

Theses on the Chinese Question

Published in *Il Programma Comunista* 1964-65 Source: website of *Quinterna n+1*

After 1960, the year in which the 81 so-called Communist Parties (including Mao's) demonstrated their unanimity on the programme of Khrushchevite opportunism, a de facto break occurred between Peking and Moscow. We have analysed various documents in which China outlines its own national variant of Stalinism, but unlike the other "*national socialisms*" of Arab, Cuban or Yugoslav stamp, Chinese "*socialism*" insists on calling bourgeois Russia to account, on setting itself up as defender of Marxism and reconstructing under its aegis the ranks of the world proletariat. It is this claim, more than the inevitable antagonisms between the Russian and Chinese States, which requires our response, since neither the social practice nor the official political ideology of the Peking leaders is directed toward victory for the Communist programme.

The Revolutions of the East: Character and Perspectives

1. In China, as in the other backward countries of Africa and Asia, the two world wars brought to breaking point the contradiction between the development of the productive forces and the old relations of production inherited from the patriarchal regime. Here, over a long period of time, national revolts and agrarian rebellions have followed each other in quick succession, validating the prognostications already formulated by Marxism at the start of the century. Thus, despite the repeated defeats of the proletariat in the European industrial metropolises, the upsurge of national movements in the East has demonstrated the revolutionary strength of the antagonisms accumulated within the capitalist system. But, as has been proved today by the increasing retardation of the backward countries in relation to the economic development of their old industrialized metropolises, these contradictions cannot be solved within a national framework or by means of bourgeois "progress": they are the product of world capitalism, of its uneven development, of the accumulation of all wealth by a handful of super-industrialized States. It was exactly in those terms that the Communist International raised the question of the colonies in its 1919 Manifesto:

"The last war, which was by and large a war for colonies, was at the same time a war conducted with the help of the colonies (...) At best, Wilson's programme ("Freedom of the seas", "League of Nations", "internationalisation of the colonies") has as its task to effect a change of labels with regard to colonial slavery. The emancipation of the colonies is only possible in conjunction with the emancipation of the working class in the metropolises".

The proletariat had been defeated and then enslaved by bourgeois, pacifist ideology. But contrary to all the prophets of "*social peace*" and "*peaceful coexistence*", the certain lesson which the working class must derive from the revolutions of the East is this: that violence is always the sole midwife of history.

2. Whatever the oppression wrought by foreign imperialism in China, the nature of the economic and social contradictions created there were not such as to render China's revolution an "*anti-capitalist*" revolution per se. Marxism has always denounced this illusion of petit-bourgeois "*socialism*", which was adopted also by the Russian populists and is today exploited by Mao's "*extremism*". About the Russian populists Lenin had this to say:

"They all readily mouth "socialist" phrases, but it would be impermissible for a class-conscious worker to be deceived as to the real meaning of those phrases. Actually there is not a grain of socialism in the "right to land", "equalised division of the land" or "socialization of the land". This should be clear to anyone who knows that the abolition of private land-ownership, and a new, even the "fairest" possible, division of land, far from affecting commodity production and the power of the market, of money and capital, leads to their expansion" ("The Political Parties in Russia", 1912, Collected Works, Vol. 18, pp. 52-3).

The liberation of the peasant from the bonds of natural economy, the development of a "*modern*" industry, utilising the reserves of labour and capital supplied by a "*modern*" agriculture, the creation of a national market and, crowning it all, the glorification of "*national unity*", of "*national culture*", and of all the "*modern*" attributes of the State power: all this has always been, and always will be, the programme of capitalist accumulation.

3. And yet Marxism, far from restricting itself in a bourgeois revolutionary movement to issuing formal demands for a national State and political democracy, makes the most rigorous assessment of the role of the social classes in all revolutions. The appearance of an industrial proletariat in China, as in tsarist Russia or Europe in 1848, indicated to communists the necessity for a class organization which would utilise the crises of the pre-bourgeois regime for its own political purposes. This is the line of the Communist Manifesto and of the October Revolution; a line that Marx named "*permanent revolution*". In his Supplementary Theses on the colonial question presented at the 2nd Congress of the 3rd International, Roy stressed the importance of this perspective of independent and continuous struggle for the proletariat in the colonies:

"Foreign domination constantly obstructs the free development of social life; therefore the revolution's first step must be the removal of this

foreign domination. The struggle to overthrow foreign domination in the colonies does not therefore mean underwriting the national aims of the national bourgeoisie but much rather smoothing the path to liberation for the proletariat of the colonies (...) In the first period the revolution in the colonies will not be communist; if however from the very start the communist vanguard emerges at its head the revolutionary masses will be brought on to the correct path along which, through the gradual gathering of revolutionary experience, they will reach the hidden goal".

By imprisoning the Chinese proletariat, from the very start of the revolution, in "*the block of the four classes*" – political formula of the present "*people's democracy*" – Mao's party has marked the break, by the whole of the backward East, of the tactics so gloriously expounded by Russian Bolshevism.

4. The permanence of the revolutionary process which was to bring the proletariat of the backward countries to power, would make sense, in terms of the final victory of Communism, only if the proletarian revolution succeeded in spreading to the metropolises of Capital. In the second foreword to the Russian edition of the Manifesto, Marx wrote that Russia could only escape the painful phase of capitalist accumulation: "*if the Russian revolution becomes the signal to a proletarian revolution in the West, so that both complement each other*".

Lenin's International not only took up this perspective again for Soviet Russia, but extended it to the whole of Asia. We quote here from the theses of the Baku Congress in 1920:

"Only the complete triumph of the social revolution and the establishing of the Communist world economy can liberate the peasants of the East from ruin, poverty and exploitation. Therefore, no other course is open to their liberation than allying themselves to the revolutionary workers of the West, to their Soviet republics and simultaneously fighting the foreign capitalists as well as their own despots (the landowners and the bourgeoisie) until the complete victory over the world bourgeoisie and until the final establishment of the Communist regime".

It is well known how Stalinism turned this thesis on its head by making Russia's economic and diplomatic success the universal criterion of Communism's progress. Peking goes even further in repudiating it: instead of seeing the victory of the Western proletariat as the only prospect for social liberation in the East, Peking makes the cause of the international proletariat dependent on the outcome of the bourgeois national revolts in Africa and Asia.

5. In opposition to the Stalinist theory of *"building socialism in the USSR"*, and the tactical extensions that the degenerated International gave to this theory in China, Trotsky has the historical merit of defending the unabridged view of the revolutionary process which was triggered by the first World War and the October Revolution. Thus, in his *"Theses"* of 1929 on the permanent revolution he declared:

"The completion of the socialist revolution within national limits is unthinkable. One of the basic reasons for the crisis in bourgeois society is the fact that the productive forces created by it can no longer be reconciled with the framework of the national State. From this follow, on the one hand, imperialist wars, on the other, the Utopia of a bourgeois United States of Europe. The socialist revolution begins on the national arena, it unfolds in the international arena, and is completed on the world arena".

Thus the theory of the permanent revolution is applied to each isolated proletarian dictatorship, both those whose economic structures are ripe for certain socialist changes and those in which they are still very backward. No more than Hitler's Germany, Stalinist Russia couldn't arrogate to itself the national privilege of *"building socialism"* within its borders. But on the other hand, Trotsky insisted:

"the development of the world revolution eliminates the question of countries that are 'mature' or 'immature' for socialism, in the spirit of that pedantic, lifeless classification given by the present programme of the Comintern. Insofar as capitalism has created a world market, a world division of labour and world productive forces, it has also prepared world economy as a whole for socialist transformation".

Democracy and the Proletariat: The National Question

6. By installing the dictatorship of the proletariat in a petty-bourgeois country which had experienced neither parliamentary regimes nor developed capitalism, the Russian Bolsheviks dealt a death-blow to the reformism of the 2nd International which had made bourgeois democracy, and its *"progress"*, an absolute condition for the *"transition"* to socialism.

Half a century later, not content with considering constitutional reforms and democratic methods as the royal road to socialism, the renegades define socialism itself with bourgeois terms like *"people's democracy"* or *"State of the entire people"*. Those who destroyed Lenin's International have but one slogan and one creed: independence of the various *"Communist"* parties, non-intervention in the internal affairs of the *"national"* parties.

In explaining the collapse of the 2nd International, the 1919 Manifesto declared:

"But the centre of gravity of the workers' movement during that period remained wholly on national soil, wholly within the framework of national States, upon the foundation of national industry, within the sphere of national parliamentarianism".

We deny that the way the 3rd International ended up was inevitable. World capitalism and the imperialist wars had just shifted this "centre of gravity" onto the international arena, not just for the advanced capitalist countries, but also for the oppressed countries where the national colonial question arose to its fullest extent.

7. The national question arises as a specific question for the proletarian movement only in the revolutionary phase of capitalism when the bourgeoisie storms the bastions of power in order to complete its social and economic transformation. During the mature phase of capitalism, on the other hand, if any workers' party puts out a "national programme" demanding the perfecting of the representative or economic system of the bourgeois State, it constitutes a programme for class collaboration and for "defence of the homeland". That is why Marxism has always strictly defined with reference to geographical areas these two successive phases of capitalism.

"The epoch of bourgeois democratic revolutions in Western continental Europe embraces a fairly definite period: approximately between 1789 to 1871" wrote Lenin. "This was precisely the period of national movements and the creation of national States. When this period drew to a close, Western Europe had been transformed into a settled system of bourgeois States, which as a general rule, were nationally uniform states. Therefore to seek the right to self-determination in the programme of the West-Europe socialists at this time of day is to betray one's ignorance of the ABC of Marxism. In Eastern Europe and Asia the epoch of the bourgeois democratic revolutions did not start until 1905. The revolutions in Russia, Persia, Turkey and China, the Balkan wars – such is the chain of world events of OUR period in our "Orient"" (Lenin, "The Right of Nations to Self-determination", 1914, Coll. Works, Vol. 20, pp. 405-6).

Today, this phase is also concluded as far as the entire Afro-Asian area is concerned. Everywhere more or less "independent", and more or less "popular", national States have arisen since the end of the Second World War which, in a more or less "radical" way, have promoted the accumulation of capital. For this reason alone, Chinese "extremism" can no longer be depicted as the theory of a national revolutionary movement. Instead it is the official ideology of an established bourgeois State, a

programme for class collaboration with all that that implies in terms of "socialist" phraseology.

8. Even during the period of bourgeois democratic revolutions, communists mustn't make a fetish of the "*national question*", and should never place resolving it above the interests of the class and their own struggle. The revolutionary proletariat must never forget that its historic task is to destroy the bourgeois State and its relations of production in order to build a society where classes will disappear, along with distinctions between States and even between nations.

As it capitalism develops it tears down national boundaries with its commodities and its armies. As destroyer of property relations, capitalism breaks down national entities and imposes its forms of world domination upon the most advanced countries as upon the oppressed peoples. Therefore communists should not expect capitalism to create a harmonious "*society of nations*" where relations between States are regulated in conformity with "*people's rights*". They were however entitled to hope that the overthrow of world capitalism might mean that the East would be able to escape the phase of capitalist accumulation and constitution of bourgeois national States.

Lenin also said:

"We cannot say whether Asia will have had time to develop into a system of independent national States, like Europe, before the collapse of capitalism, but it remains an undisputed fact, that capitalism, having awakened Asia, has called forth national movements everywhere in that continent, too; that the tendency of these movements is towards the creation of national States in Asia; that it is such states that ensure the best conditions for the development of capitalism" (ibid., p.399).

9. The Third International had foreseen the different ways in which the world revolution might develop:
 - Simultaneous victory of the proletariat in the West and the East
 - Victory of the proletariat in the industrial centres and independence for the colonies under the national bourgeoisie
 - Victory of the proletariat in the colonies and delay of the communist revolution in Europe.

But it never considered the victory of a block of classes to be a lasting revolutionary perspective to which the proletariat in the backward countries should link its destiny. The theses of the 2nd Congress, which Roy dedicated especially to China and India, in any case stressed how necessary it was for the proletariat to detach itself from the "*national*" bourgeoisie:

"Two movements can be discerned [in the oppressed countries] which are growing further and further apart with every day which passes. One of them is the bourgeois-democratic nationalist movement, which pursues the programme of political liberation with the conservation of the capitalist order; the other is the struggle of the propertyless peasants and workers for their liberation from every kind of exploitation. The first movement attempts, often with success, to control the second; the Communist International must however fight against any such control, and promote the development of the class consciousness of the working masses of the colonies".

10. The history of the Chinese workers' movement and of the political tradition of the Communist Party of China is one of rejection of this demand made by the International. Already having entered the Kuomintang in 1924, the young Chinese Communist Party (CCP) gave its support to the *"people's three principles"*, Asiatic variant of the formulas advocated by Lincoln (*"Government of the people, for the people and by the people"*) and the bourgeois French revolution (*"Liberty, Equality, Fraternity"*). As Trotsky pointed out, the fusion of the Communist Party of China with the nationalist party had nothing to do with the tactics of temporary alliances which Marx considered acceptable during a bourgeois democratic revolution and which had been used by the Bolsheviks in Russia. It was a case of a merger on principle, renewed by Mao Tse-tung at every *"stage"* of the Chinese revolution even after the defeat and destruction of the Kuomintang. Indeed in 1945, in his report *"On Coalition Government"* he would declare:

"These views of ours are completely in accord with the revolutionary views of Dr. Sun Yat-sen... struggle against foreign feudal oppression to deliver the Chinese people from their miserable colonial, semi-colonial and semi-feudal plight and establish a proletarian-led, new-democratic China, whose main task is the liberation of the peasantry, a China of the revolutionary Three People's Principles of Dr. Sun Yat-sen, a China which is independent, free, democratic, united, prosperous and powerful. This is what we have actually been doing" (Sel. Works, Vol. III, pp. 230 and 232).

From the Russian Revolution to the Canton Commune: the Revenge of the Mensheviks

11. It is in the analysis of the events of 1905 that Bolshevism found its tactics confirmed and which separated it definitively from the Menshevik current. Lenin stated that in Russia *"the bourgeois revolution is impossible as a revolution of the bourgeoisie"*. Thus the proletariat cannot be expected to wait until the bourgeoisie has carried out its political and social tasks

(overthrowing tsarism and abolishing feudal property) before launching its own struggle. Leading the social movement without restricting it within bourgeois juridical forms (the constituent assembly) was the meaning of the slogan: *"the democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants"* and *"All power to the soviets!"*. The result of these tactics was not the establishment of a bourgeois democracy but of the open dictatorship of the proletariat.

In combatting the theory of the *"stages"* of bourgeois revolution which Stalin already supported at this time, Lenin recalled in March 1917 the essence of the conflict between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks:

"Ours is a bourgeois revolution, therefore, the workers must support the bourgeoisie, say the incompetent politicians in the camp of the liquidators. Ours is a bourgeois revolution, we Marxists say, therefore, the workers must open the eyes of the people to the deception practiced by the bourgeois politicians, teach them to put no faith in words, to depend entirely on their own strength, their own organisation, their own unity, and their own weapons" ("Letters From Afar", Coll. Works, Vol. 23, pp.297-308).

12. Stalinism has done its utmost to prevent the application to the colonial countries of the principles and lessons of the October Revolution, and to this end it has supported a typically Menshevik interpretation, according to which the imperialist yoke rendered the *"national"* bourgeoisie of the backward countries more revolutionary than the Russian anti-feudal bourgeoisie. In reply to this theory of Bukharin, Trotsky wrote:

"A policy that disregarded the powerful pressure of imperialism on the internal life of China would be radically false. But a policy that proceeded from an abstract conception of national oppression without its class refraction and reflection would be no less false (...) Imperialism is a highly powerful force in the internal relationships of China. The main source of this force is not the warships in the waters of the Yangtze Kiang, but the economic and political bond between foreign capital and the native bourgeoisie" (The Chinese Revolution and Stalin's Theses, 1927).

Without an analysis of the class relations in China, or in the other colonial countries, it was impossible to understand either the essence of the agrarian question or the phenomenon of the comprador bourgeoisie, or finally the role of the *"warlords"* and the other nationalist generals such as Chiang Kai-shek and Wang Ching-wei, to whom the International looked for *"allies"* but found only hangmen.

13. *"The Asiatic revolutions have again shown us the spinelessness and baseness of liberalism, the exceptional importance of the independence of the democratic masses, and the pronounced demarcation between the*

proletariat and the bourgeoisie of all kinds" (Lenin, "Historical Destiny of the Doctrine of Karl Marx", 1913, Coll. Works, Vol. 18, pp. 584-5).

Such are the lessons that Lenin drew after 1913 from the first wave of bourgeois national revolutions in the East: Russia (1905), Persia (1906), Turkey (1908), China (1911). And Trotsky, shortly before the ending of the second revolutionary with the massacre of the Canton proletariat in 1927, would sum up the bitter lessons of the International's tactics as follows:

"From the theses of Stalin it follows that the proletariat can separate itself from the bourgeoisie only after the latter has tossed it aside, disarmed it, beheaded it and crushed it under foot. But this is precisely the way the abortive revolution of 1848 developed, where the proletariat had no banner of its own, but followed at the heels of the petty-bourgeois democracy, which in turn trotted behind the liberal bourgeoisie and led the workers under the sabre of Cavaignac. Great though the real peculiarities of the Chinese situation may be, the fundamentals that characterized the development of the 1848 revolution have been repeated in the Chinese revolution with such deadly precision as though neither the lessons of 1848, 1871, 1905 and 1917 nor those of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Comintern had ever existed".

And during the great battles of the Chinese revolution between 1924 and 1927, it was not actually the future of an *"independent, prosperous and powerful"* China which was compromised for many years, but the future of the entire workers' movement in the colonies, for an infinitely longer, and much more painful, historical period.

14. By joining the Kuomintang, and dispatching its *"ministers"* to the nationalist government in Canton, the CCP wasn't making a smart tactical manoeuvre to increase its influence as the International in Moscow would have had it believe. It was renouncing its principles and subordinating its action to the national strategy of the bourgeoisie. Stalin took this position to its extreme consequences, and the *"theses"* he published in April 1927, more than a year after Chiang Kai-shek's first blow against the Communists, were given a *"classical"* form.

Indeed adherence to *"the people's three principles"* did not imply just the simple recognition of abstract principles, the *"common belief of the workers and the bourgeoisie in the national movement"*. According to the doctrine of Sun Yat-sen to the *"three principles"* corresponded *"three stages"* in the development of the bourgeois revolution:

- the first, *"military"*, stage was to translate the principle of nationalism into practice through the unification of China;

- the second, "*educative*", stage was to prepare the people for political democracy;
- the third, and final, stage was to realise this democracy and introduce "*the welfare of the people*".

Stalin adopted these same "*stages*" in his "*theses*" renaming them anti-imperialist, agrarian and soviet, only for him the massacre of the Chinese proletariat signified the ending of the "*first stage*", during which Communists were neither to broach the agrarian question nor consider leaving the Kuomintang. All the Stalinist parties would take up this policy again in the colonial countries. In China, where it was used for the first time, it revealed itself as open class betrayal, abandoning the insurgent proletarians in the main industrial centres to the blood-thirsty repression of Chiang Kai-shek.

- 15.** Stalinism never wished to consider the defeat in 1927 as anything other than a "*stage*" of the bourgeois revolution in China and a "*temporary*" setback in the workers' movement. We reject this interpretation. The class struggles of this period were anything but "*partial*", so much so that they were transformed into a struggle for power between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and defeat was accompanied by the physical and long-lasting elimination of the entire Communist vanguard. By then, as Trotsky said, the "*democratic revolution*" in China had taken on the character not of bourgeois revolution, but of bourgeois counter-revolution. Finally, the failure in 1927 marked the complete rejection on the part of the Moscow International of the Bolshevik tradition in all countries in the East. The April Theses of 1917, in which Lenin announced the approaching victory of the Russian revolution, are contradicted word for word by the theses of April 1927 in which Stalin justifies Chiang Kai-shek's coup d'etat by the theory of revolutionary "*stages*".

In opposition to bourgeois and national historiography, Marxism must re-establish its proletarian and international concept of the historical course of the bourgeois revolutionary movements:

1789 - 1871: bourgeois democratic movements in Western Europe (as well as in North America and Japan);

1905 - 1950 (roughly): national revolutionary movements in Eastern Europe and in the entire Afro-Asian area; just one proletarian victory: in Russia;

1917 - 1927: world strategy of the permanent revolution, with defeat in Europe (1918-1923) and in Asia (1924-1927) as the conditions for the Stalinist counter-revolution in Russia and in the rest of the world.

Peasant "Socialism" and the "New" Democracy

16. Marxism has not only denounced the theory of the *"democratic stage"*, it has also rejected, during the *"agrarian stage"*, the use by Stalin of the slogan *"democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants"* to cover up the governmental alliance with the left of the Kuomintang. In its completed form this theory has become the theory of the *"new"* democracy, signaling the complete abandonment of those Marxist conceptions on the class nature of each and every State.

"Thus the numerous forms of State systems in the world can be reduced to these three basic types: 1) republics under bourgeois dictatorship; 2) republics under the dictatorship of the proletariat; 3) republics under the joint dictatorship of several revolutionary classes(...). During a specific historical period, the only applicable form of State organisation is the third, the one which we call the new-democratic republic". (Mao Tse-tung, On New Democracy, 1940).

Lenin's International never called upon the proletarians of the colonies to establish such *"intermediary"* States between the dictatorship of the proletariat and that of the bourgeoisie, and we also deny that there exists, or ever has existed, a single example of such a State after over 40 years of *"anti-imperialist fronts"*. The experience of duality of power during the Russian revolution showed that the *"democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants"* is inevitably transformed, in a short period, into either the dictatorship of the proletariat or the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. Trotsky extended this lesson to the Chinese revolution, and we can see its confirmation today in the bourgeois outcome of every anti-colonial movement.

"While the Russian Narodniks, together with the Mensheviks, lent to their short-lived "dictatorship" the form of an open dual power, the Chinese "revolutionary democracy" did not even attain that stage. And inasmuch as history in general does not work to order, there only remains for us to understand that there is not and will not be any other "democratic dictatorship" except the dictatorship exercised by the Kuomintang since 1925" (Trotsky, The Communist International After Lenin).

17. After having long ignored the agrarian movement and the arming of the peasants, the Stalinists became so infatuated with it that they came to consider it the *"defining trait of the Chinese revolution and the basis of the new democracy"*.

"In essence, the national question is a peasant question", Stalin declared. And Mao commented:

"This means that the Chinese revolution is essentially a peasant revolution, and that the resistance to Japan now going on is essentially peasant resistance. Essentially, the politics of New Democracy means giving power to peasants" (Mao Tse-tung, On New Democracy, 1940)

It is not in this, as far as we are concerned, that the originality of the bourgeois revolutions in the imperialist epoch lies. In the past, all of them have all used the peasants in different ways, including the armed organization, and they have all, to varying degrees, brought along profound changes in agriculture. Yet Marxism has always stressed the incapacity of the peasant class to define a policy of its own. It has shown that agrarian insurrections, which are an integral part of bourgeois revolutions, have only succeeded under the leadership of the cities and by ceding power to them. The Communist Manifesto already insisted back in 1848 on the dual character of the peasantry and why it cannot act as an independent class. The peasant is nothing but the social representative of bourgeois relations; he always leaves his political representation to others.

To all those champions of peasant *"socialism"* who, both in Russia and China, have reproached us for *"underestimating"* the peasantry, we answer that we have always stressed the lessons of Marxism and that the originality of the Eastern revolutions lies not in the armed intervention of the peasant masses, but in the prospect of a proletariat course towards not inevitably bourgeois goals.

18. The defeat of the Chinese proletariat explains why the revolution had had to recede to the countryside. But it does not provide justification for communists to exchange their class conceptions for the theories of peasant *"socialism"*. In 1848-9 the failure of the German revolution had left the proletariat in the same politically disorganised situation; it had put it in the same danger of being submerged by petit-bourgeois democracy. This was the danger confronted by Marx and Engels in their famous Address to the Communist League.

Against the petit-bourgeois radicals, who *"seek to ensnare the workers in a party organization in which general social-democratic phrases prevail, while their particular interests are kept hidden"*, the Address stresses the necessity of an independent class party.

Against every type of petit-bourgeois democratic power, this is how the Address introduced the slogan of the proletarian revolution:

"Alongside the new official governments the workers must simultaneously establish their own revolutionary workers' governments, either in the form of local executive committees and councils or through workers' clubs or committees, so that the bourgeois-democratic

governments not only immediately lose the support of the workers but find themselves from the very beginning supervised and threatened by authorities behind which stand the whole mass of the workers". (Marx, The Revolutions of 1848).

This is the classical answer of Marxism to the reactionary formulas of "workers' and peasants' parties", "workers' and peasants' governments" and of the "new" democracy. The Address of 1850 is directed entirely against them. If Marx and Engels do not speak of "democratic dictatorship" here, it is because they didn't consider it a fitting slogan for the proletariat to use against the agitation of the petit-bourgeois democrats. The opinions of Stalin and Mao cannot even be based on the absence in Germany of the "original" particularity they claimed to have discovered in China, and indeed even in Russia: the agrarian revolution. On the contrary, Marx and Engels more than once discounted a 're-run' of the peasant war of the 16th century under the political guidance of the proletariat.

19. The Russian revolution, no more than the German bourgeois revolution, doesn't reveal the secret of a stable "popular" power representing a block of classes. Long before 1917 Lenin explained the formula of the "revolutionary and democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants" as a power of the proletariat "relying upon the peasants" or "drawing the peasants along behind it"; a formula which was neither frontist nor "democratic". This is how, in perfect continuity with Marx and Engels, he interprets the slogan in April 1917:

"The revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry has already become a reality in the Russian revolution, for this "formula" envisages only a class correlation and not a concrete political institution implementing this correlation, this cooperation. "The Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies" – there you have the "revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry" already accomplished in reality" (Lenin, "Letters On Tactics", Coll. Works, Vol. 24, 44-5).

"We have side by side, existing together, simultaneously, both the rule of the bourgeoisie (the government of Lvov and Guchov) and a revolutionary-dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry, which is voluntarily ceding power to the bourgeoisie, voluntarily making itself an appendage of the bourgeoisie" (ibid., p.46).

"A new and different task now faces us: to effect a split within this dictatorship between the proletarian elements (the anti-defencist, internationalist, 'communist' elements, who stand for a transition to the commune) and the small-proprietor or petit-bourgeois elements" (ibid., p. 45).

Between February and October the populists and Mensheviks were rabid supporters of the *"democratic dictatorship"*, reproaching Lenin for *"underestimating"* the peasantry and for wanting to *"jump over"* the stage of bourgeois social reforms. The Bolsheviks, on the other hand, pointed out that it was not a question of *"introducing socialism"* into Russia, but of seizing political power; after which they would show how the proletarian dictatorship would realise the economic reforms of the petit-bourgeois democracy.

20. After the capitulation before the Chinese liberal bourgeoisie, the *"struggle against Trotskyism"* aimed to ensure the triumph, within the defeated proletariat, of positions which had previously been defended by the bloc of populists and Mensheviks at the time of the Russian revolution. And it was Mao Tse-tung, one time member of the Central Committee of the Kuomintang and recent agitator of the peasantry, who executed this task.

In our view he neither *"saved"* nor *"reconstructed"* the party of the proletariat by leading it *"into the mountains"* and pushing it into peasant guerrilla warfare: he simply drowned it in the confused petit-bourgeois mass. In contrast, Lenin in April 1917, and Marx in March 1850, were able to prevent Communists from getting bogged down in this way. And as regards the question of power in the Chinese revolution, Mao tse-tung has not even shaken off the petit-bourgeois illusions which allowed Chiang Kai-shek's repression to go unchecked in 1927. The theory of the *"new democracy"* is nothing but the development of these same illusions in a period and in a country in which the weakness of the *"national"* bourgeoisie left no other prospect for constituting the bourgeois power than by the action of the *"popular"* and peasant masses, so inept and slow to get themselves organised.

The petty-bourgeois democrats love to blame 'reaction' for the difficulties they have in achieving 'effective' unity, for their lack of character and their innate instability. Marxism, on the other hand, sees it as a reflection of their unstable economic situation. To appeal to the political initiative of these masses in order to found a national State, to combat imperialism or to realise the socialist programme, this not only repudiates Marx and Lenin, but compromises the entire revolutionary movement. Proof enough is provided, in our view, by the interminable fluctuations of the Chinese revolution and, today, by the blood-stained anarchy contorting the major part of black Africa.

This is why in 1917 Lenin set aside the *"old formula"* of the *"revolutionary and democratic dictatorship"*, which the populists and Mensheviks wanted to *"realise"* by means of... the constituent assembly.

In the same way the Bolsheviks consigned the name "social-democratic party" to the archives of the 2nd International.

Because, and this also goes for the "new democracy":

"Democracy" expresses in reality one moment the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, next the impotent reformism of the petit-bourgeoisie that submits to this dictatorship" (Lenin, The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky).

"Impotent Petit-Bourgeois Reformism"

21. In their 1850 Address, Marx and Engels warned German proletarians that the petit-bourgeois democracy would play the same treacherous role as the liberal bourgeoisie in the revolutionary transformation of the old social and political structures. The confirmation of these predictions in Russia would be the social-revolutionaries. The Chinese example gives us absolute confirmation on the scale of an entire historical period and of an entire country.

"The democratic petty bourgeois, far from wanting to transform the whole of society in the interests of the revolutionary proletarians, only aspire to a change in social conditions which will make the existing society as tolerable and comfortable for themselves as possible. They therefore demand above all else a reduction in government spending through a restriction of the bureaucracy and the transference of the major tax burden onto the large landowners and bourgeoisie. They further demand the removal of the pressure exerted by big capital on small capital through the establishment of public credit institutions and the passing of laws against usury, whereby it would be possible for themselves and the peasants to receive advances on favourable terms from the State instead of from capitalists; also, the introduction of bourgeois property relationships on the land through the complete abolition of feudalism..."

"As far as the workers are concerned one thing, above all, is definite: they are to remain as before. However, the democratic petty bourgeois want better wages and security for the workers, and hope to achieve this by an extension of State employment and by welfare measures... But these demands can in no way satisfy the party of the proletariat. While the democratic petty bourgeois want to bring the revolution to an end as quickly as possible, achieving at most the aims already mentioned, it is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent until all the more propertied classes have been driven from their ruling positions, until the proletariat has conquered State power and until the association of the proletarians has progressed sufficiently far – not only in one country but in all leading countries of the world – that competition between the proletarians of these countries ceases and at least the decisive forces of production are concentrated in the hands of the workers. Our concern cannot simply be to modify private property, but to abolish it, not to hush up class antagonisms but to abolish classes, not to

improve the existing society but to found a new one" (Address..., ibid. pp. 323-4).

22. With regard to the agrarian question, Mao's party had done nothing to combat the petit-bourgeois tendencies which were anxious to emphasise the break with the old relations with a juridical consecration of the sacred rights of peasant property. And none of the reforms so noisily proclaimed since the creation of the People's Republic have contemplated a greater concentration of agriculture than that based on the development of small production, the "*interests*" of the small-holding peasant and State "*aid*" for the latter. When they wished to overcome these limitations, which are those of bourgeois relations of production, the social catastrophe which occurred was no less serious than that which followed the false Stalinist collectivisation in Russia.

In brief, the famous "agrarian revolution" is reduced to a harsh accumulation of capital in the Chinese rural areas in accordance with the two classical phases of the development of capitalist agriculture: firstly the establishment of peasant property, then a slow process of expropriation and concentration under the impulse of the bourgeois productive forces and a growing market economy.

"If no special obstacle arises, we are prepared to continue this policy after the war, first extending rent and interest reduction to the whole country and then taking proper measures for the gradual achievement of "land of the tiller"" (Mao Tse-tung, On Coalition Government, 1945, op.cit., p. 248).

"Then, as the peasants are helped to organize farming and other production co-operatives step by step on a voluntary basis, the productive forces will grow" (ibid., p.251).

It has taken a quarter of a century (1927-1952) to achieve the first phase: confiscation and division. But before China has a "*modern*", concentrated, i.e., fully capitalist agriculture, we can only hope that the Communist proletariat of the world will have got the better of national, peasant and petit-bourgeois "*socialism*".

23. In the weary historical development of Chinese agriculture we can see one fact confirmed: its bourgeois character. But our criticism of the agrarian policy of the CCP is to do with a matter of principle: all it has done is mirror the molecular processes of this development without trying to anticipate its social consequences, particularly as regards the overthrow of bourgeois property relations. Let us quote again from the 1850 Address:

"The first point over which the bourgeois democrats will come into conflict with the workers will be the abolition of feudalism; as in the first French revolution, the petty bourgeoisie will want to give the feudal lands to the peasants as free property; that is, they will try to perpetuate the existence of the rural proletariat, and to form a petty-bourgeois peasant class which will be subject to the same cycle of impoverishment and debt which still afflicts the French peasant. The workers must oppose this plan both in the interest of the rural proletariat and in their own interest. They must demand the confiscated feudal property remain State property and be used for workers' colonies, cultivated collectively by the rural proletariat with all the advantages of large-scale farming and where the principle of common property will immediately achieve a sound basis in the midst of the shaky system of bourgeois property relations" (op. cit., pp. 327-8).

For Communists, it was not a matter of determining whether China or petit-bourgeois Russia was "ripe" for this transformation: the overthrow of bourgeois domination is conceivable only on an international scale. Neither was it a matter of inventing, in a given country, "collectivist" recipes in order to accelerate its economic development. "We write a decree and not a programme", Lenin said commenting on the "Decree on the Land", which some reproached for being the programme of the social-revolutionaries. And yet on one point this "decree" differed from their "programme": it did not include the aspirations of the peasantry in fixed juridical forms (division of land, nationalization). In this resides the whole of the difference between the programmes of national "socialism" and internationalist Communism.

24. The petit-bourgeois policy of Mao's party appears in a still clearer light in the "question of the workers". Far from writing "abolition of the wages system" on its banner, the CCP proclaims the association of capital and labour and does not neglect any "measure of charity" in the tradition of the "socialists" à la Louis Blanc:

"The task of the Chinese working class is to struggle not only for the establishment of a new-democratic State but also for China's industrialization and modernization of her agriculture. "The policy of adjusting the interests of labour and capital will be adopted under the new-democratic State system. On the one hand, it will protect the interests of the workers, institute an eight to ten hour working day according to circumstance, provide suitable unemployment relief and social insurance and safeguard trade union rights; on the other hand, it will guarantee legitimate profits to properly managed State, private and co-operative enterprises – so that both the public and private sectors and both labour and capital will work together to develop industrial production" (Mao Tse-tung, On Coalition Government, 1945, op. cit., p. 254).

Such a programme, such a practice, does not differ at all from the old reformism of the advanced capitalist countries, from the election speeches of any "progressive" deputy or any "reactionary" minister of the West. By calling this "socialism" and vindicating its exclusivity as compared with Moscow, Mao has elevated himself to the "ideological" level of the bourgeois conservative forces of the world. He has lost his halo as a peasant agitator.

In China the petit-bourgeois democracy ceased to be revolutionary in 1927; even before it took State power it had become reformist; today it has become reactionary, presenting its illusions, and especially its economico-social practice, under the label of "socialist construction". That is the only political significance that we attach to its conflict with Moscow.

25. Thus the historical destiny of Chinese "populism" has been brought to a close. Since the first bourgeois revolution in 1911 Lenin stressed the double aspect of Sun Yat-sen's ideology. Utopian was the idea of realising "socialism" through a nationalisation of the land, the "limitation" of big capital and the "honest" application of a plan for industrial development agreed upon by the Great Powers. But this programme had a bourgeois revolutionary substance that the Bolsheviks could recognise in China, as in Russia. In adopting it, and realising it, Mao's party conferred on it the only "original development" that was reserved for it: the Utopian idea of peasant "socialism" has become the reactionary ideology of the "socialist construction" in China; and its revolutionary substance has been squandered in the ocean of petty-bourgeois reforms.

Thus did the political ideology of a class degenerate long after history had condemned it to death. At the other extreme, as early as 1894, as the Russian proletariat was taking its first faltering steps, Lenin could announce the ideological bankruptcy of the "Friends of the People" several decades before their "popular" power saw the light of day:

"The rural countryside is indeed splitting up. Nay more, the countryside long ago split up completely. And the old Russian peasant socialism split up with it, making for workers' socialism, on the one hand, and degenerating into vulgar petit-bourgeois radicalism, on the other hand. This change cannot be described as anything but degeneration. From the doctrine that peasant life is a special order and that our country has taken an exceptional path of development, there has emerged a sort of diluted eclecticism, which can no more deny that commodity economy has become the basis of economic development and has grown into capitalism, but which refuses to see the necessity of the class struggle under this system. From a political programme, calculated to arouse the peasantry for the socialist revolution against the foundations of modern society, there has emerged a programme calculated to patch up, to

"improve" the conditions of the peasantry while preserving the foundations of modern society" (Lenin, "What the Friends of the People Are", Part III, 1894 - Coll. Works, Vol. 1, pp. 264-5).

Rivalries in the Bourgeois East

26. Unlike India and other colonial countries, China entered modern history as *"everybody's colony"*. Very soon the export of capital prevailed over the export of industrial products from the old English metropolis. To protect their investments the Great Powers *"agreed"* on the division of the country into spheres of influence. In Peking the diplomatic corps had the State finances at their disposal. This situation was a reflection, as Lenin pointed out, of the transition of capitalism to its highest stage: imperialism. Wilson's programme for *"the internationalisation of the colonies"*, Kautsky's *"ultra-imperialist"* version of it, and the project, laid down by Sun Yat-sen, for the creation of a consortium of the Great Powers for the development of an *"independent"* China had no other objective basis.

"Let us assume – said Lenin – that all the imperialist countries conclude an alliance for the "peaceful" division of those parts of Asia; this alliance would be an alliance of "internationally united finance capital". There are actual examples of alliance of this kind in the history of the 20th century – the attitude of the powers to China for instance. We ask, is it "conceivable", assuming that the capitalist system remains intact - and this is the assumption that Kautsky does make – that such alliance would be more than temporary, that they would eliminate friction, conflicts and struggle in every possible form?" (Lenin, Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism, 1916).

The example of China has shown that it was inconceivable. The country which at the beginning of the century seemed to offer the greatest promise of a capitalist development and the surest guarantees of profits has become the closed battlefield of civil wars and imperialist rivalry. Or rather, faced with the outbreak of these antagonisms world imperialism had to renounce all its economic *"plans"* in China, transferring the unbridled competition between Capitals to the old colonies or semi-colonies: India, Africa, South America. Here *"overseas development"* and the stale pacifisms of the Russo-American Wilsons and Kautskys reappeared: but the groundwork was also laid for future revolutionary explosions on an even larger scale.

27. Mao's party did all it could to ensure its victory wasn't characterised by a violent rupture of the imperialist chain in Asia. The CCP, adhering even more completely to the world war than Sun Yat-sen, acquired the illusions of the liberal Chinese bourgeoisie about a *"society of nations"*, and an *"international co-operation"*, which would benefit China.

"The CCP agrees with the Atlantic Charter and with the decisions of the international conferences of Moscow, Teheran and Yalta (...). The fundamental principles of the CCP's foreign policy are as follows: to establish and develop diplomatic relations with all countries, to resolve all questions of mutual relations (...) setting out from the need to crush the fascist aggressors, to maintain international peace, to mutually respect independence and equality in the rights of States, to cooperate with each other in the interests of States and peoples" (Mao Tse-tung, On the Coalition Government, 1945).

Sun Yat-sen recognised the bankruptcy of this programme back in 1924! Mao not only remained faithful to it but passed it off as "socialism":

"The socialist countries, great and small, whether economically developed or not, must establish their relations on the basis of the principles of complete equality, of respect for territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence, of non-interference in internal affairs, as well as reciprocal support and assistance" (Letter in 25 points, 14/6/63).

In opposition to the petty-bourgeois utopia of a 'socialism' of the countries realising a 'harmonious' development towards 'equal' trade, we call for the destruction of the bourgeois countries and the establishment of non-mercantile, not merely 'equal', relations between countries in which tomorrow the dictatorship of the proletariat will be established!

28. Far from reflecting 'ideological differences', the Sino-Soviet conflict exists on the same terrain as bourgeois national interests. It is incontestable that the compromises which the USSR made with the indigenous bourgeoisie and with foreign imperialism delayed the constitution of national bourgeois States in the East until after the 2nd World War. Just as the Russian Revolution was re-awakening the anti-colonial movements in Asia, the Stalinist counter-revolution halted their development. But Mao's party taking its stand against Moscow today never denounced this betrayal: neither in 1937, when the CPP timidly executed the turn towards "popular fronts" by renewing the alliance with Chiang Kai-shek, nor in 1945, when Stalin signed a treaty of peace and friendship, again with Chiang, which was supposed to last... thirty years.

It isn't therefore consciousness of the interests of the anti-colonial movement, less still a critique of Russian 'socialism', which lies behind the Sino-soviet conflict. Rather it is the contradictions between the interests of Chinese capitalism and Russian imperialism:

"It is yet more absurd to transpose into relations between the socialist countries the praxis consistent with realising profits at the expense of others – a praxis which characterises relations between capitalist countries – and arrive at stating that the "economic integration"

and "common market" introduced by monopolist groups in order to corner markets and divide up profits could serve as an example to the socialist countries in their mutual assistance and economic collaboration" (Letter in 25 points).

29. The 'programme' which Stalin pushed through at the 6th Comintern Congress excluded China and the other backward countries from 'building socialism' within their national borders: a privilege which Russia had so recently arrogated to itself. Just at the moment when the interests of Russian capitalism became integrated into those of the world market, China took up this old Stalinist slogan to use on its own behalf. And about it we will repeat what Trotsky said about *"Russian socialism"*:

"The world division of labour, the dependence of soviet industry upon foreign technology, the dependence of the productive forces of the advanced countries of Europe upon Asiatic raw materials, etc., etc., make the construction of an independent socialist society in any single country in the world impossible" (Theses on the Permanent Revolution).

The *"construction of Socialism"* in China can signify only the accumulation of capital and the extension of a market economy. But this theory hasn't managed to mask much more acute antagonisms. The Sino-soviet conflict, the entire history of the national bourgeois movements in Asia and Africa, and every conference on world trade has anxiously underlined the growing backwardness of the 'under-developed' countries, be they 'independent' or 'socialist', compared to the handful of great imperial powers which detain all military, economic and political power in today's world.

30. To avert the destiny awaiting it, the bourgeoisie of the backward countries strives by all means to pass off its political and national emancipation as social and human emancipation of the exploited masses. The proletarians of the ex-colonies, who are victims both of their own bourgeoisies and the contradictions accumulated within world imperialism, will find ever more reason to break with democratic and reformist ideology. They will then recall that Marxism, and Lenin's International, never expected political democracy and national independence to free the colonial peoples from exploitation:

"Finance capital, in its drive to expand, can 'freely' buy or bribe the freest democratic or republican government and the elective officials of any, even an 'independent', country. The domination of finance capital and of capital in general is not to be abolished by any reforms in the sphere of political democracy; and self-determination belongs wholly and exclusively to this sphere. This domination of finance capital, however, does not in the least nullify the significance of political democracy as a freer, wider and clearer form of class oppression and class struggle" (The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-determination, Lenin, 1916).

It is against this more open, broader, and freer form of class oppression that the proletariat of 'popular' China, and of Russo-American India, will have to conduct their struggle.