

## **Maoism: A Stage of Marxism**

Group for the Foundation of the Union of Communists of France Marxist-Leninist (UCFML)

Our conviction that Maoism is a stage of Marxism—its post-Leninist stage—dates back to the moment of our foundation. It is rooted in the experience, the universal significance, and the assessment of the Cultural Revolution. Between 1966 and 1976, and especially from 1966 to 1969, this revolution in China has seen the first political mass revolt against the new revisionist bourgeoisie present in the party and in the state. Mao has given the very first Marxist indications as to the novelties of this revolutionary class struggle, which is characteristic of our era.

As is only natural, our definition of Maoism, tied as it is to our political experience, has been enriched and developed. Here we give a few markers, taken from the successive definitions that we have put forward.

**The Initial Definition: Ideology and Ultraleftist Influence**

“Mao Zedong’s thought is the Marxism-Leninism of our era, the era in which imperialism is heading for its total collapse and in which socialism marches on toward victory in the whole world. . . . it is the Marxism-Leninism of the era in which modern revisionism is the concrete force of bourgeois ideology and of class collaboration in the midst of the world proletariat’s forces.” (March 1970)

“Mao Zedong’s thought is the weapon that allows the people to struggle victoriously against revisionism and, in so doing, to struggle victoriously against imperialism and reaction.” (March 1970)

“To serve the people: this guideline summarizes the contribution of Mao Zedong’s thought to Marxism and to Leninism.” (March 1970)

“What the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution [GPCR] and Mao Zedong’s thought teach us is that it is possible to vanquish revisionism only by putting the proletarian, collectivist, and altruistic ideology in the command post, by UNIFYING the people on this unshakable ground.” (March 1970)

A fundamental idea: that Maoism is the Marxism of the era of modern revisionism. The rest is caught in ultraleftism: an “impatient” characterization of the stage in question (imperialism is collapsing); an ideologist definition of revisionism, in terms of “collaboration” and not in terms of a specific state project; Maoism reduced to “serving the people.”

**The Intermediate Stage: Recognition of the Continuity between Marxism, Leninism, and Maoism**

“Maoism is the continuation of Marxism and of Leninism in our era. It is the deepening of the scientific theory of the class struggle, pushed all the way to its historical endpoint, to the dictatorship of the proletariat, to the withering of the state, all the way to communism.” (September 1976)

“Maoism is the revolutionary politics of the current stage in world ideological history. Maoism is the actual rapport of the mass movements to politics, to the class struggle. Maoism defines, in the conditions of our time, the space of politics.” (November 1976)

“Practice, guided by the new theory of the class struggle under the dictatorship of the proletariat, and consequently, by the new theory of proletarian revolution: that is what is required from the reference to Maoism. Because Maoism concentrates the new universally acquired knowledge of Marxism-Leninism on the practical ground of the eminent revolutionary experience of our time: the Cultural Revolution. Equally eminent for our time as the Paris Commune was for its time.

How can we combat, in France, the modern revisionism of the PCF [Parti communiste français] and the CGT [Confédération générale du travail], without being a Marxist of this time, a Marxist of the mass struggle against the bureaucratic bourgeoisie and its counterrevolutionary state project? How can we build the Leninist Party of the new type, the party of the proletariat of our time, without assimilating and applying the teachings of the Cultural Revolution? How can we summarize in a communist political program the revolutionary ideas of the masses in revolt, the ideas that came out of the concrete historical movement, without being the bearer of the method of knowledge, the philosophy, the proletarian theory of the state that is at work in the most advanced mass experiment of our time, the revolutionary experiment in China, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution?

Those who step back from Maoism in fact turn away from the very possibility of seizing what is new in the revolutionary movement of the proletariat and the popular masses. They are not Marxists of the mass movement of our time, they are not Marxists at all.” (November 1976)

“Maoism affirms that, even under socialism, what happens at the level of the state is subordinate to what happens in the class struggle. Maoism affirms that the dictatorship of the proletariat is a concept of politics, and not a concept of the state. To be a Maoist means to restore to the antagonism of bourgeoisie/proletariat its absolute primacy and its universality.

And that is why to be a Maoist means simply to be a Marxist from after the Cultural Revolution. A Marxist today, and this no matter what happens in China.” (June 1977)

In the years between 1975 and 1977, our definition of Maoism becomes firmly inscribed around three themes:

- Maoism is the ACTUAL Marxism, that of the class struggle today.
- Maoism means to push the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat all the way to recognize the class struggle even under the dictatorship of the proletariat.
- Maoism is the Marxism that is contemporary to the new bourgeoisie and its proletarian obverse: the GPCR.

The force of this conception resides in the return to a truly political definition of Marxism. It also does justice to the recasting, by Maoism, of the fundamental concepts: that of class (with the new bourgeoisie) and that of the dictatorship of the proletariat (with the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat).

The relative weakness comes from the fact that, in a natural move of rectification, we underscore the continuity with Leninism and we do not yet submit the problems of Maoism (and the assessment of the GPCR) to the most difficult and essential questions: the question of the party, and that of communism.

### **Maoism, the Marxism of the Struggle on Two Fronts**

“Maoism is the Marxism of the era of imperialism, of social-imperialism, and of the proletarian revolution.” (February 1978)

“For us, the point is not to redo and improve upon the completely or partially disastrous itinerary of our predecessors of the Third International. That is not where the question lies. It lies in the restoration of capitalism in the USSR: is this restoration the sign of a formidable failure on the part of proletarian politics, or not? Is it not the outcome of the class struggle, in which the proletariat has been defeated because the bourgeoisie has gained the

upper hand? On the nature of this new bourgeoisie, on its political essence, on its difference and its continuity with the old one, we are no longer in 1963, we are situated after the Cultural Revolution. After the first proletarian revolution against this bourgeoisie. We are not only Leninists, but Maoists, and this all the more so in that May '68 and the years that followed until today, whatever their difficulties may be, have shown that Maoism understood in this way was a politics at work within the proletariat and among the people in France. At work, because here too the combat is against the two bourgeoisies, and because, as such, the space of politics here is necessarily that of Maoism.” (February 1978)

“Structural” stabilization of our definition. From now on we are confronted with the failure of the Cultural Revolution (fall of the Four, reactionary countercurrent in China . . .). It is the complete space of the (world) struggle on two fronts that objectively grounds Maoism.

The subjective aspect of the question, practiced in our party politics, is not completely systematized.

### **Toward a Critical Assessment of Leninism (the Post-Leninist Era)**

“The assertion: ‘He alone is a Marxist who extends the recognition of the class struggle all the way to include that of the dictatorship of the proletariat’ is an essential acquisition of militant Marxism. Modern revisionists, headed by the CP of the Soviet Union in the sixties, followed by others in its wake, one of which is the PCF, have not been mistaken when they rejected this fundamental principle of proletarian politics.

But in the historical conditions that are our own, after the emergence of bureaucratic state capitalism and the installment of a social-fascist type of power in the USSR, after the failure—be it transitory—of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the theme of the dictatorship of the proletariat no longer concentrates in and of itself the current political essence of Marxism, that is to say, the proletarian conception of the class struggle. Today the Marxist view of the class struggle must include both the dictatorship of the proletariat and communism.” (June 1980)

“Maoism marks a break with regard to Leninism. Rather, it opens the necessity for a break, while the conceptual framework for this break has not been constituted. There reigns a relative silence in the GPCR and on the part of Mao about what would be the profile of the party of the new stage. Mao and the GPCR open the period of post-Leninism by clearing certain tracks on the question of the masses, on the proletariat, but not on proletarian politics, not on the politics of the party. Mao opens post-Leninism in terms of mass politics, but for the moment we cannot say that the principle of unity between mass politics and class politics has been found.” (January 1981)

“The CCP, by completely dividing itself, guaranteed a relative control over the mass process of the GPCR. In light of this experience it is necessary to reintroduce the distinction between revolution and party, between class party and revolutionary party. The revolution, which means the state, the replacement of one state form by another. The party, that means the revolution plus communism. It is not only the state in its current phase, but with the next phase as well. For this reason there are revolutionary situations without party, and Marxist parties that are not revolutionary; a revolutionary party is not by force communist, in the way a class party is. The class party is revolutionary AND communist.” (January 1981)

At this stage, Maoism is defined as the subjective framework of politics, around the following central ideas:

- Leninism, which has victoriously resolved the problems of power (antagonistic classes and state) inherited from the nineteenth century, is insufficient to think the politics of the period of transition, the period that must include the question of communism at the same time as the question of the revolution.
- What gives focus to the contradiction revolution/communism is the party. This is also the new center of gravity of the assessment of the GPCR.

These are open problems, problems of the crisis of Marxism.

Translated by Bruno Bosteels

**Note**

This text originally appeared in *10 ans de maoïsme: Une histoire, un bilan, une politique*, a special double issue of *Le Marxiste-Léniniste: Journal Central du Groupe pour la Fondation de l'Union des Communistes de France Marxistes Léninistes* 50–51 (1981): 7–9. All the quotations in this brief anthology are excerpted either from previous issues of *Le Marxiste-Léniniste* or from the many pamphlets and books published by the UCFML. For each stage, the original excerpts, from 1970 to 1981, are followed by a retrospective evaluation from this last year. The reader interested in knowing more about the specific sources used in this anthology may want to consult the bibliography included as an appendix to this special issue. —Trans.