

A First-Hand Report on the Cultural Revolution

By REWI ALLEY

WRITTEN ESPECIALLY FOR CHALLENGE READERS

January, 1967, and each morning as Peking sprang to life, I pulled over the transistor and twisted knobs to hear what was being said in London, Washington, Tokyo and Melbourne. How foolish one would have been to take the hearsay reporting to cover in any way what is really a vast movement. The China of 1967 is something that few without a knowledge of and a belief in the revolution will understand. China's Cultural Revolution started in a big way in the early summer of 1966, when various Peking organizations began to denounce those in charge of Cultural Affairs in the Peking Party Committee. Then, as things went onward, more facts began to come to light, and a more widespread section of the people began to express their disapproval of the road being taken, which was obviously veering away from the far-sighted thinking of Chairman Mao.

The Communist Party had had a glorious history, including success in the Wars of Resistance and Liberation, then over the U.S. in Korea. The country had become self-sufficing in much, especially in essentials like cotton, coal, oil, iron and grain. She had developed the atom bomb, and had synthesized insulin for the first time in the world. She had covered her land with a network of highways and irrigation systems, and built new cities with fine schools and hospitals. But the older cadres, who had come through so much, now had their own spheres to work in.

Chairman Mao had laid down the axiom that in everything it must always be the people who are to be depended on. It is the people, especially those of the newer generation, for whom the revolution has been fought—they who are all-important. Always he has been against letting revolutionary enthusiasm stagnate.

Some cadres, however, had become used to the habit of thinking that the particular task they had in hand was the all-important thing regardless of the people. For instance, at times temporary workers have to be taken on to complete some rush task. This is normal and only to be expected in China's present state of development. But some began to follow a method learnt from the Soviet Union, of keeping certain workers (really permanent) as temporary,

"The imperialists and revisionists spread mountains of lies about the Cultural Revolution. They know it is aimed at them from a class point of view, and they are trying to defeat it at all costs... We wish the Cultural Revolution every success."
(From Road to Revolution-II, a statement of the National Committee of the Progressive Labor Party.)

with the purpose of denying them a voice in the political life of the organization. Better to play safe, they thought, and have a good hold on supporters who could be relied on to always support. So, actually, some stagnation did ensue in certain places.

A few cadres thought a good deal of personal power, and their own position in the organization. Their families had grown, their own living standard had been raised. Some sought security for their own position, by making combinations with other cadres, and naturally they often wanted their own precious children to succeed them in some new cadre class, as painlessly as possible. "I do not want my children to go through all I have gone through" is a common enough cry around the world.

In consequence, the same thing that finally led to revisionism in the Soviet Union began to happen in China, though practically all the cadres concerned would stoutly deny that they had any revisionist thought whatsoever. In the present revolution it has been the masses who have pointed out to them the mistakes in the line they were taking.

Obviously what was next on the programme would be that some cadres of the new generation would try and make a tight cadre class of old fellow students, of revolutionary families, and would thus prevent the creative masses from rising to their full potential.

The revolution to help to counter all this went into a struggle: to get the thought of Mao Tse-tung firmly fixed in people's minds as a first essential. Thought which would increase determination in front of all difficulties, and make for a deep practical understanding of the mass line. Editions of Mao's works climbed rapidly into the hundreds of millions. The whole nation started to study.

Then, from the universities and schools of Peking and Tsinghua, the Red Guard movement flared up, a movement which, by

the end of 1966, had brought eleven million youth to Peking, and had taken others into literally every populated part of China. This caused near panic amongst certain opponents of the cultural revolution. They dared not express themselves openly, so high did rebel waves beat, so they took advantage of the Red Guard movement, in some instances succeeding in infiltrating it with youth loyal to them, exciting them on to excesses which they know would help to discredit it.

It is still too early as this is being written to fully assess all the aspects of the Red Guard movement, but there is no doubt that, by and large, Red Guards did do a big piece of work, carrying out much that was needed to be done, especially in bigger

question "What have I myself done to serve the people?" So does theory more and more express itself in practice. In this 1966-7 winter people have thrown themselves into irrigation and other public works with immense enthusiasm. This success in the application of the thought of Mao Tse-tung is perhaps the most sensational news of our day, embracing as it does one-fourth of the world's people.

Coming just recently from a five-week tour of the hinterland hills and streams of Hunan, I have seen evidences of this that are staggering. Everywhere the people are depending on their own resources to find ways to increase production, irrigate fields that so short a time ago were subject to drought, become more self-sufficient and raise their political understanding.

In the land of Lenin, Lenin's works did not always get down to the common man. In China today, there are few, even amongst the humblest, who do not have an understanding of the "Three

which preceded it, for it will have found unity in a new way, and will have abolished many of the abuses

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Red Guards meet Chairman Mao in Peking.

which so easily creep in. It will have developed a momentum which will carry the revolution forward.

Chairman Mao is fully determined that there shall be no lapse into revisionism, that China will not desert the revolution but rather remain its guiding star. An article in the Peking press advises cadres who are against the cultural revolution to return to the correct path, or else the masses will surely overthrow them and they will have only themselves to blame.

The object is a "thorough proletarian revolutionization of our party and government institutions." There must be democracy within the ranks of the people. On no account is it permissible to exploit them. There is of course, dictatorship over the reaction. Outmoded rules and conventions must be banished from institutions. Science must replace feudal-minded custom. The masses must be encouraged to educate and liberate their minds. In these things, much has been done already. Much more is being done all the time.

The cultural revolution will go on for quite a while yet. But one thing is sure. The thought of Mao Tse-tung will be the thought that will carry China forward through the next stages, the thought that will illumine the path of the world

cities.

Naturally, not everyone likes the promise of a social order based in a new and downright way on the mass line. The whole concept of half-work half-study schools was especially hated by older educational bureaucrats, who neither understood nor wanted to understand it. In their heart of hearts they had a contempt for the peasant youngster.

They wanted to have universities become the privileged stamping ground for their children and the children of those like them. If a child could memorize easily, talk glibly, pass exams with honors, dress nicely, then of course he was fit to govern.

It got to the stage in some universities that when talented youngsters were sent in from the villages, such Confucian autocrats found ways and means to get rid of them swiftly. "Failed in Politics" was one common excuse for sending the talented common child back home again.

Since early 1966 there has come a tremendous popular desire to study Mao's works. Red Guards, country school children, cadres, peasant associations, and practically everyone now has the little Red Book of Mao's quotations. Many passages are memorized. The walls of villages and towns are covered with quotations with yellow characters on a red ground. Children write out essays such as that on *Serve the People*, and in some places sing them.

Short Essays' of Mao Tse-tung, those on *Serving the People*, *In Memory of Norman Bethune*, and *The Foolish Old Man who Removed the Mountain*.

The spirit of youthful optimism is current amongst the people, though in certain circles, especially amongst some of the higher officials, there has been a certain amount of head-scratching, and a lot of self-criticism.

The China that is emerging from this struggle will be infinitely stronger than the one



Liberated Tibetan serfs at a meeting.



Wall posters put up by students at Peking University.

Then, all the time, comes the