolutionary masses. Right-wing intellectuals were just “collateral damage” of their suppression of the people, just as they had been in 1957, during the GPCR and again in 1989. Their stands against the people were consistent among those who wanted to “cash in on their contribution to the revolution.”

One key feature of capitalist roaders had thus been demonstrated: they were experts at being “left” politically to cover their reactionary nature, of not only taking the capitalist road on economics but also being hostile and oppressive towards the people.

In contrast to Stalin's brutal treatment of his opponents, one can argue perhaps Mao went to the other extreme and had unrealistic expectations of those decades-long former comrades-in-arms-turned-capitalist-roaders mending their ways, especially among top-ranking Party officials. Mao had a soft spot towards them. Although Mao’s “medicine” can be quite bitter, he always tried and hoped to “save the patient.” Many of them, however, did not want to be “saved.” Once they got used to enjoying their bureaucratic privileges, they were not easily persuaded to get rid of them.

Furthermore, as someone customarily giving orders, being challenged from below was a bitter pill for some of them to swallow. In hindsight, giving people like Deng a second chance will inevitably follow the script of the farmer and the viper. Kindness toward diehard capitalist roaders was objectively cruelty toward the people. However, without giving a second chance, how can one tell who is a diehard capitalist roader? That is the challenge for revolutionaries under socialism.

II. Several theoretical summarizations of the class struggle under socialism

Having investigated the specific forms of class struggle during different stages of the Mao era, it is time to embark on a discussion of some of the theoretical issues arising from this examination and to summarize their consistencies. To this end, this part of the paper attempts to demonstrate the material basis for the existence of classes during the socialist period, to define class divisions, to clarify the nature of the dictatorship of the proletariat and to identify the core contradictions within it. Based on this, certain main features of class struggle during the socialist period may be summarized.

A. Objective conditions and material bases for the existence of classes during the socialist period

Socialism is the transition from capitalism to communism, i.e. the transition from a class society to a classless society; the existence of classes is thus inevitable. There are at least two reasons for this.

First, when material conditions are not sufficient to eliminate class, which is to say when, for the overwhelming majority of the people, labor is mainly a way of making a living rather than an enjoyable pursuit, or before labor becomes, as Marx eloquently put it, "life's prime want",⁸⁴ the division of labor tends, in the areas of politics and economics, to differentiate people's social statuses.⁸⁵ Second, a lagging ideological response to the changing social reality causes a similar delay in the responsive changes in customs and habits to that changing social reality. As the delayed ideological response to the changing reality is easy to grasp, to understand the material bases for the existence of classes, it is necessary to explore more deeply the relationship between the division of labor and social status.

1. Defining classes

Unlike the self-sufficient class societies of the past, capitalism is a class society based on large-scale socialized commodity production. Carrying out this type of production requires the division of labor and coordination of responsibilities among many people. This gives rise in the production process to the dichotomy between managers and managed. As long as productivity remains inadequately developed due to insufficiently abundant material output, labor will inevitably remain the way for workers to make a living and support a family, rather than being "life's prime want."

Under this circumstance, the nature of the contradictions between managers and managed is determined by this question: in whose interests is the production process, as well as the distribution of its products, organized and scheduled? If production managers at all levels proceed from the people's overall and long-term interests in organizing and scheduling the production process, as well as the distribution of products, then the fundamental interests of the two are consistent. The contradiction between managers and the managed is, then, a non-antagonistic one among the people that can be resolved accordingly. Otherwise, it is an antagonistic contradiction between workers and their employers, i.e. between labor and capital.

The capitalists are the group of individuals who in reality control socialized mass production and the distribution of social wealth for the benefit of individuals or small groups, such as joint-stock companies. This group can be either those capitalists or owners of businesses under commodity

⁸⁴ Marx: *Critique of the Gotha Program*.

⁸⁵ Only when the necessary labor that people tolerate rather than enjoy is mainly done by robots and the like, and when those doing the remaining tasks can be rotated as in military service, can we finally say the material conditions for communism have been achieved. The division of labor will then no longer be a basis for differences in social status or a tool for class oppression.

production and a market economy that emerged from a feudal society, or those diehard capitalist roaders who carried the communist banner under a planned economy.

Before the GPCR, people knew only the former and could not comprehend the latter. They thought the capitalists could only exist under a market economy, wherein commodity production has legal ownership of the means of production. Unexpectedly, however, the ghost of the defeated capitalists reemerged through the back door. The bourgeois “DNA” attached itself to those lesser advanced among the proletarian vanguard whose worldview tended to be more bourgeois, and who gradually became agents of capital.

For example, even though the establishment of the new Republic in 1949 overthrew the rule of the Chinese bureaucratic capitalists, the existence of capitalist logic prevented the complete abolition of the more or less capitalist production relations, and capitalism was not entirely eradicated. This is the unavoidable reality of the transitional period from a capitalist society to a communist society.

The capitalist cared more about their ability to dominate social wealth than titles. It made no difference whether a person was known as the “boss” or the “Party secretary” as long as the capitalist logic did not change, and as long as he or she had the final say according to his or her particular interest, or that of a small group. As long as he or she could become “top dog” by having objective control of social wealth, even without legal ownership of the means of production, he or she could be the actual possessor of capital to a varying degree.

The proletariat is the group of people who have no control — as individuals or small groups — over production and distribution under conditions of socialized mass production. In a capitalist society, members of this class have to make a living by selling their labor power. In a socialist society, they remain workers who exchange their means of living for their labor. The fundamental difference is that under socialism the working-class controls production and distribution both as a class and as the master of the state — not as individuals. Therefore, they have the right as a class to speak and make decisions on the allocation of production. In the Mao era, the most prominent yet harrowing manifestation of this power was the widespread factional fighting among workers verging to a civil war over local politics that was so hard to quell during the GPCR.⁸⁶

Although the overwhelming majority of the population during the Mao era was petty-bourgeois peasants, they were the product of land reform that overturned the feudal land ownership system. Thereafter they could either stand with the proletariat and walk the socialist road, as was the case during the Mao era, or defend the system of private enterprise, and so inevitably become the proletariat as the capitalists came to power and steadily deprived them of their livelihood. There was no other way out for peasants. This is why the class analysis here is mainly focused on the dichotomy between labor and capital.

2. Class dictatorships

In all class societies, the property-owning relationship is indisputable in the eyes of the ruling class. In other words, whoever owns the means of production, or whoever has the final say on the use of the land, factories, enterprises, etc. is beyond challenge. No democratic process ever decides the ownership issue is the essence of the dictatorship of a ruling class.

Under conditions of socialized mass production, what bourgeois dictatorship, i.e. capitalism, defends is private ownership of the means of production (i.e. private enterprise) where individuals or small

⁸⁶ To have a civil war, at least one side must be the ruling class (otherwise, for example, the U.S. civil war under British rule would be impossible). In contrast to factional fighting among capitalists and incessant fighting among mercenary armies hired by warlords, however, factional armed conflicts during the GPCR were fought by voluntarily armed workers on both sides in the spirit of self-sacrifice (such as the bloody Chongqing factional fights in 1967). If the working class had not been the ruling class, they would not have had such a privilege to engage in such spontaneous factional fights. Instead, facing them would have been machine guns of the state.

groups have the right to make decisions about what, where and in whose interest to produce. The guiding principle here is private property is “sacred and inalienable.” Therefore, capitalists cannot allow any private enterprise that belongs to individuals or small groups to be transformed against their will into an entity that is owned by the people as a whole, even by the most democratic means. They denounce any such proposal, which threatens the right of private enterprise, as “populism,” “robbery” or “class war!”

By contrast, what proletarian dictatorship, i.e. socialism, defends is ownership of the means of production by the people as a whole, where the people have the right to make decisions about what, where and in whose interest to produce. The guiding principle here is ownership by the people in common is “sacred and inalienable.” Therefore, socialists cannot allow anyone to transform this ownership of the means of production by the people as a whole into an entity that is owned by private individuals or small groups, even by the most democratic means. They denounce any such proposal, which threatens such ownership by the people in common, as “backward,” “reactionary” or “counterrevolutionary!”

Therefore, whether under bourgeois dictatorship or proletarian dictatorship, what its army and police, i.e. the instruments of state violence, primarily defend is the class affiliation of property rights, not the rights of democratic participation by the people.

Thus, democracy ranks secondary relative to the system of ownership. This is why capitalists are so opposed to the so-called “tyranny of the majority.” Even progressives who seem to regard democracy as primary (e.g. social democracy) will not allow the majority to decide on all matters. They too defend certain basic principles, such as “human rights.”⁸⁷ Many often conceal their true class intentions under the banner of democracy. Marxist-Leninist-Maoists do not disguise the true purpose of the dictatorship of the proletariat that defends the ownership of the means of production by the people as a whole. They know only in this context will the people be able to enjoy the widest possible democracy. Any political theory of democracy that sidesteps the issue of ownership of the means of production can be nothing more than a facade.

Although democracy is secondary to class rule, the lack of democracy in a capitalist regime tends to imply its fragility. Faced with strong resistance from the working class there were times when the capitalists had to resort to dictatorial rulers like Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco to effectively suppress it. But dictators often threaten the interests of many other capitalists, and their conflicts might be difficult to resolve. This is likely to create breathing space for revolutionary forces.

Only when the intensity of domestic class conflicts does not reach the extent of threatening the rule of the capitalists will it have enough confidence to enact the formalities of “democracy of the people,” or “one person one vote.” In reality, however, the “democracy of the dollar” or “one dollar one vote” status quo remains in place. Those with the most dollars carry the most weight by their control over the economy, media, etc. This is how capitalists prefer to settle intra-class conflicts.

By contrast, the dictatorship of the proletariat ceases to exist without democracy within the class. Otherwise, the working class is no longer the ruling class, and “ownership by the people in common” becomes vacuous. However, what the dictatorship of the proletariat depends on is not simply the formalities of “one person one vote.” Instead, owing to the predominantly capitalist ideology among the majority of the working class, democracy within the class is a system that combines democratic centralism within the vanguard of the proletariat on one hand, and the masses outside the Party exercising a wide range of powers to supervise leaders at all levels on the other, as was explored during the GPCR.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ For example, they won’t allow the white majority of a country to classify or treat minorities as second-class citizens by any means, however democratic.

⁸⁸ For a more in-depth analysis of this, see *On the Relationship Between the Working Class And Its Party Under Socialism* by Fred Engst cited above.

3. Principal-agent dichotomy

Owing to the development of modern science and technology and the expanding scale of production in a capitalist society, the capitalists are becoming less able to directly manage the production and state apparatus in its service. Capitalists, who are a shrinking proportion of the population, must hence appoint and employ more specialists to serve as their agents. The capitalist principal-agent dichotomy has thus come into being. Through equity controls and incentives, capitalists oblige the business managers they employ to maximize their profits. Politically, the management of the state apparatus (including the instruments of state violence) and the control over other political institutions that serve capitalists' interests is based on the "one dollar one vote" principle, i.e. those with the most capital carry the most weight.

In a socialist society under the dictatorship of the proletariat, although the old capitalists have been overthrown, the inevitable contradictions between managers and the managed still exist within socialized mass production. As under capitalism, therefore, the principal-agent contradiction still exists.

The difference is that in a capitalist society the capitalists, which account for a tiny minority of the population, entrusts its particular agents to dominate the majority of the population, which the proletariat and other working people constitute. On the other hand, in a socialist society the proletariat entrusts certain full-time specialists as agents to govern the economy and the state apparatus that serves them, i.e., the class puts itself under the management of someone it has delegated to do so.

This is indeed contradictory. On the one hand, those specialists who manage the proletarian state are entrusted by the class itself, rather than by any individuals or cliques within that class, to serve the interests of the class, rather than the benefit of any individual or cliques. On the other hand, it is impossible to designate any entity (such as trade union representatives who look out for the interests of particular industries or factions) that is capable of comprehensively representing the interests of the proletariat as a whole, other than its own unified and centralized political party that implements democratic centralism.

Therefore, the central issues that arise are: whether or not this party truly represents the interests of the class as a whole; which interests the administrators serve; and how does the working class supervise its party.

The historical rise of the new capitalists under the dictatorship of the proletariat lies precisely in the fundamental change of the vanguard of the proletariat from a revolutionary party to a party in power that has the ability to control the wealth in society, and thus arises too the question: in whose interest must this power be exercised? Therefore, the relationship between the working class and its vanguard party also embodies the principal-agent dichotomy. The danger of transforming the relationship between the working class, as master of society, and its party, as guardian of the class, into their opposites, therefore, becomes particularly prominent.

Because for the majority of the people under socialism working is still the main means of subsistence rather than personal enjoyment, or "life's prime want," their focus is necessarily more on how to make ends meet rather than on the purpose of production with their labor. This is why "to each according to the amount of labor performed"⁸⁹ in the socialist period is necessary. Under such circumstances, the relationship between workers and managers can readily be transformed from the originally intended principal-agent relationship into the oppressed-oppressor relationship. Those entrusted managers can easily form a class stratum based on bureaucratic privileges, and the master-guardian relationship between the proletariat and its party can be overturned. The essence of "ownership by the people as a whole" thus may be muted, even if the form of state ownership is

⁸⁹ Lenin: *State and Revolution*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/ch05.htm#s3>

retained.

This is the main content of class struggle in the socialist period.

B. Major features of class struggle in the socialist period

In summing up the experiences of class struggle during the Mao era, several basic laws of class struggle under socialism stand out.

First, although the main form of class struggle during the period of proletarian dictatorship was the struggle between revolutionaries and revisionists (i.e. the capitalist roaders) over the socialist versus capitalist road as the aim within the Party, it was disguised by two-line struggles over means.

Second, on the question of how to both distinguish and deal correctly the two kinds of contradictions, i.e. those between the people and their enemies versus those within the people's camp, two polar opposite targets, lines, and policies were advocated both within and outside of the Party. One tried to "convince others by reasoning" and believed in "learning from past mistakes to avoid future ones, and curing the disease to save the patient." The other tried "conquest by force of arms," and believed in "ruthless struggle and merciless blows." Starting with the flip from the Rectification Campaign to the Anti-rightist Movement in 1957, the struggle between the two permeated the last 20 years of the Mao era.

Third, factionalism turned out to be the Achilles heel of the working class. Primarily among those lesser-advanced members of the vanguard who were unintentional capitalist roaders, factionalism is the key reason for the tragic demise of the GPCR.

The following is an attempt to prove these points.

The concentrated expression of the class struggle during the period of proletarian dictatorship was, of course, the conflict between the socialist and capitalist roads. However, the newly emerged capitalists represented by the capitalist roaders — whether or not they were diehard revisionists — could not directly control the means of production. They had to attach themselves, at least initially, to the state institutions of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Consciously or not, they followed the logic of capital accumulation and tried to change the world according to the capitalist worldview, meanwhile disguising the differences between them and the revolutionaries as a two-line struggle among comrades over the means to build socialism.

The leadership of the proletarian vanguard and a planned economy are undoubtedly the necessary conditions for sustaining the dictatorship of the proletariat. However, they do not constitute conditions sufficient to guarantee the dictatorship of the proletariat. To distinguish between the roads leading members of the Party advocated as socialist or capitalist, it is necessary to take into account several other distinctive differences: whether they opposed or defended bureaucratic privileges, supported or opposed mass supervision of their leadership, relied on empowering the masses to build socialism or followed the logic of capitalism in developing the economy. In other words, whether or not they were indeed vanguards of the proletariat needs to be examined.

A core difficulty in debates and arguments among revolutionaries is often that of distinguishing between the two-road battles over aims versus the two-line struggles over means. However, this distinction is the key to untangling the complex class struggle during the Mao era in China. Thus, this distinction needs to be delineated, otherwise, revolutionaries would be unable to decide correctly whom to unite and whom to fight.

1. The nature of two-line struggles about means

Two-line struggles, in general, are over the different ways and means revolutionaries within the

communist movement try to achieve their goals. For example, the early stages of the Chinese revolution featured arguments over the strategy of urban uprisings versus that of “surround the city from the countryside,” and during the Anti-Japanese War there arose Wang Ming’s⁹⁰ proposition of “everything through the united front” versus Mao’s “independence and initiative within the united front.” In the Soviet Union, meanwhile, there were arguments between the Stalinist and Trotskyist lines over whether socialism can be built in one country.

The nature of any two-line struggle is contradictions among revolutionaries. As long as there is no evidence of betrayal or treachery, disputes among comrades, however grave line differences, remain non-antagonistic contradictions among revolutionaries within the communist movement.

Antagonistic line struggles are the result of improper handling of such conflicts. In this regard, Mao’s handling of Zhang Guotao’s attempt to set up an alternative Central Committee and split the Party during the Long March⁹¹ seemed to be more mature than Stalin’s handling of the conflict with Trotsky.

Two-line struggles within the Party and the international communist movement is a reflection of the ideological struggles between the two main classes in society. The fundamental reason behind these struggles is the incomplete transformation of the revolutionaries’ worldviews. Reflected in the revolutionary ranks, wrong lines fall under at least three categories. One type is based on individualism, turf mentality, sectarianism, and factionalism. Another type is due to a lack of investigation, self-righteousness, and narrow-mindedness. The third is having violent swings from petty-bourgeois frenzy and rashness to pessimism, desperation, and defeatism. Serious errors of line, such as those put forward by Zhang Guotao, came from the desire to contend for power and prestige, to be above the rest and to strive to be the “top dog” within the revolutionary movement. These problems are ideological, even those before their blatant betrayals exemplified by Zhang Guotao. Therefore, they are indirect rather than direct class struggles.

The solution to line differences lies in democratic centralism, based on Mao’s principle of the “three do’s and don’ts,” i.e. “Practice Marxism-Leninism, not revisionism; unite, don’t split; be open and aboveboard, don’t intrigue and conspire.” The main reason why Trotskyism could no longer be resolved within the international communist movement is that Trotskyists violated the principle of the “three do’s and don’ts,” especially “unite, don’t split.” Furthermore, they refused to observe the discipline required by democratic centralism and placed factional interests above the Party.

As regards two-line struggles, Mao was always opposed to cover-ups and skirting controversy but was at the same time against splitting over them. Two-line struggles are over differences of principle. Therefore, it is wrong to blur the line between right and wrong or to make unprincipled concessions. However, one must abide by the principles of democratic centralism, i.e., the minority is subordinate to the majority. Splits between revolutionaries signify the immaturity of the movement.

Mao’s consistent approach to preventing splits among revolutionaries was to seek truth from facts, to reason things out, to sum-up lessons learned through criticism and self-criticism sessions and full internal democracy, rather than “dictatorial” methods of dealing with comrades who held different

⁹⁰ Wang Ming (王明, May 23, 1904 – March 27, 1974) was a senior leader of the early CPC. Before WWII, Wang pushed for frontal confrontation with the KMT which led to major defeats of the Red Army and the ensuing Long March. More on this see the “Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party” adopted by CPC Central Committee on Apr. 20, 1945 (where Wang Ming’s true name in this document is Chen Shao-yu), <http://www.bannedthought.net/China/Individuals/MaoZedong/Pamphlets/OurStudyAndCurrentSituation-Mao-1962-Appendix.pdf>

⁹¹ Leading a Red Army of 80,000 strong, Zhang Guotao (张国焘) challenged the leadership of the Central Committee who had an army of less than 10,000 at the time the two armies met. Zhang lost most of his army in battles after leading them south and then west instead of north. In 1938, after Mao won over all of his followers, Zhang escaped and betrayed the revolution. More on this see the “Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party” cited above (in it, Zhang’s name is spelled: Chang Kuo-tao).

opinions or who made mistakes.

In previous two-line struggles within the Party, it was precisely those representative individuals who took the wrong line that was exponents of the “ruthless struggle and merciless blows” method. They suppressed differing opinions and conducted two-line struggles — not for the sake of achieving unity through struggle, but rather to denigrate others. It was they who became arrogant and junked the spirit of self-criticism soon after taking over leadership of the revolutionary movement.

In a non-China context, Stalin’s handling of Trotskyists, which Trotskyists still resent to this day, also sharpened the contradiction between the two sides. Mao’s policy of “Execute no one and arrest hardly any” during the Yan’an Rectification Movement was partially based on his summary of experiences in the history of inner-Party struggles. To a large extent, it was also aimed at certain people in the Party who tried to imitate Stalin’s misguided “Great Purge” from 1936 to 1938.

2. The nature of two-road battles about aims

Battles over which road the people’s struggle must take, in the broader sense, refers to either the general direction or the immediate goal of the struggle against oppression. For example, during the first period of cooperation between Sun Yat-sen’s Kuomintang and the Communist Party of China, their steps forward in the general direction of anti-imperialism and anti-feudalism were consistent although their ultimate goals were vastly different.

Thus, when the dispute over the ultimate goal was not the main issue going forward, the two sides could shelve such differences or avoid turning them into antagonistic conflicts and engage in joint combat against the common enemy. As long as reformists outside of the Party did not resist the proletarian revolution and joined the revolutionary united front, the contradictions between the two were not antagonistic.

The battle over which road is the way forward, in a narrower sense, refers to the aim or direction in which the communist movement should be heading as well as to the ultimate goal of struggle. As communists, there should be no such dispute. Arguments on such questions do arise, however, since the success of Marxism-Leninism on the theoretical front obliges anti-Marxists, consciously or not, to conceal their true intent under the banner of Marxism-Leninism.

Consider the dichotomy of “going north” or “heading south” as a metaphor for the dispute among revolutionaries over which road is the way forward. As was the case during the Long March, there are tens of thousands of paths available for “going north.” Once a mountain is encountered, whether to make a detour to its left or right or climb over it directly (if possible) boils down to a matter of time and cost. The arguments over which path to take “going north” are metaphorically similar to line struggles. Some lines are good, some are bad, and some are death traps. However, those who truly wanted to “head south” would always find abundant reasons to take detours in that direction, even when paths to the north had clearly been opened.

This kind of two-road battle constitutes an irreconcilably antagonistic contradiction between the people and their enemy. Democratic centralism is not designed to resolve this kind of two-road battle over aims within the revolutionary movements, however, for the very premise of democratic centralism is predicated on trust between opposing sides within the movement in a common goal. Revolutionaries that refused to split from others that had a different agenda are, in effect, betraying the revolution. This was the fundamental reason for the split between Russia’s Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, for example.

3. The two-road battles about aims disguised as two-line struggles about means

The rise of capitalist roaders after the working class gained state power is a new phenomenon in the

international communist movement. The struggle between Marxist-Leninist-Maoists and diehard capitalist roaders, i.e. revisionists, must thus have seemed at first like a two-line struggle over means.

The difficulties of the revolutionary road are due not only to the strength of the enemy but also to the difficulties of distinguishing and separating the two-road battles about aims from the two-line struggles about means within the revolutionary movement. Those within the movement who are against MLM tended initially to use the two-line struggle over means as a pretext. This blurred from the beginning the distinction between the two types of contradictions and complicated further the struggle between the two, i.e. between those of real and fake Marxist-Leninist-Maoists.

This is because we cannot read other peoples' minds, and people change their minds over time.

For example, the struggle between Mao and the capitalist roaders right after the 1949 revolution looked initially like a two-line struggle over means. Liu Shaoqi, for example, was at first opposed to cooperatives without mechanization, and later he pushed for the "communist wind" and "exaggeration and boasting." Afterward, he tried to blame its subsequent crushing defeat on the "premature" establishment of people's communes. On the surface, however, these were all two-line struggles over means to advance socialism.

As those people within the revolutionary movement who are against MLM nonetheless carries the MLM banner, correctly distinguishing the struggle with them as either a two-line struggle over means or a two-road battle about aims seems to be based on the following criteria. Who, in practice, do they rely on and unite with, and who do they oppress? Is the way they conducted struggle aboveboard and based on a desire for unity, or do they underhandedly engage in intrigues? And, more fundamentally, do they use the powers entrusted on them to protect or to suppress the people? Thus, one might say, the struggle with dogmatism is a struggle about means, not aims. In contrast, the struggle with revisionists and opportunists are struggles about aims, not about means.

Furthermore, we must distinguish between the two-road battle about aims within the revolutionary movement where revisionists or opportunists don't yet have the repressive power of the state versus those that do. Once revisionists or opportunists come to power, the struggle between revolutionaries and those power holders is no longer a two-road battle about aims.

History proves revisionists coming to power means capitalists became the ruling class. Once they seized state power, those diehard capitalist roaders were no longer merely capitalist roaders, but full-blown capitalists with control over the instruments of state violence to oppress the working class. Therefore, the struggle between the proletariat and this kind of capitalists was no longer a fight over which road forward, but rather a direct, naked, life-or-death class struggle.

On the international front, for example, the Chinese and Soviet parties engaged in a ten-year debate (1956-1966) more than half a century ago on the general line of the international communist movement. At first, people thought it was a two-line struggle over means among revolutionaries. They found later it was not even a struggle over which way forward within the revolutionary camp, but rather the people of the world's struggle against social-imperialism.

4. The two-line struggle on contradictions among the people

There are diametrically opposite ways and methods of dealing with contradictions within the Party and people's movements, which reflect the interests of different classes and their worldviews. Although the struggle of the oppressed against oppression is a typical class struggle, the fight over power and prestige among the oppressed for "top dog" positions is a continuation of the system of oppression within class society, and thus remains a part of the class struggle.

What the communist worldview pursues is an end to the class society where human beings exploit and oppress others. Proletarian revolutionaries who develop this consciousness know it is only by

liberating humanity in its entirety the proletariat itself can finally achieve emancipation as a class. Therefore, in dealing with contradictions among the people, often expressed through different opinions and arguments, true communists take the attitude of “letting a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend.” Similarly, in dealing with comrades who have made mistakes, they insist on starting from the desire for unity by seeking truth from facts, and reasoning things out through criticism and self-criticism, so to achieve the goal of “curing the disease to save the patient.”

Thus, no matter how intense arguments among comrades might be, they presume the innocence of critics, absorb as much truth as they can and learn what they can from it, even if such criticism is not well-grounded. The organization’s decision, in the end, is based on democratic centralism, i.e. the minority is subordinate to the majority. One can be removed from office after an intense struggle. However, under socialism, one’s income should not be affected (other than in cases of corruption or felons). Political two-line struggles must not be linked to individuals’ economic wellbeing (the GPCR was the first time this delinking took place). If the policy of “Execute no one and arrest hardly any” can be carried out during times of war, there is no reason to arrest some and deprive others of the freedom of speech in peacetime. Even in the case of fellow travelers who wavered in the two-road battle, revolutionaries still insist on allowing people to make mistakes and to correct them, so offering them a way out, rather than hitting them with a “big stick.” This is the method of struggle through which proletarian revolutionaries handle contradictions among the people.

Striving to be “top dog,” to stand out and be the boss is the crux of the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois worldviews. This is often reflected among the revolutionary ranks as turf mentality, sectarianism, factionalism, self-centeredness, and other forms of individualism. The Marxist slogan “Workers of the world, unite” so becomes distorted to “unite around me.”

Therefore, the petty-bourgeois among the revolutionary ranks have no desire for solidarity or to win others to the revolutionary side. Their goal is not to “save the patient” but to put others down, regardless of any differences. Consequently, their method of struggle is to win arguments by any means, including fabrication, mudslinging, character assassination and name-calling. They are unforgiving of others’ mistakes and exaggerate others’ faults, at the same time ignoring others’ contributions. When in power they do not hesitate to use force or violence to arrest and silence those they cannot win over with their arguments. Capitalist roaders used this method of struggle to handle contradictions among the people, as amply manifested by the so-called “bourgeois reactionary line” that they propagated during the early days of the GPCR.

Thus, there is a two-line struggle too on the question of handling contradictions among the people. One line is to “convince others by reasoning,” “learn from past mistakes to avoid future ones” and “cure the disease to save the patient.” The opposing line, embraced by the capitalist roaders and other petty-bourgeois among the revolutionary ranks, waves the flag of “ruthless struggle and merciless blows” and “forceful conquest.”

The latter was clearly shown throughout the factional fights between different mass organizations during the GPCR. It was clear the purpose of these struggles was not to seek truth from facts, but rather to see who could “win arguments” over whom; not for the emancipation of humanity, but to overpower opponents; not to destroy oppressive class relations, but to become “top dogs.” Therefore, they could not be convinced by anyone, and were even proud to “go it alone.”

When engaged in the two-road battle over aims, however, diehard capitalist roaders presented themselves as underdogs or victims. They nevertheless accused revolutionaries of subjecting them to baseless or exaggerated criticisms, or of mere nitpicking. The capitalist roaders’ tactic is to deliberately muddy the distinction between means vs. aims and muddles the two kinds of contradictions.

In his later years, Mao put forward the principles of the “three do’s and don’ts,” which were highly condensed summaries of his entire life’s experience of struggles within the Party. “Practice

Marxism-Leninism, not revisionism” was about the two-road battle over aims, “unite, don’t split” was about the purpose of the two-line struggle over means, and “be open and aboveboard, don’t intrigue and conspire” was about the methods of the struggle itself.

5. The relationship between factionalism and class struggle

Ideological differences and struggles, and divergent views and arguments are inevitable as long as there is a crowd, even in the classless communist society. However, such differences do not automatically turn into factional divisions.⁹² Factional struggles are products of a class society. Since such struggles are closely related to the interests of individuals or small groups, they are more than just ideological differences. Thus, factionalism means specifically the pursuit of interests of a small group that goes against those of other groups within the same social class, at the cost of the common interests of the class.

The essence of the capitalists, like all other exploiting classes, is to contend for power and greed. Thus, factional struggles are second nature to them. In contrast, the dictatorship of the proletariat — that is, the defense of ownership by the people as a whole — cannot exist unless its vanguard adheres to the principle of the supremacy of the interests of the whole class, expressed as a unified party upholding such interests. Factional struggles among proletarian revolutionaries would amount to a betrayal of communism.

The principle of factionalism is to draw lines primarily according to factional interests and to forget, ignore or exclude the principle of the supremacy of the interest of the whole class, even openly betraying class interests. The difference between upholding the proletarian party line versus factionalism lies in which interests are considered primary: those of the entire class, or those of a small group.

The root cause of the persistence of factionalism within the proletariat lies in small-scale production. In the process of turning from an agrarian society, represented by small-scale production, into an industrial society, represented by large-scale mass production, large numbers of laborers were transformed from small-scale producers like peasants and artisans into wagers toiling in factories. There is a duality in their resistance to capitalism. On one hand, as proletarians, they resist exploitation and oppression and aspire after full social emancipation. On the other, those who retain the small-scale producer mentality are nostalgic for the “freedoms” associated with the autonomous nature of the self-sufficient peasant economy and resist the strict discipline and regimentation associated with socialized large-scale mass production.

One clear manifestation of such small-scale production mentality was when many villagers in China cheered “freedom” after Deng’s regime broke up the people’s communes. Such a mentality relished the “freedom” to “do it alone” or to “be one’s own boss,” the “freedom” not to wait in line, the “freedom” not to follow traffic rules, the “freedom” not to be on time for work and the “freedom” to pursue individual interests. Within the revolutionary movement, this mentality is evident in the urge

⁹² Factionalism means organized forces, even if only loosely so. The difference between factional fights and ideological struggles could be metaphorically compared to the difference between Humanities versus Science and Engineering. Due to their lack of objective standards and close relations to individual interests, Humanities have many factions. There can be never-ending arguments about which has the final say and which has authority on a subject. However, when there are academic disputes in Science and Engineering, there can be unproven hypotheses, rather than different factions as regards to objective understandings. Even when greedy for fame, each side can contend for scientific research funds by means fair or foul. Eventually, however, whoever’s viewpoint represents the truth is decided by experimental results rather than by any authority. Similarly, once communism is achieved and distribution is based on need (both at the individual level and the society as a whole), people’s disagreements and arguments might not be related to individual material interest; difference of opinions will be more like those about Science and Engineering, and factional fights will lose their material basis. For example, the different ideas within the “open source” movement feature more contradictions among the people in communist society.

or demand for the “freedom” to form cliques and factions.

During the Mao era in China, the main form of factionalism was that of capitalist roaders, especially during the GPCR. They emerged from a class stratum that arose independently of the proletariat, based on bureaucratic privileges, which poisoned the inner-party struggle. It was their factional interests during the Anti-Rightist Movement in 1957 where they sacked most of those cadres and masses who opposed them as “Rightest.” This faction also propped up loyalists within the working class who defended those local Party leaders around the country during the GPCR. In the name of fighting factionalism, however, these capitalist roaders cleverly disguised themselves as defenders of the Party line while condemning as factional organizations those rebel groups that opposed them.

Organized rebel groups were formed precisely to fight the capitalist roaders who had transformed many local Party organizations under their watch into factional ones that served the interests of individuals or small groups. Dialectics would have it that the vanguard party of the proletariat based on democratic centralism that outlawed internal factions needs “factional” mass organizations that are not based on democratic centralism to serve as a check on the Party. As long as there are capitalist roaders, rebel mass organizations are at times needed, even if they are “factional” on the surface. The real challenge is to delineate properly the jurisdictions and responsibilities between the local Party authorities and mass organizations, the details of which can only be ironed out in future struggles.

The key to overcoming factionalism within the working class lies in overcoming the factionalism of those unintentional capitalist roaders among the proletarian vanguard. To achieve this it is necessary to abolish bureaucratic privileges, which provide a fertile breeding ground for capitalist roaders. Furthermore, spontaneous grassroots mass organizations, such as those formed by workers during the GPCR, must be mobilized at times to effectively supervise the party leadership. These points encapsulate the basic experience gained from the GPCR.

Conclusion

The working class must transform itself as it changes the world. The task of changing the world cannot be achieved without the working-class vanguard’s leading role in storming its enemies’ bulwarks, while self-transformation is primarily reflected in the vanguard’s self-rectification. This vanguard does not fall from the sky. Instead, it emerges amidst struggles and is tempered by struggles. Therefore, the key to whether the working class can change the world depends on whether its vanguard can undertake self-rectification. All previous two-line struggles, from the founding of the Communist Party of China in 1921 to the establishment of new China in 1949, constituted the self-rectification process of the vanguard. The Yan’an Rectification Movement was the culmination of this transformation. The Rectification Campaign in 1957 was also a deliberate attempt by the proletarian vanguard to consciously prepare for a continuation of this transformation. However, the flip to the Anti-Rightist Movement, which misdirected the focus of attack, reflected the fact many Party cadres, especially those within the top leadership, were either unwilling or simply refused to accept this transformation.

At that time the Chinese working class faced not only the task of transforming its vanguard but also of rebuffing enemy attacks from all sides, including powerful external threats by imperialist forces as well as desperate internal attempts by the overthrown exploiting classes to restore their rule.

The superimposition of the transformation of the world and the transformation of the vanguard of the proletariat rendered the class struggle in a socialist society both sharp and complex. It was extremely difficult to untangle and deal with the two distinct kinds of contradictions that were of diametrically different natures.

Proletarian revolutionaries could only wage revolution in the concrete circumstances in which they found themselves and with the cards they had been dealt with, so to speak. Thus, their ranks are

inevitably a mix of diverse characters. Although most of them wanted to wage the revolution, many had no clear idea of how or were unwilling or reluctant to subordinate their individualism and personal considerations. This hindered the revolution.

The success of the Chinese revolution in 1949 changed the political and economic status of the vanguard and its relations with the rank and file of the Chinese working class. Guiding those members of the vanguard who were still laden with baggage from the old society toward finishing the socialist revolution was a daunting task for revolutionaries. The goal of the GPCR was not to knock them down but to transform them. However, certain members of the supposed vanguard, who had degenerated to various degrees or become entirely retrograded (i.e. diehard capitalist roaders), doggedly refused to undergo that needed self-transformation. This was the source of the extreme difficulties the GPCR encountered.

The root cause of the tragic demise of the GPCR was the step-by-step deterioration and eventual betrayal of the proletariat by certain former revolutionaries. This change was a quantitative to qualitative metamorphosis. Such was the core process of the history of class struggle during the Mao era.

Class struggle has its laws, independent of anyone's will. While class membership might not be fixed, each contending class tries to summarize its own experiences and constantly explores new ways to advance its interests. As one side comes up with its particular policies and strategies, the other formulates its counterstrategies and tactics.

As long as the fertile ground for capitalism is not eradicated, that is to say as long as the most basic productive activity for human existence is still, for the majority of workers, an obligatory way to make a living rather than an enjoyable pursuit or "life's prime want," then crystallized labor may again become the tools that enslave living labor, i.e., it may become capital. The managers who are entrusted to coordinate the production of social wealth thus have the possibility of forming a new class stratum that controls social wealth, and capitalist production relations inevitably materialize.

Prohibiting bureaucratic privileges and adhering to the mass supervision of the proletarian vanguard are fundamental measures to inhibit the formation of this class stratum and to prevent the restoration of capitalist relations of production. These are the eternal core principles of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.