Deng Xiaoping and the fate of the Chinese Revolution

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The death of Deng Xiaoping has sparked a flood of obituaries. None of the media commentary, however, has risen above banalities about Deng's supposed "mixed legacy" of encouraging capitalist economic development in China, while ferociously suppressing political opposition. The media discussion has been largely aimed at investors anxiously asking the question, "Will my money still be safe in China now that Deng is gone?"

There are, nevertheless, serious issues raised by the career and record of Deng Xiaoping. How could this be otherwise with a man who ruled the most populous nation in the world for nearly a generation and whose political career is bound up with the rise and fall of one of the great social revolutions of modern times.

To make an assessment of Deng Xiaoping, it is necessary to examine the course of the Chinese Revolution and its relation to the strategic problems of the struggle for socialism in the twentieth century: Did the Russian Revolution show the road forward out of the blind alley produced by capitalism? Which class, the working class or the peasantry, is the social force capable of establishing a new society? Is there a national road to socialism? What is the role of revolutionary leadership in this transformation?

Born in 1904, the eldest son of a prosperous small landlord in Sichuan province, Deng Xiaoping was part of an extraordinary generation of revolutionary intellectuals who came to maturity in China in the wake of the collapse of the Manchu dynasty in 1911. Since its defeat by Britain in the Opium War of 1839-42, the Chinese empire had gone into terminal decline, characterized by economic stagnation, civil war and prostration before the demands of rival imperialist powers.

The most humiliating symbol of China's weakness was the loss of control of its own territory in the "concessions" granted to Britain, France, Germany, the United States and other imperialist powers. Portions of cities such as Shanghai, Tientsin and Dalien and entire enclaves like Hong Kong were ceded to foreign powers, whose police forces and legal systems held sway.

When the Manchu dynasty was overthrown in 1911 China virtually disintegrated, with rival military leaders setting themselves up as regional warlords. Sun Yat-sen, founder of the nationalist Guomindang Party, proclaimed a bourgeois democratic republic in Beijing upon the fall of the empire. But he was soon forced to flee by the local warlord, Yuan Shi-kai, finding refuge in Guangdong province in south China.

The Chinese capitalist class could not carry out the tasks of the bourgeois revolution in China: the liberation of the peasantry from the semifeudal gentry-landlord class, the unification of the country against warlord rule and the freeing of China from imperialist domination. The Chinese bourgeoisie was tied economically both to the gentry-landlord class and to the imperialist powers, for whom it acted as a middleman. It was incapable of playing an independent revolutionary role.

Marxism and the Chinese Revolution

A popular revolutionary movement erupted in China in 1919. It took place after the imperialist powers, meeting in Versailles at the end of World War I, decreed that the concessions granted to Germany by the Chinese Empire, including control of the entire Shandong peninsula, were to be handed over to Japan, one of the victorious Allies. On May 4, 1919 tens of thousands of students staged anti-Japanese demonstrations in Tiananmen Square, igniting protests and a boycott of Japanese goods which quickly swept the country.

The most thoughtful and critical-minded of these youth were inspired by the example of the Russian Revolution of 1917. As in China, the bourgeoisie in Russia had proven incapable of carrying out the tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution—the destruction of czarism and the liberation of the peasantry from semifeudal oppression. These tasks fell instead to the Russian working class, which overthrew the czarist autocracy in the February Revolution of 1917 and then took power under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party, headed by Lenin and Trotsky, in October 1917.

The new generation of revolutionary youth in China turned to the emerging working class, which played a prominent role in the anti-Japanese protests. Chinese industrial development dates to the World War I period, when factories boomed under the stimulus of war orders and in the absence of foreign competition. In 1920 the Chinese Communist Party was founded, under the leadership of Chen Duxiu, later to lead the Left Opposition and found the Chinese section of the world Trotskyist movement. The CCP grew rapidly, becoming the major party of the Chinese proletariat.

It was under these conditions that the young Deng Xiaoping arrived in France in 1921 at the age of 17. He was among a group of several thousand Chinese youth sent to work in French factories and receive technical training, as part of the popular enthusiasm for the adoption of more advanced methods which would enable China to catch up with the West.

But the advanced theory which attracted Deng Xiaoping was the Marxism of the early Communist International. He quickly joined the organization of Chinese Communist students in France, where one of his mentors was Chou En-lai. Deng proved a capable organizer, evading police surveillance and arrest until he left the country in 1925. Traveling to Moscow, he spent a year and a half studying at Sun Yat-sen University under the auspices of the Communist International.

The Comintern was then involved in a raging debate over China. The faction headed by Stalin, rejecting the most fundamental lesson of 1917, had embraced the Menshevik two-stage theory of revolution. It insisted that the Chinese working class must first support the Chinese bourgeoisie in its struggle for an independent Chinese capitalism before it could aspire to power in its own right. The tactic which flowed from this strategy was

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the subordination of the CCP to the bourgeois Guomindang Party, now headed by Chiang Kai-shek.

The CCP was integrated into the Guomindang and compelled to accept the discipline of this capitalist party, while Chiang Kai-shek was elected to the executive committee of the Comintern—over Trotsky's lone opposing vote. The CCP was barred from advancing radical social policies—such as land redistribution and workers control of industry—which would threaten this alliance with what Stalin termed the "progressive" national bourgeoisie.

Trotsky and the Left Opposition fought for the independent mobilization of the working class in China. The task of the CCP, he argued, was not to tail end the Guomindang, but to lead the Chinese proletariat, and through it the multimillioned peasantry, to overthrow capitalism and landlordism and take power. He rejected the claim that because China was an oppressed country, the class antagonism between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat was mitigated.

"The revolutionary struggle against imperialism does not weaken, but rather strengthens the political differentiation of the classes," Trotsky wrote. "Imperialism is a highly powerful force in the internal relationship of China. The main source of this force is not the warships in the waters of the Yangtse Kiang—they are only auxiliaries—but the economic and political bond between foreign capital and the native bourgeoisie" (Problems of the Chinese Revolution, p. 5).

The perspective of permanent revolution

In his theory of permanent revolution, Trotsky had established that in countries with a belated capitalist development, the tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution, including the land question, national unification and independence from imperialism, could no longer be accomplished by the bourgeoisie. Its attitude to these tasks was determined by its close links to both imperialism and the landowners, on the one hand, and its fear of the proletariat on the other. The peasantry, which constituted the overwhelming majority of the population in China, as it had in Russia, was organically incapable of playing an independent role. An intermediary social layer, rooted in small property and divided internally between better-off and more oppressed layers, the peasantry could only follow the leadership of one of the other two classes.

Thus, the leading role in the bourgeois democratic revolution fell to the working class—mobilizing the peasantry behind it in establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat. Once engaged in this struggle, the working class could not limit itself to democratic tasks, but would be impelled to challenge bourgeois property, thus lending the democratic revolution an overtly socialist character.

The revolution's "permanence" had another significance. The proletarian revolution in Russia, as in China, would have a worldwide impact, creating more favorable conditions for the revolutionary struggles of the workers in the advanced capitalist countries of Europe and America. Trotsky, like Lenin, insisted that the construction of socialism was impossible within the framework of an isolated nation-state, all the more so in backward Russia. It could be achieved only through the extension of the socialist revolution internationally.

Stalin rejected this perspective of world socialist revolution. He articulated the interests of the growing bureaucratic stratum in the Soviet Union with his conservative and anti-Marxist theory of "socialism in one country." According to this theory, the construction of socialism in the Soviet Union no longer depended upon the working class coming to power in the advanced capitalist countries. Instead, it would be realized through the mobilization of the USSR's own internal resources.

Under the influence of this retrograde perspective, the role of the Communist International underwent a fundamental transformation, with catastrophic results for the working class internationally. The Stalin faction maintained that the construction of socialism in the isolated and backward Soviet Union was possible, but only if the imperialists did not intervene militarily. The young Communist parties were thus directed not to conduct the revolutionary struggle for socialism, but rather to cultivate alliances with supposedly "progressive" bourgeois parties and regimes and to exert pressure on other governments to accommodate themselves to the USSR.

During the same period that the Comintern, under Stalin's leadership, solidarized itself with the bourgeois Guomindang in China, a similar policy was elaborated in Britain, where it forged an alliance with the Trades Union Congress bureaucracy, paving the way to the betrayal of the 1926 British General Strike. In Yugoslavia, the Kremlin sought to subordinate the Communist Party to various right-wing nationalist forces.

During the 1925-27 period, the CCP's alliance with the Guomindang seemed to meet with success, as Chiang Kai-shek first consolidated his base in southern China and then prepared and launched the Northern Expedition to reconquer the rest of the country from the warlords. But Trotsky warned that Stalin's policy in China was leading the Chinese proletariat into a deadly trap.

These warnings were tragically confirmed in April 1927, when Chiang Kai-shek's troops carried out one of the bloodiest massacres in history, slaughtering 20,000 workers in Shanghai. This was followed by further massacres in Wuhan and other cities, and then a failed uprising by the CCP in Guangzhou (Canton). The urban base of the CCP was shattered and the Chinese proletariat was thrown back decades.

And not only the working class in China. The 1927 catastrophe was perhaps the most important single blow against the confidence of the Soviet working class in the perspective of international revolution. From this time on, the Stalinist bureaucracy put forward its nationalist program with ever greater arrogance, and the Left Opposition was increasingly isolated. Before the end of that year, Trotsky was expelled from the Communist Party and exiled to Soviet Central Asia, in Alma Ata, only a few miles from the Chinese border. The consolidation of Stalin's power in the USSR would in turn play an increasingly pernicious and counterrevolutionary role in subsequent events in China and internationally.

From the working class to the peasantry

In the wake of the 1927 defeats, cadres of the CCP fled into the countryside, where they gathered supporters among the peasantry and declassed elements, forming "red armies" in a number of isolated rural areas. The most famous of these was in Jiangxi province, under the leadership of Mao Zedong.

Deng Xiaoping, who had returned to China from Moscow just after the Shanghai massacre, was sent by the CCP to Guizhou province, in the far southwest, where for several years he sought to maintain a smaller liberated zone. Under intense military pressure in 1931, Deng led the remnants of his army on a tortuous march to Jiangxi, where he united his forces with those of Mao. In October 1934, under similar circumstances, Mao was forced to embark on the celebrated Long March, in which his military forces fought and trekked over 6,000 miles to the remote northwest province of Sha'anxi, where Mao set up his headquarters in the farming town of Ya'nan.

The shift from urban-based organization and agitation to the building of quasi-independent liberated zones in the rural areas was not merely a

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change in tactics, but a turn away from the class orientation and program on which the CCP had been founded. Originally the product of an international upsurge of the working class and the oppressed masses of the semicolonial countries, inspired by the Russian Revolution, the CCP turned away from the cities and the working class and oriented itself exclusively to the peasantry.

The vast majority of those who joined the "red armies" in the various zones were of peasant origin, and the social program advanced by the CCP was the defense of the interests of the great mass of middle peasants: debt reduction, honest administration in the villages, resistance to oppression by landlords, usurers and warlords, and opposition to foreign imperialism, especially after the Japanese occupation of Manchuria in 1931. The CCP abandoned any systematic work among the urban workers.

In 1925-26 peasants composed only five percent of the party's membership. By the end of 1928, they made up 70 to 80 percent. And by 1930, Chou En-lai reported that out of a total party membership of 120,000, "the industrial worker-members only number a little more than 2,000."

This shift in the class basis of the CCP had profound historical implications, as Trotsky warned in a letter to the Chinese Left Opposition, published under the title "Peasant War in China and the Proletariat." Writing in 1932, while Mao was still leading relatively small-scale guerrilla operations in Jiangxi province, Trotsky anticipated the contradictions of an eventual victory of the CCP in its military struggle with the Guomindang. A peasant army, entering the cities after having vanquished the landlord-capitalist forces, would not necessarily embrace the working class. On the contrary, given the differences in class outlook between small agricultural proprietors and workers, a direct and violent conflict was possible.

The CCP's origins in the working class upsurge of the early 1920s provided no guarantee that this party would still represent the working class when it came to power, Trotsky warned. "Had the Chinese Communist Party concentrated its efforts for the last few years in the cities, in industry, on the railroads; had it sustained the trade unions, the education clubs and circles; had it, without breaking off from the workers, taught them to understand what was occurring in the villages—the share of the proletariat in the general correlation of forces would have been incomparably more favorable today.

"The party actually tore itself away from its class. Thereby in the last analysis it can cause injury to the peasantry as well. For should the proletariat continue to remain on the sidelines, without organization, without leadership, then the peasant war even if fully victorious will inevitably arrive in a blind alley" (Leon Trotsky on China, p. 527).

The founding of the People's Republic

This example of Marxist foresight was strikingly borne out in the events which began with the Japanese invasion of China in 1937 and culminated in the coming to power of Mao Zedong in 1949. While the Guomindang regime crumbled under the impact of Japanese military pressure, inflation and endemic corruption, the peasant-based armies led by the CCP became the spearhead of national resistance to the Japanese.

During the eight years of war, the People's Liberation Army grew from 90,000 to over 1 million. The most rapid growth came in the forces headed by Deng Xiaoping, who emerged as one of the most capable of Mao's lieutenants and a genuine hero of the military struggle against both the Japanese and the Guomindang.

With the surrender of Japan in 1945, civil war was posed in China, although both Mao and Stalin maneuvered to avert it, seeking some way to establish an accommodation with the Guomindang. In the summer of 1946, however, Chiang Kai-shek broke the US-negotiated cease-fire and launched an offensive which quickly proved abortive. Detachments of the Peoples Liberation Army conquered Manchuria under Lin Biao and central China north of the Yangtse under Deng Xiaoping.

Disregarding an appeal from Stalin in 1948, transmitted by Anastas Mikoyan, urging that he stop at the Yangtse and share power with Chiang Kai-shek, Mao ordered a final three-pronged offensive that conquered the southern half of the country and sent the Guomindang into exile on Taiwan.

When Mao proclaimed the foundation of the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949 in Tiananmen Square, he did not claim to be establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat. He adhered to Stalin's two-stage theory, which called for the preservation of capitalism and the formation of a "bloc of four classes," including the peasantry, the urban petty bourgeoisie and the "national" bourgeoisie and supposedly led by the working class. In reality the working class had remained a spectator in the civil war and exercised no influence on the government of the Chinese Communist Party.

The CCP's attitude to the working class is demonstrated in a telegram sent by Mao Zedong to the military headquarters of the Loyang Front in 1948, after its capture of the city. Mao instructed party officials to "be very prudent" in limiting the scale of retaliation against Guomindang officials, landlords and capitalists.

"On entering the city, do not lightly advance slogans of raising wages and reducing hours," Mao decreed. "Do not be in a hurry to organize the people of the city to struggle for democratic reforms and improvements in livelihood." He ordered the CCP not to demand the opening of granaries to feed the urban poor, warning that this would "foster among them the psychology of depending on the government for relief."

The CCP came to power with a perspective that represented an eclectic mixture of Stalinism and peasant radicalism. It had long since divorced itself from its original working class base. Not a workers party, it could neither be called a party of the peasantry, except in the sense that peasants made up the majority of the membership. The new state established by Mao provided no means for either the working class or the peasantry to exercise democratic control. It was a bureaucratic apparatus based upon the Red Army and its leading officers and political commissars.

The Maoists' hostility to any independent action of the working class found its most savage expression in the treatment of the Chinese Trotskyists. The adherents of the Fourth International had continued, despite the combined persecutions of the Stalinists, the Guomindang and the Japanese, to build a revolutionary party in the working class, carrying out clandestine work centered in the cities, particularly Shanghai, throughout the Japanese occupation. In 1952, Mao's secret police rounded up hundreds of these Marxist revolutionaries who were tried and shot or sentenced to long prison terms. Those who did not escape into exile were jailed from 1949 until 1978, when Deng Xiaoping ordered the release of some 100,000 long-serving political prisoners.

The contradictions of Maoism

While establishing a police-state apparatus to control the working class and peasantry, the CCP carried through revolutionary measures of a bourgeois character. The first, and still the greatest, conquest of the Chinese Revolution was the liquidation of the landlord-gentry class, which had ruled China for two millennia. Their land was confiscated, then distributed to the peasants as their individual property.

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Further radical measures were taken in response to external pressures. The flight of capitalists to Taiwan forced the regime to nationalize most industrial facilities. Agriculture was collectivized, and then the bulk of the rural population organized into huge agrarian communes. Military intervention by the United States led to the Chinese entry into the Korean War and a posture of largely rhetorical anti-imperialism in Chinese foreign policy.

The Great Leap Forward was Mao's attempt at speeding up the pace of China's industrialization by mobilizing the peasants to establish backyard industries, without the necessary technical training or infrastructure. Its disastrous failure exposed the contradictions of Maoism that have been the hallmark of the Chinese Revolution ever since.

The initial successes in the planned development of industry and agriculture themselves became the cause of new problems and crises, as it was impossible to create an advanced industrialized economy in China isolated from the world economy and without the conscious and enthusiastic involvement of the working masses themselves.

Such a development was blocked by the Stalinist perspective of Mao and his associates, including Deng, who rejected the world socialist revolution in favor of Chinese nationalism and strait-jacketed any independent role for the masses within the bureaucratic apparatus.

These problems were exacerbated by the role of Mao himself. Even less educated and cultured than Stalin, he had always stood on the right wing of the CCP during the period in which it was based on the working class. In the Byzantine politics of the CCP, he played a Bonapartist role, maneuvering between factions, pitting "left" against "right," the military against the civilian, industry against agriculture, always seeking to maintain his personal role.

Given the authoritarian structure of the CCP, these personal characteristics could have an enormously destructive impact. The failure of the Great Leap Forward became clear to Deng and other officials within months. Nonetheless it was allowed to continue for another two years, causing one of the most terrible famines of the twentieth century, with an estimated 30 million dead, because to call it off would have discredited Mao, its principal sponsor. Entire regions starved, not because the national food stocks had been exhausted, but because local and regional party bosses did not dare request emergency supplies for fear of offending the "Great Helmsman."

The Cultural Revolution similarly originated in Mao's bid to recapture authority after the failure of the Great Leap by suppressing his principal rival, Liu Shao-chi, as well his lieutenant Deng Xiaoping, who was branded the "number two capitalist-roader" by Mao's Red Guards. The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution deserved none of its pretentious titles: it was profoundly anti-working class and directed against the development of education, culture, technology and science.

The Red Guard movement did express the genuine, though confused, hostility of the youth to the growth of social inequality and bureaucratic privilege. Behind the scenes however, Mao and his closest associates, including his wife, Jiang Qing, and his designated successor, Lin Biao, manipulated this movement for the purpose of settling factional scores within the ruling elite.

Ultimately Mao's opportunist maneuvers paved the way for the reorientation of Chinese foreign policy towards an open alliance with American imperialism, culminating in the visits of Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon to Beijing and the betrayal of the Vietnamese Revolution.

Maoism's international role

On the most fundamental issue, the relation of China to the world socialist revolution, Mao Zedong charted a course based on Chinese nationalism in the wake of the defeat of the 1927 revolution. While Mao rebuffed Stalin's appeal for restraint in the civil war and pursued his own policy in intervening militarily in the Korean War, this was not based on proletarian internationalism, but rather on the national interests of the Chinese bureaucracy.

Beijing was no less willing than Moscow to sacrifice the interests of the international working class to its own national concerns. This was clearly demonstrated in 1954, when Chou En-lai and Molotov jointly brokered the Geneva Accord with British and French imperialism, ending the first phase of the Vietnam War. The Stalinist diplomats deprived the Viet Minh of the victory won on the battlefield at Dien Bien Phu and pressured Ho Chi Minh to accept the partition of Vietnam, setting the stage for US intervention and another 20 years of bloodshed.

Mao continued to assert the interests of the Chinese Stalinist bureaucracy against its Soviet counterpart, culminating in the 1960 Sino-Soviet split. This did not, however, signify any break with the counterrevolutionary outlook of Stalinism.

The proof of this came in Indonesia, where the largest Communist Party outside of China and the USSR was a powerful force in the working class and took its political lead from Beijing. The Communist Party of Indonesia pursued the same policy imposed on the CCP by Stalin in 1925-27, forming a bloc with the bourgeois-nationalist party of Sukarno and suppressing any independent revolutionary action by the Indonesian proletariat.

The result was an even bloodier catastrophe than the defeat of the Chinese Revolution in 1927. The Indonesian military seized power in 1965, outlawed the CPI and slaughtered a million workers and peasants, a massacre which shored up the position of imperialism throughout Southeast Asia, despite the growing strength of the National Liberation Front in Vietnam.

Beijing's aid to Vietnam was based not on revolutionary sympathy, but on considerations arising from the conflict between China and the Soviet Union. When Mao decided to seek the support of American imperialism against Moscow, he welcomed Kissinger and Nixon to Beijing even as genocidal bombing continued in Vietnam. Three years after Mao's death, Deng Xiaoping launched a two-week border war against Vietnam in which tens of thousands of Chinese and Vietnamese soldiers died.

As Kissinger recalls in the March 3 Newsweek, Mao was utterly cynical about the perspective of world revolution. He told Nixon, "People like me sound a lot of big cannons. For example, things like 'the whole world should unite and defeat imperialism, revisionism and all reactionaries and establish socialism.'" Then, Kissinger said, "He laughed uproariously at the implication that anyone might have taken seriously a slogan which had been scrawled for decades on every public placard in China."

An important aspect of Maoism's pernicious ideological influence was the theory of "people's war," which suggested that protracted warfare by peasant-based armies encircling the cities, not the independent revolutionary mobilization of the working class, was the path to overthrowing imperialism.

This type of warfare was an element in Mao's victory—the Japanese invasion was far more decisive—and it played a similar part in Vietnam, where half the country was already under Viet Minh rule. These military victories proved unique, however, and both of them led ultimately to accommodation with imperialism and restoration of capitalist market relations. Elsewhere the attempt to wage "people's war" led to bloody misadventures, from the hunting down and destruction of Che Guevara's small band of guerrillas in Bolivia to the protracted and fruitless military actions of the Naxalites in India.

Guerrillaism provoked almost idolatrous enthusiasm among layers of petty-bourgeois intellectuals in the 1960s, who hailed such Maoist nostrums as "political power grows out of the barrel of a gun." The

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subsequent evolution of these layers was to the right, with figures such as Regis Debray, the chief publicist for Che Guevara, becoming a high-level official of the French government.

The road to Tiananmen Square

Deng Xiaoping was twice disgraced and forced to flee the capital during the Cultural Revolution. By Deng's own account, he owed his physical survival to the patronage of Mao Zedong, who blocked efforts to imprison or execute him, then recalled him to office in Beijing in 1973.

Removed from office again in May 1976, at the demand of the Gang of Four (Jiang Qing and three close supporters), Deng sought support in the provinces and in the military, campaigning behind the scenes until Mao's death in September of that year and the arrest and imprisonment of the Gang of Four a month later. After another two years of factional maneuvering, Deng displaced Hua Guofeng, who had briefly succeeded Mao, and assumed complete control of the Stalinist apparatus.

Once firmly in power, Deng embarked on the policies which have been hailed by the world bourgeoisie: decollectivization, opening up China to the penetration of foreign capital, the privatization of much of the state-run economy. Deng's policies are generally portrayed in the big business media as a radical break with Maoism. This characterization is false through and through. Deng was the heir and continuator of Mao's policies, carrying them out to their logical conclusion, while defending the same social layer, the privileged Stalinist bureaucracy, on which Mao had based his rule.

Under Deng the bureaucracy has largely completed its transformation into a property-owning bourgeois ruling class through direct appropriation of state and collective farm property (via corruption and outright theft) and through joint ventures with foreign and overseas Chinese capital. As one observer has noted: "It is symbolic of the nature of Chinese capitalism in the post-Mao era that the most prominent early members of the new 'bourgeoisie' were the sons and daughters of high Communist officials, soon to be known as the 'crown princes and princesses'" (Maurice Meisner, The Deng Xiaoping Era, p. 319).

In the initial period of his rule, from 1978 to 1980, Deng sought support among the Chinese intelligentsia, hinting at cultural and political liberalization along the lines later espoused by Gorbachev in the Soviet Union. During this period the CCP attempted an official reevaluation of Mao's political legacy. Chen Duxiu was posthumously rehabilitated, but the CCP leadership carefully avoided any acknowledgment of Trotsky's criticisms of the 1927 debacle.

Two events then produced a rapid change in course: a section of working class CCP cadres, many of them victims of the Cultural Revolution, launched the Democracy Wall movement, which included public criticism of the privileges and income of the Stalinist bureaucrats; and the Polish working class erupted in the mass anti-Stalinist movement known as Solidarity. The "Polish fear" gripped the Chinese Stalinists, mass arrests were ordered, the heavy hand of official dogmatism settled again on the country's cultural life.

The conventional interpretations of Deng Xiaoping's two decades of rule maintain that there is a conflict between his promotion of capitalism and his ruthless suppression of political opposition, suggesting that "economic reform" and "political reform" are inherently linked. But there is no such connection between capitalism and democracy.

Deng's economic measures served to privatize state property in the interests of a privileged few; created a gulf between rich and poor greater than most industrialized capitalist countries; and opened up China for imperialist exploitation, reviving, in the form of special economic zones, the infamous "concessions" of the prerevolutionary era. These policies are incompatible with the democratic rights and aspirations of the broad masses of Chinese workers and peasants and can be implemented only by dictatorial means.

The Chinese Communist Party bureaucracy was acutely aware that the social tensions created by the growth of capitalist economic relations could spark a direct political challenge to its rule from the working class. When Deng Xiaoping was preparing to extend the privatization campaign from agriculture to industry in 1983, he proposed the establishment of the People's Armed Police, a 400,000-strong, heavily armed antiriot force, whose units were sent to Jaruzelski's Poland and Pinochet's Chile for training.

While the students and intellectuals who initiated the 1989 democracy protests held a wide range of political and social views, some based on illusions in capitalism, the social and political axis of the upheaval shifted dramatically to the left with the entry of masses of Beijing workers into the struggle in mid-May. The young workers who flocked to Tiananmen Square in the hundreds of thousands were motivated above all by hostility to growing social inequality and the privileges and blatant corruption of the ruling elite.

One document of the period, issued by the Beijing Workers Union on May 17, 1989, articulates the class hostility of the Chinese proletariat: "We have conscientiously documented the exploitation of the workers ... based on the method for analysis given in Marx's Das Kapital.... We were astonished to find that the 'people's public servants' have devoured all surplus value created by the people's blood and sweat."

The independent workers organization went on to demand: "The first group to be investigated with regard to their material consumption and use of palatial retreats should include: Deng Xiaoping, Zhao Ziyang, Li Peng, Chen Yun, Li Xiannian, Yang Shangkun, Peng Zhen, Wan Li, Jiang Zemin, Ye Xuanping, and their family members. Their assets should immediately be frozen and subjected to the scrutiny of a National People's Investigative Committee" (Han Minzhu, Cries for Democracy, pp. 274-77).

The full force of the regime's repression of political opponents was directed at the working class. The vast majority of those killed during the massacre of June 3-4, 1989 were young workers, residents of the neighborhoods to the west of Tiananmen Square, who erected barricades and opposed the entry of the Peoples Liberation Army into the city. Nearly all those executed in the post-Tiananmen purge were young workers, especially those who sought to establish independent workplace and trade union organizations.

In its open-door approach to courting foreign investment, the CCP has imposed only one political requirement on capitalists entering China: foreign companies must permit the establishment of branches of the official All-China Trade Union Confederation in their factories, so that the state-controlled trade unions can more effectively police working class opposition to the regime.

The career of Deng Xiaoping demonstrates the transformation of the Chinese Communist Party from an organization based on the working class and fighting for its liberation from capitalism and imperialism into an organization which is the principal instrument for the development of capitalism in China and the suppression of the working class. Deng Xiaoping, whose political awakening coincided with the May Fourth Movement of radicalized Chinese youth, will go down in history as the butcher of Chinese youth and workers at Tiananmen Square, mowed down by machine guns as they sang "The Internationale."

Deng's legacy is a China riven by social contradictions: as many as 200 million workers and peasants have abandoned the provinces in the interior in search of jobs and better living standards in the booming coastal areas; the gap between the cities and the rural areas is the widest it has ever been; the economy is in the grips of a boom-and-bust cycle, with periods

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of runaway inflation followed by the tightening of credit and mass unemployment; official corruption, gangsterism, drug addiction, prostitution and other social evils are flourishing on a scale not seen since the worst days of Chiang Kai-shek.

As the last decade of the twentieth century draws to a close, none of the problems which confronted China in the century's first decade have been overcome. Maoism has proven to be, not a revolutionary alternative to capitalism, but a historical blind alley.

All the vicissitudes of the last five decades of China's history ultimately find their source in the impossibility of resolving the fundamental questions of the Chinese Revolution on a nationally-limited and nonproletarian foundation. The critical question is the failure of the Stalinist perspective of national socialism, whether in its "radical" Maoist guise or in the more conservative version espoused by Deng Xiaoping. Given the rejection of the perspective of world socialist revolution, there is no alternative to the integration of China into the structure of world capitalism.

The liberation of the Chinese workers and peasants requires the revival of the Marxist traditions of the CCP founders and the early Communist International, carried forward by the Left Opposition, the Fourth International and the International Committee today. In this effort the study of Trotsky's writings in the 1920s and 1930s, and the whole record of the struggle for Trotskyism against Stalinism and Maoism, will be indispensable.

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