

70 years after the Chinese Revolution: How the struggle for socialism was betrayed

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1. Seventy years ago on October 1 1949, the leader of the Chinese Communist Party, Mao Zedong stood in Tiananmen Square and proclaimed the establishment of the People's Republic of China—the outcome of a momentous revolutionary upheaval in the most populous country in the world. It was a monumental event in world history. The Chinese Revolution ended a century of imperialist subjugation and unified a country that had been divided for decades. On the international plane, it dealt a major blow to imperialism, which was desperately seeking to stabilize capitalism after the Second World War had devastated Europe and Asia. The United States, which emerged as the dominant power, had fought Japan for control over China and its vast investment opportunities, markets, cheap labour and resources. The revolution, however, abruptly ended that prospect.

The 1949 revolution overturned the domination of the landlord class and money lenders over the countryside and eliminated much that was socially and culturally backward and oppressive. An Agrarian Law in 1950 confiscated and redistributed the land of landlords. The 1950 Marriage Law allowed women to choose their own partners for the first time, ended polygamy, child betrothal, foot binding and concubinage. Prior to 1949, the illiteracy rate was 80 percent and life expectancy was just 35 years. Thirty years later, illiteracy had been largely abolished and life expectancy was 65 years.

2. The Chinese revolution expressed the aspirations of hundreds of millions of workers, peasants, young people and intellectuals for security and basic democratic and social rights, after decades of war and social upheaval. The Chinese masses had already been through two revolutions, had suffered under the rule of ruthless warlords and the brutal dictatorship of the Kuomintang led by Chiang Kai-shek, and the Japanese military occupation, first of Manchuria, then much of China. Many workers, youth and peasants had sacrificed, including with their lives, in the struggle against imperialism and its lackeys. In the working class, socialist traditions, stemming from the foundation of the Communist Party in 1921 and the subsequent revolutionary upheavals, were still strong. In the minds of many, the Chinese Communist Party was linked to the Stalinist regime in Moscow which claimed, falsely, to be the continuity of the Russian Revolution of 1917—just three decades earlier.

3. Yet today, no-one can seriously believe that China is socialist or communist. What the regime terms “socialism with Chinese characteristics”—with its huge private corporations, stock markets, flood of foreign investment and market pricing of all commodities including wage labour—is capitalism pure and simple. The Chinese Communist Party has

presided over the transformation of the country into a massive cheap labour platform. Astonishing levels of economic growth over the past three decades have been accompanied by equally staggering levels of social inequality—the concentration of vast wealth in the hands of a tiny handful of multi-billionaires at the expense of hundreds of millions of workers who struggle to survive. The so-called iron rice-bowl of social guarantees established after the revolution has been dismantled leaving working people to fund their own health care, education for their children, child-care and other services. With free rein given to the capitalist market, the social evils that were largely abolished by the revolution—drug abuse, prostitution and slave labour, to name but a few—have returned.

4. To understand how and why this happened, it is necessary to examine the historic roots of contemporary China in the revolution 70 years ago. We study history not as an academic exercise, although that has its own legitimacy, but in order to draw the necessary political and theoretical lessons for the struggles today. Anyone wanting to fight for socialism must necessarily be able to explain why Stalinism and Maoism, that claimed to represent socialism, resulted in capitalist restoration. To understand that, it is necessary to examine in some detail the complex political and theoretical issues raised by the Chinese Revolution 70 years ago.

5. The Chinese Revolution was itself the product of the defining event of the 20th century—the Russian Revolution that had created the first workers' state just 32 years earlier. In the midst of the ravages of World War 1, the revolutionary events in Russia and the seizure of power by the Bolshevik Party led by Lenin and Trotsky stood out like a beacon to the working class around the world. It generated revolutionary movements against capitalism and colonial oppression, and a commitment to socialism and socialist revolution in layers of the working class internationally that was expressed in the founding of Communist Parties and of the Third International in 1919.

The theoretical underpinning of the Russian Revolution in 1917 was the outcome of intense debate in the decade after the 1905 Russian Revolution. Three conceptions emerged.

The Mensheviks (one of the two major factions of Russian Social Democrats) were the proponents of a two-stage theory: the working class first had to support the liberal elements of the capitalist class to overthrow the Czar, establish a democratic republic and carry out land reform, and only at a much later stage fight for socialism. But as the 1905 revolution demonstrated, the Russian liberals known as the Cadets, when faced with an upsurge of the working class, swung behind the Czarist regime.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks (the second major faction) rejected the subordination of the working class to the liberals and called for a democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry. But this implied that the working class would be compelled to confine itself to the limitations of a bourgeois, that is, capitalist republic. Moreover, the exact relationship between the workers and peasants, who comprised two distinct social classes, was left open.

In his Theory of Permanent Revolution, Leon Trotsky, like Lenin, opposed any subordination of workers to the capitalist class. He insisted that the working class had to fight directly for power, drawing behind it the peasantry, which, he pointed out, could play no independent political role. Against those who ridiculed the idea that a workers' state could survive in a backward country with a huge peasantry, Trotsky explained that in the backward countries, that is, those with a belated capitalist development, such as Russia and China, the bourgeoisie was incapable of carrying through the democratic revolution. That task fell to the working class which would be compelled to begin to implement socialist measures. He insisted that the Russian revolution was an integral part of the world socialist revolution and that the problems thrown up by the revolution in Russia could only be resolved through the struggle for socialism internationally.

Lenin embraced Trotsky's perspective in April 1917, issuing the call for "all power to the Soviets," that is, to the democratically-established workers' councils that developed in 1917. He and Trotsky characterized the Bolshevik seizure of power in October as the opening shot of the world socialist revolution in the new epoch of imperialism that had been opened up by World War I. However, under conditions of the defeats of revolutionary movements in Europe and the consequent isolation of the Soviet Union, Stalin was to emerge as the representative of a privileged, conservative bureaucracy which usurped power from the working class. Its outlook was summed up in the nationalist conception of "Socialism in One Country" that rejected the internationalist perspective on which the Bolshevik revolution had been based, and was to have profound consequences for the working class internationally, not least in China.

6. Our movement—the international Trotskyist movement—was established in 1923 to fight against the Stalinist degeneration of the Soviet Union and uphold the struggle for socialist internationalism. A brief review of these theoretical issues is essential to an understanding of the revolution in China, or, I should say, the three revolutions in China.

The first Chinese Revolution overthrew the decrepit Manchu dynasty in 1911, but the capitalist Nationalist Party, or Kuomintang, that emerged proved utterly incapable of implementing basic democratic tasks or freeing China from imperialist subjugation.

The second Chinese revolution, between 1925 and 1927, erupted as a working-class struggle against the depredations of imperialism after the shooting of protestors in Shanghai by British municipal police on May 30 1925. It rapidly transformed into a mass movement throughout the country, but the role of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union was to have fatal consequences. Stalin subordinated the Chinese Communist Party, which had only been established in 1921, to the party of the Chinese capitalist class—the Kuomintang. Reverting to the Menshevik two-stage theory, Stalin insisted that the bourgeoisie could be compelled to fight against imperialist oppression and play a progressive role—as part of a "bloc of four classes" that would end China's semi-colonial subjugation.

In 1927, Trotsky warned of the dangers of such a perspective, explaining:

It is a gross mistake to think that imperialism mechanically welds together all the classes of China from without...The revolutionary struggle against imperialism does not weaken, but rather strengthens the political differentiation of the classes. Imperialism is a highly powerful force in the internal relationships of China...The struggle against imperialism, precisely because of its economic and military power, demands a powerful exertion of forces from the very depths of the Chinese people. To really arouse the workers and peasants against imperialism is possible

only by connecting their basic and most profound life interests with the cause of the country's liberation.... But everything that brings the oppressed and exploited masses of the toilers to their feet inevitably pushes the national bourgeoisie into an open bloc with the imperialists. The class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the masses of workers and peasants is not weakened, but, on the contrary, is sharpened by imperialist oppression, to the point of bloody civil war at every serious conflict. [1]

Stalin, however, continued to promote the fatal illusion that Chiang Kai-shek represented a revolutionary wing of the Chinese bourgeoisie. In doing so, he became the gravedigger of the revolution, facilitating the massacre of the Shanghai working class in April 1927 by Chiang Kai-shek and his armies and the subsequent slaughter of workers and peasants by the so-called left Kuomintang in May 1927. Stalin then did an abrupt about face and, amid the waning revolutionary tide, flung the battered Chinese Communist Party into a series of disastrous adventures.

The consequences of these defeats were to lead to the deformation of the Third Chinese Revolution two decades later, in 1949. Those leaders and members of the Chinese Communist Party committed to the principles of socialist internationalism, such as the party's chairman Chen Duxiu and Central Committee member Peng Shuzhi, who had opposed Stalin's policies and were convinced by Trotsky's critique, were expelled from the party. Those who remained, such as Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and others, whatever their tactical disagreements with Stalin, followed the Menshevik line dictated from Moscow.

Despite the disasters of 1927, Stalin and the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party insisted that no mistakes had been made and continued to adhere to the policies of nationalism and class collaboration—Socialism in One Country, the two-stage theory and the bloc of four classes. Moreover, after the crushing blows delivered by the KMT, the Communist Party retreated to the countryside, thus shifting its class axis from the working class to the peasantry. This was to undermine, weaken and endanger the post-World War II revolutionary movement.

7. Following the end of World War II and the defeat of Germany and Japan in 1945, US imperialism, now the dominant global power, relied on the betrayals of Stalinism to contain and suppress the post-war upheavals of the working class and colonial masses around the world. Having subordinated the working class to the so-called democratic allies—above all the US—during the war, Stalin continued the same policy after the war. In countries like France and Italy, the communist parties formed coalition governments with the discredited capitalist parties, disarmed the working class, and suppressed major strike movements of workers. Having stabilized capitalist rule in Europe, the US went on the counter-offensive against the Soviet Union in 1947-48, which marked the onset of the Cold War.

8. Mao and the Chinese Communist Party followed the policy dictated by Stalin. In 1937, the CCP had entered an alliance with the Kuomintang to fight the Japanese invasion. This was a repeat of the politically bankrupt policy that had led to the disasters just a decade earlier. Mao politically subordinated the party to Chiang Kai-shek, the 'butcher of Shanghai,' dropped its land reform so as not to upset the landowners represented by the KMT, and put its armies under the KMT's command. Following the defeat of Japan, under pressure from Moscow and Washington, the CCP sought to form a coalition government with Chiang Kai-shek. Mao Zedong even flew to Chongqing in 1945 to meet personally with Chiang and hold seven weeks of discussions that resulted in a joint communique.

9. While Mao later dismissed the agreement as "a mere scrap of paper," he did everything possible to conciliate with the Chinese bourgeoisie. His program of "New Democracy" was a version of the two-stage theory,

which he used to justify alliances with the capitalists. To facilitate these, the Communist Party limited its land reform to areas under its control and opposed any mobilization of the working class. In doing so, it acted as a dangerous brake on the revolutionary movement of the masses that followed the end of the war in China.

10. The Chinese Revolution involved far more than just the victory of Mao's armies over Chiang Kai-shek. After the end of World War II, the whole of Chinese society was in revolt, including in the cities. In a striking confirmation of Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution, the KMT, which took over from the defeated Japanese troops, proved utterly incapable of carrying out elementary democratic reforms or ending the social disaster facing the population. The regime presided over the looting of businesses and public property, triggered hyper-inflation, imposed military conscription and responded to strikes and protests with savage repression.

In his report to the Fourth International in 1951, Chinese Trotskyist Peng Shuzhi explained:

The first period immediately after the war from September 1945 to the end of 1946, marked a considerable revival and growth of the mass movement in China. In this period the working masses in all the great cities, with Shanghai in the forefront, first brought forward their demands for a sliding scale increase in wages, for the right to organize trade unions, against freezing wages, etc. They universally and continuously engaged in strikes... Undoubtedly this was an expression of a new awakening of the Chinese workers' movement... [2]

In Shanghai alone, China's main industrial centre, there were 1,716 strikes and labour disputes in 1946 as compared to only 278 in 1936, just prior to the Japanese invasion. The following year, that figure was 50 percent higher again. At the same time, student strikes and protests were taking place in major cities against the Kuomintang dictatorship, and demanding democracy and peace. There was rising unrest among the peasants directed against the KMT.

Yet the Communist Party made no attempt to mobilise the working class and continued to seek a coalition with the corrupt and despised KMT. Chiang Kai-shek exploited the hiatus to transport his army, with US assistance, to the cities, consolidate his position and start offensive military operations against the CCP. But Mao continued to remain on the defensive. He issued no call for Chiang's overthrow, even after KMT troops occupied the Communist stronghold of Yanan in April 1947 and issued a warrant for Mao's arrest in June 1947. It was only on October 10, 1947, two years after the end of the war, that the Communist Party finally issued a manifesto to oust the KMT and to build a "New China."

11. The fact that Mao's armies seized most of China within just two years testifies to the inner rot of the Chiang Kai-shek regime, which literally fell apart, despite the modern arms and assistance that it received from the United States. With the assistance of Japanese arms provided to its forces in Manchuria by the Soviet Union, the People's Liberation Army swept south. In many cases, the KMT armies surrendered or fled and cities were taken without any fighting. As the regime disintegrated, the US deserted the KMT because the only alternative was a full-scale American military intervention that risked a far wider war.

The speed of its collapse demonstrated that the KMT could have been toppled far earlier if Mao had not held back the revolutionary movement, particularly of the working class in the cities. Summing up these processes, the American Trotskyists of the Socialist Workers Party wrote in a 1955 resolution on the Chinese Revolution:

The Stalinist deformation of the revolution rendered its development more costly, convulsive and protracted. The armies and regime of Chiang could have been knocked down like rotten pieces of wood had the CCP, at any time, summoned the masses in the cities to rise. The Chinese Stalinists were able to ride to power because the Chinese working class had been demoralised by the continuous defeats it suffered during and after the Second Chinese Revolution, and the deliberate policy of the CCP, which subordinated the cities, above all, the proletariat, to the military struggle in the countryside, and thereby blocked the emergence of the workers as an independent political force. [3]

12. Mao's New Democracy program not only retarded and endangered the revolution but deformed the new regime. In line with the two-stage theory, the Communist Party sought alliances with bourgeois and petty bourgeois parties, and, with the exception of property left behind by the fleeing KMT forces, did not take over private enterprises, even foreign-owned ones. Eleven of the original 24 government ministries and three of the six vice-chairmen were headed by the CCP's bourgeois allies. In an effort to reach out to imperialism, Mao made no move to take over the colonial enclaves of Hong Kong and Macau.

Mao had to rein in his own members who were being pressured by workers to improve their conditions. An editorial in Xinhua in February 1948, announced an "anti-leftist" campaign that required workers, but not the private owners, to subordinate themselves to the war effort. It complained that party cadres, including in high-level positions, did not understand the Party's industrial policy and "only know about the one-sided, narrow, near-sighted so-called 'benefits for the workers,' and cannot see anything beyond that." The Communist Party recruited workers as members, and established trade unions, not to give the working class a political voice, but as a means of policing and suppressing it. When strikes and protests broke out, it resorted to violent repression.

13. The Russian Revolution of 1917 remains to date the only genuine socialist revolution in which the working class, guided by Lenin and Trotsky and the Bolshevik Party, seized power and established a workers' state based on Soviets, that is, the democratically-elected organs of the working class. In China, there were no such workers' organisations, because the CCP had instructed workers to passively await their "liberation" by its armies.

In opposition to everything written on the necessity of abolishing the capitalist state by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, the Communist Party based itself on the existing state apparatus. As it took over the cities, the Stalinists kept the civilian bureaucracy in place and incorporated the defeated Kuomintang armies, including officers, into its own military.

14. Mao's projection was that the revolution's so-called "democratic" stage, in alliance with sections of the bourgeoisie, would last many years. But, in less than a year it faced the threat of military attack by US imperialism, which launched the Korean War in 1950. As the war proceeded and China was compelled to intervene, it faced internal sabotage from layers of the capitalist class that regarded the US-led armies in Korea as their potential liberators. Confronting a possible US invasion, the Maoist regime was compelled to rapidly make inroads into private enterprise and to institute bureaucratic Soviet-style economic planning. Mao's government took over foreign enterprises such as the American-owned Asia Oil Company in China and nationalized major sections of the economy.

In 1953, it implemented the first five-year plan, closely modelled on Soviet bureaucratic planning and with the assistance of Soviet aid and advisers. The Chinese economy was 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 that they represented.

In its 1955 resolution, the Socialist Workers Party characterised China as a deformed workers' state. The nationalisation of industry and the banks, along with bureaucratic economic planning, had laid the foundations for a workers' state, but it was deformed from birth by Stalinism. The Fourth International unconditionally defended the nationalized property relations established in China. At the same time, however, 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 in China as an integral part of the struggle for socialism internationally.

15. It is not possible in the space of a relatively brief lecture to review in detail the evolution of the Chinese regime from a deformed workers' state to the second largest capitalist economy in the world, but a few points need to be made.

Leon Trotsky warned in the 1930s that without a political revolution of the working class, capitalist restoration was inevitable in the Soviet Union. That prognosis applied just as accurately to China, as well as to the Stalinist states in Eastern Europe. While the economic steps taken by Mao initially led to a revival of the war-ravaged economy, its autarkic perspective of "socialism in one country" inevitably led to worsening economic and social turmoil, and crises for which Beijing had no solution. The result was bitter internal factional warfare and abrupt twists and turns.

Mao's utopian scheme for a self-sufficient socialist society underpinned his "Great Leap Forward" in 1958, which ended in economic catastrophe and mass starvation. His factional opponents, led by Liu Shaoqi, followed the Soviet model of bureaucratic planning, but this provided no alternative. The economic crisis was greatly worsened by the 1961–63 split with the Soviet Union and the withdrawal of Soviet aid and advisers, leaving China completely isolated.

16. Various neo-Maoist tendencies in China today falsely seek to portray Mao as a genuine socialist and Marxist revolutionary, whose ideas were betrayed by others. Their claims rely heavily on Mao's so-called Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in the 1960s, which was neither great, proletarian nor revolutionary. In reality, Mao's Cultural Revolution was a last desperate bid to oust his rivals, whom he branded as "capitalist roaders." Mao sought to mobilise support outside the party among student youth, and then among the lumpen proletariat and poor peasants organised in the so-called Red Guards. The reactionary character of this movement was expressed in its encouragement of peasant individualism, the denunciation of all culture and science as "bourgeois" and its elevation of the political doggerel in Mao's Little Red Book to the status of official state religion.

This initiative 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 to bring the turmoil under control. The hostility of the regime to the working class was expressed in its warning to Shanghai workers: "As workers, their main job is to work. Joining the Revolution is only secondary. They must therefore go back to work."

In reality, it was Mao, himself, who opened the road to capitalist restoration. Facing mounting economic and social problems and the threat of war with the Soviet Union, Beijing forged an alliance with US imperialism that 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 pre-condition for foreign investment and increased trade with the West. In foreign policy, the Maoist regime lined up with some of

the most reactionary US-based dictatorships, including those of General Augusto Pinochet in Chile and the Shah in Iran.

At home, Mao rehabilitated Deng Xiaoping, who had been ostracised during the Cultural Revolution as the "No 2 capitalist roader." After Mao's death, Deng emerged as the dominant figure in the Stalinist bureaucracy and in 1978 initiated his sweeping "reform and opening" agenda of special economic zones for foreign investors, private enterprise instead of communes in the countryside, and the replacement of economic planning with the market. The result was a vast expansion of private enterprise, especially in the countryside, the rapid rise of social inequality, looting and corruption by party bureaucrats, growing joblessness and soaring inflation.

It was this social powder keg that exploded in 1989, triggered by student protests in Tiananmen Square over democratic rights. This was not simply a movement of students in Beijing, but developed into a revolt by the working class throughout the country, against the impact of Deng's pro-market policies. Its violent suppression paved the way for wholesale capitalist restoration—similar to the processes that were underway in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

The International Committee of the Fourth International was alone in explaining that the collapse or transformation of these regimes was not due to the failure of socialism, but was the product of Stalinism and its bankrupt nationalist perspective of Socialism in One Country. Moreover, we demonstrated that the globalisation of production, which had greatly accelerated these processes, was also undermining all parties and institutions based on national economic regulation, including the Labor Party and trade unions here in Australia.

17. I will conclude with several points about China today.

Firstly, the emergence of China as the industrial giant that it is today—the world's second largest economy—does not represent a new flourishing of capitalism. Nor is it the product of any inherent strength of the Chinese economy. Rather, the staggering rates of growth in China are the result of the plundering of its vast reserves of cheap labour by global capital, as it sought to overcome falling rates of profit. The foreign investment that flooded into China after the Tiananmen Square massacre was facilitated by what remained of the achievements of the 1949 Revolution—the establishment of infrastructure, basic industry and particularly, an educated workforce. The brutal suppression of the protests offered a guarantee to foreign investors that the regime would not hesitate to use police state repression against future working-class unrest.

The economic rise of China, however, has brought it face to face with the global order dominated by US imperialism. The US and other imperialist powers are eager to benefit from the super-profits generated by cheap Chinese labour, as long as China's economic expansion does not challenge their domination. Nevertheless, China's need for huge supplies of energy, raw materials and markets, as well as its moves into hi-tech areas, is cutting across the economic and geo-political interests of US imperialism.

In a bid to maintain its weakening global dominance, the US, first under Obama's "pivot to Asia" and now under Trump, has aggressively sought to undermine and confront China across the board—diplomatically, economically and also militarily. Washington has recklessly inflamed flashpoints, such as the South China Sea, built up its military forces across the Asia Pacific and strengthened alliances, including with Australia, in preparation for war.

This aggressive build-up has been accompanied by an escalating propaganda campaign, including in Australia, denouncing Chinese "expansionism" and Chinese political interference, in order to condition public opinion, and as a pretext for anti-democratic measures such as the "foreign interference" legislation passed here last year. An atmosphere of anti-Chinese xenophobia is being whipped up that casts suspicion over Chinese students and the Chinese community as a whole. Taken together,

this is the ideological preparation for war.

Pseudo-left organisations such as Socialist Alternative have become mouthpieces for this campaign, by branding China as an imperialist power—a characterisation that ignores the historical origins of the People’s Republic of China and is used to justify their tacit backing for US imperialism. While the Chinese ruling elites have ambitions for China to become a major world power, it is not part of the global imperialist order established over the past century, and dominated today by the United States.

The IYSSE and the Socialist Equality Party oppose the US-led war-drive. But we extend no political support whatsoever to the Stalinist regime in Beijing, which has no progressive answer to Washington’s provocations and military build-up. The Communist Party is organically incapable of making any appeal to the only social force capable of preventing war—the working class in China and around the world. The Stalinist bureaucracy is far more terrified of a mass movement of workers than it is of the threat of imperialism. And that is why it spends more on its internal police state apparatus than on the military. It seeks to create a social base for itself, particularly among middle class layers, by whipping up Chinese nationalism, whose only purpose is to divide both the Chinese and the international working class.

China’s rapid economic growth has lifted the living standards of significant sections of the population. According to the World Bank, the percentage of the population living under the current austere poverty line of \$US1.90 a day has fallen from 88 percent in 1981 to 0.7 percent in 2015. However, social inequality has reached staggering levels. From one of the most socially equal countries in the world, it has become one of the most unequal. The Communist Party does not represent the interests of workers or the peasant masses, but the cliques of ultra-rich oligarchs who built their fortunes through the looting of state-owned property and the gross exploitation of the working class. The combined net worth of the five richest individuals in China topped \$38 billion this year while workers struggle to survive on a minimum wage of \$370 a month.

Amid a resurgence of the class struggle internationally, as witnessed by the current 48,000 strong autoworkers strike in the US and the many thousands engaged in the Yellow Vest movement in France, there is every reason to expect explosive struggles of the Chinese working class, which has expanded massively to an estimated 400 million workers. Official statistics are no longer released of so-called mass incidents, but there are indications of rising levels of strikes, many over the non-payment of wages and benefits, such as the 2014 strike of footwear workers.

The protracted mass protests in Hong Kong involving millions over basic democratic rights are a symptom of far deeper social tensions, not only in that territory but throughout China. However, the confused and heterogeneous character of the Hong Kong protests underscores the fundamental problem confronting the working class—the lack of revolutionary leadership. That is what has to be built throughout China. In the absence of a revolutionary party, the upheaval in Hong Kong can take very right-wing directions, such as the appeals being made to US and British imperialism. Only in a turn to the Chinese and international working class on the basis of a socialist perspective can democratic rights be achieved.

Our political perspective is based on the principles of revolutionary socialist internationalism that animated the Russian Revolution in 1917, and the formation of Communist Parties around the world, including in China, and which were betrayed by Stalinism. The historic lessons of the protracted struggles waged by the Trotskyist movement must form the basis for the expansion of the sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International and the establishment of new sections, including, especially, in China.

The conclusion from this lecture is that everyone here must seriously consider playing your part in this historic task. If you are not currently

reading the World Socialist Web Site, I encourage you to begin. And if you are not a member of the IYSSE or Socialist Equality Party I urge you to apply to join and help build the necessary revolutionary socialist leadership for the struggles that lie ahead.

1. “The Chinese Revolution and the Theses of Comrade Stalin” by Leon Trotsky published in Problems of the Chinese Revolution, New Park Publications 1969, p. 5

2. “The Causes of the Victory of the Chinese Communist Party over Chiang Kai-Shek, and the CCP’s Perspectives” by Peng Shuzhi, posted on the WSWs on October 3, 2019

3. “The Third Chinese Revolution and its Aftermath,” resolution adopted by the American Socialist Workers Party in 1955, posted on the WSWs on October 9, 2019



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