

Whither China? - Sheng-wu-lien

The most famous text from 1968 by the Hunan Provincial Proletarian Revolutionary Great Alliance Committee (Sheng-wu-lien), the most influential of the ultra-left currents which developed during the Chinese Cultural Revolution. While it is politically problematic in some areas, for example despite being opposed to Mao's policies it does not escape the framework of Maoism, it does put forward a working class perspective.

The development of new productive forces in China today has brought in conflict the class that represents the new productive forces and the decaying class that represents the production relations which impede the progress of history. It will inevitably lead to a great social revolution, and a new society will inevitably be born amid the fierce flames.

... People believe that China will pass peacefully into the society depicted in the May 7 directive.¹ But what happens in reality? "Peaceful transition" is only another name for "peaceful evolution". It can only cause China to drift farther and farther away from the "commune" depicted in the May 7 directive and nearer and nearer to the existing society of the Soviet Union ... The rule of the new bureaucratic bourgeoisie must be overthrown by force in order to solve the problem of political power. Empty shouting about realization of the May 7 directive without any reference to power seizure and utter smashing of the old state machinery will of course be an "utopian" dream.

Lenin once made this famous statement: "All revolutions – provided they are real revolutions – are in the final analysis changes of classes. Therefore the best means of increasing the awareness of the masses and exposing the deception of the masses with revolutionary vows is the analysis of the class changes that have taken place or are taking place in these revolutions." Let us analyse the class changes that resulted from the January revolution in accordance with this teaching, so as to expose the deception of the masses with revolutionary VOWS ...

Facts as revealed by the masses and their wrath told people initially that this class of "Red" capitalists had completely become a decaying class that hindered the progress of history, and that the relations between them and the people in general had changed from relations between the leaders and the led to those between the rulers and the ruled, the exploiters and the exploited, from the relations of revolutionaries of equal standing to those between the oppressors and the oppressed. The special privileges and high salaries of the class of "Red" capitalists was built on the basis of the oppression and exploitation of the broad masses of the people. In order to realize the "People's Commune of China", it was necessary to overthrow this class ...

In the struggle to seize power in these units, the Marxist principle of smashing the old state machinery must be observed. Here there is no place for reformism, combining two into one, or peaceful transition. "The old state machinery must be smashed utterly. The old system of exploitation, revisionist system and bureaucratic organs must be utterly smashed." The programme of the first great proletarian political revolution was put forward in editorials in an embryonic, not very concrete state in the final stages of the storm of the January revolution.² The decaying class that should be overthrown, the old state machinery that should be smashed, and even social problems, on which people formerly had not dared to express a dissident view, were put forward. This great development was an inevitable result of the courage and pioneering spirit demonstrated by the proletariat in the storm of the January revolution.

Problems of system, policy and guideline touched upon in the January revolution were mainly those connected with the capitalist labour employment system of contract workers and casual workers as well as the revisionist movement of going to hilly and rural areas.

Why did Comrade Mao Tse-tung, who energetically advocated the “commune”, suddenly oppose the establishment of “Shanghai People’s Commune” in January? That is something which the revolutionary people find it hard to understand.

Chairman Mao, who foresaw the “commune” as a political structure which must be realised in the first cultural revolution, suddenly put forward “Revolutionary committees are fine!”

Revolution must progress along a zigzagging way. It must go through a prolonged course of “struggle-failure-struggle again-failure again-struggle again till final victory”.

Why can’t communes be established immediately?

This is the first time the revolutionary people tried to overthrow a powerful enemy. How shallow their knowledge of this revolution was! They not only failed to realize voluntarily the necessity of thoroughly smashing the old state machinery and overhaul some of the social systems, but did not see clearly that the enemy formed a class, and the revolutionary ranks were dominated by ideas of “revolution to dismiss officials” and “revolution to drag them out”. The development of the wisdom of the masses had not yet attained the degree at which it would be possible to reform society. As a result, the fruit of revolution was in the final analysis taken by the capitalist class. (The Communist Manifesto).

Any revolution must necessarily involve the army. Since a Red capitalist class is already formed in China, the army of course cannot detach itself from this reality. Yet the January storm has not touched in any way the vital problem of all revolutions – the problem of the army. Thus it may be seen that the revolution lacked depth and remained at a low stage of development. The degree of maturity of the political thought of the revolutionary people, too, was in conformity with this low level revolution – it too remained at a very immature stage ...

The putting forward of three-in-one combination³ amounts to reinstatement of the bureaucrats already toppled in the January revolution. Inevitably it will be the form of political power to be usurped by the bourgeoisie, at which the Army and local bureaucrats are to play a leading role ...

The force and intensity of the January revolution caused the bureaucrats to carry out a hurried usurpation of power ...

The “Red” capitalist class gained almost overwhelming ascendancy in February and March. The assets (means of production and power) were seized from the revolutionary people and returned to the bureaucrats. In February Lung Shu-chin, Liu Tzu-yun, Chang Po-sen, Huá Kuo-feng and bureaucrats in all the country and their agents at the Centre wielded unlimited power. It was their heyday, while the power of the revolutionary people dropped to zero. Moreover, large numbers of them were thrown into prison under the control of the bourgeois state machine – Kung-chien-fa.⁴ Intoxicated by his victory of February-March, Chou En-lai – at present the general representative of China’s Red capitalist class – hurriedly tried to set up revolutionary committees in all parts of the country. If this bourgeois plan had been fulfilled, the proletariat would have retreated to its grave. Therefore, without waiting for the establishment of all the revolutionary committees, the Central Cultural Revolution Group issued the order to hit back. After that the great August local revolutionary war in the country began to ferment.

In the struggle to hit back at the February adverse current, the important sign of the revolution’s entry into a higher stage was that the problem of the Army really began to make

itself felt. The revolutionary people had very childish ideas about the Army during the January revolution, believing that as soon as the local capitalist-roaders were overthrown, the armed forces would unite with the revolutionary people to suppress the capitalist-roaders in accordance with Chairman Mao's order of union from the upper to the lower levels. The sanguinary facts of the February adverse current told the people that the upper-to-lower order alone could not bring about an implementation of Chairman Mao's intentions in the armed forces because unanimity of the interests of the capitalist-roaders in the Army and those of the local capitalist-roaders would prevent the Army from carrying out Chairman Mao's revolutionary line. It was necessary to carry out cultural revolution from the lower level upward in the Army and to rely on the people's revolution – the locomotive of progress of history – in order to change the state of opposition between the military and the civilian population brought about by the control of the Army by the bureaucrats ...

Due to historical limitations of the time, many of the writings about the Army are very immature and have great shortcomings. But since these writings are new things, they will be proved by history to be significant things.

How well Engels spoke when he commented on utopian socialism: "Let the pedlars of the circle of authors solemnly find fault with the imaginations which at present can only make people laugh. Let them gratify themselves with the thought that their strict way of thinking is superior to such mad ideas. What makes us glad is the gifted ideological buds and gifted ideas that show themselves everywhere by breaking through the outer shell of imagination. These things the mediocre people cannot see."

There are two essential points in the writings about the Army:

It is now seen that the Army now is different from the people's army before the liberation. Before the liberation the army and the people fought together to overthrow imperialism, bureaucratic capitalism, and feudalism. The relation between the Army and the people was like that between fish and water. After the liberation, as the target of revolution has changed from imperialism, bureaucratic capitalism and feudalism to capitalist-roaders, and these capitalist-roaders are power-holders in the army, some of the armed forces in the revolution have not only changed their blood-and-flesh relations with the people that obtained before the liberation, but have even become tools for suppressing revolution. Therefore, if the first great proletarian cultural revolution is to succeed, a radical change in the army will be necessary. The "ultra-left faction" has found the basis for its thinking in a quotation from Chairman Mao. In the same year after Chairman Mao issued the order for the armed forces to live in their barracks, (they are) separated from the masses.

It is now seen that a revolutionary war in the country is necessary if the revolutionary people today want to overcome the armed Red capitalist class ...

Let us look at the content of this new danger. On the one hand, owing to the nakedness of the "February suppression of rebellion", even the "Red" capitalist class keenly sensed the inevitability of its own defeat. After May, China's "Red" capitalists changed their tactics. In many places there appeared a trend of cadres "making appearances". One after another Red capitalists like Sung Jen-ch'ung of the Northeast and Chang Po-sen of Hunan – bloodsucking vampires who used to ride on the back of the people – suddenly displayed "fervor" for the slaves' revolutionary struggles. Individually they declared support for the revolutionary masses in their bombardment of the military region or district commands. As at that time the revolutionary people had not yet tried to overthrow the capitalist-roaders as a class, and as the proletariat and the broad masses of revolutionary people were still under the influence of the doctrine of "revolution through dragging out people" and "revolution through dismissal of officials", people believed that the purpose of the cultural revolution was the purging of individual capitalist-roaders and that it was proper to use some of the

revolutionary leading cadres (who were also bureaucrats) for hitting other bureaucrats. As a result, this tactic of all big and small Chang Po-sens easily deceived the people. This determined the objective inevitability of usurpation of the fruit of victory of the August storm by the bourgeoisie ...

... the wise supreme commander Comrade Mao Tse-tung once more made a big retreat after September, in disregard of demands by impatient revolutionaries for victory. A political situation of bourgeois usurpation of power came about with the establishment of revolutionary committees or preparatory groups for revolutionary committees.

The extent of this retreat was unprecedented. The unlimited relaxation of the cadre policy after September was in fact an extensive concession to the capitalist-roaders, who were allowed to mount the stage again. An outstanding example was the treatment accorded to Ch'en Tsai-tao. The Chairman went so far as to say that Ch'en studied very well and could come back to work again.

... The revolutionary forces in Hunan which bombarded Chou En-lai were not annihilated. Instead, they have formed Sheng-wu-lien and have made progress in certain respects.

To seize the fruit of victory won by the proletariat in August and turn the mass dictatorship again into bureaucratic rule, the bourgeois in the revolutionary committees must first disarm the working class. The guns in the hands of workers have boundlessly increased the power of the working class. The fact is a mortal threat to the bourgeoisie, who is afraid of it. Out of spontaneous hatred for the bureaucrats who tried to snatch the fruit of victory, the revolutionary people shouted a resounding revolutionary slogan: "Surrender of arms amounts to suicide!" They formed a spontaneous, nationwide mass "arms concealment movement" for the armed overthrow of the new bureaucratic bourgeoisie.

The arms grabbing movement of August was great. It was not only unprecedented in capitalist countries. Moreover, it accomplished the fact of turning the whole nation into soldiers for the first time in socialist countries. Before the cultural revolution the bureaucrats dared not really hand over arms to the people. The militia is only a facade behind which the bureaucrats control the armed strength of the people. It is certainly not an armed force of the working class, but a docile tool in the hands of the bureaucrats. In the arms-seizing movement, the masses, instead of receiving arms like favours from above, for the first time seized arms from the hands of the bureaucrats by relying on the brute force of the revolutionary people themselves. For the first time the workers had their "own" arms. Chairman Mao's rousing call, "Arm the Left!" was an intensive concentration of the courage of the working class. But the September 5 order completely nullified the call to "arm the Left". The working class was disarmed. The bureaucrats again came back to power ...

The July 1st editorial of 1967 raised the question of Party building. During the violent class struggle in July and August, a very small number of "ultra-Leftists" put forward the demand that the "ultra-Left should have its own political party... To make revolution it is necessary to have a revolutionary party."

Since the past few months, the class struggle has entered a higher stage. What sort of a stage is it? In this stage the revolutionary people have already accumulated the rich experience of "redistribution of assets and power" twice (the January revolution and August revolution). This experience is the programme for the first cultural revolution produced by the January revolution, for a great revolution in China in which one class should overthrow another. It is "to overthrow the newborn bourgeoisie and establish the 'People's Commune of China' – a new society free from bureaucrats like the Paris Commune" ...

The reverses and higher-stage struggle after September also tell the revolutionary people why neither the January revolution nor the August revolution ended in thorough victory, why, after such prolonged struggle, the fruit of victory of revolution was taken away by bourgeois bureaucrats, why the old order was restored everywhere, why the bourgeoisie was able to recapture the assets and power which they had lost in August, and why the courage and pioneering spirit displayed by the proletariat in the January revolution and the August storm was almost completely extinguished and submerged. The appearance of a large-scale adverse current tells people that all illusions about bourgeois bureaucrats and distrust in the people's own strength must be thoroughly abandoned, and that the revolution of one class overthrowing another must be prosecuted.

However, the revolutionary committee is a product of the "revolution of dismissal of officials". In Hunan, Chang P'ing-hua and Liu Tzu-yun were dismissed from office, but did not remove the acute antagonism between the new bourgeoisie and the masses of the people. Instead, the acute antagonism between the preparatory group for revolutionary committee and the people as represented by Sheng-wu-lien is present in the new situation. A new bourgeois reactionary line and a new adverse current of capitalist restoration have again appeared, but a thoroughly stable "distribution of assets and power" has not been realized. The revolution by dismissal of officials is only bourgeois reformism, which changes in a zigzagging way the new bureaucratic bourgeois rule before the cultural revolution into another kind of bourgeois rule of bourgeois bureaucrats and representatives from several supporting mass organizations. The revolutionary committee is a product of bourgeois reformism.

Problems cannot be solved by merely dismissing several officials from office. Bourgeois reformism proves futile. The result of reformism – the revolutionary committee – again brings about a new bourgeois dictatorship, which arouses even more violent opposition from the people ...

The people should be made to understand this truth and should make the resolution to act, instead of our making the resolution for them. "He is not a thorough materialist who ignores the role of the teacher by negative example," because the "various incidents and changes in the struggle against capital cannot but make people realize – and more in defeat than in victory – that the panaceas so dear to them are completely useless. The defeats also enable them to understand more profoundly the true conditions for the liberation of the working class." (Engels). Revolutions often take various reformist, unthorough roads. It is only when all panaceas are proved useless that the revolutionary people would resolve to follow the most painful and most destructive, but also the most thorough and revolutionary road. The struggle in the transition period of revolutionary committees will inevitably disillusion the masses about the panacea of bourgeois reformism which they love so much. Chairman Mao says: "Buddhist idols are set up by the peasants. When the time comes the peasants will throw away these idols with their own hands. There is no need for others to do it too soon." In the not far distant future the revolutionary people will surely smash to pieces with their own iron hands the newborn red political power which they have secured with their own blood and lives ...

As a result of the practice of struggle having gained rich experience and entered a higher stage, the maturity of the political thinking of the revolutionary people of China has also entered a higher stage. A new trend of thought (called "ultra-Left trend of thought" by the enemy), including "overthrow of the new bureaucratic bourgeoisie", "abolition of bureaucratic organs", "thorough smashing of the state machine", etc. wanders among the revolutionary people like a "spectre" in the eyes of the enemy. The weapon of political thinking with which the revolutionary masses are to win utter victory in the proletarian socialist great revolution has begun to appear in a new form in the "ultra-Left faction". The

thought of Mao Tse-tung, which is carrying out a new social revolution in China, will gradually wake up the masses from all contradictions of the past. The revolutionary people are beginning to understand gradually in practice why revolution is necessary, who are to be liquidated in the revolution, and how revolution is to be carried out. Revolutionary struggle begins to change from the stage of spontaneity to that of consciousness, from necessity to freedom ...

The 9th National Congress of the Party about to be convened is not expected to be able to thoroughly settle the question of where the Chinese Communist Party is going. The political party that is produced in accordance with the provisions promulgated by the Centre for rehabilitation, regulation and rebuilding of the Party (if such a party can be formed) will necessarily be a party of bourgeois reformism that serves the bourgeois usurpers in the revolutionary committees. The convention of the 9th Congress will only be a reflection of the transition period of local “revolutionary committees” in the Centre. That decides that the 9th Congress will not be able to thoroughly settle the question of where China is going (the core of which is where the Chinese communist Party is going to and where the Chinese PLA is going to).

When a truly stable victory gradually becomes possible, the following several questions will take a prominent position.

The unevenness of the revolution will assume a prominent position. The possibility of winning true, thorough victory in one or several provinces first, overthrowing the product of bourgeois reformism – the rule of revolutionary committees, and re-establishing a political power of the Paris Commune type – becomes a crucial question as to whether the revolution can develop in depth at high speed. Unlike the preceding stage of blind, spontaneous development, here unevenness of the revolution no longer plays an immaterial role.

To really overthrow the rule of the new aristocracy and thoroughly smash the old state machinery, it will be necessary to go into the question of assessment of the past 17 years.

This is also a major problem of teaching the people fundamentally why it is necessary to carry out the great cultural revolution and what the ultimate object of the revolution is.

To really make the revolution victorious, it will be necessary to settle the “question of primary importance in revolution” – who are our enemies, and who are our friends? – and to make a new class analysis of China’s society, where “a new situation has arisen as a result of great class changes”, so as to re-organise the class ranks, rally our friends and hit at our enemies ...

... The real revolution, the revolution to negate the past 17 years, has basically not yet begun, and that we should now enter the stage of tackling the fundamental questions of China’s revolution ...

The 24th directive amounts to a declaration that Hunan is the vanguard area of revolutionary struggle of the whole country. Thus the genesis and development of Hunan’s Sheng-wu-lien is an outstanding representative of the growth in strength of the proletariat since September. Sheng-wu-lien was in fact born of the experience of the (people-run) civil offence and armed defence command headquarters – a form of mass dictatorship of the January revolution. It is a power organ of mass dictatorship of a higher order than those of January and August. It may be compared to the soviet of the February revolution in USSR when power was usurped by the bourgeoisie, while the preparatory group for the provincial revolutionary committee (Sheng-ko-ch’ou) is comparable to the bourgeois Provisional Government of that time. The opposition between Sheng-wu-lien and Sheng-ko-ch’ou is the new situation in which “power organs of two systems co-exist” but in practice power is in the hands of Sheng-ko-ch’ou – the bourgeois provisional government.

Sheng-wu-lien is a newborn sprout comparable to the soviets. It is the embryonic form of a more mature “commune” than that of January and August. No matter how the bourgeoisie alternately employ suppression and the reformist tactic of encouraging the activities of a third force, Sheng-wu-lien as a true newborn Red political power will surely grow and gather strength continuously amid big gales and storms ...

As has been said in the preceding paragraphs, the basic social contradictions that gave rise to the great proletarian cultural revolution are contradictions between the rule of the new bureaucratic bourgeoisie and the mass of the people. The development and intensification of these contradictions decides that society needs a more thorough change – overthrow of the rule of the bureaucratic bourgeoisie, thorough smashing of the old state machinery, realization of social revolution, realization of a redistribution of assets and power, and establishment of a new society – “People’s Commune of China” ...

At present, are these basic contradictions of Chinese society resolved? Is the object of the first great cultural revolution fulfilled?

As has been said above, the form of political power is superficially changed. The old provincial Party committee and old military district command have become “the revolutionary committee” or “preparatory group for revolutionary committee”. However, old bureaucrats continue to play the leading role in the “new political power”. The contradiction between the old provincial Party committee and old military district command on the one side and the people on the other, and the contradiction between the capitalist-roaders of the 47th Army and the people, remain basically unresolved. The contradiction between the new bureaucratic bourgeoisie and the mass of people is also basically unresolved, but assumes the new form of contradiction between Sheng-wu-lien and the “new political power”. The overthrow of the new bureaucratic bourgeoisie, changes in the armed forces, establishment of communes and such basic social changes, which the first great cultural revolution must fulfil, are not fulfilled. Of course, such “redistribution of assets and power” were temporarily and in a limited way realized during the January revolution and the August storm. But the fruit of victory of both the January revolution and the August storm has been basically usurped by the bourgeoisie. Social reforms were aborted, social changes were not consolidated and thoroughly realized, and the “end” of the first great cultural revolution has not been reached. As the masses have said, “Everything remains the same after so much ado.” ...

The new trend of thought (the ultra-Left trend of thought) is not yet quite mature and is still very weak, but its overcoming of the apparently powerful traditional ideas and the rotten, mummified doctrine of second revolution will be an inevitable tendency of historical development.

The bourgeoisie always represent the form of political power of their rule as the most perfect, flawless thing in the world that serves the whole people. The new bureaucratic bourgeoisie and the brutes of the Right-Wing of the petty bourgeoisie who depend on them are doing exactly that. They ignore the provisional character of the “revolutionary committee” and nauseatingly praise it. Marxist-Leninists must ruthlessly expose the suppression of the revolutionary people by the revolutionary committee, energetically declare that the People’s Commune of China is the society that we proletariat and revolutionary people must bring about in this cultural revolution, and energetically make known the inevitable tendency of the revolutionary committee to collapse ...

We really believe that ninety per cent of the senior cadres should stand aside, that at most they can only be objects to be educated and united. This is because they have already constituted a decaying class with its own particular “interests”. Their relation with the people has changed from the relation between the leaders and the led in the past to that between

exploiters and the exploited, the oppressors and the oppressed. Most of them consciously or unconsciously yearn for the capitalist road, and protect and develop capitalist things. The rule of their class has completely blocked the development of history ... However they (the bureaucrats) hit back at and carry out counter-reckoning against the revolutionary people with increasing madness, pushing themselves nearer and nearer the guillotine. All this proves that no decaying class in history would voluntarily make an exit from the stage of history.

In the new society of the Paris Commune type this class will be overthrown. This was demonstrated by ironbound facts of the great changes of the January revolution and the August storm so unexpected by mediocre people. The class (of bureaucrats) will be replaced by cadres with true proletarian authority naturally produced by the revolutionary people in the struggle to overthrow this decaying class. These cadres are members of the commune. They have no special privileges. Economically they get the same treatment as the masses in general. They may be dismissed or changed at any time in accordance with the demands of the masses. These new, authoritative cadres have not yet made their appearance.

But these cadres will be spontaneously produced following the increasing maturity of the political thinking of the revolutionary people. This is an inevitable result of the political and ideological maturity of the proletariat ...

If dictatorship by the revolutionary committee is regarded as the ultimate object of the first great cultural revolution, then China will inevitably go the way of Soviet Union and the people may again return to the fascist bloody rule of the capitalists. The revolutionary committee's road of bourgeois reformism is impracticable ...

The commune of the "Ultra-Left faction" will not conceal its viewpoints and intentions. We publicly declare that our object of establishing the "People's Commune of China" can be attained only by overthrowing the bourgeois dictatorship and revisionist system of the revolutionary committee with brute force. Let the new bureaucratic bourgeoisie tremble before the true socialist revolution that shakes the world! What the proletariat can lose in this revolution is only their chains, what they gain will be the whole world!

The China of tomorrow will be the world of the "Commune".

Taken from <http://www.marxists.de/china/sheng/whither.htm>

- 1. May 7, 1967, Directive of Mao Tse-tung, called for self-rectification campaign in the Army.
- 2. January 1968 mass workers' upheavals – strikes, violent demonstrations, etc. – the first time the industrial working class entered the arena of struggle in China since the 1925-7 Revolution. It started in Shanghai and spread to many other cities. It frightened Mao and his entourage, and led to a counter-movement against "anarchism", and "spontaneity" in February.
- 3. To counter the demand for a Chinese "Commune" raised in the January 1968 days, Mao himself called for the formation of a "one-in-three alliance": that of the Army, the Party cadres and the "revolutionary rebels" – with the Army holding the dominant role.
- 4. Footnote missing in original