Notes Towards a Critique of Maoism

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(Note to the Reader: The following was written at the request of a west coast comrade after he attended the August 2012 "Everything for Everyone" conference in Seattle, at which many members of the "soft Maoist" current Kasama were present. It is a bare-bones history of Maoism which does not bring to bear the full "left communist" viewpoint, leaving out for the example the sharp debates on possible alliances with the "nationalist bourgeoisie" in the colonial and semi-colonial world at the first three congresses of the Communist International. It was written primarily to provide a critical-historical background on Maoism for a young generation of militants who might be just discovering it. –L.G.)

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Maoism was part of a broader movement in the 20th century of what might be called "bourgeois revolutions with red flags", as in Vietnam or North Korea.

To understand this, it is important to see that Maoism was one important result of the DEFEAT of the world revolutionary wave in 30 countries (including China itself) which occurred in the years after World War I. The major defeat was in Germany (1918-1921), followed by the defeat of the Russian Revolution (1921 and thereafter), culminating in Stalinism.

Maoism is a variant of Stalinism[1].

The first phase of this defeat, where Mao and China are concerned, took place in the years 1925-1927, during which the small but very strategically located Chinese working class was increasingly radicalized in a wave of strikes. This defeat closed the 1917-1927 cycle of post-World War I worker struggles, which included (in addition to Germany and

[1] The term "Stalinism" is used here throughout to describe a new form of class rule by a bureaucratic elite that, in different times and different situations, fought against pre-capitalist social formations (as in China) or against Western capitalism. Some, myself included, see Stalinism as "state capitalism"; a smaller number, influenced by the theory of Max Schactman, see it as "bureaucratic collectivism" . Orthodox Trotskyists call Stalinist regimes "deformed workers' states"; the Bordigists simply call it "capitalism"' Marxist-Leninists see such regimes as...socialism. This is a huge debate which has taken place ever since the 1920's but one could do worse than read Walter Daum's *The Life and Death of Stalinism* which, while defending a variant of the Trotskyist view, argues that the Soviet Union and all its "offspring" were state capitalist. Outside those countries where a Stalinist regime has state power, I use the term "Stalinist" to describe those forces which are fighting to establish one, or apologists for one or another version of "real existing socialism".

Russia) mass strikes in Britain, workers councils in northern Italy, vast ferment and strikes in Spain, the "rice riots" in Japan, a general strike in Seattle, and many other confrontations.

By 1925-1927, Stalin controlled the Communist Third International (Comintern). From the beginning of the 1920's, Russian advisors worked closely with the nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) of the bourgeois revolutionary Sun Yat-sen, (leader of the 1911 overthrow of the Manchu dynasty) and with the small but important Chinese Communist Party (CCP), founded in 1921.

The Third International provided political and military aid to the KMT, which was taken over by Chiang kai-shek (future dictator of Taiwan after 1949); the Comintern in the early to mid-1920's viewed the KMT as a "progressive anti-imperialist" force. Many Chinese Communists actually joined the KMT in these years, some secretly, some openly.

Soviet foreign policy in the mid-1920's involved an internal faction fight between Stalin and Trotsky. Trotsky's policy (whatever its flaws, and there were many, including paying little attention to the Chinese crisis until it was too late) was for world revolution as the only solution to the isolation of the Soviet Union. Stalin replied with the slogan "Socialism in One Country" an aberration unheard of until that time in the internationalist Marxist tradition. Stalin in this period was allied with the right opposition leader Nikolai Bukharin against Trotsky; Soviet and Third International policy reflected this alliance in a "right turn" to strong support for bourgeois nationalism abroad. Chiang kai-shek himself was an honorary member of the Third International Executive Board in this period. The Third International advocated strong support for Chiang's KMT in its campaign against the "warlords" closely allied with the landowning gentry.

It is important to understand that in these same years, Mao Zedong (who was not yet the central leader of the party) criticized this policy FROM THE RIGHT, advocating an even *closer* alliance between the CCP and the KMT[2].

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[2] Cf. Stuart Schram, Mao tse-tung (1966). On p. 78, Schram describes Mao's situation in 1925: "Mao combined high office in the Chinese Communist Party with membership in the Shanghai Bureau of the Kuomintang...his colleagues were Wang Ching-wei and Hu Han-min, soon to emerge as leaders respectively of
the left and right wings... (he had to return to Hunan for a rest) ...but there is little doubt that his illness was at least partly diplomatic. He was under heavy attack from those in the Communist Party opposed to an excessive emphasis on cooperation with the Kuomintang...Li li-san derided him as 'Hu Han-min's secretary'..." . Further material is on pp. 83-84.

In the spring of 1927, Chiang kai-shek turned against the CCP and the radicalized working-class, massacring thousands of workers and CCP militants in Shanghai and Canton (now known in the West by its actual Chinese name Guangzhou), who had been completely disarmed by the Comintern's support for the KMT[3]. This massacre ended the CCP's relationship with the Chinese working class and opened the way for Mao to rise to top leadership by the early 1930's.

The next phase of the CCP was the so-called "Third Period" of the Comintern, which was launched in part in response to the debacle in China. In the Soviet Union, Stalin turned on the Bukharinist "right" (there was in reality no one more reactionary than Stalin) after having finished off the Trotskyist left[4]. The Third Period, which lasted from 1928 to 1934, was a period of "ultra-left" adventurism around the world. In China as well as in a number of other colonial and semi-colonial countries, the Third Period involved the slogan of "soviets everywhere". Not a bad slogan in itself, but its practical, voluntarist implementation was a series of disastrous, isolated uprisings in China and Vietnam in 1930 which were totally out of synch with local conditions, and which led to bloody defeats everywhere.

It was in the recovery from these defeats that Mao became the top leader of the CCP, and began the "Long March" to Yan'an (in remote northwestern China) which became a central Maoist myth, and reoriented the CCP to the Chinese peasantry, a much more numerous social class but not, in Marxist terms, a revolutionary class[5] (though it could be an ally of the working-class revolution, as in Russia during the 1917-1921 Civil War).

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[3] All this is recounted in detail by Harold Isaac's book *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution*, first published in 1934 and republished many times since. Readers should be cautioned that Isaacs, a Trotskyist when he wrote the book, later became a "State Department socialist" and toned down the book with each reprint, but later editions still tell the essential story.

[4] These three factions arose after Lenin's death in 1924: the Trotskyist left advocating export of the revolution and an intense industrialization policy based on strong extraction of a surplus from the peasantry; Bukharin argued for "socialism at a snail's pace" with a much laxer attitude toward petty producer capitalism by the peasants, and Stalin "wavering" in between. See on this the review of the book of John Marot in the current issue of IN.

[5] To put it in a nutshell: the historical trajectory of peasants under pre-capitalist conditions has shown itself in most cases to be toward private small-plot cultivation. In such conditions, as in Russia, they can be the allies of a proletarian revolution, in which the "democratic tasks" of socialist revolution by the workers combine with those of the bourgeois revolution (land to the peasants). There is a bourgeois mode of production (capitalism), there is a transition to the communist mode of production in which the working class is the ruling class (socialism); there is no "peasant mode of production", which limits the historical role of peasants to being allies of one dominant class or another.

Japan had invaded Manchuria (northeast China) in 1931 and the CCP from then until the Japanese defeat at the end of World War II was involved in a three-way struggle with the KMT and the Japanese.

After the "Third Period" policy led to the triumph of Hitler in Germany, (where the Communist Party had attacked the "social fascist" Social Democrats, not the Nazis, as the "main enemy", and even worked with the Nazis against the Social Democrats in strikes), the Comintern in 1935 shifted its line again to the "Popular Front", which meant alliances with "bourgeois democratic" forces against fascism. Throughout the colonial and semi-colonial world, the Communist Parties completely dropped their previous anti-colonial struggle and threw themselves into support for the Western bourgeois democracies. In Vietnam and Algeria, for example, they supported the "democratic" French colonial power. In Spain, they uncritically supported the Republic in the Spanish Revolution and Civil War, during which they helped the Republic crush the anarchists (who had two million members), the independent left POUM (Partido Obrero de Unificacion Marxista, "centrist" party denounced at the time as "Trotskyist") and the Trotskyists themselves. These latter forces had taken over the factories in northeastern Spain and established agrarian communes in the countryside. The Republic and the Communists crushed them all, and then lost the Civil War to Franco. The main Soviet goal in Spain was proving its new respectability after forming an anti-Hitler alliance with France in 1935.

In China the Popular Front meant, for the CCP, supporting Chiang kai-shek (who, it will be recalled, had massacred thousands of workers eight years earlier) against Japan.

In the Yan'an refuge of the CCP in these years and through World War II, Mao consolidated his control over the party. His notorious hatchet man Kang Sheng helped him root out any opposition or potential rivals with slanderous rumors, show trials and executions. One memorable case was that of Wang Shiwei. He was a committed Communist and had translated parts of Marx's *Capital* into Chinese. Mao and Kang set him up and put him through several show trials, breaking him and driving him out of the party. (He was finally executed when the CCP left Yan'an in 1947, in the last phase of the civil war against Chiang kai-shek).

Mao's peasant army conquered all of China by 1949. The Chinese working class, which had been the party's base until 1927, played absolutely no role in this supposed "socialist revolution". The one-time "progressive nationalist" Kuomintang was totally discredited as it became the party of the landed gentry, full of corruption, responsible for runaway inflation, and commanded by officers more interested in enriching themselves than fighting either the Japanese (before 1945) or the CCP.

The first phase of Mao's rule was from 1949 to 1957. He made no secret of the fact that the new regime was based on the "bloc of four classes" and was carrying out a bourgeois nationalist revolution. It was essentially the program of the bourgeois nationalist Sun Yat-Sen from 25 years earlier. The corrupt landowning gentry was expropriated and eliminated.

But it is important to remember that "land to the peasants" and the expropriation of the pre-capitalist landholders[6] are the BOURGEOIS revolution, as they have been since the French Revolution of 1789. The regime for this reason was genuinely popular and many overseas Chinese who were not Communists returned to help rebuild the country. Some "progressive capitalists" were retained to continue running their factories. After the chaos of the previous 30 years, this stabilization was a breath of fresh air. The People's Liberation Army also intervened in the Korean War to help Kim il-sung fight the United States and the United Nations forces. But it is also important not to lose sight of the fact that the Korean War was part of a war between the two Cold War blocs, and that what Kim implemented in North Korea after 1953 was another Stalinist "bourgeois revolution with red flags" based on land to the peasants. (North Korea went on to become the first proletarian hereditary monarchy, now in its third incarnation.)

We also have to see the Chinese Revolution in international context. Stalinism (and Maoism is, as mentioned earlier, a variant of Stalinism) emerged from World War II stronger than ever, having appropriated all of eastern Europe, winning in China, on its way to power in (North) Korea and Vietnam, and had huge prestige in struggles around the colonial and semi-colonial world (which was renamed the Third World as the Cold War divided the globe into two antagonistic blocs centered on the U.S. and the Soviet Union).

There is no question that Mao and the CCP were somewhat independent of Stalin and the Soviet Union. They were their own type of Stalinists. They were also a million miles from the power of soviets and workers' councils that had initially characterized the Russian and German Revolutions, on which basis the Comintern was originally founded in 1919. That is a thorny question that is too complex to be unraveled here. But from 1949 until the Sino-Soviet split in 1960, the Soviet Union sent thousands of technicians and advisors to China, and trained thousands more Chinese cadre in Soviet universities and institutes, as had been the case since the 1920's. The "model" established in power in the 1950's was essentially the Soviet model, adapted to a country with an even more overwhelming peasant majority than was the case in Russia.

World Stalinism was rocked in 1956 by a series of events: the Hungarian Revolution, in which the working class again established workers' councils before it was crushed by Russian intervention; the Polish "October", in which a worker revolt brought to power a "reformed" Stalinist leadership. These uprisings were preceded by Khruschev's speech to the 20th Congress of world Communist Parties, in which he revealed many of Stalin's crimes, including the massacre of between five to ten million peasants during the collectivizations of the early 1930's. There were many crimes he did not mention, since he was too implicated in them, and the purpose of his speech was to salvage the Stalinist bureaucracy while disavowing Stalin himself. This was the beginning of "peaceful co-existence" between the Soviet bloc and the West, but the revelations of Stalin's crimes and the worker revolts in eastern Europe (following the 1953 worker uprising in East Germany) were the beginning of the end of the Stalinist myth. Bitterly disillusioned

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militants all over the world walked out of Communist Parties, after finding out that they had devoted decades of their lives to a lie.

Khruschev's 1956 speech is often referred to by later Maoists as the triumph of "revisionism" in the Soviet Union. The word "revisionism" is itself ideology run amok, since the main thing that was being "revised" was Stalinist terror, which the Maoists and Marxist-Leninists by implication consider to be the "dictatorship of the proletariat". There were between 10 and 20 million people in forced labor camps in the Soviet Union in 1956, and presumably their release (for those who survived years of slave labor, often at the Arctic Circle) was part of "revisionism". For the Maoists, the Khruschev speech is often also identified with the "restoration of capitalism", showing how superficial their "Marxism" is, with the existence of capitalism being based not on any analysis of real social relationships but on the ideology of this or that leader.

Khruschev's speech was not well received by Mao and the leaders of the CCP, whose own regimented rule of China was becoming increasingly unpopular[7]. Thus the regime launched a new phase, called the "Hundred Flowers" campaign, in which the "bourgeois intellectuals" who had rallied to the regime, recoiling from the brutality of the KMT, were invited to "let a hundred flowers bloom" and openly voice their criticisms.

The outpouring of criticism was of such an unexpected volume that it was quickly shut down by Mao and the CCP, who began to characterize the "Hundred Flowers" campaign as "letting the snakes out of their holes" in order to "smash" them once and for all. Many critics were arrested and sent off to forced labor camps.

Internationally, however, Maoism began to become an international tendency, becoming attractive to some people who had left the pro-Soviet Communist Parties after Khrushchev's speech. This was a hard-core ultra-Stalinist minority (who felt, for example, that their own country's CP had not supported the Soviet invasion to crush the Hungarian Revolution forcefully enough). By the early 1960's, in the U.S., Europe and around the Third World, these currents would become the "Marxist-Leninist" parties aligned with China against both the United States and Soviet "social imperialism".

In China itself, the regime needed to shift gears after the disaster of the Hundred Flowers period. There was growing tension at the top levels of the CCP between Mao and the more Soviet-influenced technocratic bureaucrats, who were focused on building up heavy industry. This was the factional situation that led to the "Cultural Revolution" that erupted in 1965.

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[7] See for example Ygael Gluckstein's early book *Mao's China* (1955), particularly the chapter entitled "The Regimentation of the Working Class". Gluckstein (who later became better known under his pseudonym Tony Cliff, leader of the British International Socialists and then renamed the Socialist Workers' Party) was the first person to systematically analyze China as a form of state capitalism.

Therefore Mao launched the country in 1958 on the so-called "Great Leap Forward", in which Soviet-style heavy industry was to be replaced by enlisting peasants in small industrial "backyard" production everywhere. The peasants were forced into the "People's Communes" and set to work to catch up with the economic level of the capitalist West in 10-15 years. Everywhere pots, pans and utensils as well as family heirlooms were melted down for backyard small kilns to produce steel, at killing paces of work. The result was a huge drain of peasant labor away from raising crops, leading to famine by 1960-1961 in which an estimated 10-20 million people starved to death[8].

The debacle of the "Great Leap Forward" was also a terrible blow to Mao's standing within the CCP. It represented an extreme form of the kind of voluntarism, at the expense of real material conditions, which had always characterized Mao's thinking, as summed up in his famous line about "painting portraits on the blank page of the people" (some Marxist!)[9]. The Soviet- influenced technocrats around Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping basically kicked Mao upstairs into a symbolic figurehead, too important to purge outright but stripped of all real power. Thus the battle lines were drawn for what became, a few years later, the "Cultural Revolution".

The "Cultural Revolution" was Mao's attempt at a comeback[10]. It was a factional struggle at the top level of the CCP in which millions of university and high school students were

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[8] Some estimates are much higher. Researchers disagree on the severity of the famine. One influential figure is provided by Judith Banister, who estimates that 30 million excess deaths occurred during 1958-1961. Judith Banister, *China's Changing Population* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987). A much higher estimate (50-60 million) was recently made by Frank Dikotter, in his controversial *Mao's Great Famine*.Past a certain point, the exact figures are not so important as the unmitigated disaster caused by the policy.

[9] Apparently neither Mao nor any other member of the CCP had read Marx at the time of its founding in 1921. They emerged out of the many ideological influences current in East Asia before World War I: socialism (vaguely understood), anarchism, Tolstoyan pacificism, and Henry Georgism, among others. "Voluntarism" as the term is used here refers to such episodes as the Great Leap Forward, or the (above-mentioned) characterization of the Soviet bloc as "capitalist" based on Khruschev's speech, or the (more idealist) definition of class in the Cultural Revolution not by an individual's relation to the means of production but by their family background or "revisionist" ideas. For background on the voluntarist ideologies current at the time of the founding of the CCP, cf. Maurice Meisner, *Li ta-chao and the Origins of Chinese Marxism*; on Mao's voluntarism inherited from his early reading of Kant, cf. Frederic Wakeman, *History and will; philosophical perspectives of Mao Tse-tung's thought*.

[10] The most important analysis of the Cultural Revolution in these terms is Simon Leys' *Chairman Mao's New Clothes*, published in French in 1969 and translated into English a few years later. Leys also wrote brilliant books on the cultural desert created by Maoism in power, both before and after the Cultural Revolution: *Chinese Shadows*, *The Burning Fores*t, and *Broken Images*. His work is required reading for anyone nostalgic for the"Cultural Revolution" today.

mobilized everywhere to attack "revisionism" and return Mao to real power. But this factional struggle, and the previous marginalization of Mao that lay behind it, was hardly advertised as the real reason for this process in which tens of thousands of people were killed and millions of lives were wrecked[11]. China was thrown into ideology run amok on a scale arguably even greater than under Stalin at the peak of his power. Millions of educated people suspected of "revisionism", (or merely the victims of some personal feud) including technicians and scientists, were sent off to the countryside ("rustification") to "learn from the peasants", which in reality involved them in crushing forced labor in which many were worked to death. "Politics was in command" with party ideologues, and not surgeons, in charge of medical operations in Chinese hospitals, with predictable consequences. Schools were closed for three years in the cities—though not in the countryside-- (1966-1969) while young people from universities and high schools ran around the country humiliating and sometimes killing people designated by the Maoist faction as a "revisionist" and a "Liu Shaoqi capitalist roader" (Liu Shaoqi himself died of illness in prison). The economy was wrecked. In 1978, when Deng Xiaoping (who also performed hard rural labor during these years) returned to power, Chinese agricultural production per capita was no higher than it had been in 1949.

In such a situation, where revisionist rule was to be replaced by "people's power" , things got out of hand with some currents who took Mao's slogan "It is right to rebel" a bit too far, and began to question the whole nature of CCP rule since 1949. In these cases, as in the "Shanghai Commune" of early 1967, the People Liberation Army (PLA) had to step in against an independent formation that included radicalized workers. The PLA was in fact one of the main "winners" of the Cultural Revolution, for its role in stamping out currents that became a third force against both the "capitalist roaders" and the Maoists. (During all this, Kang Sheng, the hatchet man of Yan'an, returned to power and helped vilify, oust and sometimes execute Mao's factional opponents, as he had done the first time around.)

Perhaps the most interesting case of things "going too far", along with the brief Shanghai Commune, before the army marched in, was the Shengwulian current in Mao's own Hunan province. There, workers and students who had gone through the whole process produced a series of documents that became famous throughout China, analyzing the country as being under the control of a "new bureaucratic ruling class". While the Shengwulian militants disguised their viewpoint with bows to the "thought of Mao tse-tung" and "Marxism-Leninism", their texts were read throughout China, and at the top levels of the party itself, where they were clearly recognized for what they were: a fundamental challenge to both factions in power. They were mercilessly crushed[12].

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[11] Some flavor of these events is described by the liberal academic Song Yongyi. His book on the massacres of the Cultural Revolution is unfortunately only in French and in Chinese. He also edited an *Encyclopedia of the Cultural Revolution* which is dry and academic.

[12] For Shengwulian's most important statement (1968) see their text "Whither China?", http://signalfire.org/?p=6810 .

Further interesting critiques to emerge from the years of the Cultural Revolution were those written by Yu Luoke, at the time an apprentice worker, and later, the manifesto of Wei Jingsheng, a 28-year-old electrician at the Beijing Zoo on the "Democracy Wall" in Beijing in 1978[13]. Yu's text was, like Shengwulian's, diffused and read all over China. It was a critique of the Cultural Revolution's "bloodline" definition of "class" by family background and politically reliability, rather than by one's relationship to the means of production. Yu was executed for his troubles in 1970. The Democracy Wall, which was supposed to accompany Deng Xiaoping's return to power, also got out of hand and was suppressed in 1979.

Mao's faction re-emerged triumphant by 1969. This included his wife, Jiang Qing, and three other co-factioneers who would be arrested and deposed as the "Gang of Four"[14] shortly after Mao's death in 1976[15]. This victory, it is often overlooked, coincided with the beginning of Mao's quiet outreach to the United States as a counter-weight to the Soviet Union. There was active but local combat between Chinese and Soviet forces along their mutual border in 1969, and as a result Mao banned all transit of Soviet material support to North Vietnam and the Viet Cong, a ban which remained in effect until the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. Mao received U.S. President Nixon in Beijing in early 1972, while the U.S. was raining bombs on North Vietnam.

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[13] See http://www.rjgeib.com/thoughts/china/jingshen.html

[14] The "Gang of Four" came to be seen as the leaders of the Cultural Revolution towards its end. The original central organ that was directing things both openly and behind the scenes was comprised of 10 people. Among these were Kang Sheng, Chen Boda, Jiang Qing, Yao Wenyuan, Wang Li and others

[15] Once again, the books of Simon Leys, cited above, are all beautiful portraits of the ideological and cultural climate in China up to 1976.
One curious book, to be read with caution but useful nonetheless, is by Dr. Li Zhisui, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao* (1994). Li was Mao's personal physician from 1956 to 1976 and lived most of those years in the elite Beijing compound with other top party personnel, and traveled with Mao wherever he went. The English translation of the book was greeted with media-driven sensationalist focus on accounts of Mao's voracious sexual appetite for beautiful young women, which actually makes up a minor theme. Its real interest is the portrait of the comings and goings of the top CCP leaderships during the last 20 years of Mao's life, their rises and their downfalls. It also recounts Mao's deep reading in Chinese dynastic history, the so-called "24 dynastic histories" covering the years 221 BC-1644 AD. Mao's fascination was above all with court intrigue. According to Li, he had the greatest admiration for some of the "most ruthless and cruel" emperors, such as Qin Shihuangdi (221-206 BC), who founded the short-lived Qin dynasty. Qin ordered the infamous "Burning of the Books" and executed many Confucian scholars (p. 122). Another favorite was the Emperor Sui Yangdi (604-618), who ordered the building of the Grand Canal by massive conscripted labor, during which thousands died.

This turn was hardly the first instance of a conservative foreign policy at the expense of movements and countries outside China. Already in 1965, the Chinese regime, based on its prestige as the center of "Marxist-Leninist" opposition to Soviet "revisionism" after the Sino-Soviet split, had encouraged the powerful Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) into a close alliance with Indonesia's populist-nationalist leader, Sukarno. It was an exact repeat of the CCP's alliance with Chiang kai-shek in 1927, and it ended the same way, in a bloodbath in which 600,000 PKI members and sympathizers were killed in fall 1965 in a military coup, planned with the help of U.S. advisers and academics. Beijing said nothing about the massacre until 1967 (when it complained that the Chinese embassy in Jakarta had been stoned during the events). In 1971, China also openly applauded the bloody suppression of the Trotskyist student movement in Ceylan (now Sri Lanka). In the same year, it supported, (together with the United States and against Soviet ally India), Pakistani dictator Yahya Khan, who oversaw massive repression in Bangladesh when that country (previously part of Pakistan) declared independence.

In 1971, another bizarre turn in domestic policy also took place, echoing Mao's fascination with ancient dynastic court intrigue. Up to that point, Lin Biao had been openly designated as Mao's successor. The Maoist press abroad, as well as the French intelligentsia which at the time was decidedly pro-Maoist, trumpeted the same line. Suddenly Lin Biao disappeared from public view, and in late 1971 it was learned that he, too, supposedly Mao's closest confidant for years, had been a capitalist roader and a deep-cover KMT agent all along. According to the official story, Lin had commandeered a military plane and fled toward the Soviet border; the plane had crashed in Mongolia, killing him and all aboard[16]. For months, western Maoists denounced this account, published in the world press, as a pure bourgeois fabrication, including what Simon Leys characterized as the "most important pro-Maoist daily newspaper in the West", the very high tone *Le Monde* (Paris), whose Beijing correspondent was a Maoist devotee. Then, when the Chinese government itself confirmed the story, the Western Maoists turned on a dime and howled with the wolves against Lin Biao. Simon Leys remarked that these fervent believers had transformed the old Chinese proverb "Don't beat a dog after it has fallen into the water" into "Don't beat a dog *until* it has fallen into the water".

This was merely the beginning of the bizarre turn of Maoist world strategy and Chinese foreign policy. The "main enemy" and "greater danger" was no longer the world imperialism centered in the U.S., but Soviet "social imperialism". Thus, when US-backed Augusto Pinochet overthrew the Chilean government of Salvador Allende in 1973, China immediately recognized Pinochet and hailed the coup. When troops from apartheid

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[16] But another account surfaced, of which an English translation was published in 1983: Yao Ming-Le, *The Conspiracy and Death of Lin Biao*. It purports to be a pseudonymous account written by a high-ranking CCP member who was assigned to develop the cover story of Lin's flight and death. According to Yao, a struggle to the death between Mao and Lin had been underway, and Lin was plotting a coup to overthrow and kill Mao. The plot was discovered, and Lin Biao was arrested and executed. No less a skeptic of sources coming out of China than Simon Leys, in his book *The Burning Forest*, argues that Yao's account agrees with other known facts.

South Africa invaded Angola in 1975 after Angolan independence under the pro-Soviet MPLA, China backed South Africa. During the Portuguese Revolution of 1974-75, the Maoist forces there reached out to the far right. Maoist currents throughout western Europe called for the strengthening of NATO against the Soviet threat. China supported Philippine dictator Fernando Marcos in his attempt to crush the Maoist guerrilla movements in that country.

Maoism had had a certain serious impact on New Left forces in the West in the late 1960's and early 1970's. Unraveling the factional differences among these groups would take us too far afield, and most of them had faded away by the 1980's. But "Maoism", as interpreted in different ways, was important in Germany, Italy, France and the U.S. Some groups, such as the ultra-Stalinist Progressive Labor Party in the U.S., saw the writing on the wall as early as 1969 and broke with China in that year. Most of these groups were characterized by Stalinist thuggery against opponents, and occasionally among themselves[17]. Their influence was as diffuse as it was pernicious; ca. 1975, there were hundreds of "Marxist-Leninist" study groups around the U.S., and hundreds of cadre had entered the factories to organize the working class. By the mid-1970's, three main Maoist groups had emerged as dominant in the U.S. left: the Revolutionary Union (RU) under Bob Avakian (later renamed the RCP); the October League (OL), under Mike Klonsky, and the Communist Labor Party (CLP). There was in addition a wider, more diffuse influence of Maoism in New Left circles and in the black liberation movement. To really understand some of the differences between the different Maoist groups, one needed to know their relationship to the old "revisionist" Communist Party USA. The more moderate groups, such as the October League, hearkened back to Earl Browder's leadership during the Popular Front years. More hard-line groups, such as the CLP, looked to the more openly Stalinist William Z. Foster. These and other smaller groups fought ideological battles over the proper attitude to take toward Enver Hoxha's Albania, which for some (after China's pro-U.S. turn) remained, for them, the sole truly "Marxist-Leninist" country in the world. One small group trumpeted the "Three 3's: Third International/ Third Period/ Third World".

In Germany New Left Maoism was on the ascendant after 1968, a process which it gingerly termed the "positive overcoming of the anti-authoritarian movement" of that year. A major current was the KPD (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands), which fought against the much larger DKP (Deutsche Kommunistische Partei, the pro-Soviet party, which itself still barely accounted for 1% of the vote in German elections). Out of the KPD came a multitude of smaller "K-Gruppen", with poetic names such as KPD-ML Rote Heimat (Red Homeland, with distinct populist overtones of "soil"). Only the DKP had any influence in the working class, with its infiltration of the trade unions; in 1972, however, the Social Democratic government of Willy Brandt issued its "radical decree" and came down hard on both the DKP and the K-Gruppen. The Italian Communist Party

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[17] For a full account, see Max Elbaum's book *Revolution in the Air*, which purports to see these groups as the "best and the brightest" to emerge from the America 60's. For a short course, see my polemical review of Elbaum "Didn't See The Same Movie" at http://home.earthlink.net/~lrgoldner/elbaum.html .

(PCI), with 25% of the vote in the 1976 elections, and working hard to arrive at an "historic compromise" with the Christian Democrats, sat back while the Italian government criminalized the entire far left, including Maoists, as "terrorists"; it actively helped the government in the suppression of the far left after the Red Brigades kidnapped and executed the right-wing politician Aldo Moro in spring 1978, as he was on his way to sign the "historical compromise" which would have allowed the PCI to join the Christian Democrats in a grand coalition.

In France, Maoism never had the clout of the much larger main Trotskyist parties (Lutte Ouvriere, the Ligue Communiste Revolutionaire and the Organisation Communiste Internationaliste, all of which are still around today, in the latter two cases under different names). Most of the Maoist "Marxist-Leninist" groups had been discredited by their manipulative role during the May-June 1968 general strike, such as one which marched to the barricades on the night of the most serious street fighting (pitting thousands of people against thousands of cops), announced that the whole thing was a government provocation and urged everyone to go home, as they themselves proceeded to do. But in the spring of 1970, one small ultra-Stalinist and ultra-militant Maoist group, the Gauche Proletarienne (Proletarian Left), momentarily recruited Jean-Paul Sartre to its defense when the government banned it, following some spectacular militant interventions around the country. Sartre, who had over the previous 20 years been successively pro-Soviet, pro-Cuba and then pro-China, saved the GP from extinction, but it collapsed of its own ideological frenzy shortly thereafter. (It notably produced two particularly cretinous neo-liberal ideologues after 1977, Bernard-Henry Levi and Andre Glucksmann, as well as Serge July, editor-in-chief of the now very respectable daily *Liberation*, which began as the newspaper of the GP.)[18] (Former French Maoists turned up in the strangest places, such as Roland Castro, a fire-eating Maoist in 1968 who became an intimate of Socialist President Francois Mitterand, and was appointed to a leading technocratic position.)

One must make a certain exception for the so-called "Mao-spontex", made up of a base of angry young workers, imagining the Maoism of the "Cultural Revolution" to be a "libertarian" doctrine, who launched militant actions around France for a few years after 1968.

Maoism in Britain again had next to no influence, whereas both the Trotskyist Socialist Labor League (SLL) and the IS (later SWP) at their 1970's peaks had thousands of members and a serious presence in the working class.

In Japan, finally, the most advanced capitalist country in Asia, Maoism (as in Britain and in France), had no chance against the large, sophisticated New Left groups in the militant Zengakuren, which not only had no time for Maoism but not even for Trotskyism, and which characterized both the Soviet Union and China as "state capitalist". (Only the

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small underground, pro-North Korean "Red Army" could in any way have been characterized as Maoist.)

In 1976, as mentioned earlier, the Maoist "Gang of Four", who up to Mao's death had been at the pinnacle of state power, were arrested, jailed and never heard from again, as the "revisionists" headed by Deng Xiaoping returned to power and prepared to launch China on the road to "market socialism" or "socialism with Chinese characteristics" beginning in 1978.

This bizarre ideological period finally ended in 1978/79, when China, now firmly an ally of the U.S., attacked Vietnam and was rudely pushed back by the Vietnamese army under Gen. Giap (of Dien Bien Phu fame). Vietnam, still allied with the Soviet Union, had occupied Cambodia to oust the pro-Maoist Khmer Rouge, who had taken over the country in 1975 and who went on to kill upward of one million people. In response to China's attack on Vietnam, the Soviet Union threatened to attack China. For any remaining Western Maoists at this point, the consternation was palpable.

As elsewhere in different forms, the Maoists in the U.S. did not go quietly into that dark night. Many of those who went into industry or otherwise colonized working-class communities rose to positions of influence in the trade union bureaucracy, such as Bill Fletcher of the Freedom Road group, who was briefly a top aide to John Sweeney when the latter took over the AFL-CIO in 1995. Mike Klonsky of the October League traveled to China in 1976 to be anointed as the official liaison to the Chinese regime after the fall of the Gang of Four, but that did not prevent the OL from fading away. The RCP sent colonizers to West Virginia mining towns, where they were involved in some wildcat strikes (some of those strikes, however, were against teaching Darwin in the schools). The RCP also supported ROAR, the racist anti-busing coalition, during the crisis in Boston in 1975. Bob Avakian, in 1978, with four other RCP members, rushed the podium when Deng shao-peng appeared at a press conference in Washington with Jimmy Carter to consummate the U.S.-China alliance; they were charged with multiple felonies and Avakian remains in exile in Paris to this day. In 1984 and 1988[19], Maoists of different stripes were deeply involved in Jesse Jackson's run for the presidency, giving rise in 1984 after Jackson lost out to the "Marxist-Leninists for Mondale" phenomenon.

Members of the Communist Workers Party (CWP) suffered a worse fate, when in 1979 members of the Ku Klux Klan in North Carolina (where they had organized in several textile towns) fired on their rally, killing five of them. But during Occupy Oakland in the fall of 2011, it emerged that no less than Oakland Mayor Jean Quan, as well as some of her key advisors, and high-level members of the Alameda County Labor Council, were former members of the selfsame CWP.

[19] This foray into Democratic Party politics is enthusiastically recounted in Max Elbaum's book cited above.

More recently, former members of the RCP who had their fill of Avakian's cult of personality formed the Kasama network, which now has a much larger, if more diffuse influence, at least on the internet.

On a world scale, Maoists recently joined a coalition government in Nepal[20], and various groups, some reaching back to the 1960's or even earlier, continue to be active in the Philippines. The Indian Naxalites, who were stone Maoists in the 1970's before they were crushed by Indira Gandhi, have made something of a comeback in poor rural areas, and India has a number of Maoist, Marxist-Leninist groups with a significant mass base. The Shining Path group in Peru, which was similarly crushed by Fujimori, has made a steady comeback there, openly referring to such groups as the Cambodian Khmer Rouge as a model.

To conclude, it is important to consider the post-1978 fate of Maoism in China itself. For the regime which, since 1978, has overseen nearly 35 years of virtually uninterrupted and unprecedented economic growth, averaging close to 10% per year over decades, with the methods of "market socialism", Mao Zedong remains an indispensable icon of the ruling ideology. In officialese, Mao was "70% right and 30% wrong". The "wrong" part usually means the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, although serious discussion and research on those events remains largely if not wholly taboo.

As a result, a rose-tinted nostalgic view of Maoism and the Cultural Revolution has become de rigeur in the so-called Chinese New Left[21]. There have even been echoes of Maoism in the recent fall of top-level bureaucrat Bo Xilai, former strongman of Chongqing with a decidedly populist style which led some of his opponents to warn of the dangers of a "new Cultural Revolution". Given the impossibility, in China, of frank public discussion of the entirety of Mao's years in power (and before), and the small fragments of information available to the young generations about those years, it is hardly surprising that currents opposing the appalling spread of social inequality and insecurity since 1978 would turn back to that mythical past. This hardly makes such a turn less reactionary and dangerous. Everything that happened after 1978 had its origins in the nature of the regime before 1978. There was no "counter-revolution", still less a transformation of the previously existing social relations of production. Once again, Maoism reveals its highly idealist and voluntarist conception of politics by a focus on the ideology of top leaders, as it previously did with Khruschev's 1956 speech and thaw. China from 1949 to 1978 was preparing the China of 1978 to the present. Even those pointing to the "shattering of the iron rice bowl", the No. 1 ideological underpinning of the old regime, ignore the practice of significant casualized labor in the industrial centers in the 1950's and 1960's. Until a true "new left" in China seriously rethinks the place of

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[20] For a series of articles on the Maoist participation in the Nepalese government, see http://libcom.org/tags/nepal

[21] See the article of Lance Carter on the Chinese New Left in Insurgent Notes No. 1, http://www.insurgentnotes.com

Maoism in the larger context of the history of the Marxist movement, and particularly its origins in Stalinism and not in the true, defeated world proletarian moment of 1917-1921, it is doomed to reproduce, in China as in different parts of the developing world, either grotesque copies of Maoism's periodic ultra-Stalinism (as in Peru) or to be the force that prepares the coming of "market socialism" by destroying the pre-capitalist forms of agriculture and engaging in forced, autarchic industrialization until Western, or Japanese and Korean, or (why not?) Chinese capital[22] arrives to allow the full emergence of capitalism.

(This article is from the Break Their Haughy Power web site at

http://home.earthlink.net/~lrgoldner

[22] Chinese investment in Africa in recent years, aimed first of all at the procurement of raw materials, has taken on serious dimensions; already some African leaders are warning of a "new colonialism". On the level of high comedy, Western leaders have the affrontery to solemnly warn China "not to exploit Africa's natural resources". (!)