Marx and Mao and

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So much of vital importance is omitted or distorted if Mao is comprehended as Marx. In these few pages, I can only mention and develop one area where these gaps and flaws are evident and decisive.

What is the teaching of Marx on the topic of continuing the revolution after revolutionaries have won control of the levers of state power? Should one understand this transition, or potential transition, as emanating from a crumbling Asian despotism? A number of Chinese Marxists (Schwartz has explicated their work)[1] thought so, and the independent analyses and conclusions of people as diverse as Schram, Wittfogel, Lichtheim, and Avineri find support for that positon in the work of Marx. Meisner, as Mao himself, has disagreed with this interpretation of Marx.

The truth is that Marx did not systematically and thoroughly address the question. His fragmentary and passing thoughts on this topic, as on all the topics relating to continuing the revolution after the seizure of power, are as a consequence open to more than one interpretation with almost equal legitimacy. Hence the great utility of the questions put by Schwartz, Meisner, Schram, and Wakeman. They ask how it came to be that Mao, in contrast to other progressive Chinese who insisted just as knowledgeably

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and just as sincerely that their approach was proper Marxism, insisted that Marx meant only what Mao said it meant. For Mao, it did not mean accepting Marx's teaching on the passivity and nonrevolutionary nature of the peasantry.[2] Others may have been truer to Marx's words. Mao forged the strategic and political understandings which facilitated revolutionary success.

From this perspective Mao emerges as a great revolutionary innovator and creator, perhaps the greatest ever. In place of the ethnocentric and anachronistic tendency to measure the truth of Mao's revolutionary practice against Marx's strategic conclusions, I would opt for discovering some of the flaws in Marx's strategies by comparing them to the actual revolutionary practice of Mao and other twentieth-century third world revolutionaries. Here again Schwartz was right earliest in calling our attention to Mao's so-called heresies in practice. We were asked to pay more attention to what Mao and his colleagues and followers did than to what they said.[3]

Everyone knows that Mao's strategic comprehension preceded his thorough acquaintance with the works of Marx. Mao stressed investigation and practice over those who made capital out of citing the Marxist classics. "The more books one reads the stupider one becomes." Mao stressed leadership as an art which applied itself to the needs of short-term struggles. Consequently, one must always analyze Mao's words in terms of these struggles. It is an extreme idealist error to compare words with words and ignore the defining reality of different situations, to treat Mao mainly as a strategist of development and slight the imperatives of political struggles among dynamically related social groups.

Mao praised as a champion of socialism Stalin, who murdered millions of communists, whose system required slave labor camps, while condemning as a traitor to socialism Khrushchev, who checked such barbarism. I hope it is not necessary to prove the obvious, that Mao actually was in no way a Stalinist. Limited space precludes me from citing Mao's numerous strong private critiques of Stalin and from indicating how Mao's strategies in fact took Stalin's practice as a negative model. What is important is to understand that for politically strategic purposes (such

as legitimating social change in the countryside before mechanization made large-scale farming far more efficient, and blaming all the difficulties in Moscow-Beijing [Peking] relations on Khrushchev), it was useful for Mao to establish the dichotomy of Stalin as basically good, and Khrushchev as all wrong. Ultimate dangers such as Stalinism follow, however, if one is forced to treat Mao's public words as sacred without regard to the political needs of a momentary and ongoing struggle.

A serious student of Chinese politics should take the time to investigate how "the current Chinese understanding" (Pfeffer, 1976: 448) is actually a reflection and refraction of the needs and preferences of some groups rather than others. People opposed to an all-out mass campaign against bourgeois right may remember the havoc, misery, and alienation wrought during the Great Leap campaign to create some free food supply and to limit the use of wage payments at a time when Mao merely found that "We must destroy a part of bourgeois right but still retain commodity production and commodity circulation" (Mao, 1969: 249). People, such as Yao Wen-yuan, seeking to gain power in 1976 had to come up with an analysis which would discredit the center-left's 1975 campaign to emulate Dazhai, had to find a way to denounce Dazhai as backward and revisionist and a capitalist roader. Political struggle is in command.

Whom, then, did the focus on bourgeois right benefit? Is there a link at the level of interests between the platform of Yao et al. and the potential social base of his group? Is there some utility in putting the question this way rather than contending simply that Yao was a correct Maoist Marxist? What is at issue is not the sincereity of the individual, but the defining and delimiting impact of real social forces.

Who, then, is served when wages in factories are leveled down? If it was older workers who benefited from the previously existing system of rewards to seniority, experience, and attained job skills, and who also had first shot at things such as overtime, then younger workers would most immediately benefit from the change. Perhaps Yao's group expressed the interest of similar young people who rose swiftly in the aftermath of the Cultural

Revolution. In that case, Yao's group can be seen as keeping faith with its social base. It is yet another question whether that particular interest at that precise moment also embodied some broader and more generally progressive—if not actually liberating—interest.

It does not seem that workers applauded the campaign. There is even some evidence that it was greeted by a decline in morale, by sabotage and slowdowns and even strikes. Was this, then, where the national leadership should have been directing its energies? Who, then was out of touch with the masses, with Marx?

Perhaps we should take most seriously Marx's suggestion, which Yao's group endlessly quoted, that ideas become a material force when they seize hold of the masses. But the idea here which has seized hold of the masses is their enjoyment of and insistence on their new bourgeois rights, such as seniority rights. Yao's group found that these rights were mere remnants of the old society. In fact, they were true gains of the revolution.

If Yao's analysis cannot be squared with the facts, can it be squared with Marx's insistence, in his *Critique of the Gotha Program*—other parts of which Yao and his friends loved to quote—that "Right can never be higher than the economic structure of society and the cultural development conditioned by it"? Can Yao's group's linking of the attack on bourgeois right to class struggle in the socialist period be squared with Marx's insistence that bourgeois right in that period "recognizes no class differences because everyone is a worker like everyone elst"?[4]

It does not follow just because Yao innovates in ways which contradict what Marx wrote that Yao's stress on ideas, culture, and consciousness invariably made him a bad revolutionary. While I long feared that a power-grab by Yao's people could have taken China on the road to Jacobin dictatorship, if not Stalinism, nonetheless, it also seems that few groups other than his cared about confronting inhumanities such as the domination of the young by the old and the female by the male, inhumanities which cannot be negated without more serious attention to the realm of

consciousness than Marx's approach permits, with its main emphasis on culture being conditioned by the economy (Johnson, 1976).

It is not strange that Yao and his friends should try to reinterpret Marx so that Marx fits their needs and prescriptions. Marx has been reinterpreted before. I really must protest, however, against reducing Marx to someone who merely said that everything influences everything else. He really did argue that some things were far more determining than consciousness. What follows from this is that those of Yao's persuasion are in a very weak position when they try to defend their position by references to Marx. Those who prefer centralization to decentralization, and stress on advanced urban industrial areas to backward rural agrarian ones, have much the better of it when it comes to citing the main thrust of Marx's work. In fact, if Chinese politics must now be legitimated by quotes from Marx, then, as Soviet analysts have correctly argued, the tendency will be in an anti-Mao direction, a more bureaucratic direction, perhaps even, as I see it, a military takeover of the Bonapartist variety.[5]

Of course, it would be best not to have to base oneself on Marx's few relevant fragments. The long debate on the relevance of the Paris Commune model is indicative.[6] Many people insisted that the French experience, according to Marx, held out lessons for how to proceed with the dictatorship of the proletariat. Marx certainly said so at one point. He said that the first most important thing was to smash the state apparatus, including the army. But Mao has argued that "Whoever wants to seize and retain state power must have a strong army." The Cultural Revolution and the probes of Yao style people were turned back when they seemed to threaten the army.

Yet, in a letter some ten years after the Commune, Marx, on February 22, 1881, took back most of what he had said about it as clue to the dictatorship of the proletariat. He concluded, instead, that the Paris Commune "was merely the rising of a city under exceptional conditions, the majority of the Commune was in no way socialist, nor could it be" (Draper, 1971: 233). If Marx

had not written this letter, would one who asserted such a position and who had no Marx quotes to back it up be presumed wrong because un-Marxist?

The truth is that Marx left the creation of socialism to the future. He left on that topic little more than perceptive journalistic fragments and inspirational ideas motivated by pressing, momentary political situations. On the topic of continuing the revolution after the revolution, it is absurd to believe that Marx is unambiguous and decisive and that Mao-who with the analyses of the Cultural Revolution actually and explicitly innovated in this area—is simply carrying forward Marx's ideas.

Marx was not a universalistic methodologist. He was a revolutionary analyst of a particular kind of historical society. Where does he systematically confront the problems of socialist-minded state power holders in a backward agrarian society at this moment in technological change with its imperatives for raw materials, scientific training, and coordination in a global context of extraordinary market and interstate struggles? And, beyond the question of the state in this new historical era, few traditions have less to say than Marx's on the liberating potential of a supposedly backward peasantry.

Hence, it is not surprising that Yao's people should rest their case on being true to Mao's practices. Still, their opponents were surely right in dismissing this as dangerous dogmatism. What else is it when Yao et al. refused to take advantage of China's new-won opportunities in the world market to ease the citizenry's burdens and instead insisted that the policies of great sacrifice of the Great Leap, when a much poorer China suffered from the vicious U.S. embargo, should again be imposed on a poor people by comfortable leaders? The situational quality of Mao's prescriptions limits the validity of treating these policies as a continuing model of proper development.

If the words of Marx and the practices of Mao are insufficient, if it is politically impossible to call on other traditions, then what is required are endless innovation, the greatest practicality, and heroic creativity. It is impossible to continue the politics of Mao without Mao and with a much-weakened left. Only his

unique position of power and prestige permitted policies of advance by a zealous left which could then be reined in by the Mao-Zhou left-center grouping, while the center consolidated the gains before another attempt at an advance was instigated by that left-center. In the struggle over China's future, if there is to be movement in an ever more participatory and egalitarian direction, the Chinese people must, against enormous obstacles, transcend much, even the great contributions of Marx and Mao. As Marx and Mao before, what is needed are new struggles, better insights, and further breakthroughs.

NOTES

1. Pfeffer and Walder can claim that "the field" ignores the question of Marx's relation to Mao only by never mentioning, themselves, the writings on that topic such as those by Schwartz (1954a) and by Meisner (1963) on Asian despotism, those by Starr and Schram on continuing the revolution, and those by Schwartz (1954b, 1957) on the dictatorship of the proletariat. And then there is the more recent work of Levy.

2. As recently as 1971, Pfeffer, while contrasting himself to "the liberal establishment in the field," found himself at one with Meisner (uncited) in finding that "the Chinese Communist movement evolved in part as a populist movement" and with Schram in seeing Mao versus Liu as an anti-Leninist voluntarist versus a scientific Marxist-Leninist. Pfeffer found Schwartz "brillant" because Schwartz helped people to see that "Mao's goals since the 1950's may in some sense best be understood in terms of an increasingly observable rejection of Marxism-Leninism accompanied by an increasing affirmation of Rousseauean concerns and methods" (Pfeffer, 1971: 260, 265, 266, 281, 282, 296, 279). While Pfeffer, of course, is free to change his mind suddenly and completely and to conclude that Mao was mainly a Marxist-Leninist, it would have been helpful had he explained what new evidence led to this total change of mind.

3. This leads to the question of why such people, even when in conflict with Marx, insist that they are Marxists. The answer, I believe, is that Marxism is not just the writings of Marx. It is also, and most importantly, the real struggles of numerous peoples at various times and places against the inhumanities of capitalism and imperialism. To identify with this tradition is to make oneself an heir to its promise of human liberation.

4. I do not mean to rest my case heavily on the *Critique*, actually politically inspired notes published by others after Marx's death. It is not insignificant, however, that Yao's people had to rest their case so heavily on a partial and particular reading of such materials.

5. Here, too, where Marx and Mao are not in agreement on the issue of continuing the revolution, Mao may well be the superior.

6. Again, it is noteworthy that Pfeffer and Walder never mention the essays by Meisner and Starr on the political relevance of Marx's work on the Paris Commune to China.

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