

# Draw the political lessons from the bankruptcy of Maoism

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Today marks 70 years since the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) seized power and its leader Mao Zedong proclaimed the People's Republic of China in Tiananmen Square.

The current CCP regime headed by President Xi Jinping will commemorate the occasion by mounting a huge military parade in Beijing today and staging extravagant celebrations in the evening, complete with singing, dancing and fireworks. Xi is due to deliver a speech in Tiananmen Square that is certain to be saturated with Chinese nationalism and feature his “dream” of national rejuvenation and making China great again.

The Chinese Revolution was a monumental social upheaval that ended the imperialist subjugation of China, unified the country, lifted the living conditions of the population and eliminated much that was culturally and socially backward. However, political heirs of Mao Zedong cannot explain how and why the dreams and aspirations of working people for a socialist future, for which so many sacrificed 70 years ago, have resulted in the dead end of capitalism.

The staggering levels of economic growth in China over the past three decades have resulted in a huge and widening social gulf between the tiny layer of billionaire oligarchs who are represented by the CCP and masses of Chinese workers and peasants struggling to survive in a social order dominated by profit, the market and “user pays.”

For the international working class, particularly for workers in China, it is essential that the political lessons be drawn from the betrayal of Mao and the CCP. Any struggle for socialism today necessarily has to answer the question: why did the revolutions of the 20th century, above all in Russia and China, end in capitalist restoration?

In both cases, the answer lies in the emergence of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union, which usurped power from the working class. It justified its privileges on the basis of the reactionary nationalist perspective of “socialism in one country,” which was diametrically opposed to the socialist internationalism that guided the Russian Revolution led by Lenin and Trotsky in October 1917.

In China, Stalin subordinated the newly formed Chinese Communist Party to the nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) with disastrous consequences. In the revolutionary upheavals of 1925–27, Chiang Kai-shek and the KMT turned on the CCP in

April of 1927, slaughtering thousands of workers and Communists who had seized control of Shanghai. A month later, the so-called “left” KMT, which Stalin insisted represented a progressive wing of the Chinese bourgeoisie, launched its own wave of murders. As the revolutionary tide receded, Stalin flung the battered CCP into a series of adventures, all of which failed with tragic consequences for the working class and peasantry.

Leon Trotsky had warned of the dangers of subordinating the CCP to the Kuomintang and his analysis of Stalin's policies won support among CCP members and leaders who were expelled from the party. His theory of permanent revolution, which had guided the Russian Revolution, explained that the bourgeoisie in countries with a belated capitalist development such as China was incapable of meeting the democratic and social aspirations of the masses. Those tasks would fall to the working class, which would be compelled, with the support of the peasant masses, to take power into its own hands and implement socialist measures.

The CCP, however, retreated to the countryside and increasingly based itself, not on the working class, but on peasant guerrilla armies. Its perspective was based on the discredited “two-stage theory”—first a national democratic revolution under the domination of the bourgeoisie, and second, in the distant future, a socialist revolution. This nationalist perspective damaged and deformed the revolution when it took place 22 years later.

The Chinese Revolution of 1949 was part of a worldwide upsurge of the working class and colonial masses following the end of World War II. For two years after Japan's defeat, Mao sought to form a coalition government with Chiang Kai-shek—the Butcher of Shanghai—in line with Stalin's instructions to Communist parties internationally. So as not to alienate the bourgeoisie and landlords, the CCP deliberately blocked the rising struggles of workers and restricted the scope of land reform. Chiang Kai-shek used the time to consolidate his grip over the cities and, with arms and aid from US imperialism, launched military offensives against the CCP.

It was only in October 1947 that the CCP finally called for the overthrow of the corrupt and hated KMT dictatorship. The speed with which Chiang and his regime imploded

demonstrated that it could have been far more speedily ousted if the CCP had, from the outset, mobilised the workers in the cities, rather than instructing them to passively await their “liberation” by the party’s peasant armies. The CCP’s hostility to the independent struggle of the working class has been the chief hallmark of its rule over the past 70 years.

The People’s Republic of China, proclaimed by Mao in 1949, was based not on a socialist program, but on his “New Democracy”—the implementation of the first, bourgeois democratic stage. The CCP nationalised the enterprises only of “bureaucratic capitalists” who had fled to Taiwan with Chiang, while protecting the profits and property of the majority of capitalists. Its government was based on a coalition with bourgeois parties, some of which held prominent posts.

Mao’s perspective of a self-sufficient China rapidly led into a dead end. US imperialism, whose plans to exploit China had been abruptly ended in 1949, aimed to use the 1950–1953 Korean War as a means to undermine and ultimately bring down the CCP regime. Consequently, Mao was compelled by the US economic blockade and war threat to nationalise companies, foreign and national, that were sabotaging the war effort, and to institute bureaucratic economic planning along the lines of the Soviet Union.

In 1955, the American Socialist Workers Party, then the Trotskyist party in the US, concluded, based on the discussion in the Fourth International on the buffer states of Eastern Europe, that China had become a deformed workers’ state. It was a transitional regime. Nationalised property and economic planning had been established, but the new state was deformed at birth, with the working class lacking any political voice or democratic rights. Either China would proceed towards genuine socialism, which required the overthrow of the Maoist bureaucracy at the hands of the working class in a political revolution—as advocated by the Trotskyist movement—or it would relapse back to capitalism.

As a result of its nationalist program, based on the anti-Marxist perspective of socialism in one country, the Maoist regime lurched from one crisis to another—from the catastrophic Great Leap Forward in the 1950s to the Sino-Soviet split and the disastrous Cultural Revolution in the 1960s. Confronted with a stagnant economy and a rising danger of war with the Soviet Union, Mao turned to US imperialism just 22 years after the 1949 revolution. While Deng Xiaoping is always cited as the author of pro-market policies and capitalist restoration in China, he simply carried out the logic of Mao’s rapprochement with US President Richard Nixon in 1972.

Deng’s “reform and opening” from 1978 coincided with the rapid development of globalised production, spearheaded by the US and other capitalist powers. In the wake of the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, which was above all directed at suppressing the rebellious working class, foreign investment flooded into the country to take advantage of the infrastructure and basic industry built up after the revolution

and the cheap yet educated and regimented labour.

In his speech today, Xi will undoubtedly boast of China’s achievements, pay homage to the Maoist revolutionaries and evoke his dream of restoring China to greatness—a dream that represents the ambitions of the grasping Chinese capitalist class. The economic rise of China, however, has brought it face to face with the imperialist world order dominated by the United States, which is intent on using every means at its disposal, including military, to prevent China from challenging its global hegemony.

Xi and the CCP bureaucracy have no answers to the US war drive—other than attempting conciliation while engaging in an arms race that only heightens the danger of conflict. Likewise, the only response of the Maoist apparatus to growing signs of unrest in the working class—signalled in particular by the protests in Hong Kong—is to whip up nationalism to divide workers. This is combined with increased police state repression.

While the Beijing bureaucracy faces US aggression in the form of trade war and a military build-up in Asia, it fears the working class even more. It spends more on internal security than on the military.

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) calls on the international working class to draw the necessary political conclusions. The betrayals of Maoism have created one disaster after another, not only in China but, through its pernicious influence, throughout Asia and internationally. Amid the deepening crisis of capitalism globally, the only answer to the danger of war, fascistic forms of rule and the continuing decline of living conditions is the program of socialist internationalism that animated the October Revolution in 1917 and for which the Trotskyist movement alone has consistently fought.

To unite workers in China and around the world to fight for a socialist future it is necessary to build the ICFI as the revolutionary leadership for the class battles ahead. In China, that means constructing a section of the ICFI based on all the theoretical and political lessons of the struggle against Stalinism in all its forms, including Maoism.



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