

Misreading Mao: On Class and Class Struggle

PAUL HEALY

School of Humanities, University of New England, Armidale, Australia

ABSTRACT *It has been argued frequently that Mao Zedong's thought is a significant departure from classical Marxism. This break, usually dated from the mid-1950s, supposedly occurred in two areas. First, the primacy of the economic characteristic of orthodox Marxism was replaced by a "voluntarism," which emphasised politics and consciousness. Secondly, whereas classes are defined in economic terms in the classical Marxist tradition, Mao defined them by reference to political behaviour and ideological viewpoint. This definition derives from the primacy Mao is said to have accorded to the superstructure. This article rejects the second of these interpretations and argues that a fundamental continuity exists between Mao's post-1955 propositions on classes and class struggle and those advanced by orthodox Marxism. In conformity with classical Marxism, Mao conceived of classes as economic categories. Further, both Mao and classical Marxism saw classes as active participants in class struggle in the superstructure called into being by the contradiction between the forces and relations of production. Finally, Mao shared with orthodox Marxism the idea that economic classes are represented in the superstructure by a range of political agencies and ideological forms.*

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For almost three decades the theoretical impasse of Marxism has been lamented. Such observations have been made in relation to Marxism as a whole (see Callinicos, 1982) and, more specifically, in relation to class analysis and the theorisation of class struggle (see Wood, 1986). In one sense this "crisis of Marxism" is not surprising. With the demise of the Soviet Union and the socialist states of Eastern Europe, the apparent retreat from socialism in China and Vietnam, and the withering of Marxist parties in most Western societies, Marxism has been in decline both politically and intellectually. According to Wood (1986: 8, 22-3), however, the origins of the "crisis" can be traced back further, to the 1960s and, specifically, to Western Marxism's infatuation with Maoism.

Wood (1986: 22) argued that, because of the conditions of "backwardness" and an undeveloped working class, Maoism is characterised by the "autonomization of political action and ideological struggle" from material conditions. Political action, ideology and cultural struggle are seen as "largely autonomous" from the economic

Correspondence Address: Paul Healy, School of Humanities, University of New England, Armidale, NSW 2351, Australia. Email: phealy@une.edu.au

realm. This constitutes an "extreme voluntarism," which reaches its height during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. It is this autonomisation that is at the root of Western Marxism's malaise. The "insights" of Maoism on matters of class, class struggle, the social formation and social change, particularly in the period of socialist transition, have inspired some to attempt to reinterpret classical Marxism. We can see this in Poulantzas' work on class, socialism and the state, Althusser's structuralist Marxism, and Hindess and Hirst's rejection of the "economism" and "reductionism" of orthodox Marxism. Indeed, Mao Zedong's thoughts on the questions of economic development and class struggle in the period of socialist transition have been portrayed, and are presented as such by Wood (1986: 22-3), as constituting a significant break from orthodox Marxism. For the "New True Socialism," as Wood termed it, this break constituted a possible panacea for the problems of Marxist theory. For Wood, however, it is an unfortunate aberration from Marxism, and the point of inspiration for the displacement of class from Marxist theory and socialist politics.

Wood framed her argument in relation to an undefined "Maoism," rather than Mao's thought specifically. None the less, similar interpretations exist in the work of specialist Mao scholars. A recurrent theme in this literature is that Mao undertook a dramatic theoretical departure from classical Marxism. While many point to 1957 as the year of its occurrence, 1955 is often posited as the year in which this departure began. This break, so it is argued, occurred along two related dimensions. The first of these is the connection between economic base and superstructure. The primacy of the economic characteristic of orthodox Marxism was replaced by a "voluntarism" which emphasised politics, consciousness and human will as the decisive elements in social development (see Healy, 1997: 117-53). The second dimension of Mao's alleged break from classical Marxism, which is my focus here, occurs in relation to the conception of class and class struggle. Whereas classes are defined in economic terms in the classical Marxist tradition, Mao defined them in a superstructural sense by reference to political behaviour and ideological viewpoint. This definition derives from the primacy Mao allegedly accorded to the superstructure. Stuart Schram and Richard Kraus are two proponents of such a position.

Schram (1977: 72), for example, has argued that Mao emphasised subjective, rather than economic, factors in the determination of class membership. While orthodox Marxism defined classes economically in terms of their relationship to the means of production, Mao defined classes "ideologically and politically" (Schram, 1984: 46, 49). Such an approach was possible for Mao precisely because of his "stress on the *primacy* of politics" (Schram, 1984: 51). Schram (1971: 240-1; 1984: 35-7) has argued that 1957 was a significant year in terms of Mao's thinking about classes as politico-ideological categories and about the scope of class struggle in the period of socialist transition, thinking quite at odds with orthodox Marxism. The "voluntaristic" tendencies which underpin this were always present in Mao's thought (Schram, 1983: 76, 79). However, they were somewhat "submerged" until 1955 when Mao delivered his 31 July speech on the question of agricultural co-operativisation (Schram, 1977: 79-81). Between 1955 and 1957 this "voluntarism" became increasingly extreme (Schram, 1978: 401), to such an extent that the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution are described (Schram, 1967: 160; 1983: 79) as "orgies of voluntarism." The year 1955 is thus presented by Schram (1971: 236-40;

1978: 401) as a decisive one in the development of Mao's thought, as the turning point between the submergence of an earlier "voluntarism," and its re-emergence in more pronounced form.¹ Kraus (1977: 65-7; 1981: 9-15, 26-8, 64-6, 89-90, 101-10) has presented a similar analysis, arguing that from 1957 Mao's thinking on the matter of class breaks with the Marxist-Leninist tradition. Whereas Marxism defined class position in economic terms, Mao came to define it in superstructural terms, specifically on the basis of political behaviour.

If this was the case, it would indeed represent a significant break on Mao's part from the terrain of orthodox Marxism, for it would entail the rejection of the classical conception of the structure of the social formation, and the abandonment of the classical view of political and ideological struggles as being, or representing, the struggles of economic classes. In contrast to these accounts, I argue that a fundamental continuity exists between Mao's post-1955 propositions on the matter of classes and class struggle and those advanced by orthodox Marxism. In essence my argument can be summarised as a set of related propositions. First, that in conformity with classical Marxism, Mao conceived of classes as economic categories; they were bodies of human agents occupying specific locations in a determinate pattern of production relations. The principal point of delineation between classes was ownership and control over the means of production. Secondly, that both Mao and the classical Marxist tradition saw classes as active participants in class struggle in the superstructure. For both they were politico-ideological agents called into being by the contradiction between the forces and relations of production. Thirdly, that Mao shared with orthodox Marxism the notion that economic classes are represented in the superstructure by a range of political agencies, ideological structures and forms. The state, political parties, modes of thought and ideological organs all possess a class character. They therefore express class interests and function on behalf of specific classes. In short, then, Mao's position on classes and class struggle occupies the same theoretical terrain as do the conceptions of classical Marxism (see Healy, 1987: 363-422). The interpretation offered here is a fairly detailed one. This is necessary because of the apparent widespread and long-standing misreading of Mao's pronouncements on these matters. I turn first to an examination of Mao's economic identification of class.

The Economic Definition of Class

For Mao (1976: 103) the primary division of social life was that of class: "[Everything in] this world can be categorized," he noted, "and [with] mankind the division is by [social] class."² In a 1956 text, Mao (1977b: 325) outlined the progress achieved over the years in the Party's understanding of Chinese rural conditions, indicating that as its "grasp of Marxism" developed, initial views of the countryside "as a plane" had been supplanted by the realisation that it was "a solid." The conscious adoption of a class analysis had revealed the countryside to be "stratified into the rich, the poor and the very poor, into farm labourers, poor peasants, middle peasants, rich peasants and landlords." These comments are suggestive of an economic designation of class: very poor farm labourers deprived of land, rich owners of land, and so forth. At a preparatory session for the Eighth Party Congress, Mao (1977b: 320) remarked upon the matter of class in somewhat clearer

terms, pointing to the existence in China of a vast rural petty bourgeoisie whose attentions were "glued to that precious bit of property they possess." That property included both instruments of production and land. Further on, reference was made to the ownership of various means of production by the petty bourgeoisie in both rural and urban areas (Mao, 1977b: 320).

This economic delineation of classes was reaffirmed in Mao's "speaking notes" for "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People" (in MacFarquhar et al., 1989: 163): "Because at this time the socialist society does not have exploiters, the system of ownership is that of the whole people or collective [ownership]; there are no private capitalists, no private land-owners, no private factory owners [or] enterprise owners." Here the capitalist class is defined explicitly in terms of ownership relations. In his speech at the Zhengzhou Conference (in MacFarquhar et al., 1989: 474), Mao referred to the Chinese peasantry as "the owners of their labor, land, [and] means of production (seeds, tools, irrigation works, forests, fertilizer, etc.) and therefore of their products." In the socialist period, Mao (1977b: 504) saw the peasantry as a class in "transition towards the working class." As ownership forms changed from individual ownership to collective ownership to ownership by the whole people the class differences between workers and peasants would diminish, the peasantry would become "collective peasants" and finally "workers on state farms."

In the polemical texts of the Sino-Soviet dispute, the categorisation of classes by their location in an ensemble of production relations is articulated clearly. In the first of these, the so-called "Twenty-five Points,"³ Mao addressed the heterogeneous nature of production relations in socialist societies, a question inextricably linked with that of class and class struggle:

When we look at the economic base of any socialist society, we find that the difference between ownership by the whole people and collective ownership exists in all socialist countries without exception, and that there is individual ownership too. Ownership by the whole people and collective ownership are two kinds of ownership and two kinds of relations of production in socialist society. The workers in enterprises owned by the whole people and the peasants on farms owned collectively belong to two different categories of labourers in socialist society. Therefore, the class difference between workers and peasants exists in all socialist countries without exception (*The Polemic*, 1965: 37).

In this passage the cleavage between the peasantry and urban workers as separate classes has its origins not in political behaviour or ideology; rather, the difference between them is to be found in the distinct ownership forms existent in urban and rural areas. Mao was sensitive to the differentiated character of the economic structure in the socialist era. As long as this differentiation persisted classes would remain a central feature of socialist society. It was not until homogeneity in the area of ownership forms had been realised that one could refer to societies as classless (*The Polemic*, 1965: 37). Here, then, classes are conceived to be economic groups distinguished by their position in a set of production relations, principally ownership relations.

In a later text (*The Polemic*, 1965: 145-7), "Is Yugoslavia a Socialist Country?" Mao again took up the question of co-existence of different ownership forms during

the socialist epoch. In Yugoslavia private enterprises that could hire labour and purchase various means of production were flourishing. The owners of these enterprises could be categorised accurately as "typical private capitalists." In terms of their possession of means of production, the income they received and the work relations between themselves and those they employed, there was no doubt that these people were "one hundred per cent capitalists." An "exploiting class" of rural capitalists was also dominant in the Yugoslav countryside, a class demarcated from "large numbers" of impoverished peasants forced to sell their labour-power by its ownership of land, implements and other means of production, and by its "capitalist exploitation" of hired farm labourers (*The Polemic*, 1965: 149-51).

The document also focused on the apparent "degeneration of public enterprises" that had occurred in Yugoslavia. These enterprises, nominally controlled by the working class, were now in the effective possession of a new class of bureaucratic-comprador bourgeoisie:

In the enterprises under "workers' self-government", the relations between managers and workers are actually relations between employers and employees, between the exploiters and the exploited.

As matters stand, the managers can determine the production plans and the direction of development of these enterprises, dispose of the means of production, take the decisions on the distribution of the enterprises' income, hire or fire workers councils or management boards.

Abundant information published in the Yugoslav press proves that the workers' council is merely formal, a kind of voting machine, and that all power in the enterprise is in the hands of the manager.

The fact that the manager of an enterprise controls its means of production and the distribution of its income enables him to appropriate the fruits of the workers' labour by means of various privileges (*The Polemic*, 1965: 157).

The means of production thus substantively "belonged" to a new bourgeoisie, a class that controlled the property and personnel of officially "public" enterprises and greatly benefited from doing so (*The Polemic*, 1965: 154, 156). In this account the three aspects of production relations, namely possession of (or separation from) the means of production, relations formed in the labour process and distribution relations, are invoked as criteria for the delineation of classes.⁴

This economic definition reappeared in "On Khrushchov's [sic] Phoney Communism." In this text analysis was directed towards enterprises legally falling under the ambit of socialist ownership by the whole people. Examination revealed, however, a disturbing discrepancy between legal property title and actual possession of these enterprises. Socialist in name only, they had "fallen under the control" of a new bourgeoisie:

These examples show that the factories which have fallen under the control of such degenerates are socialist enterprises only in name, that in fact they have become capitalist enterprises by which these persons enrich themselves. The relationship of such persons to the workers has turned into one between exploiters and exploited, between oppressors and oppressed. Are not such

degenerates who possess and make use of the means of production to exploit the labour of others out-and-out bourgeois elements? ... [T]hese people belong to a class that is antagonistic to the proletariat – they belong to the bourgeoisie (*The Polemic*, 1965: 432).

Much the same situation existed in rural areas:

These examples show that collective farms under the control of such functionaries virtually become their private property. Such people turn socialist collective enterprises into economic enterprises of new kulaks ... Their relationship to the collective farmers has likewise become that of oppressors to oppressed, of exploiters to exploited. Are not such neo-exploiters who ride on the backs of the collective farmers one hundred-per-cent neo-kulaks?

Obviously, they all belong to a class that is antagonistic to the proletariat and the labouring farmers, they belong to the kulak or rural bourgeois class (*The Polemic*, 1965: 433-34).

The new bourgeoisie in both rural and urban areas, new in that it had emerged under socialist conditions, is here identified by Mao as a class because it possesses the means of production. This possession of and control over the means of production was so effective that it virtually resulted in a system of private ownership by the bourgeoisie (see Esherick, 1979: 64-5). In these passages, therefore, Mao advances a conception in which classes are defined in highly "orthodox" terms as economic agents who either possess, or fail to possess, the means of production. The system of ownership relations, in the sense of actual control rather than legal property entitlements, was thus the principal point of departure for Mao in the identification of classes.

Further indication of Mao's economic categorisation of class occurs in his references to "class in itself" and "class for itself." Mao (1974b: 399, 434) employed the term "class in itself" to describe an economic class formation as yet unconscious of its existence as a class. A class in itself was thus a body of human agents occupying a particular location within a system of production relations; it was economically a class, but unaware of such an identity. Under certain conditions, which will be explored subsequently, this "diffused" body developed into a "class for itself," that is an "organised" and "self-conscious" agency cognizant of its class identity and class interests. The degree of development of class consciousness is the critical point of differentiation between a class in itself and a class for itself. What must be noted here is that consciousness is not central to the definition of class; economic determinants are. Whether class consciousness has been attained or not is immaterial, in terms of the denotation of class, for a class still exists as an economic object irrespective of its level of consciousness.

In short, in the texts emanating from the post-1955 period, Mao conceived of classes as economic entities and defined them in terms of their placement in a configuration of production relations. The chief criterion of demarcation utilised by Mao was that of actual ownership, possession or non-possession of the means of production, and from this principal distinguishing feature flowed other lines of division in terms of relations between people in the production process and

distribution relations. In this reading assertions that Mao defined classes by reference to political and ideological factors are problematic.

Classes as Politico-Ideological Agents

Mao's insistence on the economic designation of classes did not preclude them from becoming, given certain preconditions, politico-ideological agents. While Mao had much to say on the question of classes as participants in struggle that takes political and ideological forms, most of these comments relate to class struggle in the superstructure during the period of socialist transition. This matter will be taken up subsequently, but before doing so it is necessary to investigate Mao's comments about the conditions under which classes emerge as combatants in superstructural conflict. In a very orthodox manner, these statements point unmistakably to the emergence of imbalance between the forces and relations of production as the factor responsible for calling classes into existence as politico-ideological agents.

For Mao, as already indicated, the terms "class in itself" and "class for itself" denoted distinct stages in the political and ideological development of a class. In the initial stages of its formation, the consciousness of a class was "scattered and unsystematic." It possessed no understanding of the essential character of the social formation, of the relations of exploitation and oppression between classes. This was a point Mao (1974b: 399) noted with regard to the working class: "In the beginning the working class was a class in and of itself, and it had no knowledge of capitalism." Lacking awareness of class identity or interests, the struggles waged by individuals comprising a class in itself were isolated and spontaneous, and restricted in scope. They were not directed against the existing social system, but towards the settlement of individual and local grievances. At this stage the members of a class undertook no political action as a class. What prevented them from doing so was the diffused nature of their consciousness. While Mao (see, for example, 1977b: 409, 411, 427) insisted that ideology always bore the stamp of a particular class, he was under no illusion as to the potential diversity of views within a class, particularly in its inchoate state (Mao, 1974a: 23). Members of one economic class could even take up the "class stand" of another, perhaps due to the ideological hegemony exercised by an economically and politically dominant class (Mao, 1974b: 433, 466).

While the ideology of a class displayed no necessary homogeneity, the tendency of development was towards the systematisation of attitudes and thoughts amongst human agents occupying the same class location (see, for example, Ch'en, 1970: 121; Mao, 1977a: 113). Over time a "class in itself" became a "class for itself," an agency aware of its identity and interests. Understanding of the social order in which it was oppressed resulted in united, organised and conscious struggle, not merely against individual exploiters, but against the very system of exploitation itself. At this stage the struggle of a class took on a political dimension, one ultimately directed at the seizure of political power, for only the possession of such power would permit a recasting of the existing social arrangements in accordance with the interests of an oppressed class (see, for example, Ch'en, 1970: 143; Mao, 1974b: 399, 434, 453; *The Polemic*, 1965: 20, 367). It was in this sense that Mao (in Ch'en, 1970: 107) understood the "basic Marxist thesis" that "all class struggles are political struggles." Consciousness was, therefore, a necessary precondition for a class to

become a politico-ideological agent. Once this precondition had been realised the “basic content” of politics became the joint and co-ordinated struggle “against the class enemy” (Mao, 1972: 103).

As the focus of their struggle coalesced towards action in common, a class gradually remoulded itself, reshaping its “own subjective world” (Ch’en, 1970: 120, 151; Mao, 1977b: 402). Such a level of consciousness did not arise *ex nihilo*, however; certain material imperatives were required (Mao, 1977a: 113): “Ideology becomes systematic, generally speaking, in the wake of the movement of phenomena. The reason is that thought and understanding are reflections of material movements.” The “material movements” in question were the development of the productive forces and their subsequent fettering by the relations of production. Mao (*Long Live Leninism*, 1960: 19; Mao, 1977b: 338, 393; *The Historical Experience*, 1961: 3-4, 34) insisted that the generation of non-correspondence between the forces and relations of production, initiated by the advance of the former, was the basic contradiction propelling all social formations forward, one precipitating “changes of a fundamental nature” (*The Historical Experience*, 1961: 34; also see Healy, 1997: 127-9 for an examination of this matter).

This contradiction effectively polarised class agents, precipitating an oppressed class to action in the superstructure in pursuit of its now recognised class interests. Such had been the history of the rise and subsequent fall of class-based social formations:

Since its division into classes with conflicting interests, human society has passed through several thousand years of dictatorship – of slave-owners, of feudal lords and of the bourgeoisie ... [and of] the dictatorship of the proletariat ... The first three kinds of dictatorships are all dictatorships of the exploiting classes These exploiting classes, which once played a certain progressive role in the history of social development, invariably accumulated experience in their rule through making innumerable mistakes ... Nevertheless, with the sharpening of the contradiction between the relations of production which they represented and the productive forces of society, still they invariably committed mistakes, bigger and more, precipitating a massive revolt of the oppressed classes and disintegration within their own ranks, and thus eventually bringing about their own destruction (*The Historical Experience*, 1961: 3-4).

The “massive revolt” of an oppressed class referred to here took the form of a violent revolution waged in the political and ideological realms. In the “old class societies,” such as capitalism, it was axiomatic that imbalance between the forces and relations of production found expression “in acute class antagonism and conflicts, in sharp class struggle” (Mao, 1977b: 393). Under capitalism, for example, the “contradiction between the development of the social productive forces and the capitalist relations of production” inevitably led to a “rousing of the revolution” (*Long Live Leninism*, 1960: 19). Even when rendered redundant by the development of the productive forces, a ruling class never gave way voluntarily, utilising the state machine to preserve its privileged position (*Long Live Leninism*, 1960: 35-6, 43; *The Polemic*, 1965: 20). “State power” was thus the “fundamental question” in every revolution and, in order to attain it, an oppressed class was compelled to undertake a

protracted political and ideological struggle and, ultimately, an armed struggle (Ch'en, 1970: 117, 143; Mao, 1977a: 51; *The Polemic*, 1965: 20, 367). This was certainly the case with the proletarian revolution, for it was a "universal law" that the transition to socialism could be effected only through violent means and the smashing of the bourgeois state apparatus (*The Polemic*, 1965: 400).

While proceeding through "zigzags" and "setbacks," the long-term result of a revolutionary upheaval of an exploited class engendered by the incompatibility of the relations of production with their determining productive forces was not open to question (Mao, 1977b: 515; *The Polemic*, 1965: 21, 467). Mao affirmed this in relation to the inevitable supersession of capitalism by socialism:

The text says on page 327 [of "Political Economy"] that socialism will "inevitably" supersede capitalism and moreover will do so by "revolutionary means." In the imperialist period clashes between the productive forces and the production relations have become sharper than ever. The proletarian socialist revolution is an "objective necessity." Such statements are quite satisfactory and should be made this way . . . To call the revolution an objective necessity simply means that the direction it takes does not hinge on the intentions of individuals. Like it or not, come it will (Mao, 1977a: 33).

Such had also been the case throughout human history. The slave system had been replaced by feudalism, in turn supplanted by capitalism, and in each case, no matter how hard reactionary classes had attempted to prevent "the advance of the wheel of history," revolution had ultimately occurred, the exploiting class swept away and victory achieved by the exploited (*Long Live Leninism*, 1960: 34-5).

Having triumphed in revolutionary struggle in the superstructure, an oppressed class wielded its newly-won political power to recast the relations of production according to its own class interests, thereby removing the impediment that had hindered the productive forces. This was precisely what had occurred in the Chinese revolution:

All revolutionary history shows that the *full* development of new productive forces is not the prerequisite for the transformation of backward production relations. Our revolution began with Marxist-Leninist propaganda, which served to create new public opinion in favour of the revolution. Moreover, it was possible to destroy the old production relations only after we had overthrown a backward superstructure in the course of revolution. After the old production relations had been destroyed new ones were created, and these cleared the way for the development of new social productive forces (Mao, 1977a: 51, emphasis added).

The bourgeois revolution in Europe had followed the same pattern. An incipient bourgeoisie had emerged as a politico-ideological agent in response to the development of the productive forces. It had changed the superstructure and taken possession of the state before pushing ahead with changes in the relations of production:

Similarly, from the standpoint of world history, the bourgeois revolutions and the establishment of the bourgeois nations came before, not after, the Industrial

Revolution. The bourgeoisie first changed the superstructure and took possession of the machinery of state before carrying on propaganda to gather real strength. Only then did they push forward great changes in the production relations. When the production relations had been taken care of and they were on the right track they then opened the way for the development of the productive forces. To be sure, *the revolution in the production relations is brought on by a certain degree of development of the productive forces*, but the major development of the productive forces always comes after changes in the production relations . . . In England the Industrial Revolution (late eighteenth-early nineteenth centuries) was carried through only after the bourgeois revolution, that is, after the seventeenth century. All in their respective ways, Germany, France, America, and Japan underwent change in the superstructure and production relations before the vast development of capitalist industry (Mao, 1977a: 66, emphasis added).

What must be noted in these passages is that the emergence of classes as superstructural agents was seen as being engendered by a "certain degree of development" of the productive forces. While relatively small in scale compared to their development after changes in the superstructure and relations of production, it was sufficient to initiate contradictions within the social formation, and to impel their resolution through class struggle in the superstructure. In this conception, then, economic classes are brought into being as participants in political and ideological struggle as a consequence of the progression of the productive forces and their ensuing contradiction with the existing production relations. This contradiction results sooner or later in the development of class consciousness whereby an oppressed class becomes cognizant of its existence as such, and aware of the shared interests of its members that derive from their common economic position. Consciousness transforms the isolated and spontaneous actions of individuals into the organised and united struggle of a class, a struggle conducted in the ideological and political arenas of the superstructure.⁵

This conception is a highly orthodox one. Superstructural forms of conflict are equated with the confrontation of economic classes that occurs in response to the imbalance between the productive forces and the economic level of the social formation. Events unfolding in the superstructure, specifically the political and ideological struggles that transpire within this realm, thus ultimately reflect economic classes and their interests and, in turn, the degree of development of the productive forces.

Class Struggle in the Period of Socialist Transition

An important feature of the social formation in Mao's perception was its differentiated character. In the general trend of development classes were destroyed and new ones arose to take their place, societal types were eliminated and replaced by new social arrangements; however, in this process all was not "pure." Elements of the old survived and continued to exist in the new. One could thus find "something of the slave-holding system" in societies dominated by feudalism, and so on (Schram, 1974: 226-7). Thus, even after a revolution, previously existing social forms

were not entirely eliminated; ideological patterns, relations of production and classes characteristic of the previous social order endured. While they no longer occupied a predominant position, their presence none the less indicated that the resolution of contradictions between and within the various levels of the social formation was a partial one. The Chinese revolution was no exception. In terms of ownership relations a fundamental but incomplete resolution had been attained. With regard to the other aspects of production relations, and on the "ideological and political fronts," a "complete resolution" had not been achieved and "further efforts" were required (Mao, 1974a: 72, 75; Mao, 1977b: 242-3n., 371).

The partial nature of the transformations accomplished by the proletarian revolution meant that the class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in the period of socialist transition was by "no means over;" rather, this struggle would be a "protracted and tortuous" one, taking a "long period of time" to finally settle (Mao, 1977b: 409-10). Indeed, according to Mao (1977b: 475) the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie would remain on the agenda "for the entire transition period." Such views received forceful expression in a 1962 speech (Schram, 1974: 168), which noted that the dangers posed by remnant classes and the continued generation of the bourgeoisie meant that "protracted, complex, sometimes even violent" class struggle would persist throughout the "whole socialist stage." Mao returned to these matters later in the same year, remarking upon the prolonged nature of class struggle in the socialist period and the constant threat of a bourgeois restoration:

Now then, do classes exist in socialist countries? Does class struggle exist? We can now affirm that classes do exist in socialist countries and that class struggle undoubtedly exists. Lenin said: After the victory of the revolution, because of the existence of the bourgeoisie internationally, because of the existence of bourgeois remnants internally, because the petit-bourgeoisie exists and continually generates a bourgeoisie, therefore the classes which have been overthrown within the country will continue to exist for a long time to come and may even attempt restoration ... We must acknowledge that classes will continue to exist for a long time. We must also acknowledge the existence of a struggle of class against class, and admit the possibility of a restoration of reactionary classes (Schram, 1974: 189).

This theme of the persistence of classes and class struggle throughout the socialist era received repeated affirmation in the Mao texts of the post-1955 years (see, for example, Ch'en, 1970: 98-9, 145; Mao, 1974b: 318; Schram, 1974: 243; *The Polemic*, 1965: 33-7, 181-2, 420, 423, 426, 471-2).

The reasons posited by Mao for the continuation of class struggle after the proletarian revolution include the presence of the bourgeoisie externally, the survival of remnant classes, the influence of bourgeois ideology, the differentiated system of ownership, and the regeneration of the bourgeoisie because of small commodity production, "bourgeois right" and inequalities in distribution relations. To the first of these factors, the external presence of the bourgeoisie, Mao (Mao, 1968-9: 87; Schram, 1974: 189; *The Polemic*, 1965: 421, 423) simply noted that international capital's encirclement of socialist states, its threat of armed intervention, and its

subversive activities, provided favourable conditions for class struggle in socialist societies, within which the international class struggle would “inevitably find its reflection.” This external state of affairs was a source of comfort to overthrown “remnant” classes which possessed a “thousand and one links” with the international bourgeoisie (*The Polemic*, 1965: 421). Unable to resign themselves to “losing state power,” they continually engaged in political struggle against the proletariat. In the economic sphere they sought to undermine socialist ownership forms (see, for example: Baum and Teiwes, 1968: 60-1; Mao, 1974a: 74; 1977b: 443, 454; Schram, 1974: 168; *The Polemic*, 1965: 421).

Of particular concern was the impact exercised by bourgeois ideology. Bent on transforming society “according to its own world outlook,” the bourgeoisie continually counterposed the ideology of their class to that of the proletariat (Mao, 1977b: 409, 411). This active propagation of bourgeois thought was an important factor in explaining its persisting incidence and potency in socialist society. When combined with the inherent tendency of ideological constructions to trail behind changes in objective conditions (Ch’en, 1970: 88, 123; *The Historical Experience*, 1961: 9), the result was that even after the alteration of ownership relations bourgeois ideology continued to exert an influence:

Although the socio-economic system has been transformed reactionary thought, bourgeois and upper-petty-bourgeois thought inherited from the past, still exists in the minds of a considerable number of people, and cannot be transformed quickly. Its transformation needs time, a long period of time. This is the class struggle in [our] society (Ch’en, 1970: 144-5).

While the bourgeoisie was relatively small, its representative ideology none the less penetrated other classes. Members of the proletariat could be corrupted by modes of thinking characteristic of the bourgeoisie and take up the “stand” of this class (Mao, 1974a: 73; *The Polemic*, 1965: 33, 421-2). The proletariat was therefore compelled to wage an ideological struggle to divest members of its own class of bourgeois contamination, and to remould the thought patterns of the bourgeoisie (Ch’en, 1970: 107, 117, 123; Mao, 1977b: 409-10, 504).

The incomplete transformation of ownership relations was also significant. In all socialist societies the ownership system was a differentiated one in which co-existed ownership by the whole people, collective ownership, and individual ownership (Leung and Kau, 1992: 727; Mao, 1974a: 144; 1977a: 53-4, 107, 111; Schram, 1974: 115; *The Polemic*, 1965: 37). This constituted a source for the preservation of class divisions, and an economic base for continuing class struggle (*The Polemic*, 1965: 37; Mao, 1977a: 53-4). This was a point Mao (1977b: 494) remarked upon in 1957: “We have said that the problem of ownership is solved basically but not completely. Class struggle has not died out.” This was certainly the case in the Soviet Union (Mao, 1977a: 107): “Their society has three types of ownership . . . If there are three types of ownership, there will be contradiction and [class] struggle.”

The heterogeneity in ownership relations was related to the appearance of bourgeois elements within the framework of socialism (Baum and Teiwes, 1968: 61; Mao, 1976: 113; Schram, 1974: 168; *The Polemic*, 1965: 421, 422). The partial transformation of production relations provided fertile ground for the continued

regeneration of the bourgeoisie. China possessed a "huge petty bourgeoisie" which included both the urban and rural "self-employed" and the peasantry (Mao, 1977b: 320, 474). The presence of these small producers, according to Mao (Schram, 1974: 189), "continually generates a bourgeoisie." This position was reaffirmed in relation to Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. The existence of individual ownership and small commodity production in these societies had played a significant part in both the generation of a "new bourgeoisie" and the restoration of capitalism (*The Polemic*, 1965: 33, 148, 421, 422). Cases such as these proved that "individual economy, petty-producer economy, generates capitalism daily and hourly" (*The Polemic*, 1965: 148). Nor would the collectivisation of agriculture solve this problem. It would turn individual peasants into collective farmers and provide conditions propitious to their "thoroughgoing remoulding," but until collective ownership was replaced by socialist ownership by the whole people the peasantry would retain the "inherent characteristics of small producers," and the petty bourgeois nature of the peasantry would give rise to "spontaneous capitalist tendencies" and engender "new bourgeois elements" (*The Polemic*, 1965: 148, 422).

The form of distribution relations also played a prominent part in the continued re-emergence of the bourgeoisie under socialism. Mao elaborated upon this in 1964, quoting Lenin:

In socialist society, the differences between workers and peasants, between town and country, and between manual and mental labourers still remain, bourgeois rights are not yet completely abolished, and it is not possible "at once to eliminate the other injustice which consists in the distribution of articles of consumption 'according to the amount of labour performed' (and not according to needs)," and therefore differences in wealth still exist. The disappearance of these differences, phenomena, and bourgeois rights can only be gradual and long drawn-out (*The Polemic*, 1965: 420).

Similar sentiments emerged in Mao's 1975 instruction (*Peking Review*, 1975: 5) on the dictatorship of the proletariat, which suggested that inequalities in distribution and the practice of commodity exchange in socialist China were "scarcely different" from what occurred in the "old society." These had to be "restricted under the dictatorship of the proletariat." Along with differentiated ownership, bourgeois rights and associated inequalities in distribution provided an economic basis for the continuing generation of the bourgeoisie. As Mao noted in 1964 (*The Polemic*, 1965: 422), "the influence of the remaining bourgeois rights ... breed[s] ... new bourgeois elements." It was only by eliminating differences in ownership forms and abolishing bourgeois rights that the material base for the "re-emergence of classes and the restoration of capitalism" would be destroyed (*The Polemic*, 1965: 420, 422, 427).

The problems posed by the "new bourgeoisie" would thus be overcome once the differentiation of ownership forms had been superseded by the universal presence of socialist ownership by the whole people, and once inequalities in the distribution system had been transcended. Uniformity in the relations of production was the central factor in preventing the regeneration of the bourgeoisie. In the absence of differentiated production relations, the economic basis for this continued creation would cease to operate.

These various factors explained the continuation of class struggle in the period of socialist transition. This struggle was one that proceeded primarily in the political and ideological realms:

Class struggle is by no means over. The class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, the class struggle between the various political forces, and the class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in the ideological field will still be protracted and tortuous and at times even very sharp ... the question of which will win out, socialism or capitalism, is not really settled yet (Mao, 1977b: 409).

Certainly the Cultural Revolution was portrayed in these terms (Ch'en, 1970: 153). It was "a great political revolution under socialist conditions by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie and all other exploiting classes." It was, as well, a struggle of ideological dimensions:

Although the bourgeoisie has been overthrown, it is still trying to use the old ideas, culture, customs and habits of the exploiting classes to corrupt the masses, capture their minds and endeavour to stage a comeback. The proletariat must do just the opposite: it must meet head-on every challenge of the bourgeoisie in the ideological field and use the new ideas, culture, customs and habits of the proletariat to change the mental outlook of the whole of society (Ch'en, 1970: 117-18).

The struggle between classes after the proletarian revolution was thus a conscious one conducted in the superstructure. As Mao (1974b: 453) remarked: "The main thing is which class seizes political power." The bourgeoisie, in order to realise its restorationist aims, was compelled to struggle for the overthrow of proletarian political supremacy. This was a task that required preliminary effort in the ideological domain (Ch'en, 1970: 117): "To overthrow a political power, it is always necessary, first of all, to create public opinion, to do work in the ideological sphere. This is true for the revolutionary class as well as for the counter-revolutionary class." To prevent a bourgeois restoration, the proletariat had to engage in an unrelenting struggle to retain and consolidate its control in the political and ideological realms (Ch'en, 1970: 107-8, 110-11, 112, 118, 121, 125-6; Mao, 1974b: 459). Failure to do so would result in a regression to capitalism (Schram, 1974: 189, 243; *The Polemic*, 1965: 139-83, 415-80).

While Mao saw this class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in the socialist transition period as an enduring one, and while the resulting danger of capitalist restoration would persist for a "long period of time," in the final analysis there could be no doubt as to the outcome (Ch'en, 1970: 139, 159; Mao, 1974b: 459; *The Polemic*, 1965: 426, 471-2). Eventually the pressures emanating from the forces of production would assert themselves, the proletariat would be victorious, the bourgeoisie would be cast aside, and the goal of communist society realised (see, for example, MacFarquhar et al., 1989: 124-5; Mao, 1968-69: 87; 1972-73: 41; Schram, 1974: 189-90, 298).

Mao's frequent pronouncements on the question of continuing class struggle in the socialist epoch, therefore, do not constitute a departure from classical Marxism.

The proletarian revolution signalled only the partial resolution of the contradictions engendered by non-correspondence between the forces and relations of production. The forces of production were unfettered to a degree, but the full transformation of the relations of production and the superstructure remained on the agenda. The bourgeoisie was deposed, but not eliminated, nor was bourgeoisie ideology destroyed. Differences in the economic structure, in which elements characteristic of the previous social order such as petty bourgeois commodity production and inequalities in distribution relations continued to exist, constituted a basis for the ongoing regeneration of the bourgeoisie. Class struggle thus persisted in the era of socialist transition as the bourgeoisie fought a determined battle in the political and ideological realms for the restoration of capitalism, and as the proletariat waged a struggle in these domains to prevent such an occurrence. Classes therefore remained on the superstructural stage as participants in class struggle, and would do so until further modifications in production relations eliminated those conditions conducive to the regeneration of the bourgeoisie, and until the further transformation of the superstructure completely obliterated bourgeois ideology.

Mediums of Representation: The State

In his conception of classes as economic agents, and as participants in class struggle waged in the superstructure, Mao thus appears to be entirely consistent with the classical Marxist tradition. Similarly, just as in the works of orthodox Marxism, the notion of representation occupies a prominent position in the Mao texts of the post-1955 years.⁶ In Mao's view various mediums of representation such as the state and its appendages, political parties, ideological structures and ideational forms acted on behalf of classes and expressed their interests. The struggle between these representational mechanisms was perceived to be a product of class relations and interests defined at the economic level.

Among the various agencies of representation identified by Mao, the state occupied a central position. It was the principal apparatus through which a ruling class maintained its position, and the prime focus of activity for an oppressed class attempting to overthrow its exploiters (*The Polemic*, 1965: 367). Mao was unequivocal in his insistence that the state possessed a class character:

In the view of Marxist-Leninists, there is no such thing as a non-class or supra-class state. So long as the state remains a state, it must bear a class character; so long as the state exists, it cannot be a state of the "whole people." As soon as a society becomes classless, there will no longer be a state (*The Polemic*, 1965: 36).

The existence of the state was thus inextricably bound up with the existence of classes. As long as there were classes, so too would there be a state stamped with the character of a particular class. Mao (*The Polemic*, 1965: 444-5) succinctly conveyed this idea by noting that the state was a "class concept . . . so long as the state exists, it cannot possibly stand above class or belong to the whole people."

The class basis of the state found expression in its function of oppression. The state existed as an "instrument of class struggle" serving the interests of an economically dominant class by suppressing any opposition to it (Mao, 1977b: 378).

Elsewhere (*The Polemic*, 1965: 444-5), Mao defined the state as "a machine by means of which one class represses another." It was the very composition of the state which constrained it to function in this manner. While the state and the class it represented were not synonymous, it was none the less the case that the state was "formed by a number of people (a small number) from the class in the dominant position" (Mao, 1977b: 378). State personnel may commit certain "isolated" and "temporary" mistakes (*The Historical Experience*, 1961: 36), but there could, by virtue of its class composition, be no long-term discrepancy between the actions of the state and the interests of the class it stood for.

The coercive role of the state was central to its very existence. In order to uphold the interests of the class it represented, the state perforce oppressed any actual or potential threats to these interests. Described by Mao (*Long Live Leninism*, 1960: 23) as an "institution of violence," the principal organs of the state apparatus were precisely those that actually exercised force or possessed the capacity to do so (Mao, 1977a: 99-100): "The nature of the state is that it is a machinery for suppressing the opposed forces . . . The so-called form of the state means nothing more than armed forces, prisons, arrests, executions, etc." Courts and security organs thus served the interests of the dominant class by enforcing laws designed to maintain the existing social order, including the pattern of production relations (Mao, 1974a: 61; 1977b: 338, 379; Schram, 1974: 195). It fell primarily to the armed forces, however, as the "principal part of the state machine" in all social formations (*The Polemic*, 1965: 27), to defend the fundamental concerns of the ruling class. It was in the armed forces that the "real strength of a class" resided (Mao, 1977a: 60). In the eventuality of a serious challenge to ruling class domination, the armed forces operated to prevent any transformation of the superstructure or the production relations.

The class nature of the state, and the centrality of the instruments of coercion within the state apparatus, meant there was no possibility of a peaceful transition to socialism. Togliatti's theory of "structural reform," which held that the proletariat could gain state power via elections, reform the superstructure and introduce socialist production relations, was rejected (*The Polemic*, 1965: 406). The armed forces as the "first aspect of the superstructure, the basic, the primary thing," would operate in the interests of capital to prevent any possibility of meaningful social reform (Mao, 1969: 544). Khrushchev's similar notion of the "parliamentary road to socialism" was to be dismissed for the same reasons. To suggest that socialism could be achieved in this fashion in the contemporary political conjuncture was to betray Marxism-Leninism (*Long Live Leninism*, 1960: 44-5; *The Polemic*, 1965: 20, 367, 391). To be sure, Marx had raised this possibility with respect to Britain and the USA in the 1870s as exceptions to the general rule, but had done so precisely because "militarism and bureaucracy were not yet much developed in these two countries at that time." By the early years of the twentieth century, however, these qualifications no longer applied. The bourgeoisie in these societies had set about strengthening their "militarist-bureaucratic machines of suppression," in particular their armed forces, effectively precluding any possibility of a peaceful transition to socialism (*Long Live Leninism*, 1960: 41-3). Therefore, to argue for a parliamentary path to socialism was to overlook the primacy of the armed forces and other coercive organs within the realm of the state and to accord a misplaced importance to parliament, which was nothing more than a "screen for bourgeois rule" (*The Polemic*, 1965: 389).

Even in the unlikely event of the proletariat obtaining a parliamentary majority, the coercive appendages of the state and the bureaucratic apparatus would act promptly to serve the interests of the bourgeoisie by amending the constitution, declaring elections null and void, dissolving parliament, outlawing the Communist Party, expelling Communists from the government and resorting to violence to suppress the working class movement (*Long Live Leninism*, 1960: 46; *The Polemic*, 1965: 105-7).

The proletariat, in order to achieve its class aims, had no other recourse than armed struggle. "Violent revolution," Mao argued (*The Polemic*, 1965: 400), "is a universal law of proletarian revolution. To realize the transition to socialism, the proletariat must wage armed struggle, smash the old state machine and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat." This dictatorship was qualitatively different from previously existing forms of the state, all of which had been a "special force for suppressing the exploited classes in the interests of the exploiting classes" (*Long Live Leninism*, 1960: 23). The proletarian state, however, represented not a dictatorship of an exploiting minority, but rather a "dictatorship of the exploited class," of "the majority over the minority" (*The Historical Experience*, 1961: 4). It was thus an embodiment of the interests of the proletariat. Through the actions of the proletarian state these interests found their concrete manifestation:

The internal task [of the dictatorship of the proletariat] consists mainly of completely abolishing all the exploiting classes, developing socialist economy to the maximum, enhancing the communist consciousness of the masses, abolishing the differences between ownership by the whole people and collective ownership, between workers and peasants, between town and country, and between mental and manual labourers, eliminating any possibility of the re-emergence of classes and the restoration of capitalism and providing conditions for the realization of a communist society with its principle, "from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs" (*The Polemic*, 1965: 427).

Without a dictatorship of the proletariat to undertake these tasks, the interests of the working class could not be achieved, and its final emancipation could not be realised (*The Polemic*, 1965: 36-7, 427).

To suggest that the dictatorship of the proletariat be supplanted by a "state of the whole people" only jeopardised the attainment of the interests of the proletariat. It failed not only to recognise that the state, whatever its form, necessarily acted on behalf of a particular class, but also to appreciate the continued existence of classes and class struggle throughout the socialist period. The dictatorship of the proletariat was essential in these circumstances:

... socialist society covers a very long historical period. Classes and class struggle continue to exist in this society, and the struggle still goes on between the road of socialism and the road of capitalism ... during the historical period of socialism it is necessary to maintain the dictatorship of the proletariat and carry the socialist revolution through to the end if the restoration of capitalism is to be prevented, socialist construction carried forward, and the conditions created for the transition to communism (*The Polemic*, 1965: 471-2).

Throughout the socialist epoch the proletariat was compelled to suppress antagonistic class forces and to destroy those conditions favourable to the continued creation of the bourgeoisie and a regression to capitalism. In the performance of these tasks the dictatorship of the proletariat was indispensable.

In keeping with previous state forms, the dictatorship of the proletariat was thus coercive in nature, an agency of "revolutionary violence" (*Long Live Leninism*, 1960: 23). It possessed, however, an important feature distinguishing it from earlier types of state, which had always been dedicated to the perpetuation of the rule of a particular class. The dictatorship of the proletariat, in contrast, was aimed at the extinction of class rule and class cleavages (*The Historical Experience*, 1961: 5). Its purpose was to provide the conditions of its own dissolution and, as the "last form of state in human history," to gradually wither away (*The Historical Experience*, 1961: 4-5). This process of withering away was contingent, in Mao's view, upon both internal and external factors. Internally, the state would have fulfilled its mission when all class differences had been eliminated and the "classless society" of communism brought into existence (*The Polemic*, 1965: 427, 445, 447). Externally, the disappearance of the state was premised upon the international abolition of "imperialism, capitalism and the system of exploitation" (Mao, 1977a: 99). Until this goal had been realised and a "full communist society" inaugurated across the world, the proletarian state would continue to act in the interests of its class and struggle for the complete global emancipation of the proletariat. At that time it would bow out of the historical drama (*The Polemic*, 1965: 427).

Mediums of Representation: Political Parties

The state was but one of a range of superstructural mediums of representation of class interest. Political parties also constituted an important vehicle for the expression of class aims and concerns at the political level. "A political party," Mao declared (1977b: 355), "is a class organisation." This assertion did not imply that political parties existed at the economic level of the social formation, for they were defined by Mao (1974a: 44, 73, 189; 1977b: 464) as an important component of the political realm of the superstructure. Nor did this assertion imply any retreat to a political definition of class. Mao's point, rather, was that political parties were connected invariably with the class divisions existent at the economic level of the social formation. As such, they possessed a class character and functioned to represent a specific economic class and its interests (Leung and Kau, 1992: 604).

This was something Khrushchev had misunderstood in his propagation of the erroneous concept of a "party of the entire people:"

Elementary knowledge of Marxism-Leninism tells us that, like the state, a political party is an instrument of class struggle. Every political party has a class character. Party spirit is the concentrated expression of class character. There is no such thing as a supra-class political party and there never has been, nor is there such a thing as a "party of the entire people" that does not represent the interests of a particular class (*The Polemic*, 1965: 453-4).

On a number of occasions in the post-1955 years (see, for example, *The Polemic*, 1965: 49), Mao was constrained to point to the obligatory class complexion of

political parties, and to dismiss notions of “non-class” or “supra-class” political parties, or “parties of the entire people.” Mao’s discussion of the Communist Party at the January 1962 Central Work Conference (Schram, 1974: 182) is a case in point: “Some people say that the Communist Party is ‘a party of the whole people,’ but we do not see things in this way. Our Party is a proletarian party; it is the vanguard of the proletariat . . .” Elsewhere (*The Polemic*, 1965: 38), Mao insisted that the Communist Party, the “party of the proletariat,” was that which “represents the interests of the proletariat, whose ideas and will it concentrates.”

The role of the Party as the representational medium of proletarian class interests was not a function of the social background of its membership (*The Polemic*, 1965: 457). To be sure, a communist party could not exist in a vacuum. A *sine qua non* for its appearance was the presence of a proletarian class, a precondition Mao (1974b: 367) posited in relation to the possibility of forming a communist party in Africa: “The question of establishing a communist party must rest on whether there are any industrial workers.” None the less, it was not imperative that the membership of a communist party be limited to those of proletarian origin. Even when describing the Chinese Communist Party as a “proletarian political party,” for example, Mao noted the diverse economic background of its members (Mao, 1977b: 355; *The Polemic*, 1965: 454). Mao’s distinction between economic class origin and class stand is significant here, for those of non-proletarian class designation did not join the Party as representatives of their class of origin; rather, they had to rid themselves of the ideology of their class and “take the stand of the proletariat” (*The Polemic*, 1965: 454). Despite incorporating a membership ranging across class boundaries, the party of the proletariat could not be construed as standing above classes, or as failing to possess a specific class character. The attributes possessed by leading personnel of the party ensured that they were “genuine representatives of the proletariat” and acknowledged as such (*The Polemic*, 1965: 132). Further, the ideological disposition of the Party was a manifestation of the concerns of a particular class. As Mao noted (*The Polemic*, 1965: 38), “Party spirit” was but the “concentrated expression of class character.”

The proletarian political party played a vital role in socialist revolution. As the vanguard of its class, it provided leadership in the revolution, promoted the further development of class consciousness, prepared the way for revolutionary activity through the performance of various ideological, political, organisational and military tasks, and generally fought for the “basic interests” of the proletariat. In this fashion the proletarian political party laid the groundwork for a successful seizure of state power once the objective conditions for a revolution had come into being (*The Polemic*, 1965: 17-18, 22-3, 392-4; Ch’en, 1970: 152). This organised and conscious struggle by the vanguard party was of crucial importance in Mao’s view: “The historical experience of China and Russia,” he insisted (Mao, 1977a: 37), “proves that to win the revolution having a mature party is a most important condition.”

The attainment of state power by the proletariat did not signify, however, the cessation of the Party’s efforts in the interests of its class. It continued to play a pivotal role in the proletarian state. Indeed, in socialist societies state power was “under the leadership of communist political parties,” and it was via the medium of the Party that the “leading role” of the proletariat in the state was expressed (*The Polemic*, 1965: 476). The dictatorship of the proletariat faced onerous responsibilities in waging struggle against the class enemies of the proletariat, in eliminating class

distinctions and in constructing a socialist system of economic production. The successful fulfilment of these responsibilities was essential in order to realise the transition to communism. Mao insisted that the Party was indispensable in this process:

Leninism holds that the proletarian party must exist together with the dictatorship of the proletariat in socialist countries. The party of the proletariat is indispensable for the entire historical period of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The reason is that the dictatorship of the proletariat has to struggle against the enemies of the proletariat and of the people, remould the peasants and other small producers, constantly consolidate the proletarian ranks, build socialism and effect the transition to communism; none of these things can be done without the leadership of the party of the proletariat (*The Polemic*, 1965: 38).

Without the leadership provided by the Party, the efficacy of the dictatorship of the proletariat could only be impaired. The continued existence of the Party throughout the era of proletarian dictatorship was thus imperative if the most fundamental of the proletariat's class interests, its complete emancipation through the inauguration of communism, was to be attained (*The Polemic*, 1965: 401).

This centrality of the proletarian party within the socialist state was no doubt a contributing factor in the efforts of antagonistic class forces to subvert its proletarian character and turn it into a "bourgeois political party." The Party did not exist in splendid isolation, standing above and protected from the class struggle present in socialist society. This class struggle invariably found its "reflection" within the Party organisation (see, for example, Ch'en, 1970: 108, 110, 112; Mao, 1974b: 239, 244, 427, 457, 460, 480; 1977b: 302, 440; Schram, 1974: 148-9; *The Polemic*, 1965: 423-4). Mao sought to explain this translation of the extra-Party struggle into the Party itself by reference to the polluting effects of bourgeois ideology, as well as by the diverse social background of Party members. All Party members, irrespective of their origin, were potentially capable of abandoning the proletarian world view and espousing the class viewpoint of the bourgeoisie (Mao, 1977a: 41; 1977b: 432).

Economic classes opposed to the proletariat constantly sought to cultivate their own representatives within the Party. The old and new bourgeoisie, and the old and new rich peasants, "constitute the social basis of revisionism," Mao argued (*The Polemic*, 1965: 424), "and they use every possible means to find agents within the Communist Party." These agents struggled to press the case of revisionism and bourgeois restoration within the Party, attempting to turn the dictatorship of the proletariat into a dictatorship of quite another kind – that of the bourgeoisie. The Mao texts of the post-1955 years are replete with references to the presence of the "representatives of the bourgeoisie" within the Party (see, for example, Ch'en, 1970: 106, 108, 110, 112, 118; Mao, 1974b: 239, 244, 411, 427). These representatives gave political voice not to the interests of the proletariat, but to those of the bourgeoisie. Through their attempts to seize control of the Party, overthrow the dictatorship of the proletariat and restore the capitalist order, these people acted on behalf of the bourgeoisie outside the Party (Ch'en, 1970: 112; Mao, 1974b: 411; 1977b: 474; *The Polemic*, 1965: 154, 440). The political struggle they engaged in was not lacking in organisation; they constituted a distinct faction within the Party, a capitalist faction

advocating the pursuit of policies inimical to the socialist cause (Mao, 1974b: 427; Schram, 1974: 263).

The struggle within the Party between the socialist and capitalist factions, which both functioned as mediums of representation of specific economic class interests, had profound ramifications. Should the attempts of the bourgeoisie to control the Party succeed, it would degenerate into a "bourgeois political party." Further, given the leading role of the proletarian party within the socialist state, its degeneration would result in reversion to a bourgeois state (*The Polemic*, 1965: 173, 423-4, 468). Such had been the case in Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, and alarming tendencies towards this same result were present in China as well (Ch'en, 1970: 112; *The Polemic*, 1965: 174, 181, 440, 468-70). Despite such setbacks, Mao's faith in the ultimate triumph of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the attainment of communism remained undiminished (see, for example, Mao, 1972-73: 41; Schram, 1974: 189-90, 298; *The Polemic*, 1965: 471-2, 480). Once the proletarian party had played its part in overcoming class struggle both in the wider society and in its reflected form within the Party, and had cleared the ground for the transition to communism, it would have completed its "historical mission." At this stage, like the state, it would perish (Mao, 1974a: 147; *The Polemic*, 1965: 476). What is clear in this conception is that political parties and groupings, even if subjected to attacks from within, and even if able to "change their colour" as a result, necessarily expressed the interests of a particular class. That they did, indeed, constitute such representational mechanisms of economic classes was not subjected to the slightest degree of questioning within the post-1955 Mao texts.

Mediums of Representation: Ideological Forms

Yet another superstructural entity that Mao saw as acting in the interests of specific class forces was ideology, both in its structural and ideational aspects. Ideology, Mao asserted (1977b: 460), "reflect[ed] class relations" and could not avoid having a "class character." While Mao did not envisage ideological uniformity amongst all members of a class as given, it was still the case that distinct ideological forms corresponded with the position of economic class agents. One could thus refer to the "class ideology" of the bourgeoisie, to the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie "giv[ing] expression to their own ideologies," and to the "new ideas" of the proletariat as opposed to the "old ideas" of the bourgeoisie (Ch'en, 1970: 117-18; Mao, 1977b: 409, 411). Employed in this sense, ideology denoted a reasonably systematic and coherent body of thought, a "world outlook" as Mao termed it (Mao, 1974b: 460; 1977b: 409, 417; *The Polemic*, 1965: 421). In the socialist epoch basically only two world outlooks existed, that of the proletariat and that of the bourgeoisie (Mao, 1977b: 427). Mao thus identified ideological constructions as belonging to particular classes. They expressed the fundamental interests, concerns and viewpoints of specific economic classes.

It follows that ideational forms were important media through which the struggles of classes were waged, and that one could read into the conflict between different ideologies the battle of class forces. In this sense Mao (*The Polemic*, 1965: 474) described the struggle between proletarian and bourgeois ideological forms in the socialist epoch as a "protracted and fierce class struggle." In the transition period,

Mao argued (1977b: 409), bourgeois ideology was constantly being counterpoised to the *weltanschauung* of the proletariat as each of these classes sought to “transform the world according to its own world outlook.” The outcome of this conflict impinged directly upon the future of socialism. It was therefore imperative that an unrelenting struggle be conducted against bourgeois modes of thought by propagating those characteristic of the proletariat: the “old ideas, culture, customs and habits” of the bourgeoisie, Mao argued, were being utilised to “create public opinion” in favour of a capitalist restoration, moves which necessitated that this challenge be met “head-on” via the active dissemination of the “new ideas, culture, customs and habits of the proletariat.” Only in this way could socialism be consolidated (Ch'en, 1970: 117-18).

It fell primarily to various structural organs to promote the ideology and interests of the particular class they represented. Especially important amongst these ideological structures was the media. As long as class distinctions remained, Mao contended (Ch'en, 1970: 55), newspapers were “an instrument of class struggle.” This had certainly been the case with the Shanghai paper *Wenhui bao*. By publishing reports “showing the bourgeois point of view,” *Wenhui bao* had adopted the “orientation” of a capitalist newspaper. It had, in short, taken up the “standpoint of the bourgeoisie” to wage an ideological struggle against the proletariat (Ch'en, 1970: 55-6).

Mao was thus in no doubt as to the significant role played by newspapers as tools of class struggle. Through the views they conveyed to their readers, newspapers served as vehicles for the expression of the interests of particular classes. This view was unequivocally set forth in a 1957 speech (Mao, 1977b: 460). After noting that the press was an ideological organ, Mao continued: “Some people say that the press has no class nature and is not an instrument of class struggle. They are mistaken. Until at least the extinction of imperialism the press and everything else in the realm of ideology will reflect class relations.” This was also the case with cultural institutions such as the theatre, literary and art organisations, and educational facilities. During the Cultural Revolution the actions of these ideological organs was of great concern to Mao. The cinema and theatre, he noted (Schram, 1974: 243), were “entirely in the service” of the bourgeoisie, not the proletariat. Certain literary and art agencies were “corrupting the masses” with bourgeois ideology, thereby “paving the way for a capitalist restoration.” It therefore behaved proletarian literary and art organs to actively engage their bourgeois protagonists and “carry the great proletarian Cultural Revolution through to the end” (Ch'en, 1970: 133). Nor did educational institutions stand as neutral in this ideological struggle; rather, they were “in the hands of the bourgeoisie” and were being employed to promote bourgeois interests (Mao, 1974b: 375). All of these cultural agencies, Mao asserted (1977b: 460), “fall within the scope of ideology, belong to the superstructure, and have a class nature.”

Conclusion

In the texts of the post-1955 years Mao thus elaborated a conception in which a range of political forces, ideological structures and ideational forms are deemed to represent economic classes and their interests. These entities are seen as imbued with the “character” of a particular class and as expressing the interests, aims and concerns of this class. Mao's pronouncements on this matter are entirely consistent with those of classical Marxism. In similarity with the orthodox Marxist tradition, he

argued that political and ideological media of representation embody economic class interests and act on behalf of classes.

In the classical Marxist tradition this conception, which portrays economic classes as represented in political and ideological struggle, co-exists with another, one in which economic classes themselves become participants in superstructural conflict as a result of the emergence of non-correspondence between the forces and relations of production. Mao and his European predecessors all argued that the development of the productive forces at some point outstrips the capacity of the existing pattern of production relations. This event sooner or later transforms an oppressed class in itself into a conscious agency, impelling it to pursue its newly-discovered interests in common. A polarisation of class forces occurs and the struggle between them takes place in the superstructure. The dominant class attempts to maintain the existing arrangement of production relations and superstructural forms in which it is advantaged, while an oppressed class undertakes action aimed at obliterating them. Violent revolution ensues; the oppressed class emerges victorious and recasts the old superstructure and production relations. In this fashion, the impeded productive forces are unfettered.

The reorganisation of the relations of production and the superstructure that occurs, however, is incomplete. While the productive forces have been freed to an extent sufficient to permit their further development, features characteristic of the old order continue to exist. This point emerges most clearly in the discussions undertaken by Mao (and Lenin and Stalin too) of the continuing presence of classes and class struggle in the period of socialist transition.⁷ With the proletarian revolution the bourgeoisie is deposed but not eliminated, nor is their class ideology. The incomplete transformation of the relations of production provides an economic basis for the continued and renewed existence of the bourgeoisie. Class struggle therefore persists after the proletariat's accession to political power. Those classes that confronted one another as politico-ideological agents in the final stages of capitalism because of the contradiction between the forces and relations of production thus remain on the scene as participants in class struggle. They continue to do so until further transformations of the production relations and the superstructure destroy bourgeois ideological forms and the economic basis for the regeneration of the bourgeoisie.

On this matter of classes and class struggle, I suggest a fundamental continuity exists between the classical Marxist tradition and Mao's thought after 1955. In both there is a common identification of classes as economic categories, as entities brought into existence as agents in superstructural class struggle in response to a contradiction between the forces and relations of production, and as bodies whose interests are expressed within the superstructure by various politico-ideological forces and forms. I argue, therefore, that the positing of a break occurring sometime around or after 1955 between Mao and the classical Marxist tradition in terms of the conception of classes and class struggle is an untenable exercise. Mao's pronouncements on this issue do not depart from the conceptual terrain of classical Marxism.

This is not to deny the presence of minor differences (for example, assessments of the extent of class struggle under socialism or how easily it may be resolved) between the "late Mao" position and the discursive formulations of classical Marxism. Nor does it dispute that Mao himself regarded the 1955-56 period as an important one in

his own intellectual development as he set forth a development strategy deemed appropriate to China in the period of socialist transition.⁸ However, the propositions advanced by Mao after 1955, and in the field of orthodox Marxism, on the issue of classes and class struggle share a common conceptual terrain. Underlying any differences is a common framework of assumptions and premises.

It is ironic, therefore, that Mao's thought, particularly as it was expressed in the era of socialist transition, has been commonly seen as breaking from orthodox Marxism, thus providing a source of inspiration for neo-Marxist critiques of the "economism" and "reductionism" of classical Marxism. It is also a paradox that Mao's persistent focus on class and class struggle, especially after 1955, has at least indirectly inspired the development of neo-Marxist approaches which displace such issues from the core concerns of Marxism.

Notes

- ¹ Maurice Meisner has also argued that while Mao's thought was always somewhat voluntaristic in approach, this voluntarism became more significant after Mao's 31 July 1955 speech, and was further accentuated with the Great Leap Forward (see Meisner, 1977: 1021-22, 1025; 1982: 26, 70-1, 102, 190-1).
- ² There are often slightly different Chinese language versions, and sometimes multiple English translations, of Mao's writings and speeches. In this article I have generally cited only the most accessible, or most well-known, English version of each source. Chinese language citations are available from the author.
- ³ For a discussion of the authorship of texts commonly attributed to Mao, such as "The Historical Experience of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat" and the polemics with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, see Healy (1987: 83-91). The *Wengao* sources attest to Mao's involvement in drafting and commenting on these documents. See, for example, Mao, 1992: 59-67, 283-5; 1996a: 369-76; 1996b: 102.
- ⁴ A similar point was made by Esherick (1979: 64-5). For a contrasting view, see Young (1986: 56-60).
- ⁵ I have discussed elsewhere the causal primacy Mao attributes in his post-1955 texts to the forces of production (see Healy, 1997: 127-9).
- ⁶ For a discussion of this issue in classical Marxism, see Healy (1987: 363-422).
- ⁷ For a discussion of Lenin's and Stalin's views on this matter, see Healy (1987: 387-422, 489-91).
- ⁸ See, for example, Schram (1974: 101) and Mao (1977a: 122).

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