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SOME POLITICAL THEORIES FROM PEIPING

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FOREWORD

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SOME POLITICAL THEORIES FROM PEIPING

Following is the translation of an article by Dr. Klaus Mehnert in Osteuropa (Eastern Europe) Vol X, No 7/8, Stuttgart, Jul-Aug 1960, pages 514-517.]

Since the winter of 1959-60 a campaign aiming to establish Mao Tse-Tung once again as a great theoretician of Marxism-Leninism has been in progress in China. It is conducted under the slogan: "Study Mao Tse-Tung's thoughts!". One of the most widely used catchwords of recent times has been "Mao Tse-Tung's thoughts", the term "Maoism" intentionally not being used. Such concepts as the latter exist only in non-Communist spheres. For many decades the Chinese have had a counterpart to the western suffix "ism"; they use it frequently -- also in connection with Marxism and Leninism -- but not with regard to Mao. (Khrushchev's name is linked by the Chinese with neither "ism", nor "thoughts"; Khrushchev remains simply Khrushchev).

But what do "Mao Tse-Tung's thoughts" consist of? If one reads the essays that lead to the study of these thoughts, one finds that they refer in the majority of cases to the well-known writings and speeches of Mao from the three decades between 1927 and 1957. The authors of these particular articles handle their themes, whatever they may be called, by interspersing with them numerous quotations from Mao's works, much in the same manner as was done during his lifetime with Stalin's speeches and essays.

As is well known, the fact that Mao was no longer a candidate for the office of President of State in December 1958, was linked, at the time, with the explanation Mao intended to devote himself henceforth -- unencumbered by office -- to questions of ideology. Since then more than a year and a half has passed without the world being informed of any new theoretical formulations from Mao's own lips. Certain indications of the content of Mao's new thought have been revealed, however, in the course of the "Study Mao's thoughts" campaign.

Possibly Mao had thoroughly discussed his latest deliberations within the confines of the innermost circle, and had then let them -- perhaps as a means of gauging public opinion, not under his own name -- be transmitted by his co-workers to the public. In any case, this was the manner in which it was done in 1957, when his speech of opposition of 27 February was first made known only in fragments, until ultimately -- some months later -- a version, which had meanwhile been revised by Mao,

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reached the people in dozens of millions of copies. Should this supposition be correct, then "Mao's thoughts" of recent times lend themselves to a certain degree of reconstruction.

For this purpose an article which appeared on 25 February 1960 in the Peking People's Daily, the central organ of the Communist Party of China, under the heading, "Study Mao Tse-tung's thoughts on the rapid establishment of Socialism", is most informative. It bears the signature of a man called Su Hsing, but the article could just as well have been written by Mao himself, or, at least have originated in his workshop. This is already evident in the arrangement of the article. It is divided into four sections with the stereotyped headings:

"The proper management of the relationship between conditions of production and forces of production."

"The proper management of the relationship between super-structure and economic base."

"The proper management of the relationship between rate of growth and degree of growth in the development of the political economy."

"The proper management of the relationship between objective possibilities and subjective dynamics".

Mao, himself, would probably have been more consistent and would have used the same word sequence that had been used in the first three headings also in the fourth: he would have placed subjective dynamics first, and objective possibilities second. For, what strikes one in these headings, at least in the first three, is that the sequence used is not the Marxist one: concepts that are regarded as secondary from Marxist point of view (conditions of production, superstructure, rate of growth) precede those that Marxists consider as primary (forces of production, economic basis, degree of development).

We cannot quote here the whole, rather extensive, article; the most important sections must suffice. The first sentences of Chapter I are as follows:

"The conflict between the conditions of production and the forces of production is the basic motive power in the development and transformation of all social forms. Development of the forces of production is the prerequisite for the transformation of conditions of production; conversely, changes in the conditions of production tend to induce rapid development of the forces of production. This basic principle of Marxism-Leninism applies to Socialist as well as to Communist society."

"One can discern the following way of thinking: In the Socialist society the conditions of production and the forces of production are in complete accord with one another, conflict no longer existing between them. This manner of reasoning is false."

The author then introduces the people's communes as proof of Mao's courage in changing the conditions of production (i.e., converting kolkhozes into people's communes), before the forces of production had developed so far as to make this inevitable. The result is supposed to

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have been a great increase in production. (The validity of this statement on the increase in production will not be discussed here; as is well known, it is a controversial point). "This is the strongest proof that the conditions of production in the people's communes have substantially contributed to the development of the forces of production." The meaning is clear: Mao was right -- thus reads the thesis of the author -- in creating people's communes before the material prerequisites for these were in existence; it is by these means that the (higher) conditions of production in the people's communes, can have a stimulating effect on the (as yet, low) forces of production. The chapter ends with these words:

"Never should we focus exclusively on the forces of production, neglecting the conditions of production, their modification and adaptation. For if we fail in the correct management of these two, we will not be in the position to guarantee the continuous forward impetus in our political economy."

Chapter II also begins with the exposure of a misconception:

"Some people believe that in Socialist society, where the superstructure is derived from, and is in agreement with the economic basis, the two (i.e., superstructure and economic basis) are united and no conflict exists between them. This assumption is false."

It is then explained that, according to Mao, the conflict between superstructure and basic continues to represent the principal conflict, and that it must be controlled in proper time if one would propel the development of the forces of production forward. In essence, this chapter follows Mao's theory of conflict of 1957. He makes his teachings more precise with the statement:

"New conflicts will always crop up between the superstructure and the economic basis, demanding a solution. The repetitive process of emergence of conflicts and their solution, the re-emergence of conflicts and their renewed solutions is a dialectic process, and, as such, eternal by nature."

It is interesting to see the author now turn abruptly to the problem of remuneration. It would be quite correct to remunerate according to performance the individual who has been taken over from the Capitalistic system; it would be wrong, however, to rely exclusively on this principle. The "one-sided emphasis on material incentives" creates a materialistic orientation among the working people; it undermines their revolutionary will. Mao is quite right with his watchword: "The policy (i.e., not the economy) must be the guide". This watchword comes first, the material incentive second.

In Mao's opinion the existing misconception "among some people", which is to be cleared up in Chapter III, is their false assumption that the degree of development is to be regarded as something fixed, and that it stands in opposition to the rate of development. Here is one dealing with a question that has been much discussed in China during

recent years -- particularly by the critics of the Party line, as well as by critics within the Party -- namely the degrees of development in the various branches of the economy, particularly the relationship of agriculture to industry, heavy to light industry. In this area the opponents have directed their criticism especially to the excessively rapid rate demanded by Mao and his followers. It is true that this is not explicitly stated, but the implication of these deliberations is that imbalance is an impetus to development, that it is of assistance in propelling the political economy forward "at a rapid rate and in great leaps and bounds". The lack of clarity, particularly in this chapter, indicates that the critics, which include the recently deposed brave vice-chancellor of the University of Peking, have essentially the stronger argument in their attack on Mao's tempo and his disregard for the consumer goods industry.

What the author -- and presumably Mao himself -- are driving at, appears with special clarity in Chapter IV. Here too, "some people" are censured, this time because they share the belief that the emphasis on "subjective dynamics" signified neglect of "objective possibilities". What Mao actually meant is then explained by means of an older quotation of Mao's:

"Ideas are subjective, while endeavours or actions are manifestations of the subjective in the objective; both are characteristic of human behaviour. We designate them by the term "subjective dynamics", and it is this that differentiates man from matter. All ideas which are based on and correspond to objective facts are correct ideas, and all endeavours or actions which are based on correct ideas are right actions. We must bring forth such ideas and such actions -- in short, such a form of subjective dynamics."

The subjective dynamics called forth by Mao entail a thorough recognition of objective laws. However, after the author has carefully protected himself in this manner in the face of traditional Marxism, he makes a statement as to what he understands by the term of subjective dynamics. This turns out to be the ability "to gather together millions and dozens of millions of people and to unite them into an invincibly strong force, which changes the universe and creates a new world."

In other words: it is necessary to put the subjective dynamics of people into action in order to drive development forward, despite the fact that objective possibilities for this do, as yet, not exist. This is not a wholly incomprehensible proposition for the ruler of a country in which there is a large labor force, but, thus far, only little "horsepower".

From these statements one may draw the conclusion that they are meant to furnish theoretical proof that it is possible to traverse the road to Communism faster than it had been done by the Soviet Union; that China, by means of subjective dynamics, is already set to enter into a thousand year state of communism, and this, before it had established the objective industrial and other prerequisites necessary thereto.

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This, however, appears to be nothing but an attempt to rehabilitate the people's communes ideologically, despite the fact that Khrushchev had -- without mentioning them by name, of course -- designated them as wrong on the XXI Party Congress. If one recalls that Mao has, in the one and a half years since his declaration of intent to concentrate on theoretical questions, travelled much around the country, spending most of his time in the people's communes, this supposition wins on probability.

One would, therefore, venture the following hypothesis: "Mao Tse-tung's thoughts" have for some time been revolving around the problem of theoretically justifying, vis-a-vis Khrushchev and the Soviet ideologists, the people's communes and the forced tempo of the march toward Communism. One would hope that the old master would now also let his own voice be heard. One will then wait with eager interest for the reaction from the Kremlin.