

The Stalinist State in China: The Social Meaning of Mao Tse-tung's Victory

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1. Now that the CCP's military forces have conquered the entire mainland, the People's Republic in official existence for five months, and the New Democracy in effect in some of China's principal cities for approximately one year, we possess sufficient material and facts to judge the nature of the CCP and its state machine and to test the accuracy of our past views concerning them.

2. In judging and estimating the nature of a movement, a political party, or a state, for the proletarian revolutionist there is one unchanging standard: What is its relation to the working class, that is, to the only revolutionary class in the modern world? For us there can be no more decisive standard than that, nor can there be any other point of departure.

3. What is the relation of the CCP, the Liberation Army led by it, and the People's Republic which it has established, to the Chinese working class? What attitude does it take toward that working class? Notwithstanding the fact that the CCP calls itself a working-class party, notwithstanding the fact that the CCP proclaims this new state to be a "people's" state led by the workers, nevertheless a variety of facts demonstrates that the political and economic position of the workers has not only failed to improve, but in certain respects has even deteriorated. The working class is the victim of this "War of Liberation". "The liberation of the working class is the function of the working class itself." Consequently, "liberators" drawn from another class cannot confer

genuine liberation upon it. And this has in fact been the case. Politically speaking, the position of the working class has not changed at all. The military governments established by the conquerors are composed entirely of a new nobility, and have no connection with the working class. Not only could workers' soviets not be formed in practice, they were not permitted to exist even as a concept. All that the workers got from their "liberators" was the designation – on paper – of "leaders" of the new society. A new government which proclaims that the working class occupies a position of leadership in it has not given the working class an ounce of such latitude as would enable it to advance to political power.

In the early period of the "liberation", because of the long-standing prestige of the Communist Party and because of the revolutionary illusions entertained toward it by the workers, the working class got out of hand in some of the big cities and went so far as to demand an improvement in living conditions, even confiscation of factories (as, for example, the Lien-ch'ang iron works in Tientsin), the liquidation of certain capitalists, and so forth. But this period came to an end very quickly. In Tientsin from February to April and in Shanghai during June and July there was extensive activity on the part of the workers, but after the suppression in April of the Tientsin movement by Liu Shao-ch'i and the promulgation in Shanghai on August 19 of Military Government regulations for the adjustment of labour-management disputes,

the working class was robbed completely of its right to fight and of its fundamental right to strike. In other words, it was made the victim of exploitation at the hands of private entrepreneurs. This new slave status of the working class was finally fixed in September by governmental fiat, and the workers have been unable to win an improvement in living conditions by striking. In order to disguise this act of barbarism, the new rulers have given the working class the right of "factory control". But this right, as a glance at the *Regulations for the Conduct of Factory Committees* will indicate, is a patently worthless piece of trickery. For example:

"7. The Factory Committee shall be presided over by the Head of the Factory (or the Manager) ... 8. If a decision passed by a majority of the Factory Committee shall be judged by the Head of the Factory (or the Manager) to be in conflict with the said Factory's best interests, or when the said decision shall be in conflict with the instructions of higher authority, the Manager or Head of the Factory is empowered to prohibit its implementation."

In other words, everything depends on the decision of the factory head or the manager, who is not elected by the workers but is appointed by the "people's" government, which has no connection with the working class. Basically, what is the significance of this sort of "workers' control"? Let us have our answer straight from the mouth of one of the "national capitalists", Sung Fei-ch'ing:

"In my opinion, it is not such a bad idea to let the workers participate in the factory management. While on the face of it the workers would appear to be detracting somewhat from the rights of the factory head, in reality the purpose of the participation of workers' representatives in the administration of personal, material, profits, finances, etc., is merely to assure the implementation of all decisions passed by the Factory Committee. Since the workers participate in the formation of these decisions, they cannot later oppose them. Thus much friction is eliminated, and in any case the final right of decision remains in the hands of the manager."

These few words constitute a frank and honest description of the real nature of this "workers' control of production". It merely exalts the workers "on the face of it", while retaining control of the factory "in reality"! This is the Chinese Communist regime's general attitude toward the working class, one of paying it lip-service in theory while oppressing it in practice. And besides this, the CCP has yet another poisonous weapon to use against the working class, the system of "heroes of labour", which divides the workers on the one hand while oppressing them more cruelly on the other. Therefore we may affirm that politically the Chinese Communist regime has not

improved the position of the working class, while economically it has lowered its standard of living. The Chinese Communist regime, while characterizing itself the "representative of the working class" and making use of the words "people" and "nation", has in reality, like the Kuomintang, in effect enslaved the Chinese working class. This view must constitute the point of departure for our interpretation of the nature of the CCP and its government.

4. Any political party or state apparatus which enslaves the working class is, in this day and age, from a proletarian, socialist, revolutionary point of view, fundamentally and completely reactionary. Therefore the CCP and the state apparatus which it has set up are also reactionary. Yet at the same time we must recognise the following facts: They have overthrown the Kuomintang government, which represented foreign imperialism and the native bourgeoisie and landlord class; they are wiping out the anachronistic agrarian relationships in China's farming villages; they have dealt a mighty blow to the foreign imperialist powers led by the United States. All of these actions, from the point of view of Chinese nationalism and democracy, have an undeniably progressive character.

5. The difficulty is this: How and why can a fundamentally reactionary political party and government perform objectively progressive acts? At bottom, what class does such a political party represent? To answer these questions we must first make a brief study of the development of world capitalism over the last twenty-some years, of the processes of political and economic change within China itself, and of the history of the first proletarian state in the history of mankind. Within this space, naturally, we can point out only with the utmost simplicity and brevity the principal peculiarities in the history of these developments, since our immediate purpose is merely to shed light on the international background and historical origins of the CCP's victory and the emergence of this new state, and thence to draw a conclusion as to its fundamental nature.

6. Since the end of the economic crisis of 1929-33, and particularly since the end of the Second World War, world capitalism, in its imperialist stage, in order, on the one hand, to deal with the proletarian revolution within each country (a task in which it has succeeded) and, on the other, because of ever more intense international competition, has acquired certain new characteristics in its internal structure, characteristics which Lenin could not adequately foresee at the time of his analysis of imperialism. The most important among them is the process by which monopoly capitalism becomes more closely bound up with the state, some enterprises are taken over by the state, and capitalism becomes statified. Hitler's Nazism and Roosevelt's New Deal, carried

out at approximately the same time in Germany and the United States, represented fundamentally the same tendency towards statification on the part of capitalism. This movement for a time resolved the internal crisis of capitalism, but intensified the international crisis and culminated in the Second World War. As soon as the war broke out, this tendency was greatly accelerated, because the production of the implements of the war reached an unprecedented height. It exceeded the manufacture of the machinery of production and of consumers' goods and wrought a change in the most important sectors of the national productive plant. This one sector is of exceptionally large proportions and of an exceptionally exacting nature and makes it difficult for other capital enterprises to function with complete freedom; hence, the control of it must be directly in the hands of the state, which causes an unprecedented growth in the statification of enterprise. Since the war, this process, far from being retarded, has been intensified in scope.

Beginning with the war itself – except for the Soviet Union, which has a planned economy, and the United States, which gained economically from the war – all the capitalist empires, victors as well as vanquished, have found themselves in a position from which they cannot extricate themselves. The economy has completely collapsed, the revolutionary crisis is very tense, and at the same time, on the international scene, the world powers, American and Russia, are moving closer and closer to a clash – all of which forces these capitalist countries, for the sake of their continued existence, to concentrate the economic machinery in the hands of the state, to plan for internal stabilisation, and, to whatever degree possible, to ward off external attacks. As a result, such countries with traditionally “free” economies as England and France have both carried out “nationalisations” on a very large scale. The United States would seem to be the exception to the rule whereby, since the end of the war, the system of state interference in the individual economy has become more or less solidified. The principal reason, naturally, is that the power of American private monopoly capital is very great, and at the same time the United States is experiencing a period of abnormal prosperity on the back of a bankrupt world, whence these “free entrepreneurs” have a high power of resistance to the incursions of state capitalism. But if we examine more closely, we see that the production of the implements of war, with the atom bomb heading the list, is being more and more concentrated in the hands of the state, while at the same time Truman's so-called “Fair Deal”, under the impetus of a future economic panic, could most assuredly take long strides in the direction of state capitalism. (If at such a time a socialist revolution should take place and be successful then of course the whole picture

changes.)

7. A phenomenon accompanying the statification of capitalism and pointed out by Lenin in his study of imperialism, namely, the parasitism and corruption of the bourgeoisie, is also further intensified yet another degree. Broadly speaking, the entire bourgeoisie becomes separated from the means of production and becomes a class of “profit-consumers”. The state becomes the agent that reaps the profits for the owners, and the capitalists simply turn into a decayed leisure class.

8. The decay and stagnation of capitalism causes a further change in the polarisation of classes within capitalist society. On the one hand, capital concentration and the capitalist class shrink in quantity and size; on the other, the ranks of the proletariat cannot continue to expand, but in some countries the ratio of this class to the total population decreases. The bankrupt, impotent petty bourgeoisie becomes ever larger. At the same time, the so-called “new middle class” formed under conditions of state capitalism, that is, specialists, technicians, bureaucrats, and intellectuals of every type and description – these and other elements of the impoverished petty bourgeoisie at certain times form the base for the Fascist movement, and at others the cadres of Stalinism.

9. These three phenomena, viz., (a) the tendency of world capitalism toward statification, (b) the thoroughgoing corruption and decay of the individual capitalist, and (c) the numerical increase of the petty bourgeoisie and its rise in importance as a social and political force, may serve to explain the principal events that have taken place throughout the world during the last twenty years, particularly since the end of the war, and can explain very adequately the events that have transpired in China.

10. The semi-colonial, backward Chinese bourgeoisie, under the pressure of the enmity of the workers and peasants from within and the direct blows of Japanese imperialism from without, fell in wholeheartedly with the world current of the nationalisation of capital. But precisely because the weak base of Chinese industrial capitalism and China's political and social backwardness caused her “nationalised” capitalism to assume a particularly shameless rapacity, the result has been in the last six or seven years a so-called bureaucratic capitalism and unprecedentedly graft-ridden political setup, the stench of which rises to the heavens. This sort of rule not only enraged the Chinese workers and peasants, but also angered broad layers of the urban petty bourgeoisie and even the medium bourgeoisie, the so-called national capitalists.

11. The Chinese Stalinists, taking advantage of this state of affairs, basing themselves on the overwhelming numerical strength of the impoverished and embittered peasantry, and proposing a programme of reformed state

capitalism (that is, the New Democracy), rallied the urban petty bourgeoisie and medium bourgeoisie, and gathered to their banner even a part of the working class. Through military might they easily transformed the rotten rule of the Chinese-style “national capitalists” and took over (but by no means abolished) the state machinery and the entire economy under its control.

12. The above constitutes our explanation, on the basis of the development of world capitalism and its peculiarities, of the reasons for the collapse of Kuomintang rule and the rise of Chinese Stalinist rule. Of course, this explanation can account for only one half of the story. It still leaves unanswered questions such as the following: Why did the CCP rely on the peasants rather than the workers? Why did the “communists” at the head of China’s impoverished peasantry put forth a programme of reformed state capitalism rather than socialist revolution? Why are they carrying out a reform from the top down rather than a revolution from the bottom up? Why did they merely “take over” undisturbed the bureaucratic state apparatus rather than abolish it? Why, although they have transformed the rule of the landlords and the bureaucratic capitalists, have they adopted a friendly attitude towards the bourgeoisie in general while carrying out repressive measures against the proletariat? Why do they proclaim themselves to be a working-class party and China to be a “people’s republic led by the working class” while giving the workers not the least opportunity to participate in the government or even to organise soviets?

To answer these questions, we can point out the following facts about the internal situation in the country: The Chinese proletariat since 1927, when it suffered a staggering defeat thanks to its adherence to Stalinist policies, has not ascended the political stage. Although a year or two before the struggle with Japan and within the first year after Japan’s surrender the labour movement revived for a time, nevertheless, thanks to the weakness of the proletarian parties, the Kuomintang’s oppression and deceit, and the degeneration of Chinese industry in the war, and under the influence of the decay and stagnation of world capitalism, the ranks of the working class were scattered and weakened, and these movements could never acquire sufficient political and revolutionary character. The fact that the Chinese proletariat for over twenty years was unable to interfere in China’s political processes to a significant extent determined the peasant aspect, the capitalist nature, and the bureaucratic-collectivist direction of Chinese Stalinism. Of course – and this is far more important – we must seek the answer to this question in the nature of the Soviet Union and the CPUSSR and the influence they exerted on the CCP.

13. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union,

since the late Twenties, after the elimination of the entire Old Bolshevik leadership, quickly degenerated into a bureaucratic clique exploiting the proletariat. Of course, as far as membership, organisation, and ideology were concerned, it ceased to be a vanguard of the proletariat or even a part of the proletariat. As for membership, except for a handful of Stakhanovites, workers simply could not join the party; as for organisation, democratic centralism gave way to bureaucratic absolutism, and lower-ranking party members (to say nothing of non-party workers) had absolutely no right to criticise, change, or recall the leaders or their policies; as for ideology, internationalism gave way to narrow Great-Russian nationalism, world revolution gave way to national construction based on the Soviet Union, the class struggle was transformed into “national cooperation” (or a bureaucratic operation), equalitarianism was transformed into the most naked system of privilege and discrimination, collective leadership was transformed into the most arbitrary personal dictatorship. Along with the complete degeneration of the Bolshevik party, and inextricably bound up with it, was the complete change in the character of the Soviet state.

This change expressed itself primarily in the following ways: (a) The soviets on which the working class had relied to control the state remained in name but disappeared in fact, and the workers were not only unable any longer to “recall at will those of their elected representatives who did not suit them”, but even to elect their own representatives. (b) The officials of the state apparatus, the officers of the regular army, the responsible persons and specialists, formed a relatively stable ruling class, became estranged from the working class, then oppressed the working class cruelly. (c) The working masses in general were cheated not only of their right to participate in government but also of any right to fight for the improvement of their own living conditions. (d) Therefore the Soviet Union now stands in the following class relationship politically and economically: On the one hand the bureaucracy collectively holds all political and economic power in the state, and on the other the toiling masses are absolutely without rights. This sort of state is naturally not a workers’ state, nor even a degenerate workers’ state, because the working class is politically ruled over and economically exploited; and yet it is not a capitalist state, since there is no capitalist class in it which privately owns the means of production. In that state all the means and materials of production are concentrated in the hands of a bureaucracy comprising the party, the governmental machinery, and the army, which collectively owns all the wealth.

Therefore we may say that the Soviet Union of today is a country in which the bureaucracy collectively owns the means of production. The

reason this sort of state was able to come into being is that, in the first place, the world socialist revolution was late in arriving and its energies dissipated, thus forcing a backward and isolated workers' state to degenerate completely; in the second place, that the decay of world capitalism itself and the process which is pushing it at top speed in the direction of state capitalism made it impossible for the degenerated workers' state to revert to orthodox capitalism.

14. On the face of it, bureaucratic collectivism, that is, Stalinism, would appear to be a completely new thing. It is neither socialism nor capitalism. But upon closer examination it is not difficult to perceive that it belongs under a subheading of capitalism. One difference between it and traditional capitalism is collective ownership of the means of production as opposed to private ownership. The ownership of the means of production has not been socialised, but it has been collectivised (in the hands of the ruling class). And as for the relationship of owners to producers, exploitation continues exist, and is in fact intensified. Bureaucratic collectivism has two great advantages over private capitalism and even over state capitalism (under the latter also there is large-scale private ownership): (a) it is possible to regulate capital in a more systematic fashion; (b) it is possible to exploit workers more efficiently. These two advantages are precisely what is needed to overcome the present crisis of capitalism. Seen from this point of view, Stalinism is a special kind of reformism, it is the reformism of the age in which capitalism has developed into imperialism. On the one hand it prevents the emergence and success of a genuine socialist revolution, and on the other, by means of collective exploitation, it continues the rule of capital over labour. Bureaucratic collectivism or Stalinism is essentially the transitional form which obtains during the delayed and difficult birth of socialism from the womb of capitalism. It cannot create a new historical era, but it can maintain itself for a long time, and in several countries at once. In southeast Europe several such states have already been created, while the New China is being recast in the same mould.

15. To create a bureaucratic-collectivist state, one must first have a bureaucratic-collectivist party to carry out the action. The Chinese Communist Party has been that ever since Communism degenerated into bureaucratic collectivism. Because of a common international situation and longstanding historical ties, also because the class relationships within China after the defeat of the Great Revolution (the destruction of the proletariat, the long peasant wars, the utter corruption of the bourgeoisie, the anger and dissatisfaction of the petty bourgeoisie) were favourable to reformism and utterly unfavourable to the growth of revolutionary socialism, the Chinese Communist Party took over entirely the

bureaucratic collectivism perfected by Stalin within the Soviet Union. The ideological change was complete by the early Thirties. Now the CCP, embracing this ideology, has come to power and is organising the state around it. Hence it is quite natural that it can only carry out a reform from the top down, put forth a state-capitalist programme, simply and easily take over the Kuomintang's bureaucratic state apparatus, destroy only part of the bourgeoisie, put a strict check on the genuinely revolutionary proletariat, and regard with hostility every mass action from the bottom up. Since the creature spawned by the CCP is a bureaucratic-collectivist state and must continue to enslave the workers, it is reactionary; but since such a state must reform capitalism, change property forms, and increase productive power, it cannot help adopting certain progressive measures. Herein we have found the answer to our question posed in 4: How and why can a reactionary regime carry out certain progressive measures? The contradiction between progress and reaction which characterises the Chinese Communist Party's regime expresses itself particularly in its relation to the bourgeoisie on the one hand and the proletariat and poor peasantry on the other. To stabilise the rule of the bureaucracy it is necessary to conciliate the former and oppose the latter, while to reform capitalism it is necessary to conciliate the latter and oppose the former.

16. This internal contradiction has caused the Chinese Communist rule for the present to assume Bonapartist features. It attempts to play the part of a supra-class mediator and proclaims "labour-capital unity for the benefit of all society", while in reality manipulating and smoothing over class contradictions for the ultimate advantage of the bureaucratic caste. All varieties of Bonapartism rest primarily on the mass base of the petty bourgeoisie, the present CCP included. All forms of Bonapartism are fundamentally anti-working class, and the CCP at present is no exception. Of course, Stalinist Bonapartism attacks private property, while orthodox Bonapartist dictatorship does not, and therein lies the great difference between them. It is absolutely necessary for us to understand this point. Therefore we cannot say that the Bonapartism of the CCP will perform a capitalist function in the sense in which we could say it of traditional Bonapartism, of Bonapartism in the literal meaning of the word. It will perform the functions of capitalism in a peculiar way, that is, by substituting the collective ownership of the bureaucracy for the private ownership of the individual capitalist. The capitalism represented by the Stalinists is no longer capitalism in the original sense of the word, but bureaucratic collectivism; the class they represent is not a capitalist class in the original sense, but a bureaucratic class which collectively owns the means of production. This distinction is of exceptional importance. If one

points to the Bonapartism of the CCP without understanding this difference, then one will be unable to understand the events taking place before one's eyes or to predict future developments, because, while others may expect the attitude of the CCP to become daily more conciliatory towards the bourgeoisie, what we shall in fact see is a greater solidification of collectivism and a strengthening of state capital.

Of course, we are under no obligation to make airily optimistic promises about what the CCP will achieve from these sad beginnings. In semi-colonial, backward China, which has suffered the ravages of civil and foreign wars for over ten years, if only because of the power of resistance of the internal "automatic economy" (not to mention the increasingly acute contradictions on the international scene), the construction by the CCP of a bureaucratic-collectivist system will probably be extremely difficult. Thanks to two wars within the last ten years, the decisively significant sectors of the Chinese economy are nationalised. This gives the CCP's future activities a great boost, but they have yet to absorb all private capital, abolish the backward relationships in the farming villages, and collectivise the small farming units which have gone bankrupt in their technical backwardness – all of them uncommonly difficult tasks. To do this the first and most important step is for the Stalinist party to initiate a broad mass struggle, to absorb countless worker and peasant elements and organise them for action, but this is a step that the Stalinist party is wary of taking. To guarantee that the new China shall remain under bureaucratic rule and not turn into a genuine workers' and peasants' state, they must limit this movement to certain well-defined bounds, beyond which it must not be permitted to stray so much as a single step. In its present position of extreme caution, events have naturally made it impossible for the CCP's collectivisation to go very deep; however, the general tendency is in the direction just described, and its principal features have been pointed out above.

17. When the Stalinist party, in order to advance the cause of bureaucratic collectivism, very cautiously initiates its mass movement, can the workers and poor peasants, taking advantage of this opportunity, push the struggle further, work free of the limitations imposed upon them by the Stalinist party, and cause a bureaucratically dominated movement to turn into the Chinese socialist revolution – or can they not? In theory, we can never exclude this possibility, and we – the Chinese Proletarian Revolutionary Party – must turn all our subjective efforts in that direction. But, in fact, if we passionately analyse China's present class relationships, we cannot deny that this possibility is extremely slight. The prestige of the Stalinist party among the general masses is still very great, the illusion that bureaucratic collect-

ivism equals socialism is widespread; the Chinese proletariat and its real vanguard have yet to educate the Chinese themselves and unite through the bitter experience of Stalinist rule for only then can they initiate a mighty anti-Stalinist revolution.

Our chief task at present is patiently to interpret and reinterpret the fundamental nature of Stalinist bureaucratic collectivism. Naturally, "patient interpretation" by no means signifies passive observation. We must participate actively in these events. We must, while pointing out the internally contradictory character of the Stalinist party's present struggle, on the one hand advance and broaden in scope the fight against the landlords and rich peasants and advocate and participate in all anti-capitalist struggles; and, on the other hand, oppose simultaneously the fight of the bureaucracy, oppose the enslavement of the workers under whatever guise, oppose the oppression of the poor peasantry, and, above all, consistently advocate the convocation of a Congress of workers, peasants, and soldiers, to exchange the Stalinist military agencies and the so-called "People's Government" for a genuine workers' and peasants' state. We must direct every struggle toward the formation of soviets. Our principal slogan must be for a Congress of Workers, Soldiers and Peasants.

18. In view of the political and economic evidence, the China of Mao Tse-tung, unless a new world war or an internal revolution stops the course of its development, can "peacefully" turn into another Stalinist Russia (that is, it need not necessarily first go through a proletarian revolution and then degenerate in order to reach the same end result); or, if the China of Mao Tse-tung is to become a workers' state, then nothing short of a proletarian revolution can alter the present rule.

Therefore, not only can we state positively that China is not a workers' state, but we can also prove by the same token that the Soviet Union is no longer any sort of workers' state. The difference between the new China and the Soviet Union at present is one of degree, not of kind. Both are equally bureaucratic-collectivist states, except for a huge difference in *degree* of thoroughness. Therefore the Fourth International's traditional attitude towards the Soviet Union must be altered. It must reject the view that the Stalinist parties are parties of Menshevik opportunism, because, although the Stalinist parties are at present indeed fundamentally reformist, their principal crime is not their collaboration with the bourgeoisie but bureaucratic enslavement of the proletariat. Needless to say, it is only by viewing the Soviet Union and the Stalinist parties from the point of view of bureaucratic collectivism that one can understand their nature and their actions. The same is true of the Chinese Stalinist party and its newly-established state. ■