

Revolution in Imperialist Countries Requires Mao Tsetung Thought

by the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA

“It is no exaggeration to say that without the theory and line developed by Mao and the practice of the Chinese masses in carrying it out, especially through the Cultural Revolution, our party would not and could not have been founded when it was and on such a revolutionary basis.” — Bob Avakian, *Bullets*.

The dawn of the 1960's arose on new revolutionary stirrings that would eventually build into a global force ripping and battering at all the fortifications of imperialism. But at that very time the international communist movement, which should have been the center for intransigent and thoroughgoing revolution, bore more resemblance to a barracks of smug and fattened priests. And these priests delivered one commandment to the masses: thou shalt not rise up in revolutionary struggle.

Not that the Pharisees encountered no opposition. The Communist Party of China, led by Mao Tsetung, had begun to unfold struggle, as early as 1957, against this betrayal of communist principles, and as the terms grew clearer the international movement began to polarize. But as Marx himself once noted, the weapon of criticism, while absolutely necessary, cannot

match the impact of criticism by weapons, and while the struggle against revisionism did not mainly assume the form of armed combat, the real emergence of a new and genuinely communist current internationally still required the transformation of theory into revolutionary practice on a grand scale.

The storm center of revolution at that point focused on the wars of national liberation then raging in the oppressed nations (especially Vietnam) — struggles which the Soviet Union mainly openly attempted to hold back at that point, and which the Communist Party of China crucially upheld and supported on many different levels. This in itself served to demarcate revolution from revisionism in concrete practice. But that as crucial backdrop, the thing that finally crystallized the revolutionary, anti-revisionist vision of Mao Tsetung, and which really revitalized the cause of communism and the international movement with it, was the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. In the words of the *Declaration of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement*, the Cultural Revolution “gave rise to a whole new generation of Marxist-Leninists” and struck “a vibrant chord among millions of

people across the world who were rising up as part of the revolutionary upsurge that swept the world in the 1960s and early 1970s.”

The revisionists offered as “socialism” an ideology and a program insisting that the masses keep their noses to the grindstone, content themselves with individual gain, stick to tried and true ways, and ask no questions — in the name of some law-like logic of efficiency, economic rationality, and social stability. In opposition, Mao proclaimed that all of Marxism could be concentrated in a single truth: that it is right to rebel against reaction. To those disgusted by the cynicism and callousness of revisionism and the stagnant societies it ruled, the Cultural Revolution revealed the prospect of a society so vital and so utterly revolutionary in its determination to shatter and move beyond every shackle of the past that it was like a revelation in flesh and blood.

Those heady, turbulent days have a far-reaching legacy, including the growing strength of the international trend that bases itself directly on the contributions forged by Mao. Speaking of our own party in the editorial marking the 10th Anniversary of the founding of the

RCPUSA we noted that we “grew up in and [were] part of that ‘60’s tradition’ here and internationally of making radical *breaks* with tradition”; there is a Maoist “intoxication” with revolution bred into our marrow.

But does the importance and influence of Mao, after all, go beyond that — especially for a party preparing to make revolution in an imperialist country? There are many who recognize, or in some cases pay lip service to, Mao’s military thinking, or who regard him as an important revolutionary nationalist (and nothing more). And there are those who concede Mao’s relevance, even his importance, to this or that area of Marxist theory, but who still view him as fundamentally a theoretician “just for the third world.”

We differ with all these views. We stand instead with the *Declaration*, which affirms Mao Tsetung Thought as a “new stage in the development of Marxism-Leninism” and states further that “without upholding and building on Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought it is not possible to defeat revisionism, imperialism and reaction in general.” This holds as true for the imperialist countries as it does for the oppressed nations.

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Mao’s single most important contribution to the body of Marxism is the theory of continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat. In the wake of the 20th Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 (at which Khrushchev repudiated Stalin as a way of repudiating the experience of socialism and revolution generally) and the Hungarian revolt, Mao noted drily that socialist society does not just “contain” contradiction, it *teems* with them.

Later, in 1962 — after the experience of the Great Leap Forward in China, after the betrayal by the Soviets, and in the midst of the polemical battle then raging within the international movement — Mao formulated what came to be called the basic line of the Chinese Communist Party, the opening passage of which introduced a qualitative advance over anything yet achieved in the international movement:

“Socialist society covers a considerably long historical period. In the historical period of socialism, there are still classes, class contradictions and class struggle, there is the struggle between the socialist road and the capitalist road, and there is the danger of capitalist restoration.” The theoretical kernel here — a concentrated summation of nearly a half-century of practice in socialist society — would soon flower into the line that led the Cultural Revolution, the most important revolutionary milestone since the days of Lenin.

The Cultural Revolution marked nothing less than a qualitative leap in humanity’s understanding of how to advance to classless society. RCPUSA Chairman Bob Avakian has noted that “adjectives such as ‘unprecedented,’ ‘historic,’ ‘earth-shaking’ and so on have frequently been used to describe this mass revolutionary movement, and if anything they understate its importance. With the reversal of the revolution in China in 1976 and the suppression of everything revolutionary there in the years since, and in the present world situation, there is a strong tendency to forget what it meant that there was a country, with one-quarter of the world’s population, where there had not only been a successful revolution leading to socialism, overcoming tremendous obstacles and powerful reactionary forces in the process, but even after that there was again a mass revolutionary upheaval, initiated and inspired by the leading figure in the new socialist state, Mao Tsetung, against those in authority who sought to become the new party of order, restoring capitalism in the name of ‘socialism,’ using their revolutionary credentials as capital. The Cultural Revolution involved literally hundreds of millions of people in various forms and various levels of political struggle and ideological debate over the direction of society and affairs of state, the problems of the world revolutionary struggle and the international communist movement. Barriers were broken down to areas formerly forbidden to the masses of people — science, philosophy, education, literature and art. Putting self above

the interests of the revolution, in China and the world, was an outlook under attack and on the defensive and few were those who would openly utter such phrases as ‘my *career*.’ Through all this, transformations were brought about in the major institutions in society and in the thinking of masses of people, further revolutionizing them. Through all this as well, new breakthroughs were made and new lessons gained in moving, through the exercise of the dictatorship of the proletariat itself, toward the eventual withering away of the state — striking at the soil engendering class distinctions and at the same time drawing the masses more broadly and more consciously into the running of society.” (*For a Harvest of Dragons*, pp. 110-111)

It is important to note that whatever the particularities of China, which include the influence of a new-democratic stage on its revolution and the ongoing legacy of semi-colonial oppression, Mao’s central contributions on the theory and practice of continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat apply, and directly so, to imperialist countries, along with, and as the central element of, his overall development of revolutionary science.

Can anyone deny that upon seizing power in an imperialist country the proletariat will also face very acute contradictions between the socialist road and the capitalist road? Certainly the soil for new bourgeois headquarters to arise within the party in power will be at least as great in a (formerly) imperialist power as in former colonies and semi-colonies. At bottom, there is going to be the ongoing question of restructuring its international relations on a completely new economic foundation and according to communist internationalist principles. Especially within the party in power (and linked, of course, to the ideological pressures resulting from privileges enjoyed by large sections of the population due to imperialist rule) it is almost inevitable that struggles will arise over how (or ultimately even whether) to eradicate that imperialist legacy and to lend every support to interna-

tional proletarian revolution.

While important revolutionary advantages will accrue to the proletariat in power in an advanced country, these will not and cannot negate the centrality of class struggle to preventing capitalist restoration and advancing the revolution further. Indeed, Mao found himself fighting continually against one or another variant of the "theory of productive forces", which propounded the opposed view that greater productive capacity was the key to resolving the contradictions of socialist society. This theory will no doubt recur at least as tenaciously, if in different forms, in a more developed society.

Likewise, the uprooting of the well-established institutions and ideas of the superstructure will certainly be just as necessary in an imperialist country as in one emerging from semi-feudalism. The bourgeoisies of the advanced countries have honed and perfected their superstructures over centuries, the better to foster the production and reproduction of bourgeois social relations. Because these institutions are in some ways more firmly entrenched and viable in imperialist countries than they are in oppressed nations, where the entire culture is often in the throes of acute crisis and dissolution, the necessity to uproot these may well be all the greater.

Mao's theory and the practice of the Cultural Revolution, in other words, possess universal relevance. There are those, however, who portray the Cultural Revolution not as a further extension of proletarian dictatorship but almost as something in direct opposition to it. This mistaken view — or outright distortion, in some cases — is especially prevalent in imperialist countries. People with this view seize on certain aspects of the Cultural Revolution, particularly the direct mass revolt against those sections of the party that had become bourgeois strongholds, and try to make this into an argument for doing away altogether with the party's leading role in socialist society. Sometimes genuinely important innovations like the Shanghai Commune, which attempted the direct unmediated rule of the proletariat, are seized

upon as the alpha and omega of the Cultural Revolution, and it is then said that following the Commune's abandonment in early 1967 everything was downhill.

Such people ignore that Mao himself explained that the reason for not continuing with the Commune form was its vulnerability to the enemies of the proletariat and their various forms of attack and, related to that, the fact that the various contradictions of socialist society (between town and country, worker and peasant, mental and manual labor, etc.) had not yet reached a stage of resolution sufficient to attempt such a thing. These people also negate the genuine achievements made in the years following the initial upsurge; they miss, really, the last leg of the famous Maoist formula of "struggle -criticism -transformation." They negate as well the real purpose of the all-out mass struggles of the Cultural Revolution. Their ultimate purpose, as Mao saw it, was not to dismantle the party or weaken the proletarian dictatorship. The real objective was the dual task of overthrowing capitalist-roaders *and* revitalizing and transforming the institutions of socialist society — including the party — onto a qualitatively higher level (while accomplishing the aim of further remolding people's world outlook). At its most extreme this phony version of "upholding the Cultural Revolution" liquidates the tasks of overthrowing, uprooting, and transforming; it fixes instead on a sort of anarcho-syndicalist vision of the "workers running the plants unhindered by party bureaucrats," a very much economist view that openly denies (or turns away from) the ability of (and need for) the proletariat to master all spheres of society — including the struggle within the vanguard party!

Mao did not project the communist future as some kind of endpoint, whether a kingdom of great harmony or a cheerful little conglomeration of Jeffersonian communes. Mao understood revolutions as the decisive force of social development not only through socialist society but on into communism as well (though these latter

revolutions would not be violent suppressions of one class by another). Truth is ever at first in the hands of a minority, Mao maintained, and he insisted that "going against the tide is a Marxist-Leninist principle," one that stretched across all social formations.

Certainly without this orientation of going against the tide those parties that held to principle in the face of the 1976 counter-revolutionary coup could not have taken the stand that they did. True, Mao also stressed that while one must always be ready to go against the tide, one must also be able to recognize what is, and what is not, a counter-revolutionary tide. In both of these aspects Mao taught well. As Comrade Avakian pointed out at the time of the fierce struggle (and eventual split) within the ranks of the RCPUSA over the import of the coup, "it is wrong to look at the experience of the Soviet Union and China as the same. There are a number of differences, not the least of which is that at the time of Khrushchev's coup, denunciation of Stalin and repudiation of Marxism-Leninism, the masses in the Soviet Union and millions of revolutionary-minded people in other countries (though not all of them) were left confused, without an understanding of what was taking place, and this could only create large-scale demoralization. On the other hand, because of the Cultural Revolution in China, because of Mao's great leadership and because of the heroic struggle put up by the Four, millions of people in China are armed with an understanding of what is going on, and millions more are debating and struggling over the questions involved, while those of us in other countries also have the basis for understanding not only what has happened but what is the basis for it." (*Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, pp. 130-131)

Mao's leadership during this period (as well as earlier) also educated a generation in proletarian internationalism. Lenin first noted that the exploitation of whole sections of the world by the imperialist countries profoundly alters the terms and character of the class struggle, simultaneously giving rise

to revolutionary struggle in the oppressed nations while also creating (or drastically enlarging) the basis for opportunism within the oppressor nations.

Mao, it should be remembered, was accused of racism by the Soviets for maintaining that the storm center of proletarian revolution had shifted to the third world, and that the "East wind would prevail over the West. . ." What the Soviets really opposed here was Mao's steadfast grasp on the centrality of the wars for national liberation during that period, their important role in the eventual destruction of imperialism, and the consequent duty of all revolutionaries to fully support such struggles. Of course, Mao did not confine his support to these struggles alone — the demonstrations all over China, along with Mao's statement in support of the Black revolts in the U.S. in 1968 stand as evidence for that, as do other important examples. And Mao also summed up at the height of the Cultural Revolution, in 1968, that despite the great victories already won, "the final victory of a socialist country not only requires the efforts of the proletariat and the broad masses of the people at home, but also involves the victory of the world revolution and the abolition of the system of exploitation of man by man over the whole globe, upon which all mankind will be emancipated. Therefore, it is wrong to speak lightly of the final victory of the revolution in our country; it runs counter to Leninism and does not conform to facts."

All this provided an excellent internationalist orientation for the movement; in particular, the support for the struggles of the oppressed nations against the imperialist powers provided something of a school of revolutionary defeatism for the movement within the imperialist nations. This was, on the other hand, a *basis* — and whether parties would face the challenges presented by the changes in the world situation during the mid-1970s by deepening and building on that basis, or whether they would abandon and ultimately betray it, would be settled in practice. For the revolutionary groups

and organizations in the imperialist countries who did move forward, however, the line of Mao during the 1960's formed a *sine qua non* and necessary point of departure for deepening their internationalist orientation and practice.

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The taproot of Mao's many contributions was his mastery of the dialectical method. Mao focused on the unity and struggle of opposites as central to the analysis and transformation of all things, in nature and society.

"Why is it," Mao asked in "On Contradiction", "that the 'human mind should take these opposites not as dead, rigid, but as living, conditional, mobile, transforming themselves into one another'? Because that is just how things are in objective reality. The fact is that the unity or identity of opposites in objective things is not dead or rigid, but is living, conditional, mobile, temporary and relative; in given conditions, every contradictory aspect transforms itself into its opposite...It is only the reactionary ruling classes of the past and present who regard opposites not as living, conditional, mobile and transforming themselves into one another, but as dead and rigid, and they propagate this fallacy everywhere to delude the masses of the people, thus seeking to perpetuate their rule."

Here, of course, we can only broadly characterize Mao's thinking on this cardinal point. As to its particular applicability to revolution in the advanced countries, it is nothing less than fundamental. To take just one important aspect of this, the bourgeoisie has maintained relative stability in these countries for some time now, and revolutionaries run the risk of being lulled into what Lenin warned against so sharply: the failure to grasp or the outright disbelief in the possibility of sudden and dramatic changes, and the consequent lack of preparation for and inability to seize revolutionary opportunities within vast social upheavals erupting at a moment's notice. In *Coming From Behind to Make Revolution*, Comrade Avakian discussed those activists who may concede the seriousness of the crisis faced by the imperialists

and the looming prospect of world war, but who nevertheless remain blind to the revolutionary possibilities within that same situation, and noted that "...the very fact that revolution hasn't happened conditions people's thinking; and unless you consciously strive to overcome that by a scientific analysis, then spontaneously you're just going to see what appears before you and not the potential that could arise in vastly different conditions in the future — in fact, not even what is developing beneath the surface and the seed of the future that already exists and is developing in the present, including the minor crises and eruptions that occur..."

"Of course, if you look at things metaphysically — statically, without internal contradiction and with everything absolutely isolated from everything else — then you won't and can't recognize this revolutionary potential."

Part of applying Mao Tsetung Thought to the imperialist countries, then, means learning to identify, analyze and foster the revolutionary elements that inevitably exist in an overall non-revolutionary situation. Communists have to learn to seize hold of the contradictions within society and not wait hopelessly for "deus ex machinas"; they must concretely grasp what gives the "identity," or temporary stability, of society its fragile and transitory underlying character, and strive as far as possible to identify the sources and the dimensions of that identity's inevitable rupture. They must trace the crises and foreshocks back to their source in the contradictions within society, and use the knowledge thus gained to project ahead and prepare in practice for the day when those contradictions assert themselves with full fury. They must, in short, master that most Maoist of methods: dividing one into two!

Elsewhere Comrade Avakian has written that the "ceaseless emergence and resolution of contradictions, as against all notion of absoluteness and stagnation — this Mao grasped as the driving force in the development of all things, in nature, society and thought, and this understanding runs like a crimson

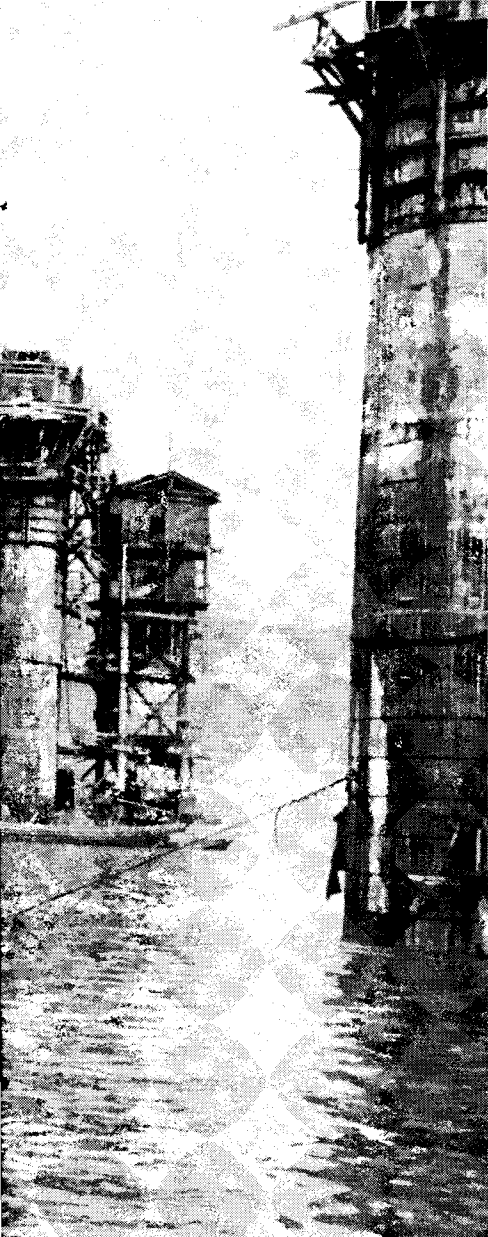


Building a bridge over the Yangtze (Yellow) River. Mao referred to the Yangtze as the spine of China.



Mao talks with steel workers in Anhwei province.





October 1, 1949. From Mao's speech, "The Chinese people have stood up" ... [all which had gone before was] "but a first step ... in a 25,000 li Long March."

Victorious Red Army greeted by ecstatic Peking residents.



path through Mao's writings and actions." That path must also run through the orientation and basic method of the parties in imperialist countries to enable them not only to successfully resist the corrosion of "peaceful times" but more than that to seize those invaluable opportunities for revolutionary insurrection which will no doubt erupt quite suddenly, with many novel and unanticipated features, and which will present challenges and opportunities not necessarily apparent — or perhaps necessarily not apparent! — to the naked eye.

The deeper recognition of fluidity, leaps, etc., has not led — and should not lead, if properly understood and grasped — to a "que sera, sera" attitude. For, dialectically enough, the deeper one grasps the pervasiveness of instability, volatility, and leaps to the new in affairs of nature and society, the more one should see the need for active and thorough-going preparation and plans, precisely so as to be ready for anything. Mao, discussing that most uncertain of human enterprises, war, wrote that within "the great river of absolute fluidity throughout the war there is relative stability at each particular stretch", and he insisted that this relative stability both necessitates and makes possible specific plans which enable the planners to gain the initiative and alter the course of that "great river". Otherwise one would fall into relativism and run the risk of "negating everything, including the war itself as well as the negator himself." (On Protracted War, Vol. II, p. 169-170) So to *really* be "ready for anything" means active, revolutionary preparation, practice, and planning.

This points to another major philosophical contribution of Mao: the principle that "matter can be transformed into consciousness and consciousness into matter". This informed and infused Mao's view of the goal of communist society — he scoffed at the "goulash communism" promised by the Soviets, posing instead a vision of "all mankind voluntarily and consciously changing itself and the world". Mao's thinking on the transition to communist society — which

pivots on the need for the proletariat to wage class struggle around cardinal questions of political line and to master all spheres of society — flows out of his grasp of the dynamic and transformative role of human consciousness.

The 1976 coup sharpened up this question in particular. Economist interpretations of a dozen different shades flowed out of Moscow, Tirana, Peking and points west, and these challenged genuine revolutionaries to dig more deeply into the essence of Mao's thinking and contributions. Especially as the trend to inter-imperialist world war became increasingly sharp and pressing, the widespread tendency of the early 1970s to try to combine Mao's great (and thoroughly anti-economist) contributions on the class struggle under socialism with a certain more or less economist approach to the class struggle within the imperialist countries became untenable. The stakes were no longer errors or deviations caused by economism (serious as those might be), but — with the rapidly changing objective conditions and the related crisis in the international movement — whether one would capitulate or not. Lenin had pointed out in the "Collapse of the Second International" during World War I that the seeds of opportunism (including economism) had given rise to full-grown, social-chauvinist capitulation. A similar situation was now presenting itself to the movement in the imperialist countries, a problem that continues to face us.

Necessity itself posed the question of whether to work backward from Mao, so to speak, into the at best flawed orientation of the old Comintern parties in the imperialist countries, or instead to work forward and to apply the spirit and thrust of Mao Tsetung Thought to fully "breaking with old ideas" concerning the movement within the imperialist countries.

Pursuing that latter course leads necessarily to a re-appreciation of Lenin. *What Is To Be Done?* — with its insistence that communist ideology must be imparted to the proletariat from outside the spontaneous movement, its grasp on the primacy of the political struggle over

the economic struggle, its focus on all-round exposure of political and social life by communists as key to instilling communist consciousness in the masses, and its proposal of the revolutionary political newspaper as the main medium for communist work in preparation for the armed seizure of power in the imperialist countries — is as important today as when it was written. For those coming out of a deeper immersion in Mao Tsetung's line on consciousness in that post-coup period of questioning, study, and struggle, and facing the challenges of the 1980's, those truths struck with special freshness and vigor. Lenin took the vanguard party as the key link in all this, as did Mao (a point to which we will return). In this, in their opposition to all forms of economism, and in their stress on the dynamic role of human consciousness Lenin leads to Mao . . . and Mao, in turn, to Lenin.

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But there is a history to this question of the party. By the summer of 1968 the question before thousands of activists in the imperialist countries was no longer *whether* the masses could ever rise up — the Black people in the U.S. had decisively affirmed that in April of that year, and they were followed by the French students and workers a month later — but *how* they could be led to actually make revolution. This urgent posing of the question in practice, coupled with the influence of the Cultural Revolution, led many, including us, to the answer of a vanguard party based on Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought.

"It may seem bizarre," we wrote on the occasion of the 10th Anniversary of our founding, "to come to an understanding of the crucial need for a vanguard party through the Cultural Revolution, when Mao and the other leading revolutionaries were unleashing the Chinese masses and bringing under their fire large sections of the Chinese Communist Party structure, even dismantling it in many cases. But it is not really so bizarre when you understand that in fact this was also and very importantly a method for revitalising the party which, thus revolutionised, would be key in unleashing the power of the masses on a still

grander scale.”

The method Mao used, of course, was specific to the conditions and contradictions of a proletarian party *in power*, but the need to keep the party truly revolutionary is universal. Stagnation must be combatted; the party must strain to attune itself to and to unleash, temper, and guide the truly advanced and revolutionary initiatives that arise from the masses (and “the masses” here should be taken in an international dimension). Assuming that a correct line is in command, the party is key to enhancing the freedom of the masses to consciously make history.

The rub is that one cannot just “assume” that a correct line will inevitably command the party. Mao wrote in “On Contradiction” that “Opposition and struggle between ideas of different kinds constantly occur within the Party; this is a reflection within the Party of contradictions between classes and between the new and the old in society.” He saw this struggle as the very lifeblood of the party. Later, during the period of proletarian dictatorship, Mao developed the view that the struggle between two lines within the party in socialist society became the key focus of struggle in society overall and he fought to arm the masses with an understanding of the history and terms of those struggles so as to enable them to consciously enter the arena on the side of the genuinely proletarian line.

The existence of contending lines within the vanguard party reflected, as Mao noted, objective social contradictions, and it would go on whether one liked it or not. The more orthodox revisionists — from the Soviets to the Albanians — howled that this flew directly in the face of the Leninist principle of unified party leadership. Meanwhile, those forces who wished to adapt Mao Tsetung Thought to one or another brand of anarchism or social-democracy — those mentioned earlier who “liked” the Cultural Revolution but didn’t quite care for proletarian dictatorship — also argued that the Cultural Revolution went against Leninist principles, although for their part they applauded this alleged departure and called for the full legalisation of fac-

tions within the party openly campaigning for competing platforms.

Our party has extensively addressed the problems with such anarchist or social-democratic views elsewhere (see especially the pamphlet “If There Is To Be a Revolution...” by Bob Avakian). But we must reiterate here that Mao did not view vigorous inner party struggle as an end in itself but instead treated it as a necessary means to combat revisionism and to a deeper, more correct line, and thus a richer, more powerful, revolutionary practice; his famous formula after all was “unity-struggle-unity”. Even in conditions of proletarian dictatorship, where the two line struggle within the party concentrates social struggles and at points assumes the character of antagonistic class struggle, Mao would only unfold and finally bring the struggle into the open in order to more or less fully expose and defeat the opposed bourgeois line (and factional headquarters).

Certainly those who claim the Cultural Revolution as inspiration for departing from the principle of a unified vanguard have somehow missed the fact that Mao was hardly advocating that Liu Shao-chi, and those who followed him, be given a freer rein to promulgate and organise for his line! (Though Mao did, again, bring the terms of the struggle into the open at the appropriate and necessary time to politically and ideologically arm — and unleash — the masses.) In fact Mao valued highly, and fought very hard for, the unity of will of whatever organisational form the vanguard assumed at different points during the tumultuous 1966-76 period.

Take Mao’s insistence that “the correctness or incorrectness of the ideological and political line decides everything,” or his statement, widely circulated during the Cultural Revolution, that “if the masses alone are active without a strong leading group to organise their activity properly, such activity cannot be sustained for long, or carried forward in the right direction, or raised to a high level” — can these really be construed as somehow opposed to Lenin’s basic orientation? A

development yes, but not a departure. Such statements also help explain why and how Mao Tsetung Thought has led our party, along with others, to a deeper appreciation of the need for vigorous internal struggle, a unified centralist organisation, and a strong party overall.

This question of vanguard leadership relates directly to the principle of the mass line. Of all Mao’s many contributions this has perhaps been most often taken as a reference point by revolutionaries in the imperialist countries. But the exhilaration of taking revolutionary politics to the masses in the late 60’s/early 70’s had by the middle of the decade all too often been vulgarised into a method for finding out just what the majority of masses were willing, at any given point, to wage struggle over.

While Mao always emphasised the need to deeply understand the sentiments of the masses, he stressed at least as much the necessity to transform those “scattered and unsystematic ideas...through study into concentrated and systematic ideas,” and then to persevere in them until the masses embrace them as their own. He also called on cadre to distinguish between the “relatively active, the intermediate and the relatively backward” — to refrain, that is, from regarding the masses as a level whole. Finally Mao connected the mass line to fostering and tempering the new revolutionary shoots brought forward by the masses themselves. In fact, some of the key junctures of struggle within the Chinese Communist Party focussed precisely on upholding new forms of struggle brought into being by the masses, going back to the Hunan Peasant Movement, extending into the socialist collectivisation of agriculture and later the Great Leap Forward, and continuing into and through the Cultural Revolution.

On the other hand, the formulation of the principle of the mass line *did* occur in a specific time and place where, as Bob Avakian has pointed out, “for a good part of the struggle... the revolutionary movement was going *with* the spontaneous thrust of nationalism — against Japan, for example.” Mao was not

contending with the sort of situation typical of imperialist countries where the revolutionary movement must oppose the outbreaks of national chauvinism at the start of, or during the run-up to, imperialist war. Our party's experience, to put the matter bluntly, is that the patriotism of the workers of the oppressor nation, carefully nurtured on the basis of imperialist privilege, is a basis for counter-revolution; there is nothing in that ideology to try to "raise to a higher level."

Mao provided some insights on this sort of problem. For one thing, he knew well and made a fundamental point of strategy the difference between oppressor and oppressed nations. And let us again point out that Mao's consistent internationalism, as well as the birth of the Maoist trend in the midst of the storm of national liberation struggles, have provided a powerful and important basis for an internationalist and revolutionary defeatist orientation to take root in parties and organisations in the imperialist countries. Further, the Maoist principle of "going against the tide" certainly applies in this context — providing a foundation of ideological and political firmness to oppose such chauvinism in a war or pre-war period and thus open the door of revolutionary possibilities in such a time.

On the other hand, this does not mean finding something or someone else to rely on beside the masses. In the imperialist countries the task of winning those who rally to the national banner of the imperialists, especially the proletarians among them, to their more fundamental class interests — to proletarian internationalism — demands that the party devote itself from the very start to fostering any and all shoots of internationalism or of potential revolutionary defeatism that emerge (and such shoots inevitably do, in one form or another) in both the sentiments and actions of the proletariat and other class forces as well. The party must train the proletariat through many concrete instances to see their real class interests in opposition to the bourgeoisie's nationalist pandering, and thus imbue in it the ability to recognise,

unite with and march to the head of the nascent opposition to the imperialists. The challenge consists in readying the advanced section of the advanced class not only to withstand the inevitable tide(s) of national chauvinism but also (and inextricably connected to that) to take advantage of the real crises that imperialist wars and aggression entail for the bourgeoisie...so as to do nothing less than lead masses in their millions to make revolution. And this challenge can only be met by utilising, and not rejecting, the mass line — correctly understood and applied.

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Mao's development of the united front strategy also has important application in imperialist countries. In 1969 the Revolutionary Union (forerunner of the RCP,USA) put forward the united front against imperialism under proletarian leadership as *the* strategy for proletarian revolution in the U.S. We still adhere to that view. And while we have deepened, and in important respects changed, our class analysis over the years, our appreciation for Mao's strategic principle has grown.

Unfortunately, the main thrust of Mao's strategic thinking on the united front is too often reduced to "the proletariat unites all who can be united, including the national bourgeoisie, against the imperialists." While this is certainly an important aspect of Mao's application of the united front strategy in China, it is only half the story, and the less important half at that. Mao grasped that the contradiction between imperialism and the oppressed nation(s)- must generate, independent of anyone's will, huge social upheavals in which many different class forces, including the national bourgeoisie, would be bound to participate.

What he did that was really new, however, was to illuminate under what conditions such a united front with the bourgeoisie was appropriate and, more important, *how the proletariat could find the ways to exercise leadership over such a front, infuse it with a real revolutionary orientation and thrust, and prevent its usurpation by bourgeois forces.* In this Mao stands in sharp contrast

to all those many forces which declared united front on Monday only to essentially liquidate the independent ideological, political and military role of the proletariat on Tuesday morning; unlike them, he forged the correct handling of the dialectic between the proletariat's participation in a united front and the enhancement of its own class-consciousness and leading role. Key to this was maintaining the independence and initiative of the proletariat's armed forces, and using those forces "to keep the red flag flying" to the greatest possible extent through every turn of events.

Mao viewed the united front as a strategy to wage revolutionary war in order to achieve a qualitatively different form of state power. This is the new-democratic revolution, which in essence (as the Chinese Communist Party summed up during the Cultural Revolution) brings into being a form of proletarian dictatorship in which the proletariat and its vanguard firmly lead the other revolutionary classes and strata in uprooting imperialism and pre-capitalist social relations and preparing the way for socialism. Mao was not a proponent of "power sharing", that is, of bartering the proletariat's independent forces for positions in an essentially bourgeois state apparatus, even if that state labels itself "progressive", "anti-fascist", or "anti-imperialist".

In the imperialist countries, such rightist interpretations of united fronts often amount to reducing this strategic conception to a diluted "coalition politics" and as a pragmatic "here's what I can offer you" approach to unity. This has never been our understanding of the united front strategy and, in this, we owe to Mao. The proletariat leads and forges the united front on the basis of the clarity of its aims, the material strength it musters, and the force of its program — it and only it can resolve the contradictions of capitalist society.

Now a party in an imperialist country must take several important differences into account between it and an oppressed nation in applying the united front strategy. First, the bourgeoisie in such countries can in no way comprise part of the united

front, as it (and the social relations it embodies) forms the target of the united front; second, unlike China, the revolution does not take the form of armed struggle from the beginning but instead goes through a protracted period of mainly political struggle until conditions ripen for a nationwide insurrection. What *does* apply, however, is quite profound, beginning with Mao's insistence that the goal of such a united front is a new, revolutionary state power: a revolutionary dictatorship led by the proletariat (again, even if it takes a specific form in oppressed nations).

Further, the united front principle and strategy speaks to the fact that many diverse class forces and strata within the imperialist countries will come into motion against the bourgeoisie, depending on circumstances. Lenin noted this when he wrote that the socialist revolution "cannot be anything other than an outburst of mass struggle on the part of all and sundry oppressed and discontented elements."

"Inevitably, sections of the petty bourgeoisie and of the backward workers will participate in it — without such participation, *mass struggle is impossible*, without it *no revolution is possible* — and just as inevitably will they bring into the movement their prejudices, their reactionary fantasies, their weaknesses and errors. But *objectively* they will attack *capital*, and the class-conscious vanguard of the revolution, the advanced proletariat, expressing this objective truth of a variegated and discordant, motley and outwardly fragmented, mass struggle, will be able to unite and direct it, [and] capture power..." (*Collected Works*, 22, p. 356)

Unfortunately, communists have often bounced back and forth between either attempting to deny this fact (with notions of leading the workers' economic struggle straight ahead to socialist revolution), or else turning ideologically mute in the face of it, reduced to united fronts in which they can only mimic the ideological propaganda and serve the political ends of the liberal bourgeoisie. Especially in the crucial days of the present, Mao's further

development of the principle and strategy of united front — especially his thinking on the proletariat's necessity and freedom to struggle for its ideological, political and organisational hegemony within it — are indispensable.

Drawing on Mao Tsetung's approach to the united front strategy and applying it to today's challenges, Comrade Avakian has noted that "it is precisely and only by establishing a clear-cut revolutionary stand and revolutionary pole in U.S. society and consistently working to rally the advanced, especially among the proletariat, to this pole, that it will be possible to apply the united front strategy correctly. It is only thus that other strata and forces with which it is correct and strategically necessary to seek unity will feel inclined and/or compelled to enter into a united front with us; and only thus that the strategic interests of the proletariat will be upheld and the prospect of proletarian leadership of the united front, infusing it with a clear-cut revolutionary thrust and content, will be maintained." (*An End to the Horror*, p. 101)

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The united front strategy aims toward one end; as Mao wrote, "The seizure of power by armed force, the settlement of the issue by war, is the central task and the highest form of revolution. This Marxist-Leninist principle of revolution holds good universally, for China and for all other countries." (*Selected Works*, II, p.219)

In the course of leading the Chinese Revolution to victory, during 22 years of war, Mao developed the first comprehensive Marxist military line. Though the product of a particular war (or wars, actually), these fundamental principles have rich universal content for all revolutions.

Key among these is that the party must command the gun — that is, that the party must *lead* the armed struggle and the revolutionary armed forces, and never allow the army to become either the leading *political force* of the revolution, or a force independent of the party's political leadership. A correct military line and strategy can only flow out of an

accurate assessment of the overall political situation and alignment of classes, internationally and within a given country, and such an analysis can only be all-sidedly undertaken and carried through by the party. The party's analysis and its methodology must be brought to bear upon the military sphere throughout the military struggle — consciousness must lead spontaneity, in this sphere as in every other, since the spontaneous road is ultimately a *bourgeois* one. Further, the revolutionary army will necessarily contain very broad forces, and without the party's firm leadership and consistent ideological education (and struggle) one or another tendency to reduce the aim of the revolutionary war to something short of all-the-way revolution — tendencies which Mao so tirelessly combated — will inevitably take root, flourish, and put the advance of the revolution in serious danger. All this is basic — or at least it has been (or should be) basic since it was hammered out by Mao on the anvil of nearly three decades of revolutionary war!

Of course, the specific military strategy appropriate to proletarian revolution in the imperialist countries is not the same as China's, as Mao himself makes clear shortly after the passage cited earlier: "But while the principle (of armed revolution — *RCP, USA*) remains the same, its application by the party of the proletariat finds expression in varying ways according to the varying conditions." He then points out that revolutionary war in the imperialist countries must begin as insurrection in the cities at a time when the bourgeoisie is really susceptible to losing — which obviously differs from Mao's strategy in China of protracted people's war, in which the party first built up its army and base areas in one or several distinct parts of the country, then accumulated strength through waging battles and campaigns, and only took the cities in the final phases of the war. This very distinction proved important in the struggle against a revolutionary adventurist tendency that arose in the imperialist countries in the early 1970s (and which found expression in the U.S. in a

sharp struggle and split inside the Revolutionary Union).

On the other hand, woe be to those who would dismiss or under-rate the relevance of Mao's specific military thinking to the advanced countries. Mao faced an army that highly outgunned and, overall, outmanned the one he commanded. For those who don't indulge in Trotskyite fantasies of immediate and wholesale defections of imperialist troops at the first proletarian salvo, there must be a recognition that a similar sort of situation will obtain at the outset of a revolution (and for some time beyond) in an advanced country. What to do?

First one must really grasp the dimensions of Mao's remark to the PLO in 1965 that all military logic, whatever the particulars, can be boiled down to the principle "you fight your way, I'll fight mine." As Comrade Avakian has pointed out, for the imperialists (and especially the U.S. imperialists) this has always meant relying on and striving to bring into play the advantages of massive firepower, sophisticated technology and (in the beginning at least) superior numbers of soldiers. The proletariat and the oppressed cannot hope to and should not aim to match this gun for gun, soldier for soldier; what they must do is bring into play *their* specific advantages. Most of all they must forge strategy and tactics that can unleash (and temper) the initiative and enthusiasm of the masses when fighting for their genuine class interests, at the same time as it breaks down, demoralises and finally shatters the bourgeois army.

This basic principle of Mao's in fact advanced beyond much of the Bolshevik experience in army-building and waging revolutionary war. The Bolsheviks in large measure took the tack of relying on those officers and military specialists of the old regime whom they could win over, or at least force to fight, and attempted to lead and control these officers through political commissars. Often they adopted almost whole the military tactics of these officers — military tactics developed by, and ultimately best fitted to, armies of reaction. This is not to diminish the Bolshevik achievement:

they did, after all, not only smash the old state power but also defeated the armies of 14 other imperialist powers at one time or another during the three-year civil war. However they did not, in the course of doing this, forge anything near the level of what Mao did in terms of a proletarian military doctrine.

It is true that one cannot simply copy Mao to find the answers for waging revolutionary war in an imperialist country. Much new in the way of strategy and tactics will have to be developed to be able to overcome the imperialist armies now arrayed, no matter how dire the situation that the bourgeoisies may and will face. Still, one must have a point of departure in undertaking such a monumental task; that comprehensive proletarian military line has been provided by Mao.

Basic to that foundation — and closely linked to "you fight your way, I'll fight mine" — is Mao's principle that people, and not weapons, are decisive in warfare. Bob Avakian has commented that "when imperialist and reactionary armies are deprived of the ability to fight their way — to overwhelm and pound the enemy with superior technology and force — then their strategic weaknesses increasingly stand out: they are an army of plunder and exploitation, opposed to the interests of the masses of people worldwide; their troops have no real political consciousness or awareness of the actual interests and objectives they are fighting for; they rely on technology and technological superiority and therefore are at a loss to a great degree when they do not have it or it is effectively neutralised; their ranks are organised in a strict, oppressive hierarchy and command structure and are riddled with acute class and national (and male-female) contradictions and conflicts, including among the 'grunts' themselves as well as between officers and rank-and-file soldiers..."

"In a fundamental sense, an army is a concentration of the society it is fighting for — of the social and political relations, values, etc. that are dominant and characterise that society...and the fundamental difference between revolutionary ar-

mies and counterrevolutionary armies will continue to find fuller expression the more a war between them goes on."

And what of the question of nuclear weapons? Mao's most famous epigram, or at least the one which most drove the imperialists up the wall, was his branding of imperialism as a "paper tiger" at a time when the U.S. was attempting to threaten and blackmail China with nuclear weapons. Mao was hardly being flip — he was more than intimately acquainted with the content of war, and took care to note that these paper tigers also possessed, in the short run, an aspect of iron about them as well. What Mao based himself on, in this statement and throughout his life, was the knowledge of imperialism's *strategic* weakness, once an oppressed people straighten their backs, lift their eyes, raise their fists and use their heads.

The ability to find the ways to turn imperialism's strategic weakness into tactical weakness, to realise concretely and bring into play the sources of the proletariat's strategic strength at each crucial tactical juncture, and to infuse his whole approach with this — surely this must be learnt from Mao Tsetung! Especially at a time when the architects of hell and masters of reactionary war prepare to unleash an unprecedented amount of destruction on the planet and its people, Mao's precious contributions must not be squandered.

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This year is a celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Cultural Revolution, and a commemoration of the 10th year since the death of Mao Tsetung. Let this also then be a time to reflect upon the ways in which those crucial turning points and the response of revolutionaries worldwide to them have infused the revolutionary orientation — and the achievements — of our entire movement, from its birth to the struggles of today and most of all to its bright future. The most fitting commemoration of all, of course, is to re-examine yet again those basic tenets and that basic orientation of Mao Tsetung, and to apply them to the various and diverse challenges

we now face.

In that light, let us state as clearly as possible that there will be no revolution in the imperialist countries, at least no proletarian revolution, without Mao Tsetung Thought. To deny or downgrade the importance of Mao's contributions, or to view them as an "optional accessory" to Marxism relevant only to the oppressed nations, is profoundly mistaken and can only lead away from revolution. A party in an imperialist country must grasp at its very bedrock that, as the Chairman of the Central Committee of our party has written, "overall Mao Tsetung Thought represents a qualitative development of Marxism-Leninism. Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought, then, is an integral philosophy and political theory at the same time as it is a living, critical and continuously developing science. It is not the quantitative addition of the ideas of Marx, Lenin and Mao (nor is it the case that every particular idea or policy or tactic adopted by them has been without error); Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought is a synthesis of the development, and especially the qualitative breakthroughs, that communist theory has achieved since its founding by Marx up to the present time. It is for this reason and in this sense that, as Lenin said about Marxism, it is omnipotent because it is true." (For a Harvest of Dragons, p. 114)



Taching. The imperialists said China couldn't find and extract its oil without Western technology. By revolutionising production relations the workers of Taching not only proved this wrong, but established China's self-sufficiency in oil.



After Soviet technicians left China in 1960, the workers employed self-reliance to overcome great obstacles.

