

The road to Tienanmen Square

Jack Cleary explains why the workers and students are in bloody conflict with China's 'socialist' rulers



One of the Chinese army's victims in Tienanmen Square

For three weeks in May and June, the Chinese government lost control of a large part of Beijing. It lost control of its capital city to the people who live there, spearheaded by the students and workers demanding radical democratic reform.

They paraded with a home-made replica of the Statue of Liberty, but their anthem was the Internationale, the song of revolutionary socialism all over the world ever since the French workers took another capital city, Paris, out of the hands of the French bourgeoisie.

Like the French workers in 1871, the students and workers in Beijing were massacred by the soldiers of the threatened regime. Unlike the French workers who were armed and fought back, the masses of young people, students and workers, in Tienanmen Square were completely unarmed. They pitted the moral force of their own idealism and self-sacrifice against the regime, as if daring it to strike them down or trying to shame the murderous old men into acting differently from the way they had acted most of their political lives. Many of the students and workers took an oath that they would die there if necessary. And die they did.

When China's rulers launched their — reportedly drugged — soldiers against the people, it was as a conquering army which went through the streets shooting anything that moved, driving tanks over the young bodies, reportedly even killing unarmed soldiers who were in the square.

For the first 30 of its 40 years in power, this regime, whose victims understandably (though not quite accurately) call it 'fascist', has been a beacon for socialists throughout the world! For a dozen years, up to the mid-'70s, many tens of thousands of revolutionary youth became Maoists. And even many of those socialists who criticised China's regime admitted that it was 'progressive' and that, despite everything, the workers ruled there.

Forty years ago the Stalinist-led peasant armies of Mao Zedong conquered the whole of China. Over the following years they created an economic and political system modelled on that of Stalin's Soviet Union.

The top layers of the so-called Communist Party owned the state, which soon owned everything; so the top bureaucrats, collectively, owned everything. They became a privileged elite. Their political system was a rigid totalitarianism. From the beginning the Chinese state displayed the features that it had taken the Russian Stalinists over a decade to develop and perfect.

All the freedoms won over centuries by the working people in countries like Britain, some of which had begun to have a flickering existence in China too, were obliterated.

There was no freedom of speech, press, self-organisation, assembly, sexuality or intellect. The working class was

regimented, controlled, forbidden to form trade unions, forbidden to organise politically, repressed when it tried to.

Over three decades the ruling Maoist elite tried to develop China's economy, which was very backward and poor in resources. They did develop the economy, mobilising and driving the working class and the farmers with a combination of physical police-state pressure and intensive propaganda. They said that they were building socialism, though in fact the ruling bureaucracy had most of the features of traditional exploiting classes.

They developed the economy; but they bungled it. The combination of bounding population growth and great shortage of natural resources created tremendous difficulties anyway. The attempt to plan and control that development from above, by an elite giving orders, with no democratic control over economic goals or economic measures, with very scanty information — this made the difficulties vastly greater.

The group around Mao went in for irrational economic experiments aimed at achieving miracles of economic development. They drove the people, who had no say in the matter, into economic adventures like the 'Great Leap Forward' in 1958. It led not forward but to widespread destruction and waste in the economy. As a result over 20 million people starved to death in the late '50s and early '60s.

The failure of that adventure led to serious faction-fighting inside the ruling party. At first Mao was forced to take a back seat. But in 1966 and after Mao, backed by the army, came back and organised the so-called 'Cultural Revolution'.

Students and others made a god of Mao, around whom there had always been a Stalin-like cult. They went on a rampage through China, destroying the culture of the past and of the world outside China, denouncing intellectuals, and preaching the miraculous power of 'Mao Zedong thought'. Though sometimes the youth got out of hand, ultimately they were controlled by the army.

To this day the Chinese higher education system is warped and stunted because it came close to being destroyed in that 'Cultural Revolution'. In 1970 there were more teachers than students in China's institutions of higher education.

When Mao Zedong died, those who eventually succeeded him decided on a radical change of course. Breaking with much of Maoism, abjuring the long Maoist search for economic miracles, they went to the other extreme: 'market socialism'.

The central controls and commands over the economy were lessened and weakened. Managers were allowed great leeway in deciding production targets and selling what they produced. Better-endowed areas were encouraged to thrive and differentiate from the rest of the economy.

The peasants were given back the land and allowed to grow things for their own profit, reaped by selling their produce at market. Foreign investment was eagerly sought, both joint state-foreign ventures and straightforward Chinese subsidiaries of international companies.

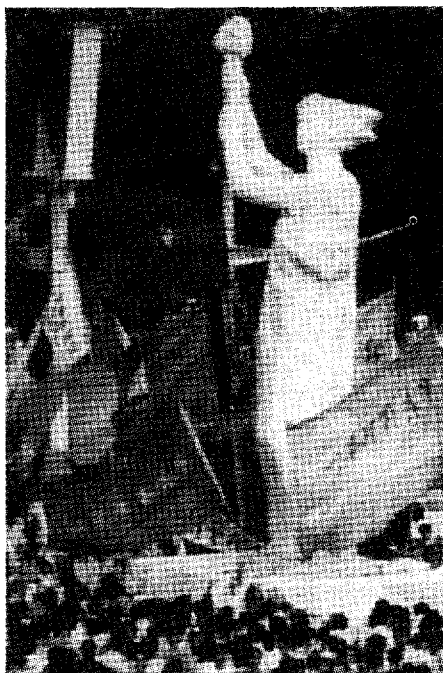
It worked for a while. Industrial pro-

duction advanced, so did food production.

The lessening of economic controls led to a lessening of other controls. The decades of intense Chinese isolationism and chauvinism came to an end. Students were allowed to study in countries like the USA. This international contact would be a factor in inspiring the revolt of 1989.

For over 10 years China has been introducing the sort of 'market socialism' that Gorbachev is aiming for. Like the Russian bureaucrats, China's rulers had no time and no thought for the best alternative to rigid state control: conscious democratic planning of the economy by the proletarians and working farmers.

Such democratic planning is the programme of working-class power in China. It would mean the expropriation of the existing bureaucratic ruling class, and the



The Statue of Liberty in Beijing

rule of another class.

Compared to the old command economy, the 'market socialist' system at least allowed the people to have some choice and gave them some method of expressing preferences, but it was both wasteful and brutal.

It led to chaos: bounding inflation; an unevenness which means, for example, that many factories are idle because of a chronic shortage of energy; massive unemployment, as workers are shaken out of industries where before they had some sort of security, in deference to the new god of profitability.

It has led to tensions between regions, some of which are comparatively thriving while others lag behind.

In short, the changes unleashed the 'war of all against all' characteristic of capitalism — but within, and as part of, a system still heavily weighed down and shaped by the gigantically inflated bureaucratic state, run by the state-party.

The state retains final control, and has power to snuff out the capitalist growths springing up in the areas it controls. The all-powerful Chinese state licensed

capitalists in the '50s and then snuffed them out, though it is unlikely to find it as easy now to stamp out the elements of capitalism that have come into existence in the last decade.

Two parallel but interconnected crises came together to give China's political and social life its peculiarly explosive character: the economic crisis and the crisis of political leadership.

After ten years of reform the Chinese economy is wracked by inflation. It has a bad and worsening balance of payments problem, which means it can't pay for essential imports. The unplanned changes in the economy have created crippling dislocations — dislocations such as the disruption of production by shortages of materials and energy, at least as bad as the dislocations produced by undemocratic and bureaucratic planning.

There is widespread and growing unemployment. In Beijing there are as many homeless people sleeping out as there are in London.

Inequality has grown. So has crime and corruption. China has a peculiarly savage way with robbers and other law-breakers: the state kills upwards of 30,000 such 'criminals' each year, sometimes after parading them around the streets as a warning to onlookers. Even South Africa is moderate by comparison, with a couple of hundred legal killings a year.

Corruption has eaten away at the bureaucracy like a virus. Many officials have become rich through participation in 'market-socialist' enterprises, others through straightforward corruption. For example, the son of Deng Xiaoping, the present leader of the Chinese Stalinists, is widely believed to have sent large sums of money to a foreign bank account out of funds collected to help disabled people. (He himself is in a wheelchair, having been thrown out of a window by 'Red Guards' during the Cultural Revolution).

The issue of corruption links the economic and political crises in China. Corruption and nepotism in China take their present form because of the monopoly of power and patronage held by the ruling party. That monopoly used to be linked to the organising function of the party in the economy and life of the country. Now it begins to seem more and more arbitrary and restrictive, both to the organisers of 'market socialism' and to the students and others who see that access to jobs is linked to patronage and family position in the top bureaucracy. They are against hereditary privileges for the bureaucracy.

The student movement began in April, using as cover the funeral of a reputedly liberal party leader sacked two years ago after the student demonstrations of December 1986 and January 1987. The students raised seven demands. The key ones were for free speech, a free press, and an end to corruption.

Students are more apt to rebel than others because they have a chance to rise out of the normal milieu and to begin to gain some overall picture of the world around them. What have the present Chinese student generation seen around them?

Maoist official ideology was egalitarian; and although the top leaders

enjoyed huge privileges behind the scenes, the ideology had some real grip. That egalitarianism has been replaced by the doctrine of dog eat dog.

But the party elite retains a monopoly of power and control over the allocation of jobs; and that elite is increasingly corrupt, self-serving, and nepotistic.

Some of the students have been overseas to study in bourgeois democracies. They see and hear of change in the Soviet Union. Naturally they want the same in China, where a decade of economic reform has gone without parallel political change and has generated economic chaos and corruption as well as growth.

The Maoist regime began not in 1949, with the declaration of the People's Republic of China, but twenty years earlier, with the defeat of the Chinese working-class movement at the hands of Chiang Kai Shek.

Masses of communist workers were slaughtered by the White Terror. After the Canton uprising of December 1927, the Chinese working class remained prostrate under the heel of Chiang. But it was still alive and capable of reviving — at least until the full-scale Japanese invasion of 1937 crushed political life in the cities.

What happened to the Chinese working class was partly determined by the actions of its political vanguard, the Chinese Communist Party. In 1927 and after that party suffered, so to speak, a three-way split.

There was the 'faction' of the massacred; the faction which eventually became Trotskyist through studying the catastrophe; and the Stalinist faction which eventually came under the sole leadership of Mao.

The Trotskyist faction remained in the cities, took as its historical precedent the policy of the Russian revolutionaries after the defeat of the 1905-7 revolution, and continued to try to organise in the proletariat. In the aftermath of the defeat, it was inevitably slow work, conducted under continuing White Terror.

The Maoist faction took another road. They went into the countryside and organised their own armies. There was little effective central state power in China; in some areas there was not even any effective local state power. The Maoists conquered a succession of territories, forming a sort of itinerant state until the mid-'30s, after which they held territory continuously.

After the breakdown of the moribund empire in 1911, China had been plagued for over a decade by the rule of the so-called 'warlords' — militarists who were local kings in their areas. Chiang Kai Shek overcame the warlords, doing deals with some of them, and forcibly united China in 1928 — just at the point where the Stalinists effectively created the most powerful of the warlord forces, a force that would eventually destroy Chiang Kai Shek.

That is the essence of it — Stalinist warlordism. For in 1927, when Chiang Kai Shek turned on the communist

workers, there was more to it than the state's butchers being turned on the people. There was a split in Chiang's own apparatus.

Many of the communists, and future Stalinists, had positions in Chiang's army. General Chu Teh created the first communist army by leading a revolt of one of Chiang's units in August 1927.

The Whampoa Military Academy, where after 1922 Chiang's Guomindang officers were trained, had been run by instructors from the USSR, and communist officers had also been trained there.

The Mao/Chu Teh group was not short of trained military personnel. They based themselves on the peasantry in some of the most backward areas of China, organised and fomented rebellion, recruited many tens of thousands of peasants into their 'Communist Party', and built up their own military apparatus, creating a local state power counterposed to Chiang's state.

The party gradually ceased to be a political selection, and became more or less identical with the cadres of the Maoist army. The Chinese Communist Party did not cease to have some presence in the towns; nor did it abjure organising the



Sun Yat-sen, founder of the Guomindang. Under Chiang Kai Shek the GMD was transformed into a military/police machine.

working class. But more and more it withdrew from the towns, until by the mid-'30s it had no influence or implantation in the towns worth speaking of.

Because of the weakness of the central state, the poor communications and transport, and the vast distances, the Maoist 'warlords' could resist the central state's drives against them. Chiang, who saw the Maoists for the threat they proved to be, hammered away at them for years without success until, in 1934, they were driven to make the year-long Long March from their base in Kiangsi north-west to Yenan.

The Stalinists suffered tremendous casualties, but they survived and, in 1935, the itinerant Maoist state established itself in Yenan, close to the USSR border. Soon Chinese Stalinism took the essential shape it would have in 1949.

The party/army ruled over perhaps 80 million people, in backward conditions. They mobilised and organised the peasants. Until 1937 they organised peasant class struggle against the landlords; but the Maoist military machine retained the power to do what Mao would describe

as manipulating the 'contradictions among the people'.

The Maoist crypto-state was organised on the model of Stalin's USSR. They replicated Stalin's purges of 'Trotskyists', and proudly called their own political police the 'GPU', after Stalin's.

But so far, this was no more than an enlarged piece of warlordism, with a durability given to it by the revolutionary aspirations of its core and the important distinction of treating the peasants as human beings, albeit human beings subordinated to the Maoist apparatus.

The Maoists were walled off in a very backward part of China, which had no cities and was poor in resources. Their prospects of conquering all China were not very good. The political situation had to change fundamentally before their prospects would change.

Chiang Kai Shek's Guomindang regime nominally controlled all of China except the 'Red' areas by 1928. The GMD had begun as an ineffective and loose bourgeois-liberal electoral alliance. In 1922 it was reorganised on 'Bolshevik' party lines with the help of Communist International (CI) experts. It became a centralised, hierarchical party — and one with its own army and its own officers' training academy, initially staffed by experts from the USSR.

The GMD was associated with the Communist International, and Chiang Kai Shek was elected an honorary member of the presidium of Stalin's CI! It was a bourgeois party, but a party of a backward and very weak bourgeoisie — moreover, a bourgeoisie tied to the landlords even more closely than the Russian bourgeoisie had been by 1917 — and a bourgeois party organised as a militarised 'combat organisation'.

It was a bourgeois political movement capable of a high degree of independence from the bourgeoisie. This was very important for what happened to the GMD and to the Chinese bourgeoisie.

The bourgeoisie did not like the GMD, and nor did the imperialist powers which had control of large parts of cities like Shanghai and Beijing. Chiang's treacherous massacre of his communist allies in 1927 changed all that. He made his peace with the imperialists and with the remaining unconquered warlords, and the GMD settled down to rule China.

What might at the beginning have been a movement whose core members were motivated by ideals higher than getting rich, degenerated rapidly into a corrupt bureaucratic apparatus for plundering China. Chiang Kai Shek himself was reputed to be comparatively honest, but his wife was a member of the rich, plundering, capitalist Soong family.

Despite the corruption, the GMD police state — as it soon became — was a formidable power. Then the Japanese intervened.

They invaded Manchuria in 1931, and set up a puppet kingdom there called Manchukuo. In 1937 they invaded the rest of China, and quickly controlled over half the country, including the cities. This was the test for Chiang.

He failed it spectacularly. A national war of defence and liberation, to prevent the enslavement of China, was the burn-

ing necessity. It was endorsed and advocated by everyone from the Chinese bourgeoisie to the Stalinists and Trotskyists. Though the GMD regime was still a formidable force against the Chinese opposition, it was almost helpless before the Japanese onslaught, unable to mobilise and organise the people. Chiang seemed more concerned to prosecute his ten-year-old war against the Chinese Stalinists than to defend China. Chiang was increasingly discredited.

In 1935 the Stalinists had made the turn towards Popular Front politics made by the Communist Parties everywhere. Now they called for a national front against the Japanese. This became an increasingly popular demand as the Japanese cut through China. It found echoes within Chiang's own army and party.

On the border with the Stalinist-held territories, the GMD officers made a private truce with the Stalinists. Chiang came to put a stop to it and was made prisoner by his own officers, who were now working closely with the Stalinists. After consulting Stalin in Moscow, the Maoists decided to release Chiang on condition that he agreed to an anti-Japanese alliance with the CP's 'state'. He agreed, and the second 'United Front' period, 1937-46, began.

The Stalinists made huge concessions — on paper. They would accept Chiang as head of state, subordinate their army to his high command, dissolve the rural 'soviets', and cease being hostile to the landlords. But in fact they made few concessions in substance. They retained their own armies and their own control of those armies, whatever was said. In effect it was an alliance of states, with the Stalinist state keeping its de facto sovereignty.

The initial result was to stiffen the resistance to the Japanese. But the corrupt GMD increasingly tried to get out of the firing line by way of local accommodations with the Japanese. The CP increased in power, strength, and credibility with layers of the people of China, and the GMD was weakened, discredited, and rendered more decrepit as a ruling force.

Even the bourgeoisie was alienated. The GMD now used the state, which it 'owned', to pillage and expropriate sections of the bourgeoisie, going far beyond the previous corruption.

Backed by the USA, which had advisers in China, and indeed had soldiers there during World War 2 and until 1946, the bourgeoisie organised the 'Democratic League' in an attempt to regain direct power. But the Democratic League was smashed up by the GMD police state, and its leaders driven into exile in Hong Kong. Most of the bourgeoisie had been eliminated as a political force.

The decrepit GMD 'party-state', hated by intellectuals, bourgeois, peasants and workers alike, faced the vigorous Maoist 'party-state', whose standing was high with large sections of all those classes and which organised the peasants as its base everywhere it went. The Maoists took much of the credit for the Chinese resistance to Japan, and they said (sincerely or otherwise) that they wanted to continue the alliance with Chiang after Japan surrendered to the US and Britain in 1945.



Chiang Kai Shek (front left) with his generals, American and Chinese

Chiang launched a new civil war in 1946, throwing million-strong well-armed armies against the numerically inferior forces of the Stalinists. But his regime was even more rotten now than it had been before 1937, when it had failed to destroy a much weaker Stalinist movement.

Whole armies went over to the Stalinists, taking their equipment with them. In 1948 the Stalinists occupied major cities, returning there in force for the first time in 20 years. In 1949 the GMD regime, led by Chiang, fled to Taiwan, where it rules to this day. In October Mao declared the People's Republic of China.

Symbolically, Mao's armies surrounded the cities and conquered them. Even Chiang Kai Shek had used working-class risings to capture cities like Shanghai in the '20s. Not Mao. The workers were strictly told to stay at work and not to strike or take any action against the employers.

Symbolic too was what the Maoists did to the grave of the first secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, Chen Duxiu. Chen had carried out Stalin's disastrous policy in 1925-7 against his own judgment, observing CI discipline, and then had been scapegoated for the catastrophe. He became a Trotskyist, was jailed by the GMD, and died in 1942. The triumphant Stalinists overturned and destroyed his gravestone.

Chinese Stalinism came, so to speak, out of the mountains and the wildernesses fully formed and able to take control of society. It had its model of society — Stalin's USSR. It camouflaged its rule by including remnants of the bourgeoisie in its governments. For seven or eight years it allowed the bourgeoisie to flourish as they had long ceased to flourish under Chiang, and then bought the capitalists out, giving them managerial jobs and 7% p.a. on their capital. The Chinese state was still paying this 7% until 1969, and resumed paying in the 1980s.

For 20 years, through many tortuous manoeuvres and zig-zags, the Maoist leaders had been fighting tenaciously to overthrow the old order. (The pseudo-Trotskyist argument that the Maoists were forced to take power by 'the pressure of the masses' is utterly baseless). The Maoists had also, in that time, been shaping, augmenting, steeling and perfecting

the instrument of rule of a new class of state bureaucrats.

The resulting socio-economic formation was characterised — in many ways like the ancient Chinese empire — by the preponderance of the gigantic state machine and its political control over the economy. Through that military-political control over the economy, it was able over decades to engage in wild experiments in 'social engineering', completely outside the control of the masses who bore the cost of it in their lives and, for millions of them, in the loss of their lives.

But, though the elite could crudely control the people and the economy, they could not at will escape China's backwardness and paucity of natural resources. Their attempts to do so by seeking economic miracles only added to the difficulties. The latest zig-zag, towards market economics, has provoked new convulsions, which are far from over.

On 6 July 1989 there was a general strike in Beijing. There have been strikes in other cities. Workers have organised independent trade unions — and suffered terrible repression.

The Stalinist troops surrounded Beijing, as in 1949. Then the cities were passive or welcoming. Now the cities were vibrant and alive, rejecting the Stalinist state power. As if by a miracle, the Chinese nation has come back to autonomous life. The iron tombstone of the Stalinist regime has lost its power to hold it in stillness.

The regime had no authority in Beijing, nor in many other cities. Probably the regime still retains support in the countryside. The farmers have had a serious degree of self-determination restored to them in the last ten years. They have had the benefits of a radical land reform carried out by the Deng regime, and many of them have known far greater prosperity than in a generation.

Even so, the legitimacy of the regime has been seriously shaken with large sections of the Chinese people. They will not believe the regime's lies about what happened. A whole generation of students have been made into bitter critics and enemies of the regime. They will be a revolutionary leaven throughout Chinese society, despite the Stalinist reign of terror.

The students have organised independent student unions. Some workers organised independent trade unions; the leaders of that movement were among the first to be arrested, even before the massacre in Tiananmen Square. Almost certainly some underground organisation will survive.

Whereas Russian Stalinism rose on the grave of the October 1917 workers' revolution, the Chinese Stalinists led a revolution. As a result of that the Maoist regime had great credit with the people, despite its bungling and its repression. It was a powerful nationalist force which had restored self-determination to the Chinese people and unified China. It was a regime whose members were not individually corrupt, though the ruling elite

was a privileged class.

All that, as it has been exhausted over the last decade. Individual corruption has eaten into the party and the state machine. A process comparable to the degeneration and corruption which rotted the GMD has progressed very far in the Chinese Stalinist polity over the last decade. The old Jacobin egalitarian ethos which Maoism provided for the masses (though the elite did very well for themselves behind closed doors) has given way to a new ethos of self-enrichment.

Only a few have got rich. The resulting damage to the standing of the ruling party has been massive. Now its open resort to mass terror must surely destroy what remains of its legitimacy.

The long historical episode of Chinese Stalinism in power as the leader of a great nation-reshaping revolution is over. The drive of the people to act for themselves and to slough off the carapace of the all-powerful state has been demonstrated mightily.

The Chinese workers have come from being a crushed and atomised mass, ground under the state, to be a mighty force. The natural weapon of the workers in the Stalinist states is the mass strike. It was the weapon in East Germany in 1953, in Poland and Hungary in 1956, and Poland in 1980. It made its appearance in China in May and June 1989. Nothing will ever be the same again — however long the reign of terror lasts at its present intensity.

Their experience of struggle will give great encouragement to the Chinese masses in the battles they face against the effects of the economic chaos created by the combination of bureaucratic tyranny and market economics. Whatever the bureaucracy does, whichever way it turns, the economic chaos will be immense. If the free market is allowed to go as it is going, many tens of millions of workers will become unemployed. But to restore centralisation will be difficult. All the conditions exist in China for a series of major working-class struggles.

In Poland a mass independent trade union, Solidarnosc, emerged in 1980 in a mass strike movement; it was the result not alone of the immediate conflict between workers and rulers in the strikes of summer 1980, but also of a long experience — the semi-revolution of 1956, the strike movements of 1970 and 1976. In those struggles the women and men who built Solidarnosc in 1980 and after gained experience and clarity.

We cannot know how long such a process will take in China, but we can be certain that it is already underway.

The reappearance on the political stage of the Chinese proletariat is also the right time to draw a balance sheet on those socialists who, for many years, accepted the present butchers of the Chinese workers as the protagonists in the Chinese workers' revolution.

In the 1940s, the survival of Stalin's

system in the USSR and the expansion of Stalinism, together with the creation of autonomous state-monopoly systems by revolutionary Stalinists in Yugoslavia and China, threw the Trotskyist movement into an immense and prolonged crisis. Incoherently still hanging on to the working-class socialist programme of Trotsky, the Trotskyists responded to the survival and expansion of Stalinism by saying that it was the spread of world revolution across the globe in a 'deformed' way.

The argument had echoes from a century earlier. In 1850-1 the Communist League, for which Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels had written the *Communist Manifesto* in 1847, was convulsed by a division which led finally to a bitter split.

The division was about the European revolutionary movements of 1848-9 and the conclusions to be drawn from their defeat.

Marx declared: *"We tell the workers: If you want to change conditions and make yourselves capable of government, you will have to undergo fifteen, twenty or fifty years of civil war. Now they are told [by the opposing faction in the Communist League]: We must come to power immediately or we might as well go to sleep."*

The word 'proletariat' has been reduced to a mere phrase, like the word 'people' was by the democrats. To make this phrase a reality one would have to declare the entire petty bourgeoisie to be proletarians, i.e. de facto represent the petty bourgeoisie and not the proletariat. In place of actual revolutionary development one would have to adopt the revolutionary phrase."

Willich and Schapper, Marx's opponents in the Communist League, insisted that immediate revolution was still on the agenda. In somewhat the same way, the Trotskyists of the late '40s responded to the defeats of the working class East and West by asserting that it was still the epoch of revolution. Anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist revolutions were being made; so they had to be working-class revolutions, even though they had not been made by the working class and they 'seemed' very far from any of the old ideas of socialist revolution.

For China, the Trotskyists were led by this sort of reasoning to identify the Stalinist 'Communist' Party as the agency (for now, and in a deformed way) of the working-class socialist revolution. The Maoists had made a revolution; it must be the socialist revolution they had made, albeit in a deformed way.

If Stalin had dug the grave of the Russian Revolution, Mao had led the Chinese Revolution to victory, though unfortunately he had bureaucratic tendencies. All that Marxists could do if they were not going to be 'normative sectarians' was face the facts and offer advice and friendly criticism to those who were actually leading the revolution. They wrote letters to the Central Committee of Mao's party which, as late as 1960, began 'Dear Comrades...'

Working-class democracy would of course have been better than Mao's bureaucratism, it was said, but that was for the future. Indeed, the cunning of the World Revolution would ensure its

development in the future. Trotskyists could not count on the workers' revolution; but they could not counterpose themselves to the real revolutionary process by calling on the Chinese workers to fight to overthrow Mao, or advocating a new workers' revolution. Even a call for the sort of supplementary ('political') revolution which Trotsky had called for in the USSR after 1935 (and which the post-Trotsky Trotskyists continued to advocate for the USSR) would be sectarian for China.

For nearly 20 years after Mao conquered all of mainland China in 1949, the mainstream Trotskyists, led by Ernest Mandel and Michel Pablo (Raptis), refused to accept that the Chinese working class would have to act independently to overthrow the oppressive Stalinist state. The Maoists were — for now — the agency of the real revolutionary process. Mandel and Pablo gave immense political and moral credit to them. When the Maoists organised the 'Great Leap Forward' in 1958-60 — and tens of millions starved to death in the consequent economic chaos — the Pablo-Mandel press published self-evidently impossible statistics and balance sheets from the Chinese government as proof of the wonders such a progressive regime could do.

In 1959 the Chinese government brutally took full control of Tibet, which had been brought back under loose Chinese jurisdiction in 1950 after half a century of de facto independence. The Trotskyists backed the invasion as a progressive extension of the Chinese revolution.

Now the Chinese working class has reappeared on the political scene, to confront the Stalinist butchers who rule China. It marks the end of an epoch. It sheds a cold light on the would-be socialist politics that, for a prolonged period, accepted those Stalinists as the agency of socialist revolution in place of the proletariat.

Like a grotesque parody of the Willich-Schapper faction, the mainstream Trotskyists in the late '40s and early '50s refused to recognise the scale of the defeats suffered by the working class at the hands of both the capitalists and the Stalinists. They maintained their belief in the proletarian revolution by accepting *something completely different* as representing that revolution — in a deformed way, and for the time being.

Willich ended up as an officer in Abraham Lincoln's Union army during the US Civil War (Marx also supported Lincoln, of course); but it is not recorded that Willich or Schapper or their friends justified their 'perspectives' by gross and quixotic delusions about the world around them as the Mandel-Pablo current did and do.

There were deep reasons, of course, for the confusion which led so far astray people who were sincerely devoted to the international proletariat and who did their best to uphold some of the ideas of revolutionary socialism. Those are outside the scope of this editorial. But the reappearance of the Chinese proletariat is the right time to draw a balance on the nonsense which has passed for Trotskyism for so many years.