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China

Old Wine in New Bottles? The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) celebrates its centenary

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In early June this year, one month before the CCP centenary celebrations, the authorities rounded up a batch of Maoists, including Ma Houzhi who was only released from a ten years imprisonment in 2019 for committing the crime of setting up a Chinese Maoist Communist Party - an attempt to revive Mao's China. [1]

About the same time Beijing is also stepping up its repression of the Hong Kong opposition which is demanding universal suffrage. It had vaguely promised universal suffrage for Hong Kong in its Basic Law but it has no intention to honour it. Today, the CCP still claims to be the faithful successor of the great 1926-27 Canton-Hong Kong general strike (which was led by the CCP), but one thing proves it is not. One of the central demands of the then strike committee was, no more and no less, the demand for universal suffrage for Hong Kong.

It is plain silly to describe today's CCP or China as "communist" or "socialist". Not even the term "progressive" is appropriate, unless it is applied in the way Marx once did in his critique of capitalism in general - if capitalism is somehow progressive it is only because its rapid development of the productive forces laid the ground for the proletariat to capture power and to reorganize the society along the principles of equality and fraternity. By turning China into a global sweat shop the CCP has simultaneously enriched its leaders while industrialising and urbanizing the country in a pace unseen in world history. In 1949 China's peasant population accounted for 90 percent, today it has fallen to 40 per cent. In terms of the active labour force the figures are even more impressive. In 2019, not only the share of agricultural labour forces dropped to one fourth of the total, making the total share of both manufacturing and services 74 percent, what is also worth noting is the fact that services had significantly increased its share to nearly half of the total (47 percent), numbering 360millions - a pattern increasingly similar to developed countries. [2]

With such a great leap forward to industrialisation the number of the working class has reached 570 million. The spectre of a rebellious working class continues to haunt the Party. Thanks to its insistence on suppressing all forms of free organization under its rule, from 1949 onward - nay, from 1942 - it has been very successful in fending off the this spectre. Despite all the twists in its political line, sometimes leftist sometimes rightist, one single thread runs through the period from 1942 to 2021, namely its monolithic and autocratic nature.

This leads us to a discussion of "six important moments of the CCP" below, which may be helpful to readers to grasp how this once revolutionary workers party degenerated into a party of bureaucrats, capitalists and murderers, although it must be added that this party also promoted industrialization of the country, albeit at a neck-breaking speed with unnecessary and tremendous costs.

1921

1921 was the year when the CCP was founded. Before 1925 it was still a very small party with less than a thousand members. Then came the 1925-27 great Chinese revolution when millions of workers and peasants rose up to fight against both Western colonialism and the Chinese warlords. This allowed the very young party to grow quickly, to nearly 60,000 members, and half of them were workers (the rest were either students, intellectuals or peasants). At one point, the party, through leading three workers uprisings, was able to overthrow the Shanghai warlord government and established real control over this vital city. Ironically the many thousands of party members, instead of fighting under their own banner, actually fought under the Kuomintang (KMT- Chinese Nationalist Party) flag and its discipline - a result of the infamous policy of "entry into the KMT" policy dictated to the CCP by the Comintern, despite objections from the party leader, Chen Duxiu. This sealed the fate of the party when the KMT stabbed it in the back. The revolution was lost, and its members were either killed or hunted down.

Birthplace of Chinese Communist Party

1928

The year 1928 began with the tragic defeat of the CCP's uprising in Guangzhou at the end of 1927. Unlike previous uprisings, this was conducted when the revolution had already been defeated. It was imposed on the CCP by Stalin, who was eager to artificially manufacture an uprising in order to save face from leading the Chinese revolution into great defeat. This suicidal uprising helped the KMT to further eliminate more than 90 percent of the CCP's urban forces. From then on the party would shift its base to the countryside and transformed itself into a party of peasants while the proportion of worker members became negligible. Both Stalinisation of the party and its engagement in chiefly guerrilla warfare now further transformed the party's once lively internal democratic regime into a top down party.

1942

1942 marked another watershed in the evolution of the party. It was the year when Mao conducted his infamous "Yanan rectification movement". According to the historian Gaohua's book *How the Red Sun Rose* this "movement" was in essence a purge against the last remnants of the Party's democratic legacy inherited from the great 1919 May Fourth Movement and the New Culture Movement. No wonder after the purge Mao was officially recognized by the leadership as the top leader who would make the final decisions for the party. Mao's personal cult was literally built upon the corpses of those being framed up and purged and also upon the final death of Mr. Democracy and Mr. Science a metaphor used by Chen Duxiu to propagate these values when he was the undisputed leader of the New Culture Movement. The Party was still launching a revolution against the KMT, but with an autocratic leadership and personal cult becoming dominant. In terms of political form it was increasingly in alignment with the traditional Chinese ill-named "peasant revolution". In the history of Imperial China - they always end up as another *Yixinggeming*, or a revolution which just brought about "a change of the family name of the Emperor". In social terms it was different. But politically speaking the Party in 1942 was no longer the same party as when it was founded.

1953

In 1949 the CCP decisively defeated the KMT and founded the People's Republic of China. A great land reform was conducted nationwide. Yet it was overshadowed by the further consolidation of the monolithic Party and the autocratic leader Chairman Mao. Not only was there no genuinely free elections ever and opposition parties banned, it went so far as to practically outlaw most of the autonomous civil associations.

Meanwhile, the persecuted Chinese Trotskyists worried that the Party's "New Democracy" program (a four-classes alliance which included the bourgeoisie and which would further promote the development of capitalism) would preclude the possibility of a turn to the left when the moment of class struggles between the landlords / bourgeoisie and the working people sharpened. To the surprise of the Chinese Trotskyists, in a matter of several years, the Party abruptly abandoned its program of New Democracy, and opted for the "general line of socialism" in 1953, which soon evolved into the madness of the "Great Leap Forward" to "communism". Small peasants would see their lands confiscated by the local communes, small merchants and craftsmen would be incorporated in the so called cooperatives, while capitalists would be eliminated, not necessarily physically, but definitely as a class. This sudden ultra-left turn was made possible by Mao's one-man dictatorship. Among top leaders he was nearly alone in arguing for dumping the old program of New Democracy into the rubbish bin and starting to introduce "socialism". The autocratic regime established in 1942 guaranteed Mao's absolute authority to accomplish the turn.

It was this turn that reminds us of the limitation of defining the CCP in its guerrilla war period as "peasant party" pure

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and simple. It was also a party which had very strong link to the Soviet Union, constantly looking to its leadership. Hence if this was a "peasant party" it was one which was practically led by a foreign state founded, at the beginning at least, by the Russian proletariat. This international element constantly shaped the course of the CCP. Upon the founding of the new state Mao had already called for copying the "model" of the USSR, which would later evolve into total nationalization and collectivization.

The great "left" turn seemed to deserve applause from the left. Yet socialism is not just about "nationalization". Choosing a correct timing and the proper way to do it is as much important as the objective itself, and this means full democracy, initiatives from below, and acting within the objective economic and technical limits. In doing the opposite the CCP under Mao had created with this Great Leap Forward one of the greatest tragedies in human history.

The fact that Mao's adventure failed miserably did not make him come back to its senses. A face-losing Mao would soon whip up another mad campaign, the Cultural Revolution, so as to wipe out those leaders like Liu Shaoqi who dared to grumble about the Great Leap Forward. The logic of rotten autocracy now fully played itself out, despite all the rhetoric about Marxism and Socialism. Precisely because of these tragedies, Mao had deeply discredited the very idea of socialism, laying the ground for the right wing counter offensive in the future.

1976

When Mao died in 1976, the country was totally exhausted by this ultra-left madness. The "old cadres" soon came back to power. They were more practical, and would soon do away with the communes, the legacies of the Cultural Revolution etc, and announced that from there onward the Party, instead of focusing on "class struggles" it would now uphold the "four modernizations". However their comeback also symbolized the ultimate triumph of the bureaucracy. Mao, the emperor without a crown, suffered the same fate of countless emperors in Imperial China - he could kill any bureaucrat he wanted, but ultimately the bureaucracy itself would always win - it would grow bigger and bigger, and devour a larger and larger share of social surpluses (until it becomes increasingly unbearable by the people).

Yet in 1979 when Deng became the new head of the bureaucracy his promises of "modernisation" was welcomed by the people who wanted to see the end of Mao's madness. For Deng, the tragic experiences of Mao's "communism" now supplied the Party with the best argument to turn to capitalism and enrich themselves. Eventually the country's most important branches of the economy would be controlled by a handful of families of the "second red generation" and the "offspring of government officials". It was also a moment when the Party has to spend a budget on internal security larger or similar to the defense budget - it knows very well who their main enemies are, namely, the people themselves.

The 1989 democratic movement was the people's response to the Party's bureaucratic capitalism - a kind of capitalism where the ruling party simultaneously fused political and economic power in its own hands. Ironically it was the CCP who in the 1930's accused the KMT's regime as a kind of "bureaucratic capitalism". The Party's bloody crackdown on the movement signifies nothing but the complete and irreversible degeneration of the ruling Party into a bureaucratic capitalist party. No wonder the dominant social composition of this party now is officials. In thirty years the Party would once again crack down on the people, this time on the Hong Kong democratic movement, so as to complete its project of building a perfect Orwellian society in China. In this sense the CCP has exhibited most perfectly the original meaning of "revolution" - a course of events that eventually lead back to the starting point. One could say that CCP's China is just a reborn KMT regime of the 1930s, only this time it is much more successful than its predecessor.

Source [Anti*Capitalist Resistance](#).

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[1] Radio Free Asia, 9 June 2021 "[Chinese Police Detain Maoist Leftists Ahead of Ruling Party Centenary](#)".

[2] World Bank [Indicators](#).