

THREE WEEKS IN CHINA

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REBEL FROM HUNAN

This article by Thomas Tregear, formerly a university lecturer in China, is reprinted by permission of the author and of 'The Friend' in which it appeared on 25 November, 1966.

Mao Tse-tung was born in 1893 in Shao Shan, Hunan, in the heart of the Yangtse valley at a time when the Manchu dynasty was tottering to its final fall in 1911. From birth until he came into power in 1949, Mao had known only a country rent by external wars, civil wars, the terror of war lords and bandits, the indignities of foreign direction and exploitation, a country having no firm central government, shot through with corruption and, above all, a peasantry oppressed by all and sundry. This made an indelible impression on Mao's thought. From it springs his faith in and compassion for the poor peasant, his hatred of their oppressors and his belief that force and force alone could achieve the unity of his country and its equality with other powers.

His father was a 'middle-rich' peasant, hard and grasping, for whom he had no affection. He ran away from home and became an impecunious student. Through reading, study and association his thought progressed through the liberalism of J S Mill, Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham and finally to communism at a time when it was dangerous to have even liberal leanings. His brothers, his sister and his wife were all killed or executed in pursuance of their politics and Mao himself came within a whisker of sharing the same fate himself.

In view of the publicity recently given to his swim in the Yangtse, it is interesting to record that one of his earliest obsessions was with physical fitness and that his first publication was on this subject. Through the years he has retained this keenness for fitness so that Robert Payne, writing of him in 1946, said: 'Then Mao came into the room. . . He looked like a surprisingly young student. . . There was about him a kind of quietness such as you

will find among people who have lived much alone. . . He was 53 and looked 20.'

Between 1921 and 1923 he was engaged largely in organising urban labour unions in Hunan, but in 1924, with the alliance between the young Communist Party and Sun Yat Sen's Nationalist Party (Kuomintang), he began organising the peasant movement in south China, an important change since from this springs Mao's faith in and reliance on the peasantry rather than the urban worker in revolution, one of the main differences between Chinese and Russian communism. In 1927 he wrote his **Report of an Investigation into the Peasant Movement in Hunan**, which had only a lukewarm reception from his colleagues. Although he was a founder member of the Chinese Communist Party, it was not until after the fierce struggle with Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang, culminating in defeat and the epic retreat known as 'The Long March', in 1935, that Mao became the undisputed leader of the CCP and that his thought and writings began to receive full attention and to carry authority.

After the Long March, which welded the remnant into a dedicated group, the CCP established itself in the dry loess of the north-west with its headquarters at Yen-an. It was here that Mao did his main writing and teaching until 1949 and here that he tried out his theories in practice among the poverty-stricken peasantry of this famine-bedevilled region.

In spite of his deep distrust of dogma, he emerges as a strict Marxist-Leninist, holding firmly to dialectical materialism as opposed to the metaphysical. The latter, he maintains, relies on external forces and is static in its approach. He equates it with the Confucian saying 'Heaven changes not and

the Way, too, changes not'—that is, that man is conditioned by forces external to himself. Dialectical materialism, on the other hand, is dynamic, inside forces being the important element of change. Within everything in the universe, it holds, there are contending forces, which, by their interaction, lead constantly to change and development. External elements are of only secondary importance. These contending forces, known as contradictions, give rise to the most important fundamental law of dialectical materialism, the law of unity of opposites. 'Contradiction is universal, absolute, existing in all processes of development of things and running through all processes from beginning to end.' Probably the most important of all Mao's writings is on this subject and is called 'On Contradiction' (August, 1937).

This struggle between contending forces, he holds, is the very essence of life. The absence of struggle is synonymous with death. Antagonism is essential. Writing in the midst of the Sino-Japanese struggle, when confronted with a military foe, he says: 'It is a good thing, not a bad thing, to be opposed by an enemy.' Thus confronted, one is able to see clearly what has to be done. This ideal of struggle, of contradiction, is carried through class struggle against imperialist, capitalist and landlord into every aspect of domestic and economic life, into the field where the farmer contends with nature, into the factory where the worker strives with problems of inadequate tools or new means of production, into the hospital, into the school, home and playing field. 'There is infinite joy in struggling against Heaven; there is infinite joy in struggling against Earth, and there is infinite joy in struggling against man.' 'Happiness is struggle.' Thus Mao demands of the people continuous struggle, continuous revolution. Much of the present upsurge, led by the young Red Guards, under the name of 'Cultural Revolution' may stem from a fear on the part of Mao

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and his colleagues that the present generation, lacking memory's spur of former oppression and want, is becoming fat and contented and so losing the will to struggle, which would spell disaster. Therefore there must be periodic campaigns which will enable the people to see the enemy, quicken hatred and so maintain the revolutionary spirit.

Friends will feel some unity with Mao in his distrust of dogma and bookishness. As early as 1930 he wrote a pamphlet entitled **Combat Bookism** in which he states: 'Without investigation there is no right to speak'. Later, in **On Practice** (July, 1937) he develops this theme.

Man's knowledge depends mainly on his activity in material production, through which he comes gradually to understand the phenomena, the properties and laws of nature, and the relations between himself and nature; and through his activity in production he also gradually comes to understand, in varying degrees, certain relations that exist between man and man. None of this knowledge can be acquired apart from activity in production. . . . Man's social practice is not confined to activity in production, but takes many other forms—class struggle, political life, scientific and artistic pursuits; in short, as a social being, man participates in all spheres of the practical life of society. Thus man, in varying degrees, comes to know the different relations between man and man, not only through his material life but also through his political and cultural life (both of which are intimately bound up with material life).

Thus experiment and experience lead to thought (theoretical knowledge), which must then be tested in practice before it becomes correct knowledge and which, in its turn, leads to fresh thought and so on. Mao expressed this later in **Where Do Man's Correct Ideas Come From** (May, 1963) in these words:

It is often necessary to repeat many times the process of going from matter to spirit and from spirit back to matter, i.e., from practice to knowledge and from knowledge back to practice, before correct knowledge can be achieved. This is the Marxist theory of knowledge, that is, the dialectical materialistic theory of knowledge.

This belief that knowledge depends essentially on material practice is the main reason why there is a constant pressure on all theoreticians, be they administrators, researchers, managers, teachers and the like, to spend some of their time each year working with their hands.

All personnel of our State agencies, writers, artists, teachers and scientific research personnel should contact the workers and the peasants by making use of all possible opportunities. Some go to factories and the countryside to take a look. This is called 'looking over the flowers from the back of a galloping horse', but it is better than not looking at all. Others may stay in the factories or rural villages for a few months and there make investigations. That is called 'getting down from the horse and taking a look at the flowers'.

Much of his writing clearly shows the

urgency he feels for increasing the confidence of the masses, the need for initiative and experiment both in thought and action and the need for courage to make mistakes. In his famous 'Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom' speech (March, 1957) he urged just this on the intellectuals.

Blooming means giving rein to everyone in speech so that people may dare to speak, criticise and argue. . . . To convince people, one can only persuade them instead of coercing them. The result of coercion is always negative. It will not do to try to subdue people by force. It may be done with an enemy but can never be done with a comrade or friend.

Unfortunately, this particular experiment ended with a good deal of coercion and subsequent, long-lived loss of confidence among the intelligentsia—a very negative result.

From the time when Mao Tse-tung began to work among the rural communities he has unwaveringly and passionately placed his faith and reliance on the peasant masses. There is an ancient Chinese saying: 'The people are the water and the ruler the boat. The water can support the boat but it can also sink it' (Hsun Tze. 300 BC). Mao's equivalent is: 'We are the fish and the people are the water of life to us. We do not ride over the people but swim with them' (see E. Snow's **The Other Side of the River**). This has been a guiding principle with him throughout his turbulent political life. His appeal is consistently to the poor peasant for whom he has a deep compassion. Moreover, only thus can he move towards the classless society on which he has set his eyes. Howard Boorman, writing of him in the **China Quarterly** (No 16), says:

Mao Tse-tung has stood out as one of the very few national leaders in twentieth-century China who has shown sustained concern with the hardships, brutality and grinding want which characterised the lot of the poorer peasants. This concern required no sophisticated Marxist rationale. . . . Further, Mao recognised that the major source of potential political energy rested in the Chinese peasants; and that the leader able to exploit and mobilise that energy source was destined to triumph in China in the long run.

Mao's attitude to women has had a profound effect on the country and on the course of the revolution. In securing for them equality of status with men he has expected them to tackle the same physical work as men and to shoulder the same responsibilities, and his expectation has met with amazing response.

Perhaps more than anything else Mao's undisputed leadership has derived from his unwavering faith throughout all adversity in ultimate victory. Right or wrong—and he has made many mistakes—he regards all tasks and all enemies as conquerable.

We despise all enemies strategically and take account of all enemies tactically. . . . All reactionaries are paper tigers. In appear-

ance reactionaries are terrifying but in reality they are not so powerful. From a long-term point of view it is the people who are powerful.

This aim, the creation of a strong, united, modern and Communist China, which involves nothing less than the conversion of 700 million people from an individualistic way of thought to one in which the good of the whole predominates, has been pursued with a ruthlessness which his outward quiet, urbane appearance belies. Right at the beginning of his political career he wrote:

A revolution is not the same as inviting people to dinner, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing fancy needlework; it cannot be anything so refined, so calm and gentle or so mild, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous.* A revolution is an uprising, an act of violence whereby one class overthrows another.

Much of his life, at least up to 1949, was engaged in fighting and much of his thought and writing devoted to military theory and tactics.

Yet to close this sketch on this note would be unjust to China's leader. Mao Tse-tung, like so many of China's rulers, is a poet. While much of the subject matter of his poems is concerned with the revolution and the political scene, his verses reveal a contemplative side, full of warmth, friendship and love of beauty. The following lines were written when he returned home to Shao Shan after an absence of 32 years. He had been driven from Shao Shan after an unsuccessful peasant revolt—hence the reference to red pennons and black hands. The poem is translated by Jerome Ch'en and Michael Bullock in **Dr Ch'en's Mao and the Chinese Revolution** (Oxford University Press).

I curse the time that has flowed past
Since the dimly-remembered dream of my
departure
From home, thirty-two years ago.
With red pennons, the peasants lifted their
lances;
In their black hands, the rulers held up their
whips.
Lofty emotions were expressed in self-
sacrifice:
So the sun and moon were asked to give a
new face to heaven.
In delight I watch a thousand waves of
growing rice and beans,
And heroes everywhere going home in the
smoky sunset.

Thomas R Tregear

* Confucian virtues.

SACU EVENTS IN MAY

May

- 4 **CAMDEN BRANCH.** Public Meeting. The May Fourth Movement. 7.45 pm.
- 19 **BIRMINGHAM BRANCH.** Public Meeting. Roland Berger. 7.30 pm.
- 24 **BARNET BRANCH.** 'The Thought of Mao Tse-tung'. John Lewis and William Ash. North Finchley Library, 7.45 pm.

To Change People's Thinking

THROUGHOUT THE AFTERNOON and evening of Sunday, 12 March, over 100 people were present at a discussion meeting held by SACU to consider the Cultural Revolution in China. There were four main speakers: Sybille van der Sprenkel, who is a lecturer at Leeds University and who knew China before 1949; Colin Penn an architect who worked in China from 1962 to 1964; Dick Wilson who was, until recently, editor of *Far East Economic Review*; and Bill Brugger, who returned to England last autumn after two years teaching in China.

Mrs van der Sprenkel opened by denying that previous statements of China's successes were invalidated by the Cultural Revolution. It was not new for the Chinese to openly admit past mistakes and learn from them. She instanced the over-concentration on heavy industry in the mid 1950's and certain faults in the organisation of the early communes.

There had been many other very important problems to overcome. The influence of the West had determined the placing of early industry in the nineteenth century in the coastal areas and that, with the reinforcement of the intellectual strata by Western methods of education, created long-term social problems.

The Cultural Revolution was the most recent and the most important of a series of campaigns to change people's thinking. By 1965 the economy was strong and there were disagreements on the policy priorities to be pursued. Despite the previous campaigns, many of the young people may not have felt involved in changing Chinese society. A number of members of the Communist Party had settled into their powerful positions and had even become arrogant in their use of power. The increasingly technological society had, of necessity, produced an elite which showed signs of being self-perpetuating. Problems had arisen from the use of economic incentives and their effects on individuals and on particular enterprises. There was a tendency for the wage differentials to grow between workers and peasants. The growing population produced considerable dissent about the allocation of the slender margins for investment. Many of the intellectuals had continued to produce work which was inspired by individualist and bourgeois ethics.

The main divergency, Mrs van der Sprenkel concluded, was between those who stressed the role of leadership, saw economic advance as the priority and who enjoyed their privileged positions, and those led by Mao, who distrusted the effect of these policies upon

the society and who stressed the need for constantly sharing the common people's experience, and putting the collective long-term interest before individualist short-term interests. To do this effectively the close study of Mao's work was seen as essential.

Colin Penn pointed out that when the press saw the Cultural Revolution as a failure it was relying on the forgetfulness of its readers. The Press had, in fact, largely ignored the Sixteen Point statement of 8 August which was central to an understanding of recent events. Everything that had happened since that time had only confirmed the analysis of that statement. He exemplified 'Let the masses educate themselves', 'Develop new organisational forms', 'Take firm hold of revolution and stimulate production'.

Because the mass of the people were involved in the revolution, mass criticism was unparalleled: not only of Communist Party officials but of everyone with responsibility. Those who led this criticism had initially been the students but since the Shanghai appeal in January, industrial workers had played a more decisive part. In many cases this had led to considerable increases in production.

The basis of the new unity that was emerging was the three-way alliance and with the growth of this force there was less tendency to dismiss the role of party cadres. 'Early or late all partners deserve equal treatment', was one of the more important Chinese slogans. That the Army should take a leading role in politics should not cause surprise: it was in many ways, because of the political discussions which were a regular feature of army life, one of the most politically mature organisations in the country. As for the third partners, the Red Guards and Red Rebels (they had probably become permanent) since their congress last February.

Dick Wilson suggested that the Cultural Revolution had two main aspects. It was firstly an attempt to further increase revolutionary fervour throughout China, and secondly it was a reflection of the growing dissension within the Central Committee which itself sharpened the problem of who was to succeed Mao Tse-tung. It was his personality and extraordinary qualities of leadership which had kept his faction in power. There was a considerable problem of keeping the people together: a recent broadcast from Harbin had talked of two struggles — against those taking the capitalist road, and against selfishness in individuals.

The campaign had started in the

autumn of 1965 and its form resulted from Mao's dissatisfaction with the results of previous campaigns, especially that of the '4 Clean Ups'. They had failed because of the growth of bureaucracy. There had been significant references to the Paris Commune as early as 1960 and a number of urban communes had been started in 1959. The Red Guards were, therefore, Mao's shock force against an entrenched bureaucracy, and gave youth a chance to participate in revolutionary activity. Mr Wilson did not agree with the Western commentators' analogies with fascist movements and indeed there was a strong element of Utopianism in such demands as ending the difference between town and country.

On Boxing Day last year the Cultural Revolution was extended to the countryside but this had appeared to overstretch the campaign and endanger economic advance, bringing a threat of autonomous action from some provinces. Furthermore, US continued escalation in Vietnam increased the threat from outside. As a result of these factors a compromise was arranged with Chou En-lai in control and the emphasis changed from revolution to stability.

Bill Brugger's interpretation of the Cultural Revolution differed considerably from this. He saw it as closely connected with the reasons for the Sino-Soviet conflict. In the Army considerable wage differentials were introduced from 1955 as a result of Soviet advice. But from 1959 the process was reversed and by 1964 it was possible to say that the Army's bureaucratic structure was largely neutralised: an example was given of a man voluntarily cutting his salary by two-thirds. Thus within the Army the opposition to the Cultural Revolution had been small. There had been, however, no parallel process in civil structure despite the Red and Expert campaign. Many officials were transferred from the Army to industry and education and these had been more open to pressure and criticism from below.

The revolution had begun as being cultural. It had started as a result of criticism within Peking University which was stifled by the Peking Party Committee and only found public outlet in the *People's Daily* but not any of the Peking papers. The actual campaign against the Chancellor of Peking University was spontaneous but the basis had been laid by previous discussions. After five days of struggle the Peking Party Committee was changed.

It was after this that criticism and counter-criticism became general, but no one was dismissed immediately from their positions: this could only happen

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IN CAMBRIDGE on 13 March Prof Owen Lattimore spoke on Chinese history to an audience of almost 100, with Dr Edmund Leach, Provost of King's College, in the chair. The speaker first explained the difference between the landward history of China and her maritime history. The Mongol and Manchu invasions through mountainous terrain had been a slow process, in which the conquerors had been gradually assimilated. The later invasions from the sea, striking China in her most developed regions, had brought in a people completely alien, with no assimilable characteristics. The Westerners preserved their own way of life by sending their children home for education, and by forming enclaves and concessions in which their particular disciplines were maintained. Chinese war lords, with a stake in these enclaves, were able to retreat there in time of defeat to plan their next moves under the protection of Western law and order.

On the history of the frontier problems, Prof Lattimore suggested that 'frontier conflicts are almost never the cause of war'. This type of friction was a symptom of a clash of forces nearer to the centre of gravity. Historically the frontier between the Soviet Union and China had been drawn where two expanding empires met, passing through territory whose original inhabitants were neither Russian nor Chinese. In recent times, taking a wide view of the East, the USSR and China appeared as stable nations standing on their own territory. Since 1945 Britain, France, Japan and Holland had withdrawn from Eastern Asia, while the USA had expanded her frontiers by the establishment of military bases.

The Chinese regard their revolution as a gradual process. Their methods

have emerged from coalition, whereas in the Soviet Union the Communist Party came to power suddenly and used its prestige to force through measures which had not been subjected to criticism. Unlike other Communists, the Chinese believe that leading members of the Party must expose themselves to criticism even from non-Party members. The mass line is all-powerful. What is happening now is an appeal to the maximum number of people to make the greatest use of their abilities.

SG

CATALOGUES of the lending and reference sections of the library are now available, price 1/- each post free.

Our files of **Peking Review** are now almost complete but we still need copies of issue Number 34 of 1958 and Numbers 47 and 48 of 1962 to make up complete sets for binding. We should be grateful to receive any unwanted copies of these issues.

BRISTOL BRANCH INAUGURATED

SACU's Bristol and District Branch was formally inaugurated at a meeting held at Folk House, Bristol, on 14 April. A committee was elected, with Mr Jim Little as Secretary, and is now planning a programme for future activities.

SHEFFIELD BRANCH

Professor Tom Kaiser of Sheffield University took the chair at a most successful public meeting recently held by the Sheffield Branch of SACU when William Jenner and Sybille van der Sprenkel spoke on the background to the Cultural Revolution.

CAMDEN TEACH-IN

The very successful Teach-In held last May as part of Camden China Month is being repeated this year on Sunday, 21 May. There will be three sessions, in the Old Hampstead Town Hall, as follows: 3 to 5 pm 'China Today', 5 to 8 pm 'Cultural Revolution', and 8 to 10 pm 'External Affairs', with speakers with recent first-hand experience of China at each.

Comment

JUDGING by the report of my talk at Chester (April SACU NEWS) there are some points on which I did not make myself clear. Of course the cultural revolution has involved power struggles at all levels—the point is that they are not confined to the top. On foreign policy China's support for revolutions abroad has been limited so far; and while a nuclear war would cause terrible losses it would not destroy all that has been achieved since 1949. Although the Central Committee has been supporting the rebels the local Party structure seems to have been overthrown in some places, at least temporarily.

W J F Jenner

SOME PLACES are still available for the weekend school on **China in the World** at Moor Park College, Farnham, Surrey, 16-18 June. Members £5 17s 6d, students £5 10s 0d. Register now with central office.

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TO CHANGE PEOPLE'S THINKING

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after a thorough investigation and this was still going on at Peking University. As the Cultural Revolution spread to each town or city it was normal for there to be considerable disruption for a few days, but this was in every case soon over. In Shanghai, for example, the period of relative chaos only lasted three days, after which a Cultural Revolution committee was elected and work was able to continue in a more orderly way.

The process of raising Mao Tse-tung to his present highly acclaimed position was one that had started in 1963. This enabled him to be an important focal point in what had been foreseen

as a period of change and challenge. In his actions against bureaucracy he was not, however, wholly original. Stalin had made similar attempts but had tried to operate from above. Mao had realised the necessity of the action being initiated and carried out from below. What had been started in China was not a temporary phenomenon, a reflection of certain high-level squabbles. It was an 'uninterrupted revolution' by which the masses could constantly demand answers from officials and when necessary replace them.

Apart from these four main contributions there were about three hours of questions and discussion. This was, perhaps, the best measure of the success of the meeting.

Sam Mauger

ABOUT SACU

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