

Mao Tse-tung's Contribution to Theory and Tactics of Revolution

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NOTE

Mao Tse-tung's Contribution to Theory and Tactics of Revolution

MAO TSE-TUNG was, in several obituary notes published in the Indian papers, compared to Mahatma Gandhi and Lenin. He, like them, is supposed to have changed the destiny of a whole nation and the world at large.

No one who makes a serious study of the life and work of the three great leaders can make such a comparison. They are incomparable.

The *revolution* led by Lenin and Mao was of a qualitatively different type from the *movement* led by Gandhi. It will, in fact, be a total misinterpretation of the word to say that Gandhi led a 'revolution.' He, on the other hand, led a bourgeois democratic national *movement* which was intended to, and did, end in a compromise between the Indian bourgeoisie and British imperialism. Lenin and Mao, on the other hand, led a *real* revolution which culminated in the overthrow of the old exploiting classes who were in power (landlords and capitalists) and put the toiling millions led by the working class in the seats of power.

Between Lenin and Mao too, there is a vast difference. Lenin was the theoretical and practical trail-blazer for the new class, the proletariat, who, armed with the mighty power of Marxist theory, not only overthrew the old exploiting classes but set up the first state of proletarian power. Elaborating and further enriching the theory and tactics of proletarian revolution originally discovered by Marx and Engels he explained how the capitalism of the early years of the twentieth century was a further development of capitalism, its development into the very opposite of the competitive capitalism analyzed by Marx and Engels. Characterizing the capitalism of this phase as monopoly capitalism or imperialism, he established with an abundance of factual material and a truly Marxist theoretical generalization that this was the last phase of capitalism. The epoch of monopoly capitalism or imperialism, he went on, is the epoch of wars, inter-imperialist, national revolutionary and civil wars, all of which will inevitably lead to the replacement of capitalism by socialism.

Fortified by this theory (called by Marxists of the subsequent era as 'Leninism'), Lenin evolved the tactics of the democratic revolution led by the working class and based on worker-peasant alliance which would grow into the socialist revolution. He applied this theoretical concept to the specific conditions of Russia as well as of the world proletarian movement. The victorious socialist revolution in Russia, the successes of this revolution over its enemies at home and abroad, the consolidation of proletarian revolutionary forces in the world into the Communist International—such are the monumental contributions made by this outstanding theoretician and practical leader of the world proletarian movement. It is ridiculous to compare even Mao, not to speak of Gandhi, with Lenin.

Unlike Gandhi and Lenin

This of course is not to deny the contribution made by Mahatma Gandhi as the outstanding leader of the democratic national movement in India, the great role he played in bringing the toiling millions, particularly the peasantry, into the active anti-imperialist movement. While giving him due credit for whatever he did as the tallest leader of India's freedom movement, it should nevertheless be acknowledged that he had all the virtues as well as the weaknesses of the leader of a bourgeois national movement. Attempting to put him on the same pedestal as Lenin is to fly in face of all facts of history.

As for Mao, it is not fair to compare his services to the cause of the Chinese revolution with the monumental work turned out by Lenin in the cause of the Russian and world proletarian revolutions. Mao did not have to work out (as Lenin had to) the theory and tactics of proletarian revolution in the world as a whole and in a new epoch of human history. His was the more modest task of applying the theory and tactics of proletarian revolution worked out by the Communist International to the specific conditions of China.

In discharging this task, he did indeed achieve substantial successes. For almost two decades, he stood at the head of the Chinese revolution till it culminated in the setting up of the People's Democratic Dictatorship in China in 1949—an event which is next in importance only to the October Revolution in Russia led by Lenin. He is respected throughout the world for the fact that, while the Russian revolution was the first breach in the capitalist system, providing the first glimmer of hope for the world proletariat that the new socialist society was not a dream but an eminently practical proposition, the Chinese revolution was the first example of a democratic revolution growing into the socialist revolution in a relatively backward Asian country. The heroic exploits of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Red Army extending over two decades, the skilful combination of legal and armed struggle through which they faced up to and finally defeated the Chiang Kai-shek clique, the glorious

victory won against the reactionary forces in 1949, the gigantic measures of agrarian reforms and all-round reconstruction of Chinese society after 1949—all these are inspiring examples of what the people in the so-called ‘third world countries’ can do if only they are led by the revolutionary vanguard of the working class and firmly based on the theory and tactics of Marxism-Leninism.

It is indeed a melancholy thought that three of the tallest stalwarts of this great Asian revolution should die in succession in the course of less than a year: Chou En-lai, Chu Teh and Mao Tse-tung, each of whom in his respective way made outstanding contributions in the struggle against imperialism and Chinese reaction. Together with the Chinese people, progressives throughout the world mourn the loss of these three outstanding leaders of the revolution.

Study of Chinese Society

Mao Tse-tung has acquired for himself a place in human history in that he was the indisputable leader standing above but working closely with all other leaders of the Chinese revolution. His single contribution to the theory and tactics of the world proletarian revolution is the way in which he made a penetrating study of Chinese society and adopted appropriate tactics for the Chinese revolution.

In doing this, of course, he learnt from the experience of the Soviet Union and from the teachings of Lenin and Stalin. He however refused to apply mechanically whatever comes from the Soviet Union unless it conforms to the experience of the people’s own movement in China.

In his well-known work, *The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party*, Mao made a brief but deep study of Chinese society as a whole whose main features were as follows:

(1) The imperialist powers have waged many wars of aggression against China... After defeating China in war they not only occupied many neighbouring countries formerly under her protection but seized or ‘leased’ parts of their territory...In addition to annexing territory they exacted huge indemnities. Thus heavy blows were struck at China’s huge feudal empire.

(2) The imperialist powers have forced China to sign numerous unequal treaties by which they have acquired the right to station land and sea forces and exercise consular jurisdiction in China and they have carved up the whole country into imperialist spheres of influence.

(3) The imperialist powers have gained control of all the important trading ports in China... They have also gained control of China’s customs, foreign trade and communications (sea, land, inland water and air). Thus they have been able to dump their goods in China, turn her into a market for their industrial products and at the same time subordinate her agriculture into their imperialist

needs.¹

Giving several other facts concerning the imperialist penetration into China's economy, polity and social life, Mao came to the conclusion that imperialist aggression against China "hastened the disintegration of feudal society and the growth of elements of capitalism, thereby transforming a feudal into a semi-feudal society." At the same time, "their ruthless rule in China reduced an independent country into a semi-colonial and colonial country." From feudalism to semi-feudalism, from independence to semi-colonial and colonial status, such in short is the transformation made in Chinese society by foreign aggression.

Experience of the Chinese Revolution

It was therefore natural that the people should fight the colonial aggressors. Crucial in this context is the role played by the Chinese bourgeoisie which is "also a victim of imperialist oppression" and therefore, "once led or played a principal role in revolutionary struggle such as the revolution of 1911." In the subsequent period, however,

its upper stratum, namely, the section represented by the reactionary clique within the Kuomintang, collaborated with imperialism, formed a reactionary alliance with the landlord class, betrayed the friends who had helped it — the Communist Party, the proletariat, the peasantry and other sections of the petty-bourgeoisie — betrayed the Chinese revolution and brought about its defeat.²

From this character of the bourgeoisie arises the fact that the Chinese revolution cannot be other than protracted ... The revolutionary forces cannot hold their positions, let alone capture those of the enemy, unless they steel themselves and display their tenacity to the full. It is therefore wrong to think that the forces of the Chinese revolution can be built up in the twinkling of an eye, or that China's revolutionary struggle can triumph overnight.³

While thus sharply negating the left adventurist tactics of seeing the revolution round the corner, Mao fought those who thought that the struggle in China need not be an armed struggle but can be peaceful. Approvingly quoting the generalization made by Stalin that "in China the armed revolution is fighting the armed counter-revolution. That is one of the specific features and one of the advantages of the Chinese revolution", Mao says, "It is wrong to belittle armed struggle, the revolutionary war, guerilla war and army work."⁴

Drawing again from the experience of the Chinese revolution which began with the general strike and armed uprisings of the working class in the main cities but which were ruthlessly suppressed by the ruling classes, Mao drew another important conclusion:

Since China's key cities have long been occupied by the powerful imperialists and their reactionary Chinese allies, it is imperative for the revolutionary ranks to turn the backward villages into advanced,

consolidated base areas, into great military, political, economic and cultural bastions of the revolution from which to fight their vicious enemies who are using the cities for attacks on the rural districts, and in this way gradually to achieve the complete victory of the revolution through protracted fighting.⁵

An equally important lesson drawn by Mao bears repetition in view of the distorted understanding sought to be given by the so-called 'followers of the Mao thought' to the lessons of the Chinese revolution. That lesson is that

stressing armed struggle does not mean abandoning other forms of struggle; on the contrary, armed struggle cannot succeed unless coordinated with other forms of struggle. And stressing the working in the rural base areas does not mean abandoning our work in the cities and in the other vast rural areas which are still under the enemy's rule; on the contrary, without the work in the cities and in those other rural areas, our own rural base areas would be isolated and the revolution would further be defeated. Moreover, the final objective of the revolution is to capture all the cities, the enemy's main bases, and this objective cannot be achieved without adequate work in the cities.⁶

Armed Workers

The importance of destroying the enemy's army, his chief weapon against the people, is also given equal importance in Mao's strategy and tactics. "Besides annihilating the enemy's troops in battle, there is the important task of disintegrating them."⁷

The Mao theory and tactics of armed struggle is thus an adaptation to Chinese conditions of the Leninist teaching on the need for 'disintegrating' the organized army of the ruling classes. "Not a single great revolution", Lenin pointed out in his classical work, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*,

has ever taken place, without the "disorganization" of the army. For the army is the most ossified instrument for supporting the old regime, the most hardened bulwark of bourgeois discipline, buttressing up the rule of capital, and preserving and fostering among the working people the servile spirit of submission and subjection to capital. Counter-revolution has never tolerated, and never could tolerate, armed workers side by side with the army. In France, Engels wrote, the workers emerged armed from every revolution: "Therefore, the disarming of the workers was the first commandment for the bourgeoisie, who were at the helm of the state." The armed workers were the embryo of a new army, the organized nucleus of a new social order. The first commandment of the bourgeoisie was to crush this nucleus and prevent it from growing. The first commandment of every victorious revolution, as Marx and Engels

repeatedly emphasized, was to smash the old army, dissolve it and replace it by a new one. A new social class, when rising to power, never could, and cannot now, attain power and consolidate it except by completely disintegrating the old army ("Disorganization!" the reactionary or just cowardly philistines howl on this score), except by passing through a most difficult and painful period without any army (the great French revolution also passed through such a painful period), and by gradually building up, in the midst of hard civil war, a new army, a new discipline, a new military organization of the new class. Formerly, Kautsky the historian understood this. Now, Kautsky the renegade has forgotten it.⁸

Add to the above Leninist teaching the concept of "armed peasantry" and then you come to the Stalin-Mao concept of "armed revolution confronting the armed counter-revolution." It is easy to see how distant is the Naxalite thesis of a few squads armed with primitive weapons overpowering the modernized army of the bourgeois state.

The perspective of the revolution as outlined by Mao for China was naturally different from what took place in the only socialist revolution that had till then taken place—the Russian revolution. Taking place as it did in a semi-feudal and semi-colonial country as Chinese society was, the Chinese revolution could not follow the same course as the Russian revolution. Many in the Chinese Communist Party therefore opposed the line proposed by Mao who had to carry on a continuous, systematic struggle against right opportunism and left sectarianism—the two maladies against which all Marxist-Leninists throughout the world have to fight.

Lessons for Afro-Asia

The story of the struggles through which the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese revolution developed provides an exceedingly rewarding lesson for all Marxist-Leninists, particularly in Asia and Africa where conditions are approximately the same. The innumerable speeches, articles, reports and notes produced by Mao in the course of a quarter century before the successful end of the revolution as well as in the period following it, should be painstakingly studied by those who are interested in applying the universal principles of Marxism-Leninism to the specific conditions of Asia and Africa.

It would however be running against the basic principles of Marxism-Leninism, against what Mao Tse-tung himself taught and practised, if we in the other Asian and African countries were to mechanically copy what Mao taught and practised in the conditions of China. For, just as pre-revolutionary China was different from pre-revolutionary Russia, so are today's Asian and African countries different from pre-revolutionary China. The essence of Mao Tse-tung's teaching, as the essence of the teachings of all Marxist-Leninists, is that the

concrete conditions in every country should be studied concretely and in an all-sided manner, without abandoning the universal principles of Marxism—class struggle leading to revolutionary seizure of power; the necessity of adopting all forms of struggle including the lowest and most elementary forms which are required by concrete conditions while keeping in view the inevitability of armed struggle; the leading role of the proletariat over all other sections of the toiling millions; the importance of concentrating the fire on and forging unity against the most reactionary sections of the ruling classes; the interdependence of the national struggle in every country on the one hand and the international struggle of the world proletariat against world capitalism on the other. It would be as contrary to the spirit of Marxism to fail to take account of the concrete conditions in a particular country at a particular moment as it would be to abandon the above-mentioned universal truths which are applicable to every country without exception.

Three Interdependent Factors

The signal contribution which Mao and the Chinese Communist Party led by him made to the theory of Marxism-Leninism is the interdependence of three major factors of the revolution—the united front, the armed struggle and the Communist Party—for successfully carrying out the democratic revolution to its end and developing it into the socialist revolution. In doing this of course, he was not breaking an entirely new ground but treading along the path mapped out earlier by Lenin in his monumental works such as *Two Tactics of Social Democracy*, *State and Revolution*, and *Proletarian Revolution and Renegade Kautsky*. He however was further deepening and enriching the ideas elaborated by Lenin who himself was basing his own teachings on the path earlier mapped out by Marx and Engels. The innumerable twists and turns through which the Chinese revolution moved forward and the particular tactical line adopted by the Chinese Communist Party under Mao's leadership to suit the concrete needs of that particular epoch and moment are highly instructive for anybody who wants to understand how the universal truths of Marxism are to be applied to a country like China before the revolution.

It is however surprising that the prestige of the very same Mao Tse-tung should be utilized to prop up the "theory" that the essence of Mao's teachings is that armed struggle has to be resorted to under all circumstances and everywhere, without regard to the concrete conditions of the particular country and the particular phase of the struggle and in complete isolation from the necessity of carrying on forms of struggle other than the armed.

The tortuous course of the development of relations between the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party—from the early twenties when the Communist Party was working from within the Kuomintang to the years of Chiang Kai-shek's annihilation campaigns against the

Communist Party and the Red Army; then to the period of the Communist Party's struggle for united front with the Kuomintang; the well-known episode in which the Communist Party rescued Chiang Kai-shek from the generals who had arrested him; the posting of Chou En-lai at Chungking as the representative of the Red Army and the Communist Party; culminating in the final call of the Communist Party towards the end of the anti-Japanese war for a coalition government with the Kuomintang and, on the failure of this move, in the launching of the three-year-long civil war leading to the defeat of the Kuomintang, is a saga of glorious struggle whose experience is found generalized in Mao's works.

Errors and Distortions

Here is no magic formula as the self-styled 'followers of the thought of Mao' would want us to believe—a formula such as 'the barrel of the gun' unrelated to the painstaking ideological and political work which is necessary for building the revolutionary party of the working class and for forging the unity of all anti-imperialist and anti-feudal classes. Here, on the other hand, is a concrete analysis of the specific conditions of each particular moment, with all its variety and all-sidedness. Respect for Mao, the revolutionary theoretician, would demand of us that we too adopt the same method, make the same concrete study of the specific conditions in our country at every particular moment as the situation changes, and not copy what the Chinese Communists had to do under different conditions in the world and in their country.

It is unfortunate that Mao in his last days allowed himself to be projected as a leader to whom all the achievements of the Chinese revolution are to be credited. We may in this context usefully compare Mao with Stalin. The following assessment of Stalin in the *Short History of the C P S U* as revised in 1974 would be instructive:

Along with other leaders of the party and government, Stalin as a prominent organizer and theoretician, worked to carry through socialist revolution in the USSR, headed the struggle against enemies of Leninism (Troskyites, right opportunists and bourgeois nationalists) exposed the intrigues of the capitalist encirclement and did much to enhance the Soviet Union's defence capability. Moreover, he did much to promote the world communist and the entire liberation movement. All this earned him considerable prestige and popularity.

But with time all the achievements of the Soviet people, led by the party, began to be ascribed to him. Stalin's personality cult gradually took shape. Stalin overestimated his own contribution to the successes of the party and the whole Soviet people, believed he was infallible and began to abuse the power placed in his hands. This was furthered by some negative features of his character. He began to depart from the Leninist principles of collective leadership and

the norms of party life, He committed particularly grave errors in the last years of his life. There were unjustified limitations on democracy, flagrant violence of socialist legality and unfounded acts of repression.

The errors and distortions linked with the personality cult damaged the cause of communist construction. But they neither changed nor could change the nature of socialist society, the genuinely people's nature of the Soviet system, and they could not shake or weaken the theoretical, political, and organizational functions in the CPSU's activities. The policy pursued by the party expressed the basic interests of the Soviet people, always enjoyed their support and ensured the successful building of socialism and communism in the USSR.

While it would be wrong to draw an exact parallel, a close resemblance can be seen between the personalities of Stalin and Mao. Each of them in his respective way played outstanding roles in the development of the revolution in his country particularly, and in the world as a whole. Each of them therefore acquired prestige and popularity among the revolutionaries throughout the world. However, while they undoubtedly played the leading role in the development of the revolution, they were great because they were the leaders of the collective team -- Stalin of the Central Committee of the CPSU and of the Executive Committee of the Communist International, Mao of the Central Committee of the CCP. It would be as foolish to deny the contributions made by the outstanding colleagues of Stalin and Mao in the development of the revolution which they respectively headed, as it would be to deny the fact that among all the leading comrades who developed the revolution, Stalin was the most outstanding in the CPSU and in the Communist International, while Mao played the same role in the CCP. What came to be known as the cult of Stalin's personality was a distortion of the actual process of the revolution. So is what has now come to be known as the "thought of Mao Tse-tung."

Healing the Rift

The consequences of the inner-party struggle which appears to have been going on in the Chinese Communist Party made the last years of Mao's life a sad story. One fails to understand, for instance, how non-party youths could be mobilized against the party leadership under the instructions of the very same Mao who had put the greatest emphasis on the unity of the party and its leading role. Much that has happened within China in the name of the 'Cultural Revolution', and in the world communist movement after the Sino-Soviet rift came into the open, saddens everybody who admires the Chinese revolution and the Chinese Communist Party as a leading contingent of the world proletarian revolution.

Nor can anybody who has a genuine interest in the world proletarian revolution help being sad when he or she sees the manner in which the leaders of the CPSU and the CCP have been and are still dealing with the revolution and party in the other country. One cannot but endorse the moving appeal made by the venerable Ho Chi-minh in his last will and testament that this rift in the socialist world and the communist movement should be healed as quickly as possible.

Once that is done, the outstanding personality of Mao would come clear, with all his magnificent achievements as well as the few errors which he undoubtedly committed, particularly in his last years. The Mao that would emerge out of this would be neither the all-powerful, all-knowing, semi-divine father figure as the self-styled 'followers of the thought of Mao' would have us believe, nor the devil incarnate as is depicted by the "anti-Maoists", beginning with the leaders of the CPSU. Mao would then take his place as the most outstanding leader of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and as a theoretician whose teachings are of great importance to the revolutionaries of all Third World countries.

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- ¹ Mao Tse-tung, "The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party", *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol II, Nabajatak Prakashan, Calcutta 1973, p 311.
- ² *Ibid.*, p 316.
- ³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p 316 17.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p 317.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁸ V I Lenin, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, Progress Publishers, Moscow 1970, pp 59-60.