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The Legend of "Maoism"

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## DEBATE

### **Part 1: The Legend of "Maoism"**

By KARL A. WITTFOGEL

*How original is Mao Tse-tung? The answer is of interest beyond the bounds of academic studies of Chinese Communism, for it must affect appraisals of the future course of Peking's policies. Prof. Wittfogel contends that Mao's basic strategy can be traced back to Marx and Lenin. In our next issue, in which we will print the second half of "The Legend of 'Maoism,'" Prof. Benjamin Schwartz will take a different view. We are grateful to the New Leader for permitting Prof. Wittfogel to elaborate on an article printed in it.*

#### 1

A NUMBER of months ago I discussed in an article<sup>1</sup> some conceptual weaknesses in the study of Chinese Communism. To illustrate my point, I briefly reviewed the "Maoist" thesis—the claim that Mao Tse-tung, in 1927 and subsequently, violated basic principles of orthodox Marxist-Leninist Communism.

The response to my article was instructive in several respects. There were relatively few comments on my criticism of our conceptual weaknesses. This strengthened my conviction that the methodological aspect of the matter still arouses little concern. And there were many comments on my criticism of the "Maoist" thesis. Although highly encouraging, these comments strengthened my conviction that the "Maoist" arguments are much more widely known than the reasons for their rejection.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *New Leader*, issue of July 22/27, 1959, New York. I am indebted to the *New Leader* for permitting me to reproduce parts of this article here.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Peter S. H. Tang, "Stalin's Role in the Communist Victory in China," *American Slavic and East European Review* XIII, No. 3 (October 1954), pp. 375-388; *idem*, *Communist China Today* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1957), p. 74 *et seq.*; Richard L. Walker, *China Under Communism: The First Five Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), pp. 20, 153; *ibid.*, *The Continuing Struggle. Communist China and the Free World* (New York: Athene Press, Inc.), 1958, p. 110; Franz H. Michael and George E. Taylor, *The Far East in the Modern World* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1956), p. 414 *et seq.*; Karl A. Wittfogel, "The Influence of Leninism-Stalinism on China," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (September 1951), p. 28 *et seq.* (hereafter cited as Wittfogel 1951); *ibid.*, "The Communist Strategy in Asia," the *New Leader*, February 15, 1954 (hereafter cited as Wittfogel 1954); *ibid.*, "Short History of Chinese Communism," in *Handbook on China*, edited by Hellmut Wilhelm under

It is not necessary here to demonstrate how the "Maoist" thesis derived, and differed from, the earlier proposition that since 1927 the Chinese Communist Party (C.C.P.) became essentially a peasant party.<sup>3</sup> Suffice it to say that in substance the "Maoist" thesis was first outlined in 1947 by John K. Fairbank; that Prof. Fairbank was the "teacher and guide" of Benjamin Schwartz,<sup>4</sup> who in 1951 coined the term "Maoism" and elaborated on its meaning; that Prof. Fairbank fulfilled editorial functions in the preparation of the *Documentary History of Chinese Communism*,<sup>5</sup> a collection of documents with explanatory introductions mainly written by Prof. Schwartz and Conrad Brandt<sup>6</sup> and published in 1952; and that in 1958 Prof. Fairbank reasserted the "Maoist" thesis without considering recent findings that controvert his interpretation.

The "Maoist" thesis is formulated in various ways, but its semantic core is simple. It claims heretical originality for a Communist power strategy based essentially on peasant support, which Mao is said to have initiated in 1927 and which was indeed employed in China from the winter of 1927-28 to 1947.

In 1948 Prof. Fairbank pointed to "one seeming anomaly of Chinese Marxism," namely, "its use of a peasant movement as the class basis for revolution." This view, he tells us, deviated "from the early Marxist dogma" and also from Lenin and Trotsky: "The Chinese Communists were obliged . . . to build their movement on a peasant base. For fifteen years Chinese Communism has been a peasant, not a proletarian, movement. In this respect it follows the Chinese tradition of revolution more than the Marxist."<sup>7</sup>

Prof. Schwartz's 1951 study personalised the thesis. He argues that Mao laid the foundation for his unorthodox policy in a *Report on an Investigation of the Hunan Peasant Movement*, written in February 1927. This Report, he contends, carries "the constant implication that the

commission from The Human Relations Area Files for the United States Army, Chap. V, A (MS. hereafter cited as Short History); *ibid.*, *Oriental Despotism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 442 (hereafter cited as Wittfogel 1957); *ibid.*, "Die Bauern," Chap. 11 of *Handbuch des Welt-Kommunismus* (Freiburg/München: Karl Alber—American edition to be published soon by Frederick A. Praeger), 1958, p. 456 *et seq.*

<sup>3</sup> Owen Lattimore, *Solution in Asia* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1957), p. 108; Harold R. Isaacs, *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1938), p. 404 (hereafter cited as Isaacs 1938). Isaacs elaborated the Trotskyist view, about which see more below.

<sup>4</sup> Benjamin I. Schwartz, *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), Acknowledgments (hereafter cited as Schwartz 1951).

<sup>5</sup> Conrad Brandt, Benjamin Schwartz and John K. Fairbank, *A Documentary History of Chinese Communism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), p. 27 (hereafter cited as *Documentary History*).

<sup>6</sup> *Documentary History*, p. 27.

<sup>7</sup> John King Fairbank, *The United States and China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948), p. 260 *et seq.*

peasantry itself will be the main force of the Chinese revolution.”<sup>8</sup> It “looks to the village as the key centre of revolutionary action,” and in a “most remarkable statement,” it ascribes to the peasants 70 per cent. of the accomplishments in the democratic revolution, while conceding only 30 per cent. to “the urban dwellers and the military.”<sup>9</sup> For these reasons the Report is “an implicit attack on the whole Comintern line.”<sup>10</sup> The “Maoist” strategy constituted “a heresy in act,” which although it was “never made explicit in theory,”<sup>11</sup> was in reality a heresy against one of the “vital core presuppositions of Marxism-Leninism.”<sup>12</sup>

In a similar vein the *Documentary History* presents the Hunan Report as reflecting the gist of the “Maoist” policy: it is “one of the clearest portraits of ‘Maoism’ in its formative stage.”<sup>13</sup> On the basis of the Hunan Report Maoism can be reduced “to a simple syllogism. The ‘revolutionary vanguard’ in Marxist-Leninist parlance invariably stands for the urban proletariat. The ‘revolutionary vanguard’ in Mao’s *Report* stands, on the other hand, for the poor peasantry. By implication, the urban proletariat is thus equated to the poor peasantry. Precisely this equation constitutes the theoretical basis of Mao’s rise to power. Having lost control of the urban workers (the proletariat in the orthodox sense of the word), the Chinese Communists, under Mao, eventually found a new ‘proletariat’ in the poor peasantry as organised and led by themselves.”<sup>14</sup>

Schwartz maintains that Mao’s heretic political trend appears in the Hunan Report in a significant terminological deviation. The suggestion that in a revolution such as the Chinese the peasants may be “the main force” supposedly disregards the strictures which Marxism-Leninism puts on the independent revolutionary role of the peasants.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, “there is a huge abyss between the proposition that the agrarian revolution is *the main content* of the revolution and Mao’s proposition that the peasantry is *the main force* of the revolution.”<sup>16</sup>

Supposedly Marx, Engels and the early Lenin assigned no “creative” revolutionary role to the peasants. And Lenin, who in 1905 modified the original Marxist position, gave them only a limited role—as an “auxiliary” to the revolutionary proletariat of the cities.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Schwartz 1951: 76.

<sup>9</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 75.

<sup>10</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 77 *et seq.*

<sup>11</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 191.

<sup>12</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 199.

<sup>13</sup> *Documentary History*, p. 77.

<sup>14</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 79.

<sup>15</sup> Schwartz 1951, p. 76.

<sup>16</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 78. Italics in original.

<sup>17</sup> Schwartz 1951, p. 118; *Documentary History*, p. 79.

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The student of the Marxism-Leninism will be puzzled by these statements. In particular he will be puzzled by an appraisal of Mao's orthodoxy, which stresses Lenin's 1905 position without noting the changes he made in 1906 and without explaining the new peasant strategy which he devised after 1917 in response to the new historical situation: the rise of a Communist dictatorship in the Soviet Union and the rapid growth of Communist movements, not only in the classical areas of industrial capitalism, but also in the "colonial and semi-colonial" countries of the East.

By voicing these objections, I do not imply that the work of the Maoist group is without merit. In his 1951 monograph Prof. Schwartz assembles many important facts on the history of Chinese Communism; and he draws attention to significant problems. The *Documentary History*, through its translations, provides the non-sinological reader with certain texts that are not otherwise available in any Western language.

Unfortunately these assets are in large part vitiated by an inadequate understanding of the doctrinal and political Marxist-Leninist background, a deficiency that results in an inadequate selection of texts in the *History* and an inadequate interpretation of events in both publications. I am thinking particularly of the *History's* treatment of the First United Front (1923-27), the Chinese Communist attitude toward the first phase of the Japanese invasion (1931-35), the initiation of a second United Front policy in 1935, the Chinese Communist attitude after Munich and during the Hitler-Stalin Pact.<sup>18</sup> Here, however, I shall concentrate on the doctrinal background of the "Maoist" issue, the Communist peasant policy that was initiated by Marx and Engels and developed—and radically altered—by Lenin in 1906 and 1920.

### 3

Even an elliptical presentation of the original Marxist peasant policy must report its significant socio-historical differentiations. Marx and Engels certainly considered the peasants incapable of organising or leading their political struggle<sup>19</sup>; and, under the conditions of the Socialist revolution, they deemed them Conservative and even reactionary.<sup>20</sup> But they believed that the peasants had an essential revolutionary role in the anti-feudal bourgeois revolutions of the West

<sup>18</sup> See Short History, *passim*.

<sup>19</sup> Karl Marx, *Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte* (Stuttgart: J. H. Dietz, 1920), p. 102.

<sup>20</sup> Communist Manifesto, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Historisch-Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Werke-Schriften-Briefe (Moscow: Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute, 1927 et seq.) I, 6, p. 535 (hereafter cited as MEGA).

and in the anti-despotic (Orientially despotic) bourgeois revolution of a semi-Asiatic country in transition, such as Tsarist Russia.

Marx briefly hinted at the first point,<sup>21</sup> and Engels made both points in 1875 and 1892 respectively. In 1875 Engels described the Russian peasants as the main *socio*-revolutionary element in the struggle against Tsarist despotism.<sup>22</sup> And in 1892 he spoke of the crucial function the peasants had performed in three great European bourgeois revolutions, the German in the sixteenth century, the English in the seventeenth century, and the French in the eighteenth century: "In all the three great bourgeois risings, the peasantry furnishes the army that has to do the fighting." It was the peasantry—usually aided by the urban plebeians—that assured the success of these bourgeois revolutions by pushing them to "the bitter end." "This seems, in fact, to be one of the laws of evolution of bourgeois society."<sup>23</sup> Marx even suggested that peasant participation might decide the victory in a combined anti-capitalist and anti-feudal revolution. In 1856 he wrote to Engels that the revolutionary prospects in Germany "will depend on the possibility to *back the proletarian revolution by some second edition of the Peasants war.*"<sup>24</sup>

Thus, contrary to the opinion of the "Maoist" group, the fathers of "scientific socialism" were convinced that the peasants could be a fighting force of crucial importance in "bourgeois revolutions" and even in revolutions that were led by the proletariat, but that still had to fulfil certain tasks of a "bourgeois" revolution. Hence, Lenin eagerly cited both of them after he had proclaimed a revolutionary strategy that depended for its success on peasant support.<sup>25</sup> But while developing his new policy, he introduced a new operational idea, which sharply deviated from the original Marxist position. Since the members of the "Maoist" group have referred to this idea as an element of the "Maoist" policy without recognising its heretic character (heretic from the standpoint of original Marxism), we shall identify it briefly.

Marx and Engels considered the desire of the peasants and other lower middle class elements to perpetuate their economic existence as

<sup>21</sup> See, e.g., his letter to Engels of July 27, 1854 (MEGA III, 2, p. 47).

<sup>22</sup> As the main *national*-revolutionary element he mentioned the Poles. See Friedrich Engels, "IV: Soziales aus Russland (Volksstaat, 1875)," in *Internationales aus dem Volksstaat (1871-75)* (Berlin, 1894), p. 48.

<sup>23</sup> Frederick Engels, *Socialism. Utopian and Scientific*, translated by Edward Aveling (New York: International Publishers, 1935), p. 18.

<sup>24</sup> MEGA III, 2, p. 131 *et seq.* Marx wrote the italicised words in English in the otherwise German letter.

<sup>25</sup> In 1908 Lenin approvingly and at length cited Engels idea that in the three great bourgeois revolutions the peasants had provided the fighting army (W. I. Lenin, *Sämtliche Werke* (Wien-Berlin, Moscow-Leningrad), Vol. XII, p. 254 (hereafter cited as Lenin, SWG). In 1914, he reproduced Marx' 1856 notion about the dependence of a successful German proletarian revolution on a second edition of the peasant war (V. I. Lenin, *Selected Works*, 12 vols. [New York: International Publishers], 1943 *et seq.*, Vol. XI, p. 40 [hereafter cited as Lenin, SW]).

conservative and even reactionary; and they maintained this view to the end of their lives. In 1894 Engels expressly warned the revolutionary socialists not to appeal to the peasants by making concessions to their proprietary instincts. Such a policy was nothing but cheap demagoguery, worthy only of the "anti-Semites."<sup>26</sup>

## 4

Lenin shared this orthodox Marxian position during the first part of his career.<sup>27</sup> He still upheld it in 1905 when he began outlining the idea of a new type of bourgeois-democratic revolution, which, headed by a small proletariat, would receive its mass support from the peasants. Despite his desire to win the peasants to his cause in 1905, he still continued to reject the policy of safeguarding the small peasant holdings as "a reactionary petty bourgeois Utopia."<sup>28</sup> He urged the Socialists to cooperate with the peasants in the anti-landlord revolution "without . . . betraying our scientific conscience, without striving after cheap popularity."<sup>29</sup> And he branded the policy that promised the peasants economic improvements without explaining the political prerequisites for a genuine improvement as the method of "political swindlers."<sup>30</sup>

However, at the close of 1905 he became aware of how little attraction his new programme (confiscation of the landed estates, but not redistribution) had for the peasants.<sup>31</sup> And in 1906 he made a fateful turnabout. He now announced that after the victory of the bourgeois-democratic revolution the newly established government—a "revolutionary democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants"—would distribute the land to the peasants and thus initiate a rural development American style, that is, with flourishing small farmers' economy.<sup>32</sup> The lengths to which he was ready to go in this new demagogic appeal are indicated by his willingness to call the to-be-created revolutionary bourgeois-democratic government "a farmers' republic,"<sup>33</sup> a "peasant (farmer) republic."<sup>34</sup>

In the spring of 1917 Lenin scrapped his programme to redistribute

<sup>26</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1951), Vol. II, p. 392 *et seq.*

<sup>27</sup> See his reference to Engels' "anti-Semite" formula in the discussion of the first agrarian programme of the Russian Social-Democrats in 1902 (Lenin, SWG V, p. 40; *cf.* p. 125 and IV, 1, p. 115).

<sup>28</sup> Lenin, SWG VIII, p. 349.

<sup>29</sup> Lenin, SW III, p. 146.

<sup>30</sup> Lenin, SWG VII, p. 379.

<sup>31</sup> See Lenin, SWG VIII, pp. 516 *et seq.*, 559, 657; *ibid.*, *Werke* (Berlin: J. H. Dietz), (Vol. X: November 1905–June 1906), 1958, Vol. X, p. 76 (hereafter cited as Lenin, *Werke*).

<sup>32</sup> Lenin, *Werke* X, pp. 161 *et seq.*, 169, 188.

<sup>33</sup> Lenin, SW III, p. 258.

<sup>34</sup> Lenin, SWG XII, p. 361.

the land because he then considered the forces of the proletarian revolution so strong<sup>35</sup> that they could convert the confiscated estates directly into "model farms."<sup>36</sup> But when the "July demonstrations" revealed how weak these forces actually were, he reverted to the policy which he had been advocating in the preceding decade.<sup>37</sup> Lenin's pledge to maintain and augment the small peasant economy decisively aided the Bolsheviks in their struggle for dictatorial power, first in European Russia (which had a substantial industrial development) and also in such Central Asian areas as Turkestan which, according to his appraisal, maintained a predominantly pre-capitalist ("Oriental") way of life until 1917.<sup>38</sup>

This double experience led Lenin to conclude that the slogan of land distribution could be widely used as a weapon in the Communist struggle for power.<sup>39</sup> It also led him to proclaim the crucial importance of the peasants for the Communist strategy in the colonial and semi-colonial "pre-capitalist" countries of the East. These concepts which Lenin presented sketchily before the Second All-Russian Congress of Communist Organisations of the Peoples of the East on November 22, 1919,<sup>40</sup> and fully before the Second World Congress of the Comintern (July 19–August 7, 1920), were elaborated at two congresses of Eastern peoples, one held in Baku in September 1920, the other in Moscow in January 1922.

The new Leninist policy brought together the original Marxian idea of the peasantry as the main fighting force in bourgeois revolutions (especially: Engels, 1892), the appeal to the proprietary instincts of the peasants (Lenin, 1906) and the concept of a proletarian vanguard party whose "professional" members were characterised, not by their social origin—proletarian, bourgeois or petty-bourgeois—but by their Marxistly correct political consciousness, which enabled them to give proper guidance to the workers and other groups of toilers (Lenin, 1902).<sup>41</sup>

Lenin formulated the core ideas of his peasant strategy to meet the conditions of Tsarist Russia, where the Marxist party interacted with, and could rely on, the proletariat of a concentrated, if regionally limited, modern industry. His strategy was broadened and modified when the Communists in Inner Asia established dictatorial power (soviet governments) over populations composed in the main of peasants and other non-proletarian toilers.

<sup>35</sup> Lenin, SWG XX, 1, pp. 4, 25 and *passim*.

<sup>36</sup> Lenin, SWG XX, 1, pp. 108, 117, 527; XX, 2, pp. 9, 11 *et seq.*, 24 *et seq.*, 29 *et seq.*

<sup>37</sup> Lenin, SWG XXI, pp. 140 *et seq.*, 146, 175 and *passim*; XXII, p. 20 *et seq.*

<sup>38</sup> See below.

<sup>39</sup> Lenin, SWG XXV, p. 336 *et seq.*

<sup>40</sup> V. I. Lenin, *The National Liberation Movement in the East* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1957), p. 234 (hereafter cited as Lenin 1957).

<sup>41</sup> Lenin, SWG IV, 2, pp. 159 *et seq.*, 169 *et seq.*, 251, 254, 276.



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On one occasion Lenin left it open whether "proletarian parties" could arise under "backward" Eastern conditions.<sup>42</sup> But he was sure that "the *elements* of future proletarian [Communist] parties" existed "in *all* backward countries"; and these rudimentary groups could be "not merely Communist in name."<sup>43</sup> With proper direction they could "pursue Communist tactics and a Communist policy." But this could be done only if they had "definite relations with the peasant movement."<sup>44</sup>

Developing his ideas at the Second Congress of the Communist International Lenin demanded that Comintern policy in "colonial and backward countries" involve three steps:

(1) We must . . . form *independent cadres of fighters, of Party organisations*, in all colonies and backward countries;

(2) We must . . . carry on propaganda in favour of organising *Peasant Soviets* and strive to adapt them to pre-capitalist conditions;

(3) The Communist International must lay down, and give the theoretical grounds for, the proposition that, with the aid of the proletariat of the most advanced countries, the backward countries may pass to the soviet system and, after passing through a definite stage of development, to Communism, without passing through the capitalist stage of development.<sup>45</sup>

Remembering these directives, the reader will find it difficult to understand how Prof. Schwartz could have written that "nowhere in the whole body of Lenin's writings do we find a hint that the Communist Party can exist as an entity apart from its proletarian base."<sup>46</sup> Nor will he be satisfied with Schwartz's lame corrective in the last chapter of his book, that Lenin "speculated on the possibility of applying the form of soviets to 'backward' lands of Asia where the proletariat was presumed not to exist at all."<sup>47</sup> Lenin did not *speculate* on the possibility of peasant soviets in backward Eastern countries. He insisted that the Communist International "must" establish such soviets "in all colonies and backward countries," because Bolshevik experience *had shown* that this had been done successfully in former Tsarist colonies. In fact, the question was not whether, but "how to apply Communist tactics and policy amidst pre-capitalist conditions." Moreover, he tells us that under such conditions "we [the Communists] have undertaken and had to undertake the role of leader." And although this task was beset with "colossal difficulties," "the practical

<sup>42</sup> Lenin, SW X, p. 240 *et seq.*

<sup>43</sup> Lenin, SW X, p. 237. *Italics mine.*

<sup>44</sup> Lenin, SW X, p. 241.

<sup>45</sup> Lenin, SW X, p. 243.

<sup>46</sup> Schwartz 1951, p. 192; *cf.* p. 119 *et seq.*

<sup>47</sup> Schwartz 1951, p. 196.

results of our work also revealed to us that, notwithstanding these difficulties, it is possible to rouse among the masses a striving for independent political thought and independent political activity,<sup>48</sup> even where there is almost no proletariat.”<sup>49</sup>

Shifting to the political aim, Lenin finds it “quite understandable that peasants who are in a state of semi-feudal dependence<sup>50</sup> can fully appreciate the idea of Soviet organisation and put it into practice. . . . The idea of Soviet organisation is a simple one and can be applied, not only to proletarian, but also to peasant, feudal and semi-feudal relations.” In fact, the Comintern theses must indicate that “*Peasant Soviets*, soviets of the exploited, are a useful weapon, not only for capitalist countries, but also for countries in which pre-capitalist relations exist; and we must say that it is the *bounden duty* of the Communist Parties, and of those elements which are associated with them, to carry on propaganda in favour of the idea of Peasants’ Soviets, of Toilers’ Soviets *everywhere, in backward countries and in colonies.*”<sup>51</sup>

Lenin kept stressing that the Comintern had as yet little experience in these matters. More data had to be collected.<sup>52</sup> For reasons that need not be examined here he was eager to meet certain suggestions made by the Indian Communist, M. N. Roy, regarding the anti-imperialist struggle in the colonies. Roy’s supplementary theses (“written mainly from the point of view of the situation in India”)<sup>53</sup> placed greater emphasis on the native proletariat<sup>54</sup> and spoke of the to-be-established revolutionary governments as “soviets of *workers* and peasants.”<sup>55</sup>

But while Lenin accepted Roy’s suggestions, including the proposal that the “bourgeois-democratic” movements be called “nationalist-revolutionary” movements,<sup>56</sup> he preferred the formula “Peasant Soviets” for colonial and backward countries. He used this formula on July 17 in his major speech on the International Situation and the Fundamental Tasks of the Communist International, inserting it in a paragraph that mentions only British and French colonies and that specifies only one colonial country, India.<sup>57</sup> And he used it again on July 26 when he announced that the commission dealing with the national and colonial question had unanimously adopted Roy’s amendments.<sup>58</sup> It was Lenin’s, and not Roy’s, concept that the Comintern

<sup>48</sup> In this context, obviously: Communist-led thought and activity.

<sup>49</sup> Lenin, SW X, p. 242. Italics mine.

<sup>50</sup> For the doctrinal problems connected with the Communist use of the term “feudal,” see Wittfogel 1957, p. 379 *et seq.*

<sup>51</sup> Lenin, SW X, p. 242. Italics mine.

<sup>52</sup> Lenin, SW X, p. 242 *et seq.*

<sup>53</sup> Lenin, SW X, p. 240.

<sup>54</sup> Lenin, SWG XXV, p. 691.

<sup>55</sup> Lenin, SWG XXV, p. 692. Italics mine.

<sup>57</sup> Lenin, SW X, p. 198.

<sup>56</sup> Lenin, SW X, p. 240.

<sup>58</sup> Lenin, SW X, pp. 239, 241–243.

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elaborated at the Comintern-convoked "Eastern" congresses in Baku and Moscow.

### 5

The Baku Congress (the First Congress of the Peoples of the East), though concerned in the main with the Near and Middle East, including India,<sup>59</sup> addressed itself to the toiling peoples of the whole East, who were viewed as being essentially peasants.<sup>60</sup> The Moscow Congress (the First Congress of the Toilers of the Far East) took a similar position with regard to all countries of the Far East—with the exception of Japan.

Starting from this premise, the Baku Congress proclaimed the following strategic points:

*The main fighting force.* The peasants will be "the heavy mass," the "infantry" in the global revolutionary struggle.<sup>61</sup>

*The political aim.* The aim will be soviets—peasant soviets.<sup>62</sup>

*The leadership in the fight for this aim.* In some frank statements the leadership was identified as the Comintern and the Communist Party.<sup>63</sup> At times, and ambiguously, it was referred to as the "organised vanguard of the Western European and American proletariat."<sup>64</sup> At times, and with unrestrained demagoguery, the peasants were called the political leaders. In phrases recalling the 1920 Lenin remark that the peasants had put "the idea of Soviet organisation . . . into practice," Skachko, the speaker on the agrarian question, declared that the revolutionary peasants could establish peasant soviets.<sup>65</sup> The Theses on Soviet Power in the East asserted that the peasants can "administer their own affairs."<sup>66</sup> And Bela Kun, who presented these theses, argued that while "in the West the Soviet power is indeed a form and expression of the dictatorship of the proletariat . . . in the East, where the exploited element is not the industrial workers, but the poorest peasantry, this peasantry must become the leading element of the Soviets."<sup>67</sup> In fact, "in the East, in those countries where there is no working class, it [the Soviet power] will be the expression of the *dictatorship of the poorest peasantry.*"<sup>68</sup>

<sup>59</sup> (*Pervyi S'ezd narodov Vostoka, Baku, September 1-8, 1920* (1st Congress of the Peoples of the East, Baku, 1920). Stenographic reports (Petrograd: Communist International Publishers, 1920), 2nd ed., p. 191.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* p. 15 (Zinoviev), p. 178 (Bela Kun), p. 186 (Skachko).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* p. 13 (Zinoviev).

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 178, 184, 194.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 13, 184.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* p. 13. Meaning obviously: the Communist Parties of these areas.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 195, 198. Cf. Lenin, SW X, p. 242.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* p. 185.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* p. 179.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* p. 178. Italics mine.

*Encouraging precedents.* Soviet Russia, Siberia, the Bashkir-Kirghiz Republic and Turkestan.<sup>69</sup>

On September 20, 1920, Zinoviev, the chairman of the Comintern, in a report on the Baku Congress before the Executive Committee of the Communist International expressly mentioned Bela Kun's statement that in the pre-capitalist East, soviets could be a "dictatorship of the poor peasantry."<sup>70</sup> A few weeks later Lenin hailed the Baku Congress—and the Second World Congress of the Comintern—as having demonstrated that the Communists are the saviours not only of "the workers of all civilised [capitalist] countries," but also of "the peasants of all backward colonial countries."<sup>71</sup> And on December 22 of the same year he described the (Communist-controlled)<sup>72</sup> Soviet republics of Bukhara, Azerbaijan and Armenia as "proof and confirmation that the ideas and principles of Soviet government are accessible to, and immediately realisable by, countries with a peasant social base, and not only by industrially developed countries with a proletarian social base. *The idea of peasant soviets has triumphed. . . .* Friendly relations between the *peasant soviet republics* and the Russian Socialist Republic have already been consolidated by the practical results of our policy."<sup>73</sup>

Lenin's new ideas on Communist peasant strategy were restated in 1922 at the Moscow Congress of the Toilers of the Far East by the chairman of the Comintern, Zinoviev, and by the head of the Comintern's Far Eastern section, Safarov. Again the Comintern speakers pointed to the Bolshevik experiences "in the Near East and in Central Asia" to support their claim that soviets could be established in agrarian as well as in industrial countries.<sup>74</sup> While noting that the countries of the Far East, with the exception of Japan, had "hardly any proletariat," Zinoviev insisted that the slogan of soviets could nevertheless be raised in all of them. The four hundred million Chinese, together with the hundreds of millions of other Far Eastern peoples, "in historical perspective represent the *main force* that will overthrow imperialism. The better elements of the European workers [read: the Communists] will take the lead in this struggle, but the *masses of infantry* which will finally destroy imperialism, are you, the oppressed nations of the Far East."<sup>75</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Baku Congress reports, p. 185.

<sup>70</sup> Jane Degras, *The Communist International 1919-1943. Documents*, selected and edited by Jane Degras, Vol. I: 1919-1922 (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 105.

<sup>71</sup> Lenin, SWG XXV, p. 524 *et seq.*

<sup>72</sup> Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union. Communism and Nationalism. 1917-1923* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), pp. 184, 238 *et seq.*, 232 *et seq.*

<sup>73</sup> Lenin, 1957, p. 273. Italics mine.

<sup>74</sup> *The First Congress of the Toilers of the Far East* (Petrograd, 1922), p. 167 (Safarov) (hereafter cited as TFE).

<sup>75</sup> TFE (Zinoviev), p. 153. Italics mine.

Commenting on the Second World Congress of the Comintern, the members of the "Maoist" group record two aspects of the new "Eastern" policy: Lenin's insistence on the independence of the Communist parties and the desirability of temporary alliances with the native bourgeoisie.<sup>76</sup> But they pay virtually no attention<sup>77</sup> to his new concept of Communist power centres in pre-industrial areas based on peasant support. Failing to recognise this concept (the "Maoist" concept, if you please) in its basic form, they also fail to recognise its subsequent development.

The events of 1922-23 and 1925-26 convinced the Moscow strategists that there existed in some regions of China a modern industrial proletariat capable of being organised by radical leaders. Hence, in the winter of 1926-27 when the Comintern began seriously to discuss the possibility of establishing soviets in China, Stalin, like his Trotskyist opponents, spoke of soviets of *workers* and peasants. Some of Stalin's associates, such as Bukharin<sup>78</sup> and Mif,<sup>79</sup> raised the issue of peasant soviets. But Stalin insisted that when the revolution reached the soviet stage, the soviets would include "the industrial centres of China."<sup>80</sup> Stalin may have taken this stand in part because the Trotskyist opposition strongly emphasised the proletarian aspect of the Chinese revolution, but in part also because he viewed the revolution as a nation-wide process that would include major industrial centres.<sup>81</sup>

After the collapse of the United Front with the Kuomintang (K.M.T.), when the Communists were able to maintain power bases only in the countryside, the Comintern leaders under Stalin's direction accepted this development as legitimate—which, according to Lenin's ideas of 1920, it certainly was. But perhaps in order to counter the Trotskyist criticism they still emphasised the derivative proletarian root of these bases, calling them soviets of "workers and peasants" and

<sup>76</sup> Schwartz, 1951, p. 30; *Documentary History*, p. 67.

<sup>77</sup> Schwartz's remark about Lenin's alleged "speculation" appears to be an afterthought that has not affected the substance of his and his colleagues' argument.

<sup>78</sup> In November 1926, Bukharin referred to China as a peasant country in Lenin's sense of the term; and he cited Lenin's argument of the three steps of Communist policy in such countries, the organisation of peasant soviets being the second step (*International Press Correspondence*. English ed. [Vienna/London, 1921-38] 1926, p. 1471 [hereafter cited as *Inprecor*]).

<sup>79</sup> Mif, one of the authors of the draft resolution on the Chinese situation, seems to have proposed that the slogan of peasant soviets in the countryside be proclaimed immediately and without waiting for a corresponding development in the industrial centres. Mif's idea was rejected by Stalin in his speech on November 30, 1926 (*Inprecor* 1926, p. 1583).

<sup>80</sup> J. Stalin, *Works*, 13 vols. (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1952-55), Vol. VIII, p. 384.

<sup>81</sup> *Inprecor* 1926, p. 1583.

viewing them as manifestations of the "hegemony of the proletariat,"<sup>82</sup> In 1930 Manuilsky, Stalin's top lieutenant in the Comintern, explained the application of this formula to the Chinese rural soviets with an argument that was dramatised by Trotsky's subsequent attack on it.

Said Manuilsky: "The revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and of the peasantry in China will differ essentially from the democratic dictatorship which the Bolsheviki planned during the revolution of 1905-06."

Why?

"In the first place the development of the Chinese revolution collides with *the whole system* of world imperialism. A victorious revolution of the Chinese workers and peasants would shake the world system of imperialism to its very foundations. That is why the difficulties of the Chinese revolution are so great. This is the reason why [in the summer of 1930] the victorious advance of the Chinese Red Army against the industrial centres of China has been held up near Changsha." (Implication: For the time being the Communists cannot seize power in the industrial centres.)

"Secondly, the Chinese revolution is developing at the time of the existence of the Soviet Union, the land of the proletarian dictatorship and of the successful building up of Socialism." (Implication: There exists in the U.S.S.R. a mighty "proletarian"—Communist—régime capable and in duty bound to direct and aid the Communist power struggle in China.)

"The third peculiarity is that the Chinese revolution, even before the final victory of the workers and peasants in the whole of China, has a Red Army at its disposal, holds possession of a considerable district in which it has set up a soviet system of the workers and peasants power, in the government of which the *Communists* form the majority. This circumstance enables the proletariat to realise not only the ideological but also the State hegemony of the peasantry."<sup>83</sup> (Implication: In the soviet areas the Communists exercise "proletarian" leadership over the peasants because they are directed by the world centre of "proletarian" power and because they control the army, the ideology and the government.)

Of course, in addition to the supreme "proletarian" centre, Moscow, there were the headquarters of the Chinese Communist Party in Shanghai, which, according to Lenin's concept of the party, represented the Chinese workers (whatever their weakness) and which transmitted Moscow's directives to the rural soviets.

Under these conditions and in this way the Comintern formulated

<sup>82</sup> Theses on the Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies and Semi-Colonies, Sixth World Congress of the Comintern (*Inprecor* 1928, p. 1666).

<sup>83</sup> *Inprecor* 1930, p. 1065. Italics in original. Manuilsky wrote this in an article "On the Threshold of the Fourteenth Year," published in *Pravda* on November 7, 1930.

Lenin's concept of Communist-controlled peasant soviets in non-industrial areas of the East. Quite consistently, Manuilsky in a speech before the Central Committee of the Comintern explained the policy of "proletarian" (Communist) leadership over the peasant masses in China and other "colonial" countries by invoking the authority of Lenin.<sup>84</sup>

## 7

Professor Schwartz draws attention to an important controversy over Communist doctrine when he cites Trotsky's 1930 rejection of Stalin's and Manuilsky's appraisal of the Chinese soviets. But he errs when he claims that Trotsky's critique is based on "the solid ground of orthodoxy."<sup>85</sup>

Trotsky did indeed express his profound disagreement with Stalin on Chinese soviet policy. But behind this lies a long and serious disagreement with Lenin. In 1904 Trotsky rejected Lenin's concept of a party that would "substitute itself for the working classes" by virtue of its socialist consciousness,<sup>86</sup> that is, he rejected the very concept on which Lenin rested his 1920 thesis that Communist parties can carry out a genuine Communist policy in the pre-capitalist areas of the East. Moreover, Trotsky opposed Lenin's 1905 idea of an enduring bourgeois-democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants, because he was convinced that after a combined worker and peasant victory the proletariat must by necessity turn against the peasants and either establish a dictatorship of the proletariat or succumb to the "petty bourgeois" peasantry.<sup>87</sup> As far as I know, in 1920 Trotsky did not criticise Lenin's concept of peasant soviets; but in 1922 in a new edition of his history of the 1905 revolution he reproduced an article written in 1909 in which he attacked Lenin's view of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. And in 1930 he used the same arguments (actually his theory of the permanent revolution) to condemn as unfeasible and treacherous the application of the concept of the bourgeois-democratic revolution to China.<sup>88</sup> "To speak of a Soviet government without speaking of the dictatorship of the proletariat means to deceive the workers."<sup>89</sup>

But although Trotsky openly criticised Lenin's "hypothesis" of the

<sup>84</sup> *Inprecor* 1930, p. 439.

<sup>85</sup> Schwartz 1951, p. 193.

<sup>86</sup> Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed. Trotsky: 1879-1921* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 90. Italics in original.

<sup>87</sup> L. Trotzki, *Die Russische Revolution 1905* (Berlin: Vereinigung Internationaler Verlagsanstalten, 1923), p. 230 *et seq.*

<sup>88</sup> Leon Trotsky, *Permanent Revolution* (Calcutta: Gupta Rahman & Gupta, 1947), p. 32 *et seq.*, 141 *et seq.* (hereafter cited as Trotsky 1947).

<sup>89</sup> Leon Trotsky, *Problems of the Chinese Revolution*, translated by Max Shachtman (New York: Pioneer Publishers, 1932), p. 303 (hereafter cited as Trotsky 1932).

bourgeois-democratic revolution,<sup>90</sup> he did not state that Lenin paved the way for the application of this strategy to China at the Second World Congress of the Comintern in 1920. Referring to Lenin's 1920 Thesis on the National and Colonial Question, Trotsky mentioned the idea of a temporary alliance with the bourgeois-democratic movement and the need to keep the proletarian movement independent.<sup>91</sup> But he did not mention Lenin's concept of the peasant soviets, which in fact became the cornerstone of the Comintern's "Eastern" policy during the last years of Lenin's life.

Trotsky's critique of the Chinese policy of the Comintern provides valuable insights into the peculiarities and consequences of his theory of the permanent revolution. This, however, has nothing to do with the question of Communist orthodoxy. The doctrinal standards of the Moscow-rooted Communist movement were those of Marxism-Leninism. In their substance, they were determined not by Trotsky but by Lenin.

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*(The second part of Professor Wittfogel's article will be published in our next issue together with Professor Schwartz's reply.)*

<sup>90</sup> Trotsky 1947, p. 19 *et seq.*

<sup>91</sup> Trotsky 1932, p. 273.