

THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION AND THE FALL OF LIN PIAO

PART 2

by SAM MARCY

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MISCONCEPTIONS OF CHINESE REVOLUTION

No social revolution has ever coincided with the conception entertained by the ideologists of its time or its leading participants. Probably the Russian Revolution comes closest to conceptions which were held by its principal leaders. So many misconceptions of the Chinese Revolution prevailed, that years after the triumph of the Revolution and the ouster of Chiang Kai-shek, the class character of the Chinese Revolution was still shrouded in confusion.

Just as the West European social democrats and the Mensheviks in Czarist Russia could not believe that a proletarian revolution was possible in a backward country overwhelmed by a huge preponderance of the peasantry and an ill-developed bourgeoisie, so Western scholars and Marxists to boot, went even further in the case of China and even denied that a proletarian revolution had taken place. They advanced substantially the same erroneous theories as their colleagues in the earlier era and compounded them.

The long years in which the Chinese Red Army led by the CPC was conducting the struggle against the bourgeois-landlord regime of Chiang Kai-shek was characterized as agrarian in its class nature. The CPC itself, regardless of its advocacy of Marxism-Leninism, they explained, was merely promoting an agrarian revolution. This view was particularly rampant in the United States and vigorously pushed by the liberal bourgeoisie, including some of the highest ranking State Department officials, not to speak of the influential liberal publicists such as Owen Lattimore and others.

Some organizations which proclaimed themselves Marxists were

particularly stubborn in promoting this view and even the CP leaders in this country, undoubtedly getting their cue from the Soviet leaders, while expressing solidarity with a fraternal party nonetheless conveyed the impression that they too, in a large measure, regarded it as basically an agrarian revolution successfully carried out. Whether this objectively reflected the arrogance implicit in the attitude of an imperialist ruling class toward a formerly colonial country, only history will be able to confirm. It is at least as likely that the reservations of the Western CP leaders, generally, reflected the fear of the Soviet bureaucracy of the consequences that a proletarian revolution in China would entail in the struggle for leadership over the Communist movement and of the world working class.

As we have seen, the Chinese Revolution can be divided into two great phases. The first one — we are still using the words of Engels — “displaced one definite class rule by another” — in this case the ouster of the bourgeois-landlord class from power and the establishment of what was in essence a Proletarian Dictatorship. But this victorious revolution, like all previous victorious revolutions (at least in European history) became endangered by restorationist elements. What was needed historically, was a second, supplementary revolution, in order to fortify, consolidate, and safeguard the fundamental accomplishment of the first revolution, the new class dictatorship. Hence the Cultural Revolution. In the minds of its participants it might have been conceived as an entirely new revolution, a revolution which had far loftier objectives than the mere safeguarding and securing of new property relations which had already been won more than a decade ago. But the subjective desires of the participants and the objective historical result, while not completely at variance, certainly did not conform with reality as it has unfolded.

HISTORICAL PARALLELS

What was the historical mission of the Jacobin dictatorship? It was to clear the road for the rule of the French bourgeoisie. In France more than anywhere else, feudalism had been extinguished, cut root and branch, by the Revolution. Yet the bourgeoisie did not, until late in the nineteenth century, hold exclusive political power. It again and again fell back to sharing it with other class formations. Even more so in England. The bourgeoisie there never held undivided sway. “Even after the victory of 1832,” says Engels, “the bourgeoisie left the landed aristocracy in almost exclusive possession of the leading government offices.” It took Bismarck to unify Germany. He swept away the feudal obstructions to the development of German capitalism. He himself was, of course, a junker and it was the junker feudal landed aristocracy that dominated Germany. Indeed the German bourgeoisie did not rule directly until the Weimar Republic (after World War I).