

China: Thirty years since the Tiananmen Square massacre

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The eruption of mass protests in China from April 1989 onwards, culminating in the brutal military crackdown in the days and weeks after the night of June 3–4, was a crucial historical turning point in China and a key element of the crisis of Stalinism that was underway internationally.

What is referred to as the “Tiananmen Square massacre” was not limited to Beijing and its iconic central square, nor was it primarily aimed against students. It was, above all, directed at suppressing a revolt by the working class against the social consequences of the pro-market policies of the Chinese Communist Party under Deng Xiaoping that were destroying the gains of the Chinese revolution.

The bloody crackdown was to open the door for a vast acceleration of the processes of capitalist restoration, which produced both staggering levels of economic growth, as foreign capital flooded in, but, at the same time, the extreme sharpening of internal social tensions and external geopolitical rivalries, in which China is currently embroiled.

It is necessary to outline, even if only briefly, the course of events that took place 30 years ago. This is not just a question of reviving memories or filling in the gaps for those who were not even alive at the time. With the benefit of hindsight, the scope and revolutionary character of the struggles of workers and youth, which were without precedent since the 1949 Chinese revolution, is more apparent. The CCP regime was shaken to the core and has lived in fear ever since of another convulsive social upheaval.

In 1989, the failure of the pro-market restructuring initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 to bring about political reform, as initially promised, had generated widespread disillusionment among intellectuals and students. Protests had been planned in advance to mark the 70th anniversary of the landmark May 4 movement in 1919, in which student demonstrations against the ceding of Chinese territory to Japan, under the terms of the Versailles Treaty, exploded into a far broader movement for democratic rights.

Plans were changed, however, when Hu Yaobang, former CCP general secretary, died on April 15, 1989. He was regarded as a political reformer and had been blamed for previous student protests in 1986–87. He was accused of permitting “bourgeois liberalisation” and removed as party head, amid fears in the Stalinist apparatus that the student protests would ignite broader social unrest in the working class, as had erupted in Poland in the Solidarity strikes of 1980–81.

The protests to mark the death of Hu Yaobang rapidly expanded into a nation-wide protest movement. Not only did the students call for an explanation for Hu’s ousting, but began to raise other demands: to reveal the incomes of top leaders and their families; freedom of the press; increased education funding; an end to restrictions on demonstrations; and democratic elections to replace “bad” government officials. What

particularly concerned the Stalinist apparatus was the formation of an Autonomous Federation of Beijing University Students and a Beijing Workers Autonomous Federation.

On April 22, 100,000 people assembled in Tiananmen Square, and one million took to the streets for Hu’s funeral—most of them workers. On that day, the workers’ federation distributed leaflets, condemning the wealth of Deng Xiaoping’s family, the privileges of the bureaucracy and the “shortcomings” of market reform. In particular, they demanded the stabilisation of prices because inflation was running at nearly 30 percent.

On May 4, the numbers in Tiananmen Square swelled to 300,000, with a quarter of a million Beijing workers joining the 60,000 students. Significant rallies and marches occurred in 51 other cities, including Shanghai, Nanjing, Wuhan, Changsha and Xian.

The CCP leadership was divided over how to respond. Hu’s replacement as party head, Zhao Ziyang, was reluctant to use force to suppress the protests, preferring to seek dialogue with student leaders. The hard-line faction represented by Premier Li Peng and backed by Deng, pressed for police-state measures to prevent the movement from expanding. Zhao’s efforts to conciliate student leaders, however, were rapidly overtaken by events.

On May 13, just prior to the arrival of Mikhail Gorbachev, for the first state visit by a Soviet leader in decades, a group of students marched into Tiananmen Square and initiated a hunger strike until their demands were met. The hunger strike rapidly expanded into an occupation as students, workers and other citizens flooded into the huge square. Many had illusions in Gorbachev and his policy of *glasnost* or “openness.” The occupation was a major embarrassment to the CCP leaders, who had planned to stage the official welcome in the square and had to switch venues at the last moment.

On May 15, half a million workers and students rallied in Tiananmen Square, despite Zhao’s public pleas not to obstruct the historic Sino-Soviet summit. On May 17, two million people marched in Beijing, many under the banners of their workplace. Eighteen provinces reported large-scale protests. On May 18, in the provincial capital of Hebei, for instance, 150,000 people took to the streets. In Shanghai, 100,000 workers, teachers, government officials, students and scientists turned out.

As one academic has noted:

The significance of the massive demonstrations of mid-May was not simply the enormous numbers of participants but their social composition. Students, along with intellectuals and journalists, now had been joined by groups of Party cadres, government office workers, school teachers, peasants who had marched in from Beijing’s rural suburbs, and, most significantly, hundreds of thousands of factory workers... a month after the first students protests, virtually all urban social and occupational groups were represented among those who marched in opposition to the

government. All proudly hoisted their own banners identifying their institutions and work units... It was as if the entire city had spontaneously risen up in defiance of the regime of Deng Xiaoping. [*The Deng Xiaoping Era*, Maurice Meissner, p.428]

While the CCP bureaucracy could consider meeting some of the student leaders' demands, any compromise with the working class was out of the question. Their demands for fixing prices, guaranteeing jobs and maintaining social services cut directly across the agenda of capitalist restoration. Moreover, their hostility was to the entire bureaucratic apparatus and the wealth and privileges accumulated by CCP leaders and their family members.

At Deng's instigation, the Stalinist regime acted. Zhao was sidelined then placed under house arrest. Li Peng announced the imposition of martial law on May 20. However, far from being intimidated, more than a million people gathered in Tiananmen Square the following day and again on May 23. When the army arrived on May 23, thousands of workers and students appealed to the soldiers not to turn their weapons against the people. Many of the troops were moved to tears and even drove their trucks away. The next day, the army divisions from the Beijing region were ordered to pull out, to prevent the soldiers from joining the workers.

Deng was compelled to bring in troops from remote provinces for the bloody crackdown on June 3–4. In the intervening two weeks, the crisis of political leadership among the protesters was evident. The student leaders were divided, with the more conservative layers declaring an end to the occupation of Tiananmen Square, while more radical elements, many of whom had travelled to Beijing from other cities, vowed to stay. Large sections of the working class expressed their determination to defend the students and keep the protests going. Barricades were established in working class suburbs and flying squads on motor bikes coordinated efforts.

The membership of the Workers Autonomous Federation swelled to 20,000. With the authorities in Beijing paralysed, workers started to take matters into their own hands, performing basic functions such as directing traffic. Production ground to a halt as workers participated in the demonstrations. On May 25, one million people held another massive protest in Beijing.

A Federation statement issued the next day declared:

We [the working class] are the rightful masters of this nation. We must be heard in national affairs. We absolutely must not allow this small band of degenerate scum of the nation... to usurp our name and suppress the students, murder democracy and trample human rights.

There was no shortage of courage as the troops moved towards Tiananmen Square on the night of June 3, but the major battles took place in the working-class suburbs of Beijing. Only relatively small numbers remained in the square itself. One eyewitness stated, "Armoured vehicles ran over roadblocks, knocked over cars and buses. The unarmed people had only bricks... What they got in return was bullets, a hail of bullets from machine guns and semi-automatics." [cited in Meissner, p.458]

Another eyewitness wrote:

The whole city of Beijing seemed in a state of outrage and extreme agitation. On the side-streets off Changan Avenue, thousands of us rhythmically shouted in the intervals between gunfire: "You animals!" "Li Peng—fascist!" and "Go on strike!"

But the troops shot back, killing those who were not swift enough to squat down or move away or who simply took no heed of bullets. People were constantly falling to the ground and being taken to a nearby hospital, but the mood of indignation completely overwhelmed any feelings of fear. [cited in Meissner, p.460]

Incensed by the killing of unarmed civilians, workers armed with whatever was at hand attacked the military convoys, setting fire to trucks and armoured vehicles. As news of the massacre spread to other parts of the country, protests and strikes erupted, to which the regime responded with mass arrests. While student leaders received relatively light treatment, the full force of the state was brought down on the working class. The regime staged public executions of workers to strike fear into the population.

Determination and raw courage were not lacking, but political leadership was. In the midst of the most acute crisis of the CCP regime since 1949, and an uprising of the working class of an insurrectionary character, there was no revolutionary party and no revolutionary leadership to direct this mass movement. No matter how radical their outlook, the leaders thrown up spontaneously by the movement sought to pressure the regime for reforms, not to overthrow it.

The ICFI responds

In the midst of these momentous events, the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) issued two statements: "Victory to the Political Revolution in China!" on June 8, and "Stop Stalinist Terror against Chinese Workers" on June 22. It not only denounced the Stalinist brutality, but provided a clear analysis of the events, drew the necessary lessons and put forward a political perspective on which the working class could fight the degenerate Maoist bureaucracy in Beijing.

Recognising that the gains of the Chinese revolution had not, at that stage, been completely destroyed, and that China remained what the Trotskyist movement had characterised as a deformed workers' state, the ICFI called, in its first statement, for a political revolution, to oust the CCP regime, defend and extend the property relations established after the 1949 revolution, and build a genuine workers' state as part of the struggle for socialism internationally.

Four days after the massacre, the first IC statement declared:

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. [*Fourth International*, Volume 16, Nos 1–2, January–June 1989, p.2]

The statement exposed the hypocritical crocodile tears of imperialist leaders, who were rubbing their hands over the opportunities for foreign capital, and also the lies of the Stalinist regime, which to this day continues to brand the protest movement as counter-revolutionary. While the Western media focussed on the student protests in Tiananmen Square, the ICFI quickly recognised that it was the working class that was the chief target of the regime.

It stated:

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. [ibid, p.1]

The ICFI warned:

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. [ibid, p.3]

The ICFI's timely response stemmed directly from the political struggle that it had waged against the renegades of the Workers Revolutionary Party in Britain, and the subsequent development of its International Perspectives document published in August 1988. The WRP had adapted to the very political forces that the ICFI had been founded in 1953 to fight against: Pabloite opportunism, which abandoned the struggle for the political independence of the working class and sought to subordinate the working class to Social Democracy, the trade unions, bourgeois nationalism and, in particular, Stalinism.

The editorial of the January–June issue of the *Fourth International*, published in the immediate wake of the Tiananmen Square massacre, entitled “Trotskyism and the Chinese Revolution,” provided a balance sheet of the ICFI's struggle against the adaptation of Pablo and Mandel, as well as of the WRP renegades, to Maoism.

The Open Letter written by James Cannon in 1953, which marked the founding of the ICFI, condemned the adaptation of Pablo and Mandel to the Maoist regime in China and their refusal to defend the Chinese Trotskyists, who had been rounded up *en masse* in 1952 amid sharpening social tensions. Pablo deliberately blocked efforts to publicise the repression of the Chinese Trotskyists and to mobilise support in the international working class. He contemptuously declared: “Compared to the achievement of the revolution of Mao Zedong, the arrest of a few hundred Trotskyists is insignificant.”

In the Open Letter, Cannon wrote:

Particularly revolting is the slanderous misrepresentation Pablo has fostered of the political position of the Chinese section of the Fourth International. They are pictured by the Pablo faction as “sectarians,” as “fugitives from a revolution.” Contrary to the impression deliberately created by the Pablo faction, the Chinese Trotskyists acted as genuine representatives of the Chinese proletariat. Through no fault of their own they have been singled out as victims of the Mao regime... But Pablo's line of conciliationism towards Stalinism leads him inexorably to touch up the Mao regime *couleur de rose* while putting grey tints on the firm principled stand of our Chinese comrades.

The WRP leadership opposed the SWP's reunification with the Pabloites in 1963, but its attitude to Stalinism increasingly resembled that

of the Pabloites. From the 1960s, Michael Banda, former national secretary of the WRP, had been praising Maoism—hailing Mao's Cultural Revolution and the Red Guard movement and acclaiming Mao's guerrilla tactics. As the Fourth International editorial stated, the failure of Healy to fight out and clarify Banda's Maoist proclivities was to have fatal political consequences, as the WRP leadership adapted to Stalinism. In the wake of the split, all factions of the renegades shamelessly promoted the Gorbachev leadership, which was the spearhead of capitalist restoration.

In opposition to those such as Michael Banda who declared the gains of the Russian and Chinese revolutions were irreversible, the ICFI, in its 1988 perspectives document, warned that the Maoist regime in China was rapidly proceeding to dismantle the nationalised property relations established in the wake of the 1949 revolution. It stated:

Throughout Eastern Europe and in China, Vietnam and Laos, the bureaucracies are moving, even more rapidly than in the USSR, to the integration of their national economies into the structure of world capitalism. This process is most advanced in China. The corpse of Mao may still be embalmed for public display, but his legacy is already in an advanced stage of putrefaction. His successors have moved to dismantle whatever existed of the planned economy. Virtually all land collectivized after 1949 has been returned to private ownership, and, under the banner of the government-inspired slogan, “To get rich is glorious,” capitalist relations are flourishing in the countryside.

Just nine months later, the Tiananmen Square massacre was to confirm the counter-revolutionary character of Maoism. The ICFI was the only political party to warn of the dangers and advance a clear Trotskyist perspective for the Chinese working class.

The *Fourth International* editorial explained:

The two tendencies which opposed each other in the 1985–86 split, today find themselves on the opposite sides of the barricades in the Chinese events. The proletarian internationalist tendency represented by the International Committee defends the struggle of the Chinese workers and students in the name of international socialism and the political revolution. The petty-bourgeois nationalist tendency, represented by the renegade leadership of the WRP, above all, Healy, Banda and Slaughter, solidarizes itself, in one form or another, with the Stalinists.

The Chinese Revolution

Critical to the establishment of a revolutionary party in China as a section of the Fourth International is an understanding of the strategic experiences of the working class in the 20th century, not only in China, but internationally. The IC statement of June 8, 1989 provided a concise summary of the crucial issues in the struggle for genuine Marxism, that is, of Trotskyism in China, against Maoism. It made clear that Maoism was not a revolutionary alternative to Soviet Stalinism, but the Chinese variant, rooted in the same reactionary nationalist program of “Socialism in One Country.”

The statement explained:

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 non-proletarian 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...

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 had to base itself on another social force, the peasantry.

The 1949 Chinese revolution was part of the wave of revolutionary struggles in the advanced capitalist countries, as well as in countries of a belated capitalist development, like China, that emerged following World War II. The overthrow of the reactionary and crisis-ridden Kuomintang regime was an enormous blow against imperialism, which had kept the country divided and mired in squalor and backwardness. It expressed the aspirations of the overwhelming majority of the population for economic security, basic democratic and social rights, and a decent standard of living after decades of political upheaval and war.

However, the course of the revolution and the subsequent evolution of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), proclaimed by Mao Zedong in 1949, was distorted and deformed by Stalinism, which dominated the CCP in the wake of Stalin’s betrayal of the Second Chinese Revolution of 1925–27. Stalin subordinated the very young CCP to the bourgeois nationalist Kuomintang, resulting in crushing blows to the Chinese Communists and working class in April 1927, and again in May 1927. CCP leaders and members who supported Trotsky’s analysis of Stalin’s betrayal, based on the Theory of Permanent Revolution, were expelled.

Trotsky warned in 1932 about the CCP’s turn to the peasantry and the potential dangers facing the working class as its peasant armies entered the towns and cities. After the end of World War II and the defeat of Japanese imperialism, the Maoist leadership, following the line dictated by Moscow to Stalinist parties internationally, initially sought to continue the war-time alliance with imperialism and to form a coalition government with Chang Kai-shek. It only belatedly called for the overthrow of the Kuomintang in October 1947. The CCP made no attempt to mobilise the working class, and defended private property as it entered the cities, as part of Mao’s perspective of a “New Democracy” and an alliance with sections of the petty bourgeoisie and national bourgeoisie.

In his writings, Chinese Trotskyist Peng Shuzhi underscored the hostility of the new CCP regime to the working class, noting that strikes by workers over wages and oppressive conditions were met with brutal repression. To cite one of his examples:

At the Ching Hsing coal mines in Hopeh Province, when the

workers revolted against the cruelty and arrogance of the Soviet advisers and specialists [in May 1950], the CCP sent a large number of troops to suppress the revolt. There were more than 200 dead or wounded workers and more than a thousand were expelled and exiled to Manchuria or Siberia. [*The Chinese Communist Party in Power*, Peng Shuzhi, p.132]

The Maoist regime only turned to the broad expropriation of private property and centralised planning, along the bureaucratic lines of the Soviet Union, as a result of the economic crisis produced by the Korean War and the internal sabotage by bourgeois layers, who saw the prospect of “liberation” by US imperialism. It was also in the midst of the Korean War and the growing restiveness of the working class that the CCP rounded up and jailed all of the Chinese Trotskyists and their families, in December 1952.

While the economic steps taken by the CCP initially led to a revival of the war-ravaged economy, its national autarkic perspective of “socialism in one country” inevitably led to worsening economic and social turmoil, and crises for which the CCP bureaucracy had no solution. The result was bitter internal factional warfare and abrupt twists and turns. Mao’s utopian schemes for a socialist society, which underpinned his “Great Leap Forward,” ended in economic catastrophe and mass starvation. His factional opponents, led by Liu Shaoqi, followed the Soviet model of bureaucratic planning with its emphasis on heavy industry, but this provided no alternative. The economic crisis greatly worsened by the 1961–63 split with the Soviet Union and the withdrawal of Soviet aid and advisers, leaving China completely isolated.

Much of the Maoist mythology that various neo-Maoist tendencies draw on today, derive from Mao’s so-called Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, which was neither great, proletarian nor revolutionary. It took an entirely reactionary attitude to culture—denouncing and destroying past cultural developments—replacing it with Stalinist banalities. In reality, Mao’s Cultural Revolution was a last, desperate bid to oust his rivals, whom he branded as “capitalist roaders.” It rapidly spun out of control, leading to confused and convulsive social struggles that threatened the very existence of the regime. When workers in Shanghai took Mao’s edict, “Bombard the Headquarters,” literally and engaged in mass strikes, forming the independent Shanghai People’s Commune in 1967, Mao brought in the military.

The IC statement commented:

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.”

While Mao and his faction denounced the “capitalist roaders” and proclaimed their adherence to socialism, they could offer no alternative. Mao’s fantasy of a self-sufficient China had proven to be a disaster. Incapable of resolving the immense economic and social problems wracking the country, and facing a military confrontation with the Soviet Union, the CCP bureaucracy forged an anti-Soviet alliance with US imperialism, which laid the basis for China’s integration into global capitalism. While Deng Xiaoping is credited with initiating market

reforms, Mao's rapprochement with US President Richard Nixon in 1972 was the essential political and diplomatic pre-condition for foreign investment and increased trade with the West.

The turn to imperialism and the capitalist market, however, resolved nothing. Deng Xiaoping, who had been ostracised during the Cultural Revolution as the "No 2 capitalist roader," was rehabilitated, and after Mao's death in 1976 emerged as the dominant figure in the Stalinist bureaucracy. From 1978 on, Deng initiated his sweeping "reform and opening" agenda: establishing four special economic zones for foreign investors, dismantling the communes in the countryside, removing restrictions on private enterprise and increasingly allowing the market to set prices. The result was a vast expansion of private enterprise, especially in the countryside; the rapid rise of social inequality, looting and corruption by CCP bureaucrats; growing joblessness and soaring inflation. It was this social powder keg that exploded in 1989, triggered by student protests over democratic rights.

The Tiananmen Square massacre was a critical experience for the working class in China and internationally, and for the Fourth International. The events in China were completely bound up with the crisis of Stalinism internationally, and were a harbinger of the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, the rapid collapse of the Eastern European regimes, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

The ICFI and its sections intervened aggressively in the protests and demonstrations that took place internationally, before and after the massacre, distributing copies of the ICFI statement, calling for political revolution in China and seeking to clarify the issues among Chinese students and residents. Superficially, it might have appeared that any prospect of political revolution had ended when the tanks rolled into Beijing, but, in reality, the CCP regime was mired in deep crisis, divided as to how to proceed and facing a hostile population.

The immediate result was to strengthen the hand of Li Peng and his supporters, such as Chen Yun, who favoured more limited reforms, a reining in of the market and a slower pace of growth. The debate in Beijing was bound up with the developments in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, which, this faction insisted, remained the model for China. While Li Peng and Chen Yun represented layers of the CCP bureaucracy, whose privileges were bound up with state-owned enterprises and centralised planning, they were also deeply fearful of a renewed uprising of the working class and blamed the "reform and opening" policies for the Tiananmen Square protests.

Deng, however, insisted that such an approach would result in economic stagnation, and that a dramatic acceleration of market reform was needed. High growth rates were necessary to avoid mass unemployment and prevent social unrest. It is no accident that Deng's southern tour in 1992, which laid the basis for his renewed ascendancy, took place just days after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Deng had won the support of top military figures, who had witnessed the devastation of Iraq in the first Gulf War by American weaponry, and looked to Deng to provide the money and arms to modernise the Peoples Liberation Army. More importantly, his rivals had no alternative economic perspective to offer—a reflection of the utter bankruptcy of the Maoist perspective of "Socialism in One Country."

China, 30 years on

Thirty years on, the CCP has overcome none of the underlying economic contradictions or geo-political dilemmas. And social tensions, kept in check by a vastly expanded police state apparatus, have only become more acute.

An extraordinary economic expansion has taken place. Between 1992 and 2010, the Chinese economy grew 11-fold. In 1995, according to Wikipedia, China was the eighth largest economy in the world, and by 2011, it had overtaken Japan to become the second largest. These growth rates depended, firstly, on the gains of the 1949 revolution—the creation of

an educated and skilled workforce, basic industries and infrastructure—and secondly, on China's place in the world economy as the pre-eminent cheap-labour platform. After 1992, foreign investment, along with foreign technology and expertise, flooded into the country.

The various commentators, including the pseudo-left organisations, who characterise China as "imperialist," seize on the economic indices of growth, trade and investment torn out of their international and historical context. It is now becoming increasingly evident that the further economic expansion of China is running up against the long-established imperialist order dominated by the United States.

The US and other imperialist powers were happy to reap the profits of cheap Chinese labour, as long as China's economic expansion did not challenge their economic and geo-political interests. Under Obama and now Trump, US imperialism is determined to use the full force of its economic muscle and military might to prevent China challenging American hegemony. The constant refrain from the United States is that China must abide by the "international rules-based system"—that is, the existing world imperialist order, where Washington sets the rules.

Amid the accelerating plunge towards war, the CCP is organically incapable of making any appeal to the only social force capable of preventing conflict—the working class, in China and internationally. The Stalinist bureaucracy is far more terrified of a mass movement of workers than the threat of imperialism. Well aware that it is sitting on top of a social time bomb, it spends more on internal security than it does on the military.

The staggering growth of social inequality in China has proceeded hand-in-hand with the looting and privatisation of state-owned enterprises, the demolition of cradle-to-grave welfare benefits and the colossal accumulation of wealth in the hands of a tiny group of the super-rich. To be among the top 100 on the Forbes Rich List for China, in 2019, required at least \$US2.6 billion. Top of the list was Jack Ma, executive director of the Alibaba Group, with a net worth of \$38 billion, up \$3.4 billion from 2018. The top five richest individuals in China had a combined net worth of \$155.9 billion. It is this layer that the CCP represents and with whom it has the closest ties. A number are members of the Communist Party and hold positions on top political advisory bodies.

By contrast, the minimum wage for a worker in China is around \$370 a month or \$4,440 annually. This, however, obscures the situation facing large sections of the working class, especially the tens of millions of internal migrants from rural areas, who lack basic social rights. Underpayment and non-payment of wages is widespread. Conditions in the factories are oppressive, and often unhealthy and dangerous. The All-China Federation of Trade Unions is quite literally the arm of the CCP bureaucracy in workplaces, suppressing opposition, protests and strikes.

The return of the capitalist market and gross exploitation has also led to a return of the social ills that were largely wiped out after the 1949 revolution—child labour, forced labour, prostitution and drug abuse.

To cite just a few indices:

- The Global Slavery Index estimates that, on any given day in 2016, there were over 3.8 million people living in conditions of modern slavery in China, a prevalence of 2.8 victims for every thousand people in the country. [Global Slavery Index]

- No one knows the precise number of sex workers in China... In 2013, the United Nations estimated there were four to six million, citing police sources. The consensus is that there are between four and 10 million sex workers in China. [*South China Morning Post*, 2018]

- A 2017 report from China's National Narcotics Control Commission estimated there were 2.51 million drug users in China, as of late 2016, a year-over-year increase of nearly 7 percent. [*Time* magazine, 2019]

What then are the political tasks that confront the ICFI today?

Clearly the establishment, or, rather, re-establishment of a section of the Fourth International in China is a key strategic task. The Chinese working

class is the largest in the world, according to one estimate numbering 400 million, making it larger than the population of most countries in the world. Moreover, China has been vastly transformed since 1949, and even 1989—it is no longer predominantly a peasant or rural society, but an urban society. The majority of the population live in urban areas, many in huge cities that have either vastly expanded, or did not exist before.

In addition, as the 2016 IC statement on the building of an international anti-war movement made clear, China is a central target of the war plans of US imperialism, as it desperately seeks to maintain its hegemony. An international struggle of the working class against the drive to war must necessarily encompass workers in China.

The working class in China, as internationally, is and will increasingly be part of the resurgence of the class struggle around the world. The very limited figures available indicate rising levels of workers' strikes and protests. The fact that a layer of students from elite universities have turned to these struggles, and been detained for their involvement, is a sign that the struggles will take on a political character.

The clearest indication of the extreme social and political tensions inside China is the extraordinary power that has been concentrated in the hands of President Xi Jinping—now president for life. As the ICFI declared in its perspective in March last year, Xi is a Bonapartist with Chinese characteristics, mediating between rival factions of the CCP bureaucracy and, above all, strengthening its vast police state apparatus to suppress all criticism and opposition.

To this day, the Stalinist regime has resisted all calls to revise, in any way, its assessment of the events of June 1989, or to politically rehabilitate its victims. On the death on July 22 of Li Peng, who declared martial law 30 years ago, the official state-owned Xinhua newsagency declared: “Comrade Li Peng took a firm position and together with the majority of comrades in the Politburo adopted resolute measures to halt the turmoil and quell the counterrevolutionary rebellion.”

This amounts to a warning that the troops can be called out again, against the working class. It is not a sign of strength, but of great weakness, and will lend to the class struggle a particularly explosive character.

As the outcome of the 1989 protests makes clear, our tasks are, above all, to clarify the theoretical and political perspective that must guide a movement of the working class. It is necessary to examine and differentiate the program of Trotskyism, based on socialist internationalism, from the many and various critiques of capitalist restoration in China, which are all grounded, in one way or another, on Chinese nationalism. That task is made more difficult due to the lack of first hand materials, which is compounded by the regime's all-pervasive censorship. Moreover, all of these oppositional political currents—the New Left, the neo-Maoists—are very heterogeneous.

Central to clarifying Chinese students, workers and intellectuals are the questions of history—the key strategic experiences of the international working class, of which the revolutions in China are a crucial component. From the discussions we have had with Chinese students in Australia, it appears that very little or nothing is known about Leon Trotsky and Stalin's betrayal of the 1925–27 Chinese Revolution. Any knowledge of the 1949 Revolution and subsequent developments, such as the Cultural Revolution, is refracted through the propaganda and lies of the Stalinist regime.

We do know that a layer of youth, intellectuals and workers have turned to Maoism, and its banal “revolutionary” slogans, for answers. Capitalist restoration in China, however, was not a break from Maoism. It flowed organically out of the dead-end of “socialism in one country.” Maoism, or Chinese Stalinism, was characterised by its hostility to the independent mobilisation of the working class, its emphasis on subjective will, and above all its putrid nationalism. It is diametrically opposed to genuine Marxism, that is, the perspective of socialist internationalism, which alone

was upheld by the Trotskyist movement, including the Chinese Trotskyists.

We can be confident that there will be Chinese workers and youth seeking the political means for fighting the CCP regime in Beijing, and the capitalist system that it defends, and who will turn, for the necessary internationalist perspective, to the International Committee.



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