

A discussion with a young member of the Chinese Communist Party

The Chinese Communist Party is “an organisation with a deep, deep level of bureaucratisation”

Peter Symonds
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The World Socialist Web Site recently spoke with a young man in China who expressed an interest in Trotskyism. He is also a member at the local level of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). He agreed to speak to the WSWS about what it means to be a member of the CCP, the nature of political discussion within the party, what drew him to read the works of Leon Trotsky and his views on the struggle for socialism in China. Due to the dangers posed by the repressive Chinese regime, his actual name and details have not been included in the interview with Peter Symonds, the national WSWS editor for the Socialist Equality Party (Australia).

Peter Symonds: Thank you for agreeing to this discussion. You are just one of the 91 million Chinese who are members of the Chinese Communist Party and are only involved at the local workplace level. However, your experiences shed some light on the character of the party whose inner political life it deliberately obscures. I'd like to start by asking, when and why you joined the Chinese Communist Party?

Fu Hong: I joined the Chinese Communist Party in college, mostly because it would help with my future career development. I have never asked my friends about why they joined the party, but I could guess what their reasons are. In most cases, people join the party for material interests. If you work within the government, joining the party or not does not make a huge difference. But if you are a party member, you could be promoted to higher positions. If you refuse to join the party, you won't be promoted.

PS: As a CCP member, what are the sorts of activities that you participate in? Meetings? Conferences? What does it mean to be a member of the CCP?

FH: Mostly participating in workplace meetings. But at these meetings, you mostly only need to listen. There are no other activities. At these meetings, in most cases only leaders would speak. They will pass down to us the gist of the party centre's political line and instructions from other leaders. There are no discussions among participants. These questions are not ones to be discussed. No one has ever raised a question. We never discuss political questions.

PS: So what is the rank of official who speaks at the meeting? Is it a provincial leader? A local leader? A leader in your work place? Are they elected?

FH: I've only heard leaders at my workplace speak. There are elections, but most leaders are not elected. They are mostly promoted by higher officials. Of course, before the promotion, there will be a period of gathering public comments about this appointment. Basically, leaders are promoted by higher officials, and elections are only run formally.

PS: I would characterise this as a very bureaucratic organisation. How

would you respond to that?

FH: I think it essentially is an organisation with a deep, deep level of bureaucratisation. First of all, the bureaucracy did not just emerge today. They were at least around since the time of Mao. In the period right after the founding of the People's Republic of China, Mao wrote many articles on eliminating things like bureaucracy and corruption. However, the bureaucracy is still around today.

PS: Why do you think that is?

FH: Right after the founding of this country, in 1952, Mao thought that the bureaucracy originated from the anti-people thoughts and attitudes of reactionary classes from the past, including some remnant impacts from the Kuomintang. Mao thought this was the origin of the bureaucracy. The bureaucracy today, however, has a completely new social basis, the private property relations. The newly-emerged bourgeois class is growing stronger and stronger, while class antagonism itself also grows sharper.

PS: In China after the revolution, the emergence of a bureaucracy had its origins in the Red Army and was hostile to the working class, to any movements of the working class. The bureaucracy arose as a privileged bureaucracy and defended its interests and stifled the involvement not only of workers but more broadly of peasant masses. I agree that social tension and social antagonism have certainly intensified with the restoration of capitalism in China, but the bureaucracy has always sat on top of the working class and masses.

FH: For the working class previously, the bureaucracy was based upon nationalised property relations and gained privileges from this. However, since the property relations changed, if they want to maintain their privileges under a private property relation, the level of bureaucratisation has to deepen.

PS: Do you think things have changed under President Xi? Do you think people are less able to put their opinions forward? There's less room for political discussion?

FH: First of all, the control over free speech has actually been tightened. As for political discussions, I don't know what it was like before, but now important national policies are still discussed and decided by a few leaders. Ordinary people have no political say on these matters. And that includes ordinary party members.

PS: What do you think of President Xi's installation and the fact that he has now removed the two-term limit on the president and the vice president?

FH: I think for Xi, the decision to lift the term limits was somewhat imperative. That is to say, he couldn't decide otherwise. Generally speaking, this decision was the product of all the sharp conflicts both within and outside the country. He has to make this move. So this is not a

result of his personal possessiveness for power, but rather what he had to do under the current objective situation. This could also be a sign that the current system is heading towards its end.

PS: I very much agree. While Xi is portrayed as an all-powerful figure, particularly in the western media, the party is in deep crisis and society is wracked by extreme social tensions. Xi, as we've characterised on the *World Socialist Web Site*, is functioning as a Bonapartist figure, trying to balance between different factions within the party. The party itself is trying to balance between different class forces.

FH: I agree.

PS: When Xi first came in as president, he initiated a massive anti-corruption drive, which had a certain popular appeal because corruption is rife within the bureaucracy at all levels. He's using the anti-corruption drive against his rivals. Even in the lead up to his inauguration, moves were taken against potential rival Bo Xilai and he was imprisoned on corruption charges. What do you think of this anti-corruption drive?

FH: I think we first need to understand which class this anti-corruption drive serves. The anti-corruption drive, in essence, serves the interests of the capitalist class. Corruption itself has created a lot of discontent within the capitalist class. Because of the corruption within the bureaucracy, the capitalists need to make an extra effort to streamline the administrative processes. This is why, fundamentally, the anti-corruption drive serves the interests of the capitalist class and defends the private property relations under capitalism.

Another point is that corruption itself facilitates the forging of ties between some bureaucrats and capitalists, which constitutes a political threat [to Xi]. Thus, another aim of his anti-corruption drive is to eliminate those political threats. Corruption also intensifies the inner conflicts within the bureaucracy.

On the one hand, of course, masses of people are discontented with corruption. However, the anti-corruption drive itself has two primary goals: one, to resolve the discontent from the capitalist class; and second, to sever the ties between the capitalist class and the bureaucrats within the party. Of course, even such ties are forged to defend the interests of the capitalist class and their private property relations.

PS: From what you say, there's very little political discussion, at least at workplace level within the CCP. In your years in the party, nobody has raised a question or made a point in any of those workplace meetings. So, outside of the party, how do people view politics? Do they privately express their opinions? Are there other avenues for political discussions? Do people express criticisms toward government policies to you or to anybody you've heard of?

FH: Generally speaking, most people have not gone through a political awakening yet. In China, in fact, you rarely receive any political education. People may still not know how to discuss and describe political phenomena. They also may not be able to understand political issues both within and outside the country. There is discontent towards the current situation among broad layers of people, but they don't know how to articulate it.

Another point is that over the past few decades and since China transitioned to market economy, the official line has been that one should focus on economic development. Thus people's attention has been diverted to [pursuing] material interests and how to make more money. People have not started to understand society through political lenses. Nevertheless, I think as the economy declines, people's political awakening will come with a more rapid pace, and they will start to be interested in political questions.

PS: Well you must be an exception, because you have expressed an interest in Trotsky and Trotskyism. Can you explain when and why you became interested in Leon Trotsky and his writings?

FH: I learned about Trotsky from the defeat of the Chinese revolution from 1925 to 1927. I also learned about Trotsky from the history of the

Soviet Union. Of course, there is a certain accidental character about me coming across his writings and starting to be interested in these things, but to a certain level it was also inevitable. I think, ever since its birth, Marxism has developed many different factions and tendencies. However, if Marxism is a science and the truth, there needs to be some continuity. From Marx to Lenin to Trotsky, an unbroken string runs through and connects them. Compared to other tendencies, [Trotskyism] inherited this string completely. In other words, it inherited the scientific principles [of Marxism].

What plays an important role in all this is Lenin and Leninism. For example, the Chinese Communist Party called for a conference to commemorate Marx at the bicentenary of his birth, but they have never held any events to commemorate Lenin. This shows that they do not have this continuity, and have not advanced from Marx to Lenin. They also heavily promote the earlier works of Marx, which are the less mature ones among his writings. From this perspective, I think Marxism's evolution to Trotskyism is inevitable.

PS: What first prompted you to read about Trotsky? Are his works available in China?

FH: I started reading his works by accident. I saw a book of his in the library. I'd heard of him before, but only started reading his works after seeing that book. I think his books are sold widely. I'm not sure exactly how many people are reading his works, but I think his books sell well. His autobiography and *History of the Russian Revolution* have been reprinted many times.

PS: When did you become aware of the *World Socialist Web Site*?

FH: Probably last year. Actually, back in 2011, a book was published in Chinese, introducing various international Trotskyist organisations. The book has an appendix that briefly recorded each organisation's history and their respective websites. So back then I went to take a look [at the WSWS]. You have to use VPN software to open this website. You can't open it without a VPN.

PS: Right, I understand. Coming back to what you said about Trotskyism being the continuity of Marxism. If I were to ask you what would be the fundamental principle that runs through Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, what political principle would you identify?

FH: The first one would be a clear class orientation. They are always crystal clear on the point that they only represent the historic interests of the proletariat, not the historical interests of any other classes. This is the first point. The second one would be the perspective of a thorough social revolution. This perspective is central to all of them.

PS: I would add just one thing, which I think is fundamental to Marxism, and that is internationalism. The Communist Manifesto ends with a call for workers of the world to unite. Internationalism runs through Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky.

FH: I agree.

PS: I know that certainly some people who are disaffected and attracted towards socialism look back to the period of Mao as being true socialism. There are various neo-Maoist tendencies within China. Utopia is one that is known in the west. There are others. Why weren't you attracted to these?

FH: First, it's because of their attitudes towards the capitalist class. They always say that they need to use patriotism to educate the capitalist class. This perspective remains unchanged from Mao to Xi. They are still talking about this perspective now. In a speech not long ago, Xi said that even though corporations and marketing do not respect national boundaries, entrepreneurs do have a home country. He is still using patriotism to educate entrepreneurs. This, first of all, is completely opposite to Marx's conceptions. Marx has already said that workers do not have a home country.

The second reason is their nationalism. They always start their sentences with "the Chinese nation." They think that the Chinese nation has some

special advantage, or that China has its own particular condition so that it could be exempted from the general rules of international socialist movements. I think these two reasons are why I'm not interested in the theories of Mao. Or rather, you could say, Trotsky's theories are more logical. He indeed masters the methodology of dialectical materialism, while Maoists do not. In other words, if we compare their theories side by side, I would still have chosen the theories of Trotsky.

Another point is that from Mao to Xi, they all have contempt for theory. Mao said in his own works that he doesn't read the works of Marx and Lenin very much. Only experts read Marx and Lenin. He meant that only professional intellectuals would read these. What Mao read the most were the classical books on ancient Chinese history. That is the *Twenty-Four Histories*, the history of different dynasties. Deng Xiaoping had also said that it's useless to read that much the works of Marx and Lenin. He himself had only read *The Communist Manifesto* and *The ABC of Communism*. They think theory is unimportant, which is completely contrary to the tradition that runs from Marx to Trotsky. [From Marx to Trotsky,] they think theory is very important and are very meticulous in their approach to theoretical questions. From Mao to Xi, none of them had an attitude like this.

After Xi came to power, he quoted from Engels many times that a Marxist world view is not about dogmas but about methodology. He quoted this sentence only to cover up the fact that he has completely thrown away the most fundamental principles of Marxism. Xi has also said that one should not use Marxism to curtail reality. But what he is really doing is using nationalism and opportunism to curtail Marxism to the point of being beyond recognition. You cannot even find a hint of Marxism in Xi's current theories.

PS: That's very true. If the working class internationally is going to carry out the most monumental change in history, then it has to be based on the highest theoretical development. It's not going to happen spontaneously. The *World Socialist Web Site*, at the beginning of the year published a perspective, entitled "The 2020: the decade of socialist revolution." There is a resurgence of the class struggle taking place around the world. The working class is an international class. Processes taking place in one country, while not necessarily the same everywhere, nevertheless, are reflected in every country. There is a certain radicalisation occurring in China and we see signs of this. What do you think are the prospects for socialist revolution in China?

FH: I think, as a determined socialist, I am very positive and optimistic about the prospect [of socialist revolution in China]. Moreover, if this revolution were to be successful, it needs to be led by a genuine party of the working class. Without this premise, there might be spontaneous upheavals, but they cannot be victorious. Of course, if history develops in a somewhat favourable direction, for example, socialist revolution broke out and succeeded in the developed western countries, I believe that the success of a socialist revolution in China would be more promising. The masses in China are being radicalised. Their thoughts are becoming more radical. Thus, the order in which the revolutions break out, and the form they take, is hard to predict right now. However, in the case of China, people are indeed becoming radicalised.



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