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Political reaction in China:

The Beijing trials

If the current leaders of the Chinese government felt even the slightest revolutionary responsibility to the international working class and the oppressed peoples of the world, to whom the Chinese Revolution was a beacon lighting the way in the struggle against capitalist exploitation and imperialist oppression, they would bring down the curtain on the forthcoming trials even before they start.

These trials can do no good whatsoever for the group that now holds power in China, or for further progress in the struggle for the socialist transformation of the People's Republic.

Trials discredit Chinese Revolution

The staging of the trials, with their long list of alleged lurid and spectacular crimes involving torture, murder, attempted assassination, and the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives, can only help discredit world communism and socialism and create a wave of revulsion, not merely against the defendants in the trial, but against the Chinese Revolution itself.

The very idea of projecting trials many years after the commission of the alleged crimes and of including in the dock defendants who have been dead for almost a decade in itself makes the trials suspect, even before they start. To this should be added, as all the world knows by this time, that the principal defendants have been incarcerated for over four years without any opportunity to state their case.

In addition, since the day Jiang Qing, Zhang Chunqiao, Wang Hongwen, and Yao Wenyuan were arrested in October, 1976, the Chinese press has carried out a vituperative campaign against them without any letup. The Chinese mass media, as well as all the official publications, have carried on an uninterrupted campaign against the defendants, charging them with the most preposterous crimes, ranging from wrecking the economy to sabotaging socialist construction. They are even charged with attempting to overthrow the regime of Mao Zedong, even though the four claim to be his principal adherents and defenders.

Lump together all left opponents

For the government to frame indictments covering both the Lin Biao group as well as the Jiang Qing group, whom the Beijing leaders have good reason to know were at odds with each other, is a crude attempt at a criminal amalgam; the current right-wing grouping in the Chinese leadership wants to put all its left-wing and revolutionary opponents under one umbrella.

But it will not stand the test of careful, critical examination from the point of view of facts or even historical context.

What do the Beijing leaders hope to achieve by staging this odious spectacle? Certainly it's an attempt to ingratiate themselves with world bourgeois public opinion, to strengthen their image in the camp of imperialism of bourgeois respectability.

The international bourgeoisie has always applauded the efforts of moderate elements of a revolutionary movement to exterminate and frame the left-wing revolutionaries. Hasn't this been so since the French Revolution down even to this day? Such bloodletting only whets the appetite of the imperialists for further and more extensive purges until the very executioners themselves become victims of the developing reaction.

Treat political issues as criminal offenses

The Beijing leaders have made much pretense in recent weeks about this being a real honest-to-goodness judicial proceeding. But the very framing of the indictments, at least those portions which have been released to the press thus far, makes a mockery of the charges.

In the first place, the setup for the conduct of the trials and the broad and sweeping charges made in the indictments give every reason to believe that they will be conducted in the spirit of a police inquiry, not a working-class court of justice. The defendants are to be charged as criminals and the trials are to be conducted like criminal proceedings.

But these trials, if they take place, are in reality political trials. The attempt to confuse the two merely indicates that the Beijing leaders have descended to the level of treating a political struggle of great historical dimensions as a case of criminal conduct. This is completely in the spirit of all the repressive regimes which the oppressing class has visited upon the oppressed and exploited masses, where mass rebellions and general insurrections are treated as "riots," "trespassing upon property rights," and "subversion of entrenched authority."

Weren't even the Communards of Paris treated as criminals and wasn't the setting up of the Commune itself regarded as a riotous act? This is not to say that the defendants in any way can be properly accused of an attempt at insurrection. Nevertheless, to make the pending trials a means for listing alleged criminal acts of murder, assassination, torture, and so on, is to descend to the police theory of history, where naked struggles for power alternate between one group of conspirators and another and where there is no rhyme nor reason except the pursuit of naked power.

What about the materialist interpretation of history? What happened to the view that the class struggle, the struggle between the privileged upper strata and the mass of workers and peasants, is the driving force of history? This seemingly has no place in the approach the present leaders are taking to their opponents.

Why do they fear a political trial?

Were the Beijing leaders of a mind to pursue a political trial, there would be only one way to conduct it which might conceivably be fair to the defendants. That, of course, would entail not a police recitation of alleged crimes but a precise formulation of the political issues which divided the defendants from their opponents, who are now the prosecutors.

Yes, a political trial means a thorough and comprehensive review of the very profound issues which stirred the souls of the millions upon millions of workers, students, and peasants in a decade of revolutionary struggle unprecedented in the history of the class struggle in China. Yes, it means a **real** review of the Cultural Revolution and not a police blotter vilification of it.

Can't Deng group stand on their record?

The new Beijing leaders ought not be fearful of such a review. After all, they have been in power for over four years. They have had the reins of the economy completely in their hands. They have reorganized production according to their view. Instead of "politics in command," as was the position of the left, we have now had the pragmatists with their material incentives, their market socialism, and their decentralizing efforts calculated to make profit—supposedly in an effort to raise production.

Individual initiative, material incentive, and the revival of the capitalist market geared to the world imperialist market have had an untrammeled opportunity for almost four years to prove their case.

If the recipes of Deng Xiaoping and his cohorts have been as successful as they claim, they should not be fearful of permitting the defendants full oppportunity to state their case before the entire Chinese public, with free access to the media and the press.

They should be permitted to have lawyers of their own choice. They should be free from incarceration. They should be permitted to visit friends and co-thinkers and be guaranteed immunity in the course of propagating and preparing a political review of the overall causes and consequences of the triumph of the right-wing elements in the party struggle which went on for over a decade.

What have we got instead? A presentment of a criminal indictment against the revolutionary wing of the party, framed in a policeman's jargon. The dice have been completely loaded and no opportunity at all has been afforded for even a scintilla of truth to escape in what will certainly be a ghoulish attempt to rewrite an entire revolutionary epoch in terms favored by the governing group of reactionaries. The *People's Daily* has already determined the verdict when it wrote today that the defendants "will be nailed to the pillar of shame."

Struggle over political line

The struggle which provoked the Cultural Revolution and continued over the past decade was not between criminals and defenders of the social order. It was a struggle of two political tendencies inside the same party which over the course of years became politically incompatible.

One group sought to bring society forward on the basis of expanding and intensifying the struggle against the revival of bourgeois elements and bourgeois modes of conduct within the party, the government, and in the country as a whole. The other group saw this development as both necessary and desirable in their view of socialist construction.

The former, however, felt it was in the interest of rapid socialist construction to restrict bourgeois right, even though bourgeois right is necessary in a transition period from capitalism to socialism.

The danger which the revolutionary elements saw was that their opponents' path could lead to capitalist restoration. Hence the term "capitalist roaders," which was the accusation cast upon the current leaders.

Great leap to the right

What have the last four years shown? Capitalism as a social system has not, of course, been restored in China. But long strides in that direction have certainly been taken, both on the home front and in foreign relations. The leaders themselves admit this. International imperialist monopolies are roaming all over China. They have been given the green light by the Deng Xiaoping leadership. And China's leaders have entered into a virtual military alliance with U.S. imperialism, forsaking their revolutionary independence and trading it in for a spurious and dubious military alliance against the Soviet Union.

True, they are inhibited by the still-remaining nationalized property and planned economy. But what the bourgeoisie calls "market socialism" has taken on menacing proportions in China, as it has in Poland and much more so in Yugoslavia, which Deng Xiaoping and his followers in the government regard as a model. (Many bourgeois economists no longer regard Yugoslavia as a centrally-planned economy.)

If these so-called experiments in socialism have been successful to the extent of having materially raised the living standards of China and actually increased and expanded its productive forces, as claimed by the new leaders, then what do they have to worry about in submitting their record to a review by their opponents, who are still held under lock and key?

A comprehensive political review of the course of the Deng-Hua leadership cannot be conducted in the framework of a fraudulent criminal indictment against a whole generation of revolutionaries. The Deng-Hua leadership may be able to acquit themselves before this fraudulent bar of justice, but they cannot acquit themselves, and never will, before the bar of history. That judgment, the judgment of history, awaits them nonetheless.

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