

# Victory to the Political Revolution in China

## Statement of the International Committee of the Fourth International

David North  
3 June 2019

*The following statement was published on June 8, 1989, just four days after the Chinese government's brutal military crackdown on students and workers in Tiananmen Square.*

1. The International Committee of the Fourth International and the Workers League proclaim their unshakeable solidarity with the embattled workers and student youth of China who are engaged in a life-and-death struggle against the murderous regime of the Beijing Stalinists. The bloody massacre in Tiananmen Square—like those carried out in East Berlin in 1953, Budapest in 1956 and Gdansk in 1970—has once again exposed the counter-revolutionary depravity of Stalinism, the most insidious and sinister enemy of socialism and the working class.

A reign of terror prevails in Beijing. Soldiers and secret police are combing the city, trying to hunt down workers and students who participated in the mass protests of the last two months. There are reports that mass detention centers are being set up, and that the regime is planning to carry out mass executions. But despite this unrestrained terror, the Stalinist regime has not been able to suppress the mass movement that is sweeping the country. By Thursday, June 8, demonstrations and other forms of mass protests were being reported in dozens of cities. Shanghai has been shaken by the biggest demonstrations in 40 years. Industrial production is paralyzed and local authorities are claiming that the city's economy is on the verge of collapse. Barricades have been erected at more than 100 road intersections. In Nanjing on the Yangtze River, students and workers are demonstrating and blocking major transport systems.

In Chengdu, the provincial capital of Sichuan, there are reports of clashes between angry crowds and the police. According to Agence France-Press, martial law has been imposed and more than 300 people have been murdered by troops. Canton, in the south, is at a standstill. In Wuhan, the main north-south railway line of China has been shut down by more than 10,000 workers and students. In Xian, located in the northwest province of Shaanxi, the city gates have been blocked by more than 100,000 workers and students. Industry is reported paralyzed by strikes. Other cities in which mass protests are reportedly underway include Harbin, Changchuan, Dalian, Qingdao, Loyang and Tianjin.

2. Their hands dripping with blood, Deng Xiaoping, Li Peng and their cronies in the bureaucracy denounce their victims as “counter-revolutionaries.” What a contemptible and obvious lie! Stalinism pins this label on all those who oppose the privileges of the bureaucracy and its betrayals of the Chinese Revolution and the cause of international socialism.

In fact, the mass killings of the past week are the political culmination of a decade during which the Beijing Stalinists have worked systematically to restore capitalism to China and reintegrate its economy into the structure of world imperialism. The main purpose of the terror unleashed by the Beijing regime is to intimidate the Chinese masses and crush all opposition to its deliberate liquidation of the social conquests of the Chinese Revolution.

This is why President George Bush, while shedding crocodile tears for

the victims of Tiananmen Square, went out of his way to reassure his Beijing allies that American imperialism is determined to preserve its “strategic” relation with China. Since Richard Nixon was welcomed to Beijing by Mao Zedong and Zhou En-lai in 1972—during the height of the bombing of North Vietnam—China has become the thirteenth largest trade partner of the United States (\$14.3 billion in 1988, up 37 percent over 1987) and a major source of low-paid labor for American and other foreign multinational conglomerates. At present, 450 American companies—including the Bechtel Group, IBM, McDonnell Douglas, General Electric, Chrysler and AT&T—have various types of technology transfer, equity joint venture and co-production agreements in China. In 1988 alone, US investors signed contracts for 269 projects worth \$370 million.

Economic ties between European and Japanese imperialism and China are no less intimate. Japan is China's biggest source of private and government loans and its second-largest trading partner after Hong Kong. As for Europe, overall trade between China and the Economic Community has grown from \$3 billion in 1978 to \$12 billion last year. A senior representative of Westdeutsche Landesbank Girozentrale recently boasted that China was replacing South Korea and Taiwan as a source of low-cost commodities imported into Germany. These are the interests for whom the White House was speaking when it declared, “The world has a stake in China's economic progress, national security and political vitality. The US hopes to see the continuing implementation of economic and political reforms, which undoubtedly will also help advance these goals.”

3. Not since the final bloody days of the regime of Chiang Kai-shek has such brutality been unleashed against the Chinese masses. The carnage which took place in Tiananmen Square and the white terror which has followed it will live in their collective consciousness even long after the crimes committed during the past week are avenged. Let us review a few of the accounts which have appeared in the press:

\* “Before this final assault, the soldiers had formed a line around Tiananmen Square, facing out. Students and other citizens formed their own line, about 300 yards east down Changan Boulevard, facing in toward the soldiers.

“The soldiers were singing army songs. The students were singing the national anthem and the ‘Internationale.’ In between songs, they taunted each other with slogans and insults....

“Later a Chinese military doctor described part of the scene.

“One young man was shot. His girlfriend turned toward the soldiers and screamed: ‘Why?’ She was shot through the head.

“‘The soldiers never expected the students to be so brave,’ the doctor said. ‘And the students never expected the soldiers to be so brutal.’

“The doctor said tanks continued to flatten the tents and the bodies. Mechanical sweepers and trash compactors came next. Finally, the doctor said, the mass of crushed body parts was doused with gasoline and set on fire” (*Detroit Free Press*, June 5, 1989).

\* At Fu-Xing Hospital, following the massacre, a witness reported that

“blood was flooding in the hallway. The youngest killed is seven years old. The youngest wounded is three. The killers are the 27th Army. As they were shooting at the people, they laughed and yelled at the people, ‘Pekinese, show your guts’” (*Windsor Star*, June 6, 1989).

\* “Soldiers also beat and bayoneted students and workers after daybreak on Sunday, witnesses said, usually after some provocation but sometimes entirely at random.

“‘I saw a young woman tell the soldiers that they are the people’s army, and they mustn’t hurt the people,’ a young doctor said after returning from one clash Sunday. ‘Then the soldiers shot her, and ran up and bayoneted her. I ran away so I couldn’t tell if she lived or died’” (*New York Times*, June 5, 1989).

\* “A convoy of five tanks and 22 armored troop carriers roared along central Changan Avenue early this morning, spraying both sides of the streets with bullets.

“One carrier aimed its gun at the Beijing Hotel, the city’s oldest, and unleashed a burst of fire. A foreign witness saw the bodies of at least 50 dead on the pavement....

“Protestors displayed ghastly evidence of the bloodletting, including headless corpses....

“A teacher from the Beijing Foreign Languages Institute told this story: ‘A girl in the crowd heard that her younger brother had been killed, and lost her composure and ran toward the soldiers. We tried to stop her, but the troops opened fire. They shot her seven times, even as she was crawling’....

“‘We have people shot in the head, chest, stomach, legs, even the eyes,’ said a nurse as she gave an injection to a 27-year-old student whose lower leg was shattered.

“‘The government is so rotten,’ said the student, his shirt drenched with the blood of another youth next to him who had been shot in the head. ‘They don’t care how many people died....’

“One doctor said he handled the body of a man in his mid-20s who had been choked to death by metal chains the soldiers had hidden in their hats for crowd control.

“‘It’s just repulsive the lengths they went to,’ he said” (*Detroit News*, June 5, 1989).

\* “Again and again, Beijing residents insist—and foreign witnesses back this up—the armored guns simply began to spit when a cluster of people was perceived from the tank turrets. And there were not a few instances, attested by at least one Japanese witness, where the columns halted, poured gasoline on the bodies, set them afire and went on their way, having destroyed any evidence that they had committed a crime” (*New York Times*, June 6, 1989).

\* “Near the square, Li Tienguo, a PLA veteran, said he saw troops kick a 12-year-old girl in the chest and crush her heart.

“‘They just kicked and kicked her and she died there across the street from me. We wanted to pull her body away but they shot at us,’ he said” (*Wall Street Journal*, June 6, 1989).

4. Regardless of the immediate outcome of the present stage of the crisis, the massacre in Tiananmen Square has not ended the political revolution in China. Rather, having now been baptised in blood, the revolution will enter a new and more politically-conscious level of development. The naive illusions that the Stalinist regime could be reformed under the pressure of mass protests have been shattered. The tragic events of the past week have powerfully vindicated the emphasis placed by the Fourth International upon the necessity of the revolutionary overthrow of the Stalinist bureaucracy by the working class. As Leon Trotsky, the founder of the Fourth International, wrote more than 50 years ago: “All indications agree that the further course of development must inevitably lead to a clash between the culturally developed forces of the people and the bureaucratic oligarchy. There is no peaceful outcome for this crisis. No devil ever yet voluntarily cut off his own claws. The Soviet

bureaucracy will not give up its positions without a fight. The development leads obviously to the road of revolution” (*The Revolution Betrayed*).

5. When these words were written, they applied to the Stalinist regime in the USSR. But they are no less valid today for the Stalinist regimes in China, Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe. Never has the perspective of political revolution assumed such burning urgency. In the final stages of their death agony, all the Stalinist regimes have set their sights upon the restoration of capitalism. For decades the parasitic bureaucracies, concerned above all with the defense of their privileges, have sabotaged the development of genuine scientific socialist planning—which, at any rate, can develop only on the basis of an international revolutionary program. Now, confronted with the collapse of their reactionary national economic schemes and an aroused working class, the Stalinists are seeking to secure their own interests on the basis of capitalist property and the development of the closest ties with world imperialism. They are ruthlessly dismantling state-owned industry and agriculture, revising the legal statutes to permit private ownership of the means of production, encouraging the development of direct ties between privately-owned “cooperatives” and imperialist enterprises, and, in the form of special economic zones, placing entire regions at the disposal of imperialist multinationals for unrestricted exploitation.

The imperialists understand very well the significance of the policies now being implemented by the Stalinists. The *Financial Times* of London offered this assessment of the program of the Polish Stalinists: “The last task which the Polish United Workers Party has given itself is to secure capitalism in Poland, against what the country’s leadership fears might be the violent objections of its citizens.... Mr Wladislaw Baka, the PUWP’s politburo member with responsibility for the economy, can lament that while the command economy has been largely left behind, ‘still market mechanisms do not fully work either. The issue is whether we overcome the problem or slide back down. The political will of the party is very important in effecting this conversion to a market economy.’”

6. This reference to “the violent objections” of the Polish people indicates the acute awareness of the imperialists and their Stalinist agents that the restoration of capitalism cannot be achieved without the violent counter-revolutionary suppression of the working class. This is what accounts for the fascist-like brutality utilized by the Beijing bureaucrats against the unarmed population. *The consequences of a decisive defeat of the Chinese proletariat by the Stalinist regime—and this has by no means been achieved—would be the complete liquidation of all the remaining social conquests of the Chinese Revolution and the unrestricted reorganization of the economy on new capitalist foundations.* Of necessity, the regime presiding over such a counter-revolutionary transformation would be of a fascist character. Indeed, the features of such a regime are already visible, if only in embryonic form, in the military terror that governs Beijing today.

An astute bourgeois commentator, writing from Beijing, reported what he has been told by the aging Stalinist leaders about their plans for China: “They have been talking a good deal lately of the ‘South Korean model,’ a hard-nosed dictatorship, efficient, profit-making low wages, upwardly mobile—a place of high technology and high production. There, some say, is the path for China.... And they have already constructed an ideology to go along with the South Korean model. It’s what they call authoritarianism” (*New York Times*, June 6, 1989).

7. The propagandists of the bourgeoisie describe the crimes of the Beijing regime as the work of “communism.” This is in keeping with the decades-old practice of equating Stalinism with its most irreconcilable enemy, revolutionary Marxism. However, never has the identification of Stalinism with Marxism, socialism and communism been more transparently cynical, hypocritical and dishonest. The economic, political and military relations between the Beijing regime and American

imperialism are so intimate that they simply cannot be covered over.

In fact, the military architects of the terror in Beijing have worked closely with their imperialist counterparts. According to the *New York Times*, “All of China’s senior officers have had extensive contact with the American military and the most promising of its colonels have attended courses at American military schools. Emerging Chinese military thinking is based on the American model and China’s modernization program is largely dependent upon American technology and equipment” (June 6, 1989).

8. Moreover, the social catastrophe which has engulfed China is the direct product of bureaucracy’s restorationist policies. Having repudiated central planning, the Chinese economy is at the mercy of the anarchic forces of the world capitalist market. The creation of innumerable private links between provincial enterprises and foreign capitalists has undermined what was considered the greatest single achievement of the 1949 revolution—the unification of China. As budding capitalist entrepreneurs in the provincial bureaucracies make their separate deals with the imperialist multinationals, the central government has virtually lost control over the country’s balance of payments. The foreign debt has doubled over the last four years to nearly \$40 billion.

Inflation is raging out of control. From last year’s average rate of 18.5 percent, the cost-of-living index rose at an annual rate of 27.4 percent in January and 28.4 percent in February. The bureaucracy’s desperate attempts to control inflation with new austerity measures have had the main effect of worsening the social conditions of the working class. Even in the much-vaunted special economic zones, the conditions of the laboring masses are appalling. We quote from the authoritative *China Trade Report* of April 1989:

“Guangdong is in chaos. In terms of infrastructure and food supplies, it can no longer cope with the influx of people who for several years have staffed its booming processing factories, done construction jobs regarded as beneath the locals and taken up marginal and illegal occupations....

“That problem became acute with the onset of the current austerity drive. The freeze on loans and shortage of raw materials has meant that many factories are only operating a three-day week. The 25 percent cut in construction has also reduced the province’s demands for labor. Many of those who came to seek wealth end up as beggars, hawkers and even prostitutes, living in slum shanty towns outside the cities, Canton in particular.”

9. While the economic policies pursued by the bureaucracy have had a devastating impact upon the conditions of the working class, student youth and millions of poor peasants, it has led directly to the enrichment of broad sections of the bureaucracy. The corruption which has been denounced so vehemently by workers and students is an external form of a social process involving the conversion of bureaucrats and their family members into capitalist entrepreneurs and middlemen. Deng Pufang, the son of Deng Xiaoping, who runs the Kanghua Development Corporation, is only the most obvious representative of this tendency.

It is estimated that 10,000 companies have what the *Economist* of London described as “privileged links with party bureaucrats. Of these, 134 can boast top officials—ministers or the equivalent—on their payroll.” They serve these companies, often owned by relatives, by making available to them key commodities which are purchased at state-subsidized low prices for sale on the world market at enormous profit. Such “illegal” sales of fertilizers netted the social parasites an estimated Rmb 42 million (approximately \$12 million) last year alone. The resulting shortage of fertilizers has had a devastating impact on the poor peasantry. There have been reports that peasants have resorted to violence to obtain fertilizers for their crops. Like the old landlords of prerevolutionary China, the regime has responded by shooting down peasants engaged in such “looting.”

The bureaucracy’s policy has resulted in a broad social stratification and

regional inequalities. It has facilitated the growing integration of production in the regions of Changjiang, Zhujiang and the Minnan delta together with the Liagong and Shandong peninsulas into the imperialist world market. The result has been to separate these traditionally more prosperous coastal areas from the less productive interior, resulting in huge income disparities. For example, in 1986 the annual per capita rural income in Zhujiang province reached Rmb 609 (\$290.70), 38 percent more than in the typical interior province of Hunan, and 126 percent more than the poor interior province of Gansu. Only six years earlier, the incomes in Zhujiang and Hunan were identical, while Gansu lagged behind by only 30 percent.

Within regions and the cities, the disparities are even greater, particularly between workers in the state-owned enterprises and the growing strata of private owners. According to one recent study of private businesses in Beijing, they were reporting an average net income of Rmb 4,908 in 1987, with private transport operators reporting an average Rmb 9,348. Real income is believed to be at least twice as high, as the private owners routinely under-report in order to evade taxes.

The average wages of workers in the state-owned enterprise, on the other hand, was only Rmb 2,678.

A thin layer of China’s population has enriched itself as a result of the bureaucracy’s restorationist policies, while the vast majority of poor peasants, rural laborers and the urban working class has seen its real income and social conditions steadily eroded. The Stalinist leadership has sought to create a social base for itself by upholding the interests of this social layer of capitalists, private businessmen, and rural bourgeoisie—together with those of foreign capital—against those of the masses.

10. In the form of the Beijing regime, the Chinese working class confronts what is, in the final analysis, a ruthless agency of world imperialism. Only the revolutionary overthrow of this regime by the working class can stop the restoration of capitalism and prevent the complete re-enslavement of China by imperialism.

But the preparation of this political revolution requires the development of a Chinese section of the Fourth International, based on the complete assimilation of all the strategic lessons drawn by the Trotskyist movement—represented today by the International Committee—in the course of the protracted development of the Chinese Revolution.

11. The evolution of the Beijing regime is a crushing historical indictment of all the petty-bourgeois tendencies which have claimed over the last 40 years that Maoism is not merely a progressive variant of Stalinism, but even a genuine revolutionary ideology that has surpassed the outmoded “orthodox” Marxism of Trotsky and the Fourth International. According to the Pabloites, the most persistent exponents of this view, Maoism demonstrated that the achievement of socialism did not depend upon the construction of an international proletarian party based on the perspective of world socialist revolution. Rather, parties based predominantly on the peasantry or other nonproletarian forces could come to power and then, within the framework of a national economy, carry out the socialist transformation of society. This process did not require—indeed, it precluded—the independent political mobilization of the working class and the creation of its own organs of power.

12. This revisionist conception was advanced in its most compelling form by the political godfather of Pabloite revisionism, Isaac Deutscher, who wrote as far back as 1963: “It must be emphasized again that to the end Trotsky’s strength and weakness alike were rooted in classical Marxism. His defeats epitomized the basic predicament by which classical Marxism was beset as doctrine and movement—the discrepancy and divorce between the Marxist vision of revolutionary development and the actual course of class struggle and revolution.”

The victory of Mao Zedong, Deutscher argued, invalidated the “classical” Marxist conception, upheld by the Fourth International, of the

decisive world historical role of the proletariat in the socialist revolution. “The industrial proletariat was not the driving force of the upheaval. Mao’s peasant armies, ‘substituted’ themselves for the urban workers and carried the revolution from country to town” (Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast* [London: Oxford] pp.514–20).

This argument was, in reality, nothing more than a sophisticated apology for Stalinism in general and the policies of Mao Zedong in particular. It served to legitimize the abandonment of the Chinese proletariat by the Stalinists in the aftermath of the decapitation of the Communist Party at the hands of Chiang Kai-shek in 1927. From this defeat, which was the product of Stalin’s policy of collaboration with the Chinese bourgeoisie, Mao drew the “lesson” that it was futile to base the development of the revolutionary party on the urban proletariat. Rather, the Communist Party (CCP) had to base itself on another social force, the peasantry.

13. In the years that followed, Mao pursued this peasant orientation, while zealously upholding the class-collaborationist line demanded by Stalin. Indeed, the two elements of Mao’s policy were organically connected. The program advanced by Mao was not socialist, but limited to demands of a bourgeois-democratic character. While seeking to preserve an alliance with sections of the Chinese bourgeoisie—in accordance with the Stalinist theory of the “bloc of four classes”—Mao disavowed any specifically socialist aims. This was not a political ruse, but a faithful expression of the Maoist party’s petty-bourgeois social base. As late as 1945, Mao’s proposed program for a coalition government pledged that “proper profits, under reasonable management, of state, private and cooperative enterprises will be assured. Thus, both labor and capital will work jointly for the development of industrial production.”

It was only in October 1947 that Mao finally called for the overthrow of the Kuomintang dictatorship and, as the regime of Chiang Kai-shek disintegrated beneath the weight of its own corruption and popular hatred, achieved victory two years later.

The defeat of Chiang Kai-shek and the formation of the People’s Republic marked an enormous blow to world imperialism, which, after a century of plundering China, now found itself unable to continue the exploitation of one-quarter of humanity.

The liberation of China from direct imperialist oppression and the subsequent nationalization of the means of production laid the basis for a rapid growth in production and a campaign to overcome the backwardness which had made China one of the world’s most impoverished nations.

14. Nonetheless, the state which emerged from the 1949 revolution cannot be equated with that established by the Russian Revolution of 1917. While Mao and the leadership of the CCP claimed to represent the working class, they had come to power not through a proletarian revolution, but at the head of the People’s Liberation Army, which was overwhelmingly peasant in its composition.

The nature of this regime which issued from the 1949 revolution is decisive in understanding the subsequent struggles in China and, in particular, the powerful upsurge of the proletariat against the bureaucracy today.

In a letter to the Chinese Left Oppositionists in 1932, Trotsky had accurately warned of the potential consequences of the victory of such a peasant army:

“The commanding stratum of the Chinese ‘Red Army’ has no doubt succeeded in inculcating itself with the habit of issuing commands. The absence of a strong revolutionary party and of mass organizations of the proletariat renders control over the commanding stratum virtually impossible. The commanders and commissars appear in the guise of absolute masters of the situation and upon occupying cities will be rather apt to look down from above upon the workers. The demands of the workers might often appear to them either inopportune or ill-advised.”

The coming to power of the Maoist leadership verified this analysis completely. The ready-made bureaucracy in command of the People’s

Liberation Army concentrated all power in its own hands. From the very origins of the revolution, the working class was politically disenfranchised and oppressed by a privileged bureaucracy, which rested on the army and the peasantry and defended its own power and interests.

In the period leading up to the defeat of Chiang, at no time had Mao issued a call for a revolutionary uprising of the proletariat, though workers in the cities were entering into struggle. Rather, he maintained his strategy of “from the countryside to the city,” i.e., of the peasant army liberating the working class. This was entirely bound up with the Stalinist perspective of the “two-stage revolution” and “bloc of four classes.” Mao did not want a workers’ insurrection because he planned to form “New Democracy,” a bourgeois state, in alliance with sections of the petty bourgeoisie and national bourgeoisie. Once cities were liberated by the People’s Liberation Army, strikes and other independent workers’ struggles were routinely suppressed.

Mao’s first government, a coalition with bourgeois and petty-bourgeois elements, corresponded to the Stalinist conception of a “democratic stage,” which was to last for several decades. It pledged to defend private property and even imperialist interests and postponed serious land reform.

15. The Chinese Trotskyists, who opposed these policies and fought for the independent mobilization of the working class, were murdered and thrown into prison by the hundreds at the hands of the Maoists, never to be released. One of the few who survived the anti-Trotskyist purges has given an account of the work carried out by the genuine revolutionary leaders of the Chinese working class:

“During the three and a half years between the Communist takeover of Shanghai late in May 1949 and the nation-wide round-up of Trotskyists in December 1952, our comrades worked in many varied fields. The younger members of the Internationalist Workers’ Party continued to bring out a journal with the title *Marxist Youth*, never flinching to raise criticisms of the new regime whenever necessary. Many of our comrades took an active part in the agrarian reform movement, and not a few joined the PLA, to fight in its campaigns to liberate the rest of the country. Those in industry led many strikes against capitalist employers, thus challenging the new Government’s policy of collaboration between workers and capitalists. In many areas they became leaders of the masses, not only because they acted as staunch champions of the workers’ interests but also because the workers who came under their influence were deeply impressed, in a period where Marxism was much in vogue, by their command of revolutionary Marxist politics.... We continued to grow both in numbers and in influence throughout those three and a half years, which is the main reason why the CCP’s secret police finally carried out their nation-wide raid on the Trotskyists in December 1952” (Wang Fan-Hsi, *Chinese Revolutionary* [London: Oxford University Press] pp. 252–53).

16. On the international arena, the Maoists had no interest in following the example of the October 1917 Revolution. Unlike Lenin, they did not seek to build an international revolutionary party, but rather stood on the Stalinist platform of “socialism in one country.”

In the early 1950s, under the combined pressure of economic dislocation following World War II and China’s historical backwardness, together with the Korean War and the economic blockade imposed by US imperialism, the Maoist regime was forced to move more rapidly than originally planned in the expropriation of the capitalists and the expansion of the nationalized sector of the economy. The Chinese economy became closely tied to that of the Soviet bloc. Nonetheless, neither Stalin nor Mao ever proposed the unification of their two states into a common Soviet Union of Socialist Republics. Neither proceeded on the basis of the internationalist interests of the proletariat, but rather on the narrow national interests of the privileged bureaucracies which they represented.

This is the real content of the characterization of China as a *deformed* workers’ state, with the emphasis on the word deformed. The Fourth International unconditionally defended the nationalized property relations

established in China. At the same time, it recognized the bureaucratically-deformed origins of the Maoist regime as its dominant feature, making its overthrow through political revolution the only way forward for the construction of socialism. This is inseparably bound up with the necessity to extend the world socialist revolution, to which the policies of the Maoist regime have consistently represented an obstacle.

17. China's economic and political development has been dominated by the zig-zag policies of a Bonapartist regime—a regime seeking to balance itself between conflicting class interests in China—which has been continuously rent by internecine struggles.

Confronted with the economic and cultural backwardness of China and the insoluble contradictions of the utopian scheme of building “socialism in one country,” the Maoist leadership attempted to overcome these obstacles with bureaucratic adventures. The first of these was the so-called Great Leap Forward, which began in 1958. Economic planning was abandoned in favor of exhortations to the people to produce more and the military-style organization of labor in peasant communes. Without a conscious, centralized plan, all of these efforts served to drive the economy to the brink of collapse and threatened to create famine in a number of areas. This situation was further exacerbated by the withdrawal of Soviet aid and technicians after the break in relations between Beijing and Moscow.

Faced with this economic fiasco, Mao came under increasing attack within the party leadership. From 1961 to 1965, the bureaucracy swung to the right in its economic policies, relying heavily on economic incentives to spur production and thus increasing social differentiation, particularly in the countryside. As a consequence of the failure of the Great Leap Forward, Mao was forced to share power within the bureaucracy, handing over his position as head of state to Liu Shao-chi.

After a period of apparent peaceful coexistence within the bureaucracy, Mao launched the misnamed Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution of 1966–67. For purposes of his own internal struggle with bureaucratic rivals, and ultimately in order to strengthen the bureaucracy itself, Mao sought to mobilize support outside the party, first among the student youth and later elements of the lumpen proletariat and poor peasants who were organized in the so-called Red Guards. The reactionary character of this movement was most clearly manifested in its open encouragement of peasant individualism, the rejection of economic planning and the distribution and sale of supplies intended for the cities. Virtually all culture and science was denounced as “bourgeois.” Scientists, artists and intellectuals were ruthlessly repressed, while the political doggerel in Mao's *Little Red Book* was raised to the level of an official state religion.

For its part, the proletariat maintained an attitude of hostility to the Red Guard activities, repeatedly fighting off their attempts to seize the factories or take control of cities.

However, this period did see an independent movement of the working class, which came into struggle on its own demands, challenging the bureaucracy as a whole. This included the first mass strikes in China since the 1949 revolution. At the end of 1966 and beginning of 1967, dock workers in Shanghai launched a stoppage which soon spread to other major ports and was joined by the Chinese rail workers. Radicalized workers in Shanghai spontaneously moved to form independent factory committees, against the state-controlled unions, and set up a citywide organization called the Headquarters of the Revolutionary Revolt of the Shanghai Workers.

The attitude of the Maoist leadership to this eruption of working-class struggle exposed their fraudulent claims about the “proletarian” character of the Cultural Revolution. The bureaucrats denounced the striking workers for succumbing to “economism” and the chief of the Cultural Revolution Group, Mao's main mouthpiece during this period, issued a stern warning to the Shanghai proletariat, declaring “As workers, their main job is to work. Joining in the Revolution is only secondary. They

must therefore go back to work.”

Faced with this movement of the proletariat, Mao swiftly turned to the army, upon which he had firmly based his rule all the while. First he claimed that the People's Liberation Army represented “the workers and peasants in uniform” and should therefore be the leading force in the Cultural Revolution. Under this guise, troops were sent into the factories and worksites to suppress strikes and spur productivity. Ultimately, the army was turned against the Red Guards to suppress the very movement which Mao had called forth. Once Mao had achieved his objective, the routing of the Liu Shao-chi faction in the bureaucracy, the entire movement was swiftly brought to a halt.

In the wake of the Cultural Revolution, and in the midst of the economic chaos which it had created, the Maoist leadership carried out another lurch to the right. On the international arena, this was manifested in the rapprochement with US imperialism, with Nixon brought to Beijing during the US bombing of Vietnam, and the Maoist regime's embracing of reactionary dictatorships including that of Pinochet in Chile.

18. Internally, Mao initiated a similar reconciliation with procapitalist elements, inaugurating a line of march which has accelerated continuously since his death in 1976, under the slogan adopted by the Deng Xiaoping leadership: “To get rich is glorious.” Today, this has reached a point in which virtually all the land collectivized after 1949 has been restored to private ownership, restrictions on private ownership of industry have been largely dismantled and the massive penetration of foreign capital has been encouraged in the special economic zones. All of this has created levels of social inequality and misery unseen since the overthrow of the Kuomintang dictatorship.

Moreover, in the treaty under which the British colony of Hong Kong is to be returned to China in 1997, the Stalinist bureaucracy has agreed to maintain capitalist property relations, under the formula “one country, two systems.” In other words, the state apparatus controlled by the Chinese Stalinists will become the protector of Hong Kong capitalists against the working class.

Whatever tactical questions divide the bureaucracy today, it stands united on the program of capitalist restoration and many within it have taken personal advantage of these policies to enrich themselves through capitalist enterprises.

This evolution of the regime founded by Mao has determined the explosive character of the revolutionary movement which is now emerging in the working class. Contained within this movement is a social consciousness of the gains of the Chinese Revolution and a determination to defeat the bureaucracy's attempts to devour these gains with its restorationist program and ever-greater accommodation to imperialism.

19. In the light of this entire historical experience, it is now possible to fully appreciate the astonishing farsightedness of Trotsky's analysis. On the basis of the theory of permanent revolution, Trotsky insisted that the liberation of China from the grip of imperialism, the liquidation of the feudal legacy of poverty and backwardness, and the reorganization of society on a socialist basis was possible only through the revolutionary mobilization of the peasantry under the leadership of the socialist proletariat. Moreover, the development of China along socialist lines could be achieved only through the victory of the proletariat in the advanced capitalist countries over the imperialist bourgeoisie.

Trotsky insisted that no matter how impressive the successes of Mao's peasant armies, they could not serve as a substitute for the independent revolutionary mobilization of the working class. He warned that without the revival of the revolutionary movement of the Chinese proletariat, “then the peasant war even if fully victorious will inevitably arrive in a blind alley” (*Leon Trotsky on China* [Pathfinder] p. 527).

20. In the days following the brutal massacre, there have been innumerable reports of divisions and even splits within the bureaucracy and the military. Even if this is the case, the Chinese workers cannot base

their struggle on the divisions and maneuvers within the ruling caste, but only on their own independent strength. They must take advantage of these divisions to advance their own independent program of political revolution. This requires the building of a new revolutionary party of the Chinese proletariat.

The political revolution is not the replacement of one bureaucratic leader with another, nor merely the piling up of greater and greater democratic reforms. While in China this revolution has begun under slogans demanding democratic rights and an end to corruption, even these demands cannot be realized outside of the working class carrying out the forcible revolutionary overthrow of the bureaucracy as a whole and establishing, for the first time in China's history, genuine independent organs of workers' power, soviets, and on the basis of them a real workers' government.

21. The events in China today provide the most powerful confirmation of the perspective of political revolution first elaborated by Trotsky in *The Revolution Betrayed*, his monumental analysis of the degeneration of the first workers' state in the Soviet Union. He characterized the Soviet Union as a *transitional* and inherently unstable society, whose subsequent development could proceed along two possible lines. Either the bureaucracy would pave the way to capitalist restoration, opening up the country to imperialist penetration and drawing largely from its own ranks a new class of capitalist exploiters, or the working class would defend the gains of the October Revolution through the revolutionary overthrow of the Stalinist bureaucracy and the re-establishment of workers' democracy, and thereby unify its struggle with that of the international working class in the capitalist countries fighting for the overthrow of world imperialism.

Trotsky characterized this revolution as *political* and not social, because it would not be compelled to overthrow the nationalized property relations and planned economy established by the 1917 revolution, but rather depose the bureaucracy and introduce major reforms in the economy for the benefit of the working class.

This perspective retains its full force in relation to China today. The Chinese Stalinist bureaucracy has already proceeded far down the road of capitalist restoration and therefore the political revolution in China today will have major social implications, first and foremost, the necessity for the working class and its revolutionary party to expropriate the class of capitalists sponsored by the bureaucracy, together with the foreign multinationals which have been allowed to resume the exploitation of Chinese labor.

What remains of China's planned economy must be reorganized from top to bottom to meet the needs not of the privileged bureaucrats and capitalists, but those of the masses. Production must be placed under the control of factory committees, freely elected by the workers, and the quality and pricing of commodities should be put in the hands of a democratically organized consumers' cooperative.

Over the past decade, the procapitalist course of the Beijing bureaucracy has vitiated many of the social gains made by the 1949 revolution. In the countryside, this has resulted in the increasing impoverishment of the masses of poor peasants and rural proletariat in order to benefit a nascent rural bourgeoisie, which is closely knitted with the ruling strata itself. In carrying out the political revolution against the bureaucracy, the revolutionary proletariat must mobilize the vast majority of poor peasants and agricultural workers behind it by fighting against the oppression and social stratification which has been fostered in the countryside by the bureaucracy's restorationist policies.

Such a political revolution by the Chinese proletariat would create the greatest shock waves of social revolution throughout Asia and internationally. Breaking with the Stalinist straitjacket of "socialism in one country" and linking up its forces with those of the workers of Asia and internationally in the common struggle to put an end to imperialism, the Chinese workers would create the real foundations for developing

socialism in China as part of the development of world socialism.

22. This perspective of political revolution developed by Trotsky in struggle against Stalinism has been upheld and defended only by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). Founded in 1953 to combat the growth of opportunism in the Fourth International, the International Committee has consistently battled against the theories of Pabloite revisionism, which rejected political revolution, insisting on the capacity of the Stalinist bureaucracies to reform themselves and even play a revolutionary role on the world arena.

Based on this perspective, the Pabloite revisionists vilified the Chinese Trotskyists as "refugees from the revolution" as they were being brutally repressed by Mao, whom the Pabloites extolled as a great revolutionary leader. Even as late as 1969, the Pabloite leader Tariq Ali proclaimed that "Mao's stature as one of the greatest revolutionary leaders of this century is beyond question." Today, the program for which the Chinese Trotskyists fought is revealed as the only one for the achievement of a socialist China, while the policies of Maoism have created only capitalist restoration and collaboration with imperialism.

The events in both China and the Soviet Union, with the open turn of the bureaucracies to capitalist restoration and the upheaval of the masses of workers taking the road of political revolution, have discredited the retrograde theories of Pabloism and vindicated the ICFI's protracted struggle against this opportunist revisionism.

The Chinese events have likewise unmasked all the opportunist charlatans who attempted to declare Gorbachev and his procapitalist policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost* to represent some road forward for the political revolution. Confronted with the emergence of a real political revolution during his summit in Beijing with Deng Xiaoping, Gorbachev could not contain his organic hostility to the revolutionary struggle of the working class against bureaucracy, and denounced the demonstrators as "hotheads."

The Gorbachev regime has not hesitated to declare its solidarity with the butchers of Tiananmen Square. A statement drafted by Gorbachev's Politburo and passed unanimously by the bogus Soviet Congress of People's Deputies refused to condemn the killings, declaring instead, "Now is not the time for unconsidered, hasty conclusions and statements.... Of course, the events happening in China are an internal affair of the country."

Gorbachev understands very well that similar upheavals are on the agenda in the Soviet Union; and he is no less prepared than Deng Xiaoping and Li Peng to resort to atrocities when the time comes.

The wave of terror unleashed by the Deng Xiaoping bureaucracy has not defeated the struggle of the Chinese proletariat. On the contrary, the killings and arrests have only demonstrated the political bankruptcy of the totalitarian bureaucracy as it attempts to defend its privileges and the interests of world imperialism against the movement of the masses.

The powerful uprising of the workers, which has dominated the recent events in China, is inseparably bound up with the movement of the working class throughout Asia and internationally. The Chinese workers are being driven onto the road of political revolution against the Maoist bureaucracy in Beijing as masses of workers in neighboring South Korea are waging mighty battles against foreign and native capital and as the proletariat throughout the world is undergoing a profound radicalization, expressed above all in the revolt against its traditional Stalinist, social democratic and trade union bureaucratic leaderships.

These events, above all, demonstrate the unpostponable necessity of building a revolutionary party of the Chinese, Russian and Eastern European proletariat to overthrow the parasitic Stalinist bureaucracies in a political revolution, as a decisive component of the world socialist revolution. This is the great historic challenge which now confronts the International Committee of the Fourth International.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**