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Leninism and Maoism: Some Populist Perspectives on Marxism-Leninism in China

By MAURICE MEISNER

ISAAC DEUTSCHER once observed that the Chinese Communist revolution presents the paradox of “the most archaic of nations avidly absorbing the most modern of revolutionary doctrines, the last word in revolution, and translating it into action. Lacking any native ancestry, Chinese Communism descends straight from Bolshevism. Mao stands on Lenin’s shoulders.”¹ This echoes the generally accepted view of the historical relationship between Maoism and Leninism. Among most western students of Chinese communism it is something of a truism that Marxism came to China in its Leninist form; for different reasons, Maoists have long been saying that Mao (and now only Mao) is the true heir of Lenin. Indeed, the “thought of Mao Tse-tung” is no longer simply considered the practical application of “the universal truths” of Marxism-Leninism to the specifically Chinese historical situation, but is explicitly celebrated as a new and higher stage of universally valid revolutionary theory; it is “invincible Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought” that now propels world history forward.² In contemporary Maoist eyes, Mao stands on the shoulders of Lenin as firmly as Lenin presumably stands on the shoulders of Marx.

Yet while Mao may have the last word (or at least the latest word) on revolution, it is by no means clear that the words he proclaims are Leninist words. The whole question of the relationship between Leninism and Maoism is filled with ambiguities and the historic tie between the two has become exceedingly tenuous. How, after all, is it possible for “Leninist proletarian revolutionaries” consciously to undertake to destroy the very organizational apparatus which Leninism teaches is the vanguard of proletarian revolution? If the Party is the incarnation of proletarian consciousness, as any good Leninist must believe, then why is it that Maoists attribute true “proletarian consciousness” to individuals and groups completely outside of the Party structure? If Leninists have always regarded the “spontaneous” strivings and consciousness of

¹ Isaac Deutscher, *Ironies of History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 89-90.

² This recent and rather awkward term is more-or-less officially canonized in “Leninism or Social-Imperialism?—In Commemoration of the Centenary of the Birth of the Great Lenin” (Editorial in *Jen-min jih-pao*, *Chieh-fang-chün pao* and *Hung-ch’i*). See *Peking Review* (24 April 1970), pp. 5-15.

the masses as not only inadequate but potentially dangerous for the revolutionary cause, why do Maoists so prize the spontaneous revolutionary creativity of the masses? If Leninism teaches that the essential precondition for effective revolutionary action is the discipline and authority of the Party and its organizations, why is it that so much recent Maoist revolutionary action has been directed against this discipline? Indeed, how was it psychologically possible, much less politically and ideologically feasible, for Mao Tse-tung to call for the masses to “rebel” against the Party organization that he himself was largely responsible for building and leading to revolutionary triumph?

Few answers to these questions are to be found in the “Marxist-Leninist” writings of Maoist theoreticians. Whatever may be the actual state of the Chinese Communist Party in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution—and whatever may be the real Maoist attitude towards the Party—Maoists do not abandon their claim to be the inheritors of the Leninist tradition. Just as Lenin and his successors presented “Leninism” as orthodox Marxism, so Maoists proclaim “Mao Tsetung Thought” as the only orthodox version of Marxism-Leninism. And in both cases the most significant departures, innovations and revisions tend to be obscured by the use of orthodox ideological formulae, by the psychological, intellectual and political needs to reaffirm the tie to the inherited revolutionary tradition.

Thus, in attempting to understand the relationship between Maoism and the Marxist-Leninist tradition, it is not sufficient to examine exegetically Chinese Communists’ writings on Marxism-Leninism and the role of the Party and compare them with the writings of “pre-Maoist” Leninists and Marxists. The literature itself does not always suggest the crucial questions, much less provide the answers. Indeed, some of the central problems involved in understanding the Maoist revolutionary mentality may not be apparent within a strictly “Marxist-Leninist” framework and it may prove useful to go outside the realm of formal ideology and approach Maoism in terms of broader intellectual and historical perspectives.

The rather unconventional approach of this article involves Populist as well as Marxist intellectual perspectives and nineteenth-century Russian as well as twentieth-century Chinese historical perspectives. More specifically, I shall attempt to explore the relationship between Maoism and Leninism by relating certain implicit strands in Maoist thought to the general intellectual tendencies of Russian Populism. Rather than comparing Mao solely with his Marxist predecessors, I shall attempt to treat Maoism with reference to some general ideas and problems which were articulated in a “pre-Leninist” revolutionary movement.

In comparing Maoism with Russian Populism there is no intention of implying—for there is no evidence to suggest—that Mao or Maoists were influenced by Russian Populist ideas. Unlike Lenin, Mao (as far as one knows) did not read Herzen or Chernyshevsky, nor is there anything in the history of Maoism comparable to the lengthy anti-Populist polemics which occupied so much of Lenin's early revolutionary activities. Rather, what is relevant is the independent appearance of certain similar revolutionary modes of thought and a confrontation with certain common problems and dilemmas. Leninism was in part a response to ideas and problems most forcefully expressed and raised by Populist revolutionaries and it is by identifying the distinctively Maoist response to similar ideas and problems in China that one may hope to measure something of the intellectual distance between Maoism and Leninism. Thus, before turning to the latter, it is necessary briefly to discuss some of the characteristic features of nineteenth-century Russian Populist thought and several of the enduring revolutionary problems the Populists encountered and debated.

Although Russian Populism was ideologically amorphous and its political manifestations diverse and complex, the Populists shared certain fundamental and identifiable beliefs and hopes. These have since died in Russia but remain very much alive in contemporary revolutionary movements in other areas of the world and have, therefore, more than a purely Russian historical significance.

I. RUSSIAN POPULISM

Classical Russian Populism³ was above all marked by a conception of "the people" as a more or less single entity with collectivistic social aspirations. The socialist reorganization of society, it was assumed, would be the quite natural result of the release of the inherent aspirations and revolutionary energies of the vast peasant masses.

This faith in the socialist potentialities of the "pre-capitalist" peasantry was closely associated with a fear of the intrusion of modern

³ "Classical Russian Populism" generally refers to the movement (largely inspired by the writings of Herzen and Chernyshevsky) between about 1850 and 1880, the period prior to the degeneration of Populism into revolutionary terrorism and prior to the widespread influence of Marxism among the Russian intelligentsia. The discussion here will be confined to the intellectual rather than the political tendencies of the movement and will focus on those aspects of Populist ideology particularly relevant for contemporary comparative purposes. The discussion is based largely on the following: Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution* (New York, 1966); G. Ionescu and E. Gellner, *Populism, Its Meaning and National Characteristics* (London, 1969); A. Walicki, *The Controversy Over Capitalism: Studies in the Social Philosophy of the Russian Populists* (London, 1969); Leopold Haimson, *The Russian Marxists and the Origins of Bolshevism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1955); and various writings of Herzen and Chernyshevsky available in English translation. For an excellent discussion of the semantic, conceptual and historical problems involved in defining the "classical era" of Russian Populism, see A. Walicki, *The Controversy Over Capitalism*, pp. 1-28.

capitalist economic forces which threatened to undermine these innate socialist aspirations and to destroy the traditional village *mir*, the idealized collective social organization which was to be the basis for the socialist reconstruction of society. For the Populists, unlike the Marxists, capitalism was neither an inevitable nor a desirable stage of social development; it was not the harbinger of socialism but a spectre of a possible future that might forever preclude its realization. Reflected here was not only the desire to escape the social costs of capitalist industrialization—and a contempt for western bourgeois society in general—but also an impatience with “history,” an impatience expressed in a faith in “pre-capitalist” Russia as the pioneer of socialist revolution.

In this sense, the Populists can be seen as the ideological forerunners of the contemporary notion of “the advantages of backwardness.” Tsarist Russia, they proclaimed, was closer to the achievement of socialism than the advanced industrialized states precisely because of the relative lack of capitalist development, precisely because of the moral and social virtues inherent in Russian “backwardness.” Yet the Populists were by no means advocates of backwardness *per se*. They saw themselves as modern scientific men and advocated the appropriation of the latest fruits of western European technology—but to be utilized for the benefit of the people rather than as new instruments for their oppression.

Accompanying this “utopian” search for a means to by-pass capitalism is a curious ambivalence in the Populist view of the role of historical traditions in the revolutionary process. The general theme was announced by Herzen shortly after the failure of the revolutions of 1848. His argument that Russia could achieve the socialist transformation that the western countries were incapable of was supported, on the one hand, by the view that Russia was relatively free from burdensome traditions. Whereas Europe was “exhausted” by the weight of its history, and its “energies” and “will-power” were insufficient to “sustain its own [socialist] ideas,” Russia’s energy and freedom from burdensome historical traditions, a function of her backwardness, enabled her to by-pass capitalism and proceed more or less immediately to the advanced socialist phase.⁴ On the other hand, Herzen expressed the view that “the Russians were Socialists by tradition”⁵ and appealed to the allegedly socialist traditions of the *mir* and *artel* which had survived in Russia but not in the West.⁶ This ambivalent attitude

⁴ These ideas are expressed with particular clarity in Herzen’s influential letter to Jules Michelet entitled “The Russian People and Socialism” (1851). See Alexander Herzen, *From the Other Shore* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1956), pp. 165–208.

⁵ Quoted in Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, p. 34.

⁶ Herzen, “The Russian People and Socialism,” in *From the Other Shore*, p. 189.

towards tradition occurs throughout Populist thought; the faith in Russia's special socialist potential rested both on the uniqueness of Russian historical traditions and the notion that Russia was uniquely unburdened by tradition.

It should be noted that central to the Populist faith is the view that the state and bureaucracy are inherently evil phenomena; the state is seen as an alien force which produces and perpetuates "unnatural" class divisions in society and precludes true human solidarity. Indeed, the Populists distrusted all forms of large-scale organization, whether political or economic. In their vision of a non-bureaucratic socialist future, they looked forward to a combination of "living and working" that was to be brought about by incorporating modern industry within the framework and in accordance with the principles of the traditional peasant commune.

Closely related to this profoundly anti-bureaucratic orientation was a general hostility to intellectual and occupational specialization, and thus a certain enmity to formal higher education. Although they themselves were intellectuals and, for the most part, products of institutions of higher education, they shared Rousseau's belief in "the goodness of simple men" (as Isaiah Berlin has noted) and his distrust of intellectuals and specialists. At the heart of the Populist impulse was the intelligentsia's deep sense of isolation from society and the need "to merge" with the masses of the people.

Brief mention should be made of several other characteristic features of Russian Populism: the powerful anti-urban bias which pictured the modern city as a foreign creation identified with the corrupting and dehumanizing influences of western capitalism; and the all-pervasive mood of heroic self-sacrifice, an impulse which received its most noble expression in the ill-fated "go to the people" movement of the 1870s, when young Populist intellectuals did in fact leave the cities in an attempt to "merge" with the peasant masses. However, within the limits of this article, particular attention should be given to two theoretical problems of special contemporary relevance which the Populists encountered. One problem concerned identifying the source and bearers of true socialist consciousness; the other was the dilemma of reconciling revolutionary means with revolutionary goals.

The problem of consciousness

The question of the role of consciousness in social change is of paramount importance in Populist ideology because of its fundamentally voluntarist assumptions on the nature of history and the making of revolution. For the Populists, unlike the Marxists, the decisive factor in history was not the inexorable movement of the material forces of production but rather the choices and actions of men; although socialism

was ethically desirable and humanly possible, it was not historically predetermined. What was ultimately decisive, as Herzen put it, was, "men who combine faith, will, conviction and energy."⁷ The creation of a new society presupposed the emergence of those deeply dedicated and morally pure "men of the new age" so passionately portrayed in the writings of Chernyshevsky.

These "new men" were an elite of young intellectuals who were capable of imposing their socialist consciousness on historical reality and providing guidance for the masses. But the elitist implications of these notions were tempered by the basic, but perhaps conflicting, Populist faith that socialist consciousness resided ultimately in the people themselves, in the socialist traditions and ideals of the peasantry and the *mir*. The "new men" were basically catalytic agents in a revolutionary process in which all would become "new men" in a new and just society.

Yet the Populists never succeeded in reconciling the conflict between their duty to enlighten and lead the masses and their desire to learn from and merge with them. This conflict is found in Herzen, who called for men of consciousness and determination to "go to the people," but they were to go not with "ready-made works" but simply to reveal to the people "what is secretly stirring in their [the people's] spirits." Herzen emphasized the need for "men who combine faith, will, conviction and energy" who "do not necessarily spring" from the people, yet he also insisted that these should be men "who will never divorce themselves" from the people but "who act within them and with them. . . . The man who feels himself to be so near the people that he has been virtually freed *by them* from the atmosphere of artificial civilization . . . will be able to speak to the people and must do so."⁸

The Populist world view thus rested on a central dilemma: a voluntaristic belief in the decisive revolutionary role of the consciousness of the intelligentsia was accompanied by a basic faith that the truly creative forces of revolution reside in the people themselves. On the one hand, the transformation of society was attributed to the knowledge and action of "men of culture"; on the other, it was held that the prime duty of the intellectual was to learn from the wisdom of the masses. This Populist dilemma was to be inherited by Lenin and, within a Marxist ideological framework, to be decisively "resolved" in a highly elitist fashion. It was also a dilemma that was to confront Mao Tse-tung and one not to be so easily resolved.

⁷ Quoted in Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, p. 35.

⁸ Quoted in Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, p. 35 (emphases added).

The dilemma of means and ends

The problem of reconciling political methods with socio-political goals, the problem of ensuring that the political means employed are consistent with the ends towards which those means are directed, is a dilemma which confronts all who would engage in political activity and the manner in which the problem is treated—or ignored—is a matter that often has enormous practical historical consequences. Perhaps in no other revolutionary movement was this dilemma faced so explicitly and debated so seriously than among Russian Populist intellectuals. The reasons why this problem assumed particular prominence in the Populist movement lie both in the nature of the Tsarist Russian state and society and in the contradictory strands present in Populist ideology itself. The continued and increasing gap in Russian society between the intelligentsia and the people, the political apathy of the peasantry and the general failure of the revolutionary intelligentsia to obtain mass support, the harsh police repression which made mass organizational activities virtually impossible, the further erosion of the collectivistic traditions of the *obshchina*—such were some of the factors which fostered elitist and conspiratorial tendencies in the Populist movement. In the 1860s, and especially after the failure of the “go to the people” movement of 1874, many increasingly turned to terrorism, to Jacobin and even Blanquist notions and methods of revolution. Although this was not inconsistent with one major strand in Populist thought—the belief in the decisive revolutionary role of enlightened men—it directly contradicted the belief in the spontaneous revolutionary energies and innate socialist aspirations of the people, the deep commitment to complete equality and popular democracy and the acute distrust of anything imposed on the people from above. As the revolutionary movement turned to increasingly elitist and conspiratorial forms and formulae, the Populists were constantly preoccupied with the fear that the liberating and egalitarian ends of the revolution might be perverted by the means employed to attain them. It was this fear that lay behind their agonizing self-appraisals of the despotic and authoritarian implications possibly present in the conceptions and methods of revolution which developed in their own ranks. And it was this fear that led to their critique of the Marxist notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat in general and especially the application of this ambiguous Marxist formula to a country where the proletariat constituted only a tiny minority of the people. If the people could not or would not rise to build the new socialist order of freedom and equality, might not a revolution—or a revolutionary *coup d'état*—presided over by an elite of revolutionary intellectuals create new forms of inequality and despotism? These were questions

which Populists asked themselves and asked of the Marxists. They were questions which were to plague the history of the Marxist and communist movement in Russia, but ones which Russian Marxists were notably reluctant to confront.

The Populist impulse was expressed in very diverse political forms in late nineteenth-century Russia, but for the purposes of this essay, it is sufficient to note that an explicit recognition and a profound concern with the problem of the implications of revolutionary methods for ultimate socialist goals is a characteristic feature of Russian Populism. "The dilemma of means and ends," as Isaiah Berlin has remarked, "is the deepest and most agonizing problem that torments the revolutionary movements of our own day in all continents of the world, not least in Asia and Africa. That this debate took so clear and articulate a form within the Populist movement makes its development exceptionally relevant to our own predicament."⁹ It is also, as I shall suggest, peculiarly relevant to Mao Tse-tung's predicament.

II. LENINISM

Although Leninism is usually defined in terms of certain well-known revisions and innovations in Marxist theory and strategy, it is also useful to understand Leninism in terms of its relationship to the Russian Populist tradition. While Lenin was influenced significantly by certain Populist notions, especially in formulating his concept of the party, as a Marxist theorist Lenin rejected virtually all of the core beliefs of the Populist world view. He did not perceive "the people" as a collective entity, but rather in Marxist terms of classes and class struggle, and he strongly distrusted their spontaneous strivings. While he had more to say about the possible revolutionary role of peasants than his Marxist predecessors, he did not attribute to the peasantry any inherent socialist tendencies. While the peasantry could play a meaningful political role in the bourgeois-democratic phase of a revolution that might (under certain socio-historical conditions) turn socialist, it would be no more than an auxiliary role to the urban proletariat—or, more precisely, to the party that embodied "proletarian consciousness." In contrast to Populism, Marxist-Leninist revolutionary hopes and activities centred on the proletariat rather than on the peasantry.

Moreover, Lenin accepted Marxist historical views which directly contradicted fundamental Populist assumptions. Social class divisions and struggles, and the state power which rested upon them, were for Lenin entirely natural and inevitable historical phenomena and not

• Introduction to Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, p. xviii.

alien forces introduced from without. Equally natural and inevitable were the Marxist-defined stages of socio-historical development through which all societies must pass, or at least all western societies moving towards a socialist future. Lenin saw the forces of modern capitalist production in Russia as creating rather than undermining the historical preconditions for socialist revolution.

Furthermore, Lenin found few virtues in Russia's backwardness and he rejected all the romantic notions and messianic beliefs which the Populists had derived from Russia's "special" historical situation; for Lenin this presented special revolutionary problems but offered no special revolutionary hopes. Lenin hoped and worked for revolution in Russia on the basis of a realistic assessment of practical political situations and by seizing on the immediate opportunities for revolutionary action, not because of any messianic faith in Russia's unique historical mission. In so far as he believed that a revolution in Russia might occur before revolution in the advanced industrialized states, he generally conceived of it as one which would ignite the long-delayed—but ultimately necessary—proletarian revolution in the West.

The profound differences between the Leninist and Populist revolutionary world views can be more sharply defined by examining briefly Lenin's confrontation with the two central dilemmas which had plagued the Populist movement: the problem of the relationship between the intelligentsia and the masses and the problem of reconciling revolutionary means with revolutionary ends. In the first case, one notes certain Populist influences in Lenin's approach to the problem, but the solution is profoundly non-Populist. In the second case, one is struck by the tendency to ignore the existence of the problem.

The problem of bridging the gap between the intelligentsia and the masses centres on the question of who are the bearers of true socialist consciousness and how that consciousness is to be fashioned into a historically dynamic revolutionary force. To most pre-Leninist Marxists this problem was of less concern than to the Populists, but the source and the role of the "proletarian consciousness," regarded by Marx as essential for the realization of socialism, is a fundamental question faced by all revolutionary Marxists. Although this question is much more complex in original Marxist theory than is generally assumed, Marx tended to see true socialist consciousness as an attribute of the proletariat itself. Or, more precisely, he believed that the workers would develop socialist consciousness in the course of the practical revolutionary activities which their social conditions would force them to undertake. "Orthodox" Marxists who followed Marx, with their unshakable faith in the workings of history, tended to shift the focus from conscious man as the maker of history to man as the object through which the forces of

“history” did their work. Consequently, the achievement of socialism came to be seen as the inevitable result of necessary and natural laws of historical evolution. As Kautsky typically put it, “the history of mankind is determined, not by ideas, but by an economic development which progresses irresistibly, obedient to certain underlying laws and not to anyone’s wishes or whims.”¹⁰ The belief that the march of history guaranteed the arrival of socialism was the orthodox Marxist message which, in somewhat less deterministic terms, Lenin inherited from his first Marxist teacher, Plekhanov. It was a message that Lenin was soon to reject and the manner in which he did so was not only to have the gravest implications for Marxist theory but also profound consequences for the entire Populist dilemma of the relationship between the intelligentsia and the masses.

With Lenin, the problem of consciousness becomes the most crucial theoretical and practical question of revolutionary politics. Even though Lenin accepted the general Marxist description of a historical movement towards a socialist utopia, he never acquired a firm Marxist faith in the determining forces of history, nor did he ever really share Marx’s original faith in the revolutionary “self-activity” of the proletariat. His general attitude of distrust for the masses precluded the latter whereas his revolutionary activist temperament precluded the former. Moreover, in a land where the material and social prerequisites for socialism were still largely absent, Marxism implied that the revolutionary would have to passively observe a perhaps prolonged period of historical maturation. Neither by temperament nor intellectual orientation was Lenin any more willing than the Populists to wait in the wings while the forces of capitalist production did their historical work. Just as Mao Tse-tung later was to learn from Soviet experience that the combination of state ownership of the means of production and industrialization do not automatically produce socialist and communist societies, so Lenin had learned from western European historical experience that the existence of advanced industrialized economies and large working-class movements do not by themselves produce socialist revolutions.

In the Leninist view, the natural history of the working-class movement inevitably culminated in the dominance of “revisionism” and “economism,” both of which implied an eventual accommodation with the existing social and political orders. To avert this active revolutionary intervention from without was necessary, with the prerequisite that the source of true “proletarian consciousness” should be identified and brought into full historical play.

How then was “proletarian consciousness” to be made to guide the

¹⁰ Karl Kautsky, *Class Struggle* (Chicago: Kerr, 1910), p. 119.

revolutionary movement? In dealing with this crucial problem, Lenin was profoundly influenced by Russian Populist sources and especially the writings of Chernyshevsky. Like many of the Populists, he derived from Hegelian philosophy the notion that consciousness was not merely a reflexion of nature or history, but rather a phenomenon external to them. Furthermore, he seized on that strand in the Populist world view that attributed the essentially dynamic historic role to the will and initiative of the revolutionary intellectual.¹¹ However much obscured later by Marxist formulae, these fundamentally voluntarist (and largely Populist-inspired) assumptions remained essential features of Lenin's outlook and the intellectual foundation for the Leninist concept of the party, the most significant and distinctive feature of Marxist-Leninist theory.

The attribution of so decisive a revolutionary role to the consciousness of the intelligentsia implied, of course, a much less important place for the masses, and this was made explicit in Lenin's distinction between the categories of "consciousness," among the intelligentsia, and "spontaneity," among the masses, the former being superior to the latter. Whereas the spontaneous movement of the workers (which arose inevitably from objective socio-economic conditions) was an essential prerequisite for socialist revolutionary activity, it was an insufficient condition for revolution. True socialist consciousness would have to be imposed upon the amorphous movement of the masses by the Marxist intelligentsia who already possessed it.¹²

The practical conclusion that Lenin drew from these beliefs is well known: only a highly-centralized party apparatus, organized by a dedicated intellectual elite of professional revolutionaries could ensure the development of socialist consciousness among the workers and discipline their spontaneous strivings into meaningful political action.

It should be noted here that it is not the party's organizational principles as such which gives the party its central place in Marxist-Leninist theory (for the Leninist-type of party organization can exist quite apart from any particular ideology or social group), but rather its intellectual assumptions—the belief in the decisive revolutionary role of the consciousness of the Marxist intellectual elite. It is because the party is assumed to embody "proletarian consciousness" that it achieves its universally valid and sacrosanct character in the Marxist-Leninist world view.

Even more noteworthy for the purposes of this article is the paradox

¹¹ For a highly perceptive discussion of the influence of Chernyshevsky on Lenin, see Leopold Haimson, *The Russian Marxists and the Origins of Bolshevism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1955), especially pp. 97-103.

¹² These views, of course, are most clearly presented by Lenin in his famous treatise of 1902, *What is to be Done?*

that the Populist ideas so important in the formulation of the Leninist concept of the party were moulded by Lenin into an ideology and a form of political organization profoundly antithetical to the Populist outlook. Whereas the Populist emphasis on the consciousness of the revolutionary intellectual was combined with and modified by the more basic Populist faith that the true revolutionary consciousness and creativity resided in the people themselves, Lenin seized upon the first strand and totally rejected the second. For the Populists, the question of the relationship between the intelligentsia and the masses constituted an agonizing and unresolved dilemma and the question of where consciousness resided remained problematic. With Lenin, the questions were settled with characteristic certainty and decisiveness. Nor was Lenin deeply troubled by the need to bridge the gulf between the intelligentsia and the people. What was a cause of profound concern to the Populists, Lenin converted into a Marxist revolutionary virtue. By drawing so sharp a distinction between the "consciousness" of the intelligentsia and the "spontaneity" of the masses, Leninist theory formalized the gulf between intellectuals and masses and the Leninist practice of party organization served to institutionalize it. Nothing could have been more alien to the original Populist faith in the people than the highly elitist revolutionary formulae and strategies that Lenin in part based on borrowed Populist notions.

Leninist concepts of organization

Without questioning the sincerity of Lenin's commitment to the ultimate goal of an egalitarian socialist society which would, among other things, eventually abolish the distinction between "intellectuals" and "masses," Leninist strategy raises the gravest questions as to whether the revolutionary means employed were compatible with the revolutionary ends sought. The dilemma of means and ends is nowhere more apparent than in the Leninist concept of the party. While the more dangerous implications of Leninist organization were not to become evident until long after 1917, the problem was clearly articulated long before by another revolutionary Marxist. In 1904 Rosa Luxemburg wrote a critique of the "ultra-centralism" she perceived in the type of organization Lenin was advocating, a scheme which demanded "blind subordination" to "the party center, which alone thinks, guides and decides for all" and, more importantly, one which implied "the rigorous separation of the organized nucleus of revolutionaries" from the mass working-class movement.¹³ And she prophetically observed that there was "no greater

¹³ Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution and Leninism or Marxism?* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1961), p. 88. The article quoted here under the

danger to the Russian party than Lenin's plan of organization. Nothing will more surely enslave a young labor movement to an intellectual elite hungry for power than this bureaucratic strait jacket. . . . What is today only a phantom haunting Lenin's imagination may become reality tomorrow."¹⁴

This "bureaucratic strait-jacket" was in fact to become political reality after the October Revolution of 1917. Lenin's political policies after 1917 derived more from the authoritarian principles of his concept of party than from the libertarian and anti-bureaucratic strains of the Marxist tradition that he so eloquently evoked on the eve of the revolution and during the first months of the Soviet experience. Again, no one analysed the situation more perceptively and prophetically than Luxemburg, despite her own deep sympathy for the Bolshevik cause. Popular control and the initiative of the masses are indispensable for the life of the revolution, she wrote from her German prison cell in 1918, and "no one knows this better, describes it more penetratingly, repeats it more stubbornly than Lenin. *But he is completely mistaken in the means he employs.*" (Emphasis added.) With general repression, the bureaucracy would remain the only active element in political life and the result would be not a dictatorship of the proletariat but a bourgeois, Jacobin "dictatorship of a handful of politicians." And such conditions, she predicted, "must inevitably cause a brutalization of public life."¹⁵

There were, of course, many historical factors which contributed to the growth of a massive bureaucratic dictatorship and institutionalized social inequality after 1917. And not the least important of these was the failure of the anticipated revolution in the advanced industrialized states of the West and the consequent isolation of the revolution in conditions of extreme social and economic backwardness. But the seeds of bureaucratic degeneration were also present in the elitist Leninist conception of revolution and political organization, and the failure of Leninist theory seriously to confront the dilemma of reconciling revolutionary means with revolutionary goals. As Barrington Moore has pointed out: "Lenin and his followers set out to achieve for humanity the goals of freedom and equality by means of an organization that denied these same principles. It was anticipated that the denial would be temporary and that the fruits of victory would bring the goals desired. Instead, discipline, authority and inequality had to be intensified after victory."¹⁶

title "Leninism or Marxism?" was originally published in 1904 in *Iskra* and *Neue Zeit* with the title "Organizational Questions of the Russian Social Democracy."

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 102.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 71-72.

¹⁶ Barrington Moore, *Soviet Politics—The Dilemma of Power* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959), pp. 81-82.

The profound discordance between Leninist political practice and Marxist social goals was only aggravated by Lenin's post-revolutionary economic views and policies. While all Marxists (including Mao Tse-tung) view a high level of industrial development as the prerequisite for a true socialist society, Lenin saw no incompatibility with Marxist social theory in employing capitalist forms of organization, discipline and incentives to achieve this economic development. His only real concern was with their economic efficiency. His fascination with "Taylorism" was only the most notorious manifestation of what some writers have termed his "technocratic bias." What is at question here is not the efficacy of Leninist (and Stalinist) methods of achieving rapid industrial development, but rather the question of whether the means that were employed were consistent with the ultimate social goals that were professed. Here it may be noted that Lenin's celebrated remark that socialism could be defined as "electrification plus Soviets" proved an early formulation of what became and remains a prime Soviet ideological orthodoxy: the view that the combination of industrial development with state ownership of production guarantees the achievement of communism. As matters have turned out, it has only guaranteed the achievement of an industrialized society. In the process, economic development, which was originally seen as the means to a socialist end, became the end in itself. As Moore noted: "While the [Leninist] ideology of ends has been much modified or discarded, the ideology of means has had lasting importance."¹⁷ They remain of lasting and ultimate importance to the present day.

As has been stressed, Leninism, in contrast to Populism, is characterized by an almost total unconcern with the dilemma of means and ends. Lenin's preoccupation with the methods and immediate tactics of revolution was accompanied by his failure, in both theory and practice, to come to grips seriously with the implications of these methods for Marxian socialist goals. The history of the Leninist revolution more than bears out the old Populist fear that a revolution carried out by an intellectual elite might succeed in replacing old forms of despotism and inequality only with new forms.

III. MAOISM

Turning to the Chinese historical scene, several observations by Benjamin Schwartz are of special pertinence. In a penetrating comparative analysis of the modern Russian and Chinese intelligentsias, Schwartz remarks that "something like a populist strain emerges quite early in China, although it is speedily overwhelmed by the influence of the Russian Revolution."

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 60.

He further observes that after 1919 Marxism-Leninism cut short "the emergence of a full-blown Populism" and what survived in China was "the elitist rather than the anarchist brand of Populism."¹⁸

In the remainder of this article, I shall suggest that the influence of Marxism-Leninism never completely overwhelmed the Populist strain in China and that, in fact, a powerful Populist impulse was to become an integral component of the Maoist version of Marxism. Moreover, the form of Populism that did survive was not only compatible with the Leninist idea of an elite of "vanguard" revolutionary intellectuals, but was also, if not anarchistic, nevertheless profoundly non-elitist. I shall further suggest that one of the fundamental characteristics of the Maoist mentality is a still unresolved tension between Leninist-type elitism and the more pristine Populist-type belief that the "people" themselves (and the peasantry in particular) possess a latent "general will" and an innate "socialist consciousness." Indeed, in considering Maoism in terms of Russian Populist perspectives, one cannot fail to be impressed by the striking affinities between many aspects of Maoist thought and the beliefs and dilemmas identified with classical Russian Populism; and the affinities seem to be most striking precisely in those areas in which Lenin differed most sharply with the Populists.

Although Chinese communist historians are inclined to periodize Chinese revolutionary history in terms of the history of the Russian revolutionary movement and have thus categorized the T'ung-meng-hui period as the "Populist era" of the revolutionary movement,¹⁹ this Populist impulse was comparatively weak and appeared largely under the aegis of imported anarchist doctrines during the first two decades of the century. A much more significant Populist strain emerges in the early May Fourth period—and, paradoxically, especially among those who were or who were to become Marxists. This non-anarchist Populism is apparent in the ideas and actions of such student activist groups as the Mass Education Speech Corps in 1918, the Marxist-oriented students in Shanghai and elsewhere who went to the countryside to work with the peasants in 1920 and advocated "destroying the very concept 'intelligentsia'," and in the activities of P'eng P'ai and members of the Socialist Youth Corps who went to the villages to organize the peasantry in the

¹⁸ Benjamin Schwartz, "The Intelligentsia in Communist China: A Tentative Comparison," *Daedalus* (Summer, 1960), p. 615.

¹⁹ See, for example, T'an Pi-an, "O-kuo min-ts'ui-chu-i tui t'ung-meng-hui ti ying-hsiang" ("The Influence of Russian Populism on the T'ung-meng-hui"), *Li-shih yen-chiu* (*Historical Research*), No. 1 (1959), pp. 35-44; and Jeng Meng-yüan, "Hsin-hai ko-ming ch'ien Chung-kuo shu-k'an shang tui Ma-k'o-ssu-chu-i ti chieh-shao" ("The Introduction of Marxism in Chinese Publications before the 1911 Revolution"), *Hsin chien-she* (*New Construction*), No. 3 (1953), p. 9.

early 1920s.²⁰ Ideologically, Populism received its clearest expression in the writings of Li Ta-chao, China's first important convert to Marxism and a principal founder of the Chinese Communist Party. It is striking that Li's first important political act after declaring himself a Marxist in 1918, was a passionate call to his student followers to leave "the corrupting life" of the cities and universities and "go to the villages," to "take up hoes and plows and become companions of the toiling peasants" while educating the peasant masses in the principles of socialism in "the wholly human life" of the countryside.²¹

It is significant that whereas in Russia the Populist phase of the revolutionary movement preceded the Marxist phase, in China a genuine Populist impulse appeared and grew more or less simultaneously with the introduction and spread of Marxist ideas. Whereas in Russia Populism tended gradually to be replaced by Marxism, and Populist ideas and the Populist movement were ultimately suppressed by the Leninist version of Marxism, in China a powerful Populist impulse survived to modify significantly the Leninist character of the Chinese Communist revolution.

The Populist-type beliefs which moulded Li Ta-chao's adaptation of Marxism to the Chinese environment appear somewhat less explicitly, but no less powerfully, in the thought and actions of Mao Tse-tung. They are apparent from the very beginning of Mao's public intellectual life and are not simply a latter-day product of what became a rural-based revolutionary movement. In his first significant political writings, published some months prior to his formal conversion to Marxism in late 1919, Mao perceived the Chinese people as a single and united political entity with enormous revolutionary potentialities. "Our Chinese people," he proclaimed, "possess great *intrinsic* energy" [emphasis added] and he called for a "great union of the popular masses," a momentous political action "which will not brook a moment's delay." Although the Chinese people have been oppressed and impotent for "thousands of years," this historic backwardness seemed to Mao to augur great political advantages for the present and future for "that which has accumulated for a long time will surely burst forth quickly."²²

²⁰ Useful information on these student movements is provided in Ting Shou-ho, Yin Hsü-i and Chang Po-ch'ao, *Shih-yüeh ko-ming tui Chung-kuo ko-ming ti ying-hsiang* (*The Influence of the October Revolution on the Chinese Revolution*) (Peking, 1957), esp. pp. 137-142. On P'eng P'ai, see Eto Shinkichi, "Hai-lu-feng: The First Chinese Soviet Government," *The China Quarterly*, Nos. 8 & 9.

²¹ On Li's Populist views, see Maurice Meisner, *Li Ta-chao and the Origins of Chinese Marxism* (Harvard University Press, 1967).

²² From extracts from Mao's articles in the *Hsiang-chiang p'ing-lun* of July and August 1919, translated by Stuart Schram in *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung* (New York: Praeger, 1969), p. 163.

Here may be detected a characteristically Populist faith in the inherent potentialities of the people, not a typically Leninist distrust of the masses.

The Populist tendency is even more pronounced in the famous "Hunan Report" of 1927, when Mao presumably was firmly committed to Marxism-Leninism. It is significant here that Mao not only looks to the peasantry as the popular basis of the revolution and relegates the cities to a very secondary role (in itself a cardinal Marxist-Leninist heresy), but that he attributes to the peasants those elements of revolutionary creativity and standards of political judgment that Marxist-Leninists reserve for the party. It is not the party that is to judge the revolutionary capacities of the peasantry, but the peasants who are to judge the revolutionary sufficiency of the party: "All revolutionary parties and all revolutionary comrades will stand before them to be tested, and to be accepted or rejected as they decide."²³ The Report emphasizes throughout the revolutionary works that the peasants are accomplishing on their own initiative and is hostile to all external impingements and organizational restraints. In 1927 the spontaneous peasant movement seemed to Mao a revolutionary force so great that it would sweep away everything before it, including those "revolutionary intellectuals" who proved unwilling or unable to unite and become one with the masses. Then, as later, Mao expressed his profound distrust for the "knowledge" brought by intellectuals from the cities and admiration for the innate "wisdom" of the peasantry; the peasants themselves, he wrote, were "energetically organizing evening classes, which they call peasant schools" and these, he predicted, "will be something quite different from the futile clamour of the intelligentsia and the so-called 'educators' for 'popular education'."²⁴

In the mid-1920s, Mao found in the spontaneous revolutionary activities of the peasantry a concrete manifestation of the "great popular union of the masses" which he foresaw at the beginning of his revolutionary career in 1919. Nothing could stand in the way of the peasant movement for it was as natural and elemental as the rise of "a tornado or tempest, a force so extraordinarily swift and violent that no power, however great, will be able to suppress it."²⁵ As Benjamin Schwartz observed two decades ago, Mao's "Report" of 1927 "might just as well have been written by a Russian *narodnik* as by a Marxist-Leninist. Nowhere here do we find those strictures on the independent revolutionary role of the peasantry which run through all Marxist-Leninist literature."²⁶

²³ "Report of an Investigation into the Peasant Movement in Hunan," *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (London: Lawrence and Wishart Ltd., 1954), Vol. I, p. 22.

²⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 56-57.

²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 22.

²⁶ Benjamin I. Schwartz, *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1952), p. 76.

While Mao's later writings do not lack standard Marxist-Leninist terminology, an examination of them suggests that the Populist impulse so apparent in 1927 was never to be completely submerged by Marxist-Leninist orthodoxies. And even less orthodox in a Leninist sense are the informal ideas of Mao, ideas which are by no means always identical with official doctrine but which are no less important for social and political action.

In the most general sense, the Populist strain in Maoism manifests itself in a strong tendency to conceive of "the people" as an organic whole and to celebrate their spontaneous revolutionary actions and collective potentialities. Although Maoism demands class analyses and seemingly unending "class struggle," it also conceives of the Chinese people, or at least the overwhelming majority, as a potentially unified "proletarian" entity. As Mao has so often proclaimed, 95 per cent. of the Chinese are basically revolutionary, and those who are not are excluded from membership in "the people," for they represent and reflect alien influences; they are, in effect, the "internal foreigners" who appear in so sinister a fashion in typically Populist world views. And whether these foreign influences are derived from western imperialism or Soviet revisionism seems to make little difference now. The real enemies of the people are thus "external," and in the hostile international arena the revolutionary Chinese people ideally stand as a virtually united proletarian force leading a potential world alliance of other potentially revolutionary peoples. There is something here more akin to the more messianic elements in Russian Populism than to Marxism-Leninism.

Although Maoism emphasizes the need for organization and discipline, those who by purely Leninist criteria presumably possess the consciousness necessary to organize and lead the masses have been urged repeatedly to "merge with the masses," to "learn from the masses," and indeed to "become students of the masses." When Maoists proclaim that "the subjective activity of the popular masses" can overcome all objective material barriers, this may reflect (in extreme form) Lenin's voluntarist emphasis on the role of subjective factors in history but not Lenin's insistence that these subjective factors are brought into being by a revolutionary elite and must be organized and disciplined by them. And when Mao, in commenting on the problem of over-population, insists that "The more people there are the greater the ferment of ideas, the greater the enthusiasm and the energy,"²⁷ he echoes not simply an old anti-Malthusian Marxist bias but his own old Populist faith that true revolutionary creativity resides in the people themselves.

²⁷ The comment was made during the utopian fervour of the early Great Leap Forward period. See *Hung-ch'i (Red Flag)* (1 June 1958), p. 3.

The much celebrated Maoist "faith in the masses" is, of course, essentially a faith in the peasant masses, for the peasants constitute not only the great majority of the Chinese people but were the mass foundation upon which the victory of the Chinese revolution rested. While Mao's successful revolutionary experiences in the countryside undoubtedly served to reinforce his rural orientation, he was of course drawn to the peasantry long before they proved their revolutionary worth. How much of this orientation can be attributed to Mao's own rural background and how much to other intellectual and social factors is problematic. But there is no problem in detecting his deep emotional attachment to the rural ideal of "the unity of living and working" and the rural traditions of "plain living" and "hard work"; for four decades these themes have loomed large in Mao's thoughts and actions. While Mao has never argued (as did the Russian Populists) that the peasantry was socialist by tradition (for there was after all no traditional Chinese equivalent to the Russian *mir* to draw upon), he has celebrated the revolutionary traditions of the Chinese peasantry and has long been romantically intrigued by the heroics of traditional peasant rebels. Even if there was no traditional Chinese peasant commune to save, there was a modern people's commune to create on the basis of what was perceived to be the "inherent socialist activism" of the modern Chinese peasantry. Or so Mao believed in 1958 and no doubt still does. And that new commune was to realize the goal of combining agricultural and industrial production in the form of a self-sufficient socio-economic unit (an old Russian Populist dream), and the goal was to be achieved long before there existed the economic prerequisites, as defined by Marxism-Leninism, for the abolition of differences between town and country. In effect, the "capitalist-bourgeois phase" was to be "by-passed" socially and economically as rapidly as it had been by-passed politically.

However much Maoists may extol the spontaneous revolutionary energies of peasants, Mao has never attributed "proletarian consciousness" to the peasantry as such any more than he now attributes it to the Party. But if the peasantry is not the bearer of proletarian virtue, Mao finds many virtues among peasants. "I have spent much time in the rural areas with the peasants and was deeply moved by the many things they knew," Mao remarked on the eve of the Cultural Revolution. "Their knowledge was rich. I was no match for them."²⁸ Mao speaks here in Populist tones and not in Marxist-Leninist terminology. "Petty bourgeois romanticism" would perhaps be the most benign traditional Marxist-Leninists characterization of a statement such as this.

²⁸ From Mao's recently revealed "secret speeches," as translated in *Joint Publications Research Service (JPRS)*, No. 49826 (Translations on Communist China No. 90; 12 February 1970), p. 30.

Mao's strong tendency to look to the countryside and the rural masses for the sources of revolutionary creativity is quite naturally accompanied by a profound hostility to the cities and a perception of urban areas as sources of social and ideological impurities. As Rhoads Murphey has observed, this hostility is in large measure a product of the objective conditions of Chinese Communist revolutionary history. While the rural basis of the Communist revolution led to a glorification of the peasantry as "the revolutionary people," Chinese cities were "the official and symbolic strongholds of the traditional Confucian order, of the Western imperialists . . . and of the Kuomintang. . . ." ²⁹ Indeed, Mao's virtually total lack of interest in the urban proletariat during the revolution is matched only by the almost total political apathy of the urban working class itself after 1927. While the experience of a revolutionary situation in which the revolutionary forces of the countryside surrounded and eventually overwhelmed the non-revolutionary cities was in itself sufficient to cause many Maoists to suspect the cities and their inhabitants, for Mao himself it undoubtedly served to confirm the anti-urban biases already present in the "Hunan Report," especially his contempt for the urban intelligentsia and his distrust of the revolutionary capacities of the urban proletariat.

These tendencies remain dominant in the Maoist mentality to the present day and they have received dramatic expression in policies pursued over the past decade. While Mao has been consistently eloquent about the revolutionary virtues of the peasantry, it is remarkable that he has had virtually nothing explicit to say about the urban proletariat that has developed in socialist China over the past two decades. His silence on the role of urban workers in carrying out "proletarian revolution," whether political or cultural, suggests that his faith in the actual proletariat is no stronger today than it was in 1927. Thus, urban dwellers, and even members of the urban proletariat, are sent to the countryside to become "proletarianized" and learn from the peasants the "proletarian virtues" of struggle, hard work and plain living. Maoist economic policies pursued since the Great Leap Forward period, moreover, have emphasized, at least in theory, the industrialization of the countryside and not of the potentially "revisionist" cities. And Chinese revolutionary experience is projected on the world map so that in the uniquely Maoist conception of international proletarian revolution the "revolutionary countryside," of the backward lands of Asia, Africa and Latin America, will eventually surround and encircle the economically advanced but reactionary "cities" of Europe and the United States.

²⁹ Rhoads Murphey, "Man and Nature in China," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. I, No. 4 (October 1967), pp. 325-326.

In many respects, the ultimate expression of Maoist anti-urbanism was the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. This upheaval was directed primarily against newly-emergent urban elites—the cultural and technological intelligentsia and especially urban-based Party bureaucrats. As Stuart Schram has observed, “it is hard to escape the impression that the ‘cultural revolution’ is to a large extent a movement of the countryside against the cities, and of peasants against the workers.”⁸⁰ Although the peasantry as such did not play a particularly prominent political role in the events of the past few years, the People’s Liberation Army (composed mostly of sons of peasants) certainly did. And in so far as urban industrial workers became involved, most evidence suggests that they were involved more on the side of Party bureaucrats “taking the capitalist road” than on the side of “proletarian revolutionaries.”

There is little either Marxist or Leninist in these anti-urban notions. The abolition of the distinction between town and country is, of course, a profoundly important Marxist goal and one in which Maoists ardently believe. But Marx did not believe it could be achieved in an economically backward peasant country, much less by the means of sending the sons of urban workers to the countryside, to “the idiocy of rural life,” as Marx described it. Moreover, Lenin’s “technocratic bias” presupposed an urban bias, the industrialization of the cities and the development of a large urban proletariat; the proletarianization of the peasantry, Lenin assumed, would somehow follow in the wake of the growth and proletarianization of the proletariat. But while the Maoist attitude towards the city contradicts Marxism-Leninism, it shares certain similarities with ideas derived from Rousseau, which see the large city as the embodiment of all social evils and corruption, as a monolith threatening to crush the natural purity of the countryside—the view (as Talmon has put it) which condemned the city as both “the source and manifestation of the most glaring inequality.”⁸¹ This idea found powerful expression in the writings of Russian Populists who regarded the modern city as an alien product of foreign capitalist forces which threatened to undermine the “socialist” institutions and traditions of the countryside. Just as the Populists condemned the city as the source of bourgeois corruption, so Mao finds in the cities the remnants of corrupt old bourgeois culture and a breeding place for new bourgeois inequalities. And just as Russian Populists hated the western bourgeoisie and were generally contemptuous of the western urban proletariat, so Mao combines a contempt for both the western bourgeoisie and the western proletariat with a fear that the

⁸⁰ Schram, *Mao Tse-tung* (New York: Praeger 1966), p. 318.

⁸¹ J. L. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (New York: Praeger, 1965), p. 244.

new urban Chinese proletariat is all too susceptible to bourgeois corruption. In both cases, ultimate revolutionary hopes rest in the relative purity of the countryside and with the inherent socialism (or potential socialist transformation) of the peasantry.

Perhaps the area in which the affinities between Maoism and Russian Populism are most profound lie in a particular kind of perception of "the advantages of backwardness." What is invoked here is not simply the ability of backward nations to borrow the technologies of advanced countries but rather a faith in the intrinsic virtues of backwardness. The Populist argument that the survival of "pre-modern" collectivistic forms of social life offered a unique opportunity for Russia to by-pass capitalism was accompanied by a more general and pervasive belief that backwardness as such offered special moral and social advantages for a revolutionary future. Herzen saw revolutionary potential in a young Russia that was "full of vigour," but not in the western countries that were infected by "crude egoism" and "the unclean worship of material gain."³² Prospects for the West seemed no brighter to Chernyshevsky; history, he proclaimed, was like "an old grandmother who loves most her youngest grandchildren."³³ And other revolutionary Populists, in a manifesto of 1861 "To the Young Generation," announced that "we are a belated nation and precisely in this consists our salvation."³⁴

Populist hopes for a socialist future were thus founded not only on the *mir* and on Russia's ability to speed her economic development by appropriating modern western technology while avoiding western social mistakes (itself an argument developed at great length in Populist writings), but also on a highly romantic and emotional celebration of the purity of backwardness itself. In the Populist world view, backwardness was both the cause of barbarity in Russian life and the source of potential revolutionary virtues. And these were the virtues of youth (whether young nations or young people), freedom from traditions, freedom from the "over mature" history under which the West staggered and freedom from the social and moral decadence that had stifled the revolutionary spirit in the more economically advanced countries. These prominent themes in Russian Populist writings are remarkably similar to a powerful strain in Maoist thought. In his early writings, Mao deplored China's backwardness but saw in that very backwardness a reservoir of youthful energy and revolutionary creativity.³⁵ The culmina-

³² Herzen, "The Russian People and Socialism," in *From the Other Shore*, pp. 166-167.

³³ As quoted by A. Walicki, "Russia," in Ghita Ionescu and Ernest Gellner, *Populism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), p. 84. For a somewhat different translation see A. Gerschenkron, *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective* (New York: 1962), p. 173.

³⁴ Quoted in Walicki, *The Controversy Over Capitalism*, p. 117.

³⁵ This idea is implicit in Mao's 1919 writings in *Hsiang-chiang p'ing-Jun* referred to earlier.

tion of this idea came in 1958 when Mao attributed to the Chinese people the special revolutionary virtues of being "poor and blank." The "blankest" of all are, of course, the youth and it is therefore the young who are the most virtuous and the most revolutionary. From the worship of youth that characterized modern China's first cultural revolution of 1915-19 Mao derived, during the formative stages of his intellectual development, that special faith in the young which reached its political climax in the creation of the Red Guards in the Cultural Revolution half a century later. Not only revolutionary energy but also intellectual creativity are seen to reside in youth. "Since ancient times," Mao is said to have remarked in a speech of 1958, "those who create new ideas and new academic schools of thought have always been young people without much learning."³⁶ As did the Russian Populists, Mao believes in the special revolutionary capacities and creative energies of young people as well as young nations, for both are relatively "backward" and therefore relatively uncorrupted.

Closely associated with this romanticization of backwardness is an ambivalent attitude towards historical traditions. Along with the condemnation of the remnants of the feudal past one finds an extollation of revolutionary peasant traditions and praise for "the fine old culture of the people which has a more or less democratic and revolutionary character."³⁷ Yet more significantly, and more like the Populists, Mao also suggests that China is relatively unencumbered by the weight of historical traditions. Just as the Populists argued that Russia was a country without historical traditions (or at least western historical traditions) and therefore potentially more revolutionary than other countries, so Mao finds in China's "blankness" the conditions for her special revolutionary creativity. Just as Herzen proclaimed that "we possess nothing" in proclaiming his faith in Russia's socialist future,³⁸ so Mao proclaims China "a clean sheet of paper" and finds here the promise of her future socialist greatness.

There are several other aspects of the Maoist mentality which seem to bear stronger similarities to the Populist world view than to Marxism-Leninism. One should briefly mention here such well-known matters as Mao's profound hostility to bureaucracy and bureaucrats (those who "sit, with full stomachs, dozing in the office"³⁹ and who "are eight-

³⁶ *JPRS*, No. 49826, p. 48, and from "The Little Red Book": "Young people are the most active and vital force in society." *Quotations from Chairman Mao* (Peking, 1966) p. 290.

³⁷ *On New Democracy* (Peking, 1968), p. 62.

³⁸ "The Russian People and Socialism," in *From the Other Shore*, p. 199.

³⁹ "Oppose Bookism" (1930), translated in John E. Rue, *Mao Tse-tung in Opposition, 1927-1935* (Stanford University Press, 1966), p. 310.

sided and slippery as eels" ⁴⁰), his general distrust of large-scale organization whether political or economic, his extreme antipathy to occupational specialization (and to all things which threaten to divide "the people"), his deep and long-standing hostility to intellectuals, ⁴¹ and the romantic mood of heroic revolutionary self-sacrifice which pervades his "thoughts" and which is characteristic of so much of his life. One may also point to Mao's striking lack of faith in the objective forces of history and particularly to his unique sense of indeterminateness about the future. It is, after all, rather extraordinary for the Marxist leader of a presumably socialist state to declare publicly (as he first did in 1957 ⁴² and even more dramatically and explicitly in the Cultural Revolution) that the struggle between capitalism and socialism in China is yet to be decided; and it is more extraordinary still to suggest in an interview with a foreign journalist (as Mao did in his conversation with Edgar Snow in 1965) the possibility of the future bourgeois corruption of his own revolution. ⁴³ There is something more here than an extreme version of Leninist voluntarism or an echo of Lenin's own impatience with the objective forces of history. It was, after all, the Populists, against whom Lenin fought so long and hard, who argued that socialism was in no sense historically inevitable but rather entirely dependent on the wills, energies and conscious actions of men.

Rather than extending the list of possible affinities between Maoism and Populism, attention should be focused on Mao's confrontation with the two major dilemmas posed by Populist ideology and their implications for Mao's "Marxism-Leninism"; first, to put the question in Leninist terms, the problem of the relationship between the "consciousness" of the revolutionary intelligentsia and the "spontaneity" of the masses; and, secondly, the more general dilemma of reconciling revolutionary means with revolutionary ends.

As a master of political organization and revolutionary strategy, Mao may well have been (and perhaps still is) a "natural Leninist," as Stuart Schram once suggested. But intellectually, Mao is both something more and something less than a Leninist. Basically Mao never really has succeeded in resolving the problem of the relationship between "consciousness" and "spontaneity" in a purely Leninist fashion. His conception of the Party (and its leaders) as the incarnation of "socialist

⁴⁰ For an extraordinary condemnation of "the twenty manifestations" of bureaucratic evils in a speech of 1967, see *JPRS*, No. 49826, pp. 40-43.

⁴¹ Mao, of course, celebrates his own alleged status as a non-intellectual: "Being an unpolished man, I am not too cultured" were the words with which he prefaced a speech in 1959.

⁴² *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1957), p. 50.

⁴³ *New Republic* (27 February 1965), pp. 17-23.

consciousness" has been modified and diluted by the conflicting belief that the masses of the people themselves (and the peasant masses in particular) are the sources of true knowledge and genuine socialist strivings.

To be sure, Mao has always believed that the "great socialist activism" that the masses are assumed to embody must be brought forth by the proper leaders and directed through the proper organizational channels; and he has been, of course, the principal builder and leader of a party based on Leninist principles of organization, a party that is (or, at least, was) to supply leadership and direction for the spontaneous revolutionary impulses of the masses. But Mao's confidence in the Party and its organizations has never been as absolute as was Lenin's and Mao has always expressed a faith in the spontaneity and wisdom of the masses that Lenin neither possessed nor expressed. Mao's appreciation of the practical revolutionary efficacy of Leninist principles of organization has been combined with a Populist trust in the elemental revolutionary creativity of the masses and an essentially Populist impulse that all somehow must "merge" into the masses. His Leninist emphasis on the role of organization and discipline over the years has been accompanied by constant exhortations to revolutionary intellectuals and Party cadres to "become one with the masses" (1939),⁴⁴ to "go to the countryside . . . put on coarse clothes . . . and learn what the peasants demand" (1945).⁴⁵ Whereas Mao the Leninist has insisted that the Communists are to lead the people and are the vanguard of the revolution, Mao the Populist has declared that "the masses are the real heroes while we ourselves are often ridiculously childish."⁴⁶ He has stressed the need for Marxist intellectuals and Party cadres to bring socialist consciousness to the masses, yet has warned that "many who have studied Marxist books have turned against the revolution, while illiterate laborers have often successfully mastered Marxism."⁴⁷ He has emphasized (at least until recent years) the indispensable leadership role of the Party, but he has also argued passionately that true revolutionary knowledge ultimately comes from the people themselves and that Party leaders and cadres must therefore "learn from the masses" and "acquire the good qualities of workers and peasants."⁴⁸ He has insisted that it is necessary for Marxist intellectuals and cadres to be the pupils of the masses as well

⁴⁴ "The Orientation of the Youth Movement," *Selected Works* (London, 1954), Vol. III, p. 20.

⁴⁵ "On Coalition Government," *Selected Works* (London, 1956) Vol. IV, p. 296.

⁴⁶ "Preface and Postscript to 'Rural Survey'," *Selected Works* (London, 1956), Vol. IV, p. 8.

⁴⁷ "Oppose Bookism," in Rue, *Mao Tse-tung in Opposition*, p. 307.

⁴⁸ "Draw in Large Numbers of Intellectuals" (December, 1939), *Selected Works* (London, 1954), Vol. III, p. 70-71.

as their teachers, and that, indeed, it is necessary to learn from the people before it is possible to teach them.⁴⁹

This pupil-teacher dichotomy, which in many forms appears so prominently in Maoist writings, is (within a new ideological framework and in the context of different historical circumstances) essentially the unresolved Populist dilemma of the role of the revolutionary intellectual: the dilemma of whether the prime duty of the revolutionary intellectual (or would-be revolutionary leader) is to teach and lead the masses or to learn from and merge with them. Whereas Lenin had no doubts about where the true sources of "proletarian consciousness" resided and decisively resolved this dilemma, Mao has never precisely defined the relationship between the organized consciousness of the Party and the spontaneous consciousness of the masses. For Lenin, in this crucial realm, there was but one cardinal principle: faith in, and obedience to, the Party and its leaders. For Mao, as one can read in "The Little Red Book" (p. 2) there are two cardinal principles: "We must have faith in the masses and we must have faith in the Party. . . . If we doubt these principles, we shall accomplish nothing" (1955).⁵⁰

This dual Maoist faith in the masses as well as in the Party (or other organizational structure) is at least in part responsible for one of the most characteristic features of Chinese Communist politics: the recurrent process, both before and after 1949, of encouraging spontaneous mass revolutionary activity and then imposing Leninist-type organizational restraint on that activity. In recent years, this phenomenon has been most dramatically apparent in the Great Leap Forward campaign and in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. In the Great Leap Forward period, Mao looked not so much to the Party as he did to what in 1955 he called "the boundless creative power" of the masses and their "potentially inexhaustible enthusiasm for socialism."⁵¹ In the Cultural Revolution, he first by-passed the Party altogether and then called upon the masses to rebel against it and much of its leadership. Neither the policies of 1957-60 nor the dramatic events of the Cultural Revolution can be adequately understood without taking into account Mao's very non-Leninist "faith in the masses."

⁴⁹ "It is my wish," Mao wrote in 1941, "that, together with comrades of the whole Party, I should continue to be a pupil of the masses and learn from them." *Selected Works* (London, 1956), Vol. IV, p. 10.

⁵⁰ "The Question of Agricultural Co-operation" (31 July 1955). For an earlier translation, using slightly different wording, see Robert R. Bowie and John K. Fairbank, *Communist China 1955-1959, Policy Documents with Analysis* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), p. 96.

⁵¹ Introductory notes to Volume II of the Chinese edition of *Socialist Upsurge in China's Countryside*. For the current Peking-English rendition of these passages, see *Quotations from Chairman Mao*, pp. 118-121. In the earlier one-volume English-language edition, the latter phrase is translated: "The people are filled with an immense enthusiasm for socialism." *Socialist Upsurge* (Peking, 1957), p. 44.

The tension between conflicting Leninist and Populist tendencies has a great deal to do with the ambiguous Maoist attitude towards the Party and the present curious situation of a nation, presumably guided by "Marxism-Leninism," where "proletarian consciousness" is attributed neither to the Party nor the proletariat. It is much too simple to dispose of this problem by concluding that Mao believes that "proletarian consciousness" resides in his own person and thought.⁵² Mao, no doubt, is as convinced of his own political and ideological infallibility as was Lenin. But the problem which confronted Lenin, and the problem which confronts Mao, is not simply a question of what constitutes "correct" consciousness but rather of how that consciousness may realize revolutionary socialist goals. There are many ambiguities in Leninism, but Lenin is quite explicit on both the question of who are the true bearers of proletarian consciousness and also the question of how that consciousness is to be organized, institutionalized and activated. Here Maoist theory and practice has been something less than clear and unambiguous. While Mao has adopted Leninist principles of party organization, his actions and speeches strongly suggest that he has never fully accepted the intellectual assumptions which underlie them. His powerful Populist faith in the spontaneous revolutionary creativity and consciousness of the masses has militated against a purely Leninist resolution. For Mao the problem of "consciousness" remains a Populist-type dilemma.

The problem of reconciling ends and means

If Mao's non-Leninist attitude to "proletarian consciousness" has perhaps created unresolvable political and ideological dilemmas, he has also raised and confronted a more general dilemma, often unrecognized by typical Leninists: the problem of reconciling revolutionary means with revolutionary ends. This concerns not the conventional (and usually oversimplified) ethical dilemma of whether "the ends justify the means," for there is little to suggest that Maoists have any special ethical concern on the matter of revolutionary methods, but an unusual practical political and social anxiety that the communist goals of the revolution might all too easily be undermined by the means employed to attain them.

As is well known, during the early years of the People's Republic the need to establish and administer an effective state apparatus and to

⁵² Proceeding from different lines of inquiry this is suggested by both Benjamin Schwartz, "The Reign of Virtue: Some Broad Perspectives on Leader and Party in the Cultural Revolution," *The China Quarterly*, No. 35 (July-September 1968), pp. 1-17 and Stuart Schram, "The Party in Chinese Communist Ideology," *The China Quarterly*, No. 38 (April-June, 1969), pp. 1-26. Both of these articles now appear in John W. Lewis (ed.) *Party Leadership and Revolutionary Power in China* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

improve the economy was met by the creation of a new political elite of bureaucratic administrators (drawn largely from the Party and still within the Party) and an economic elite of industrial managers, scientists and technicians. While traditional Chinese patterns of bureaucratic behaviour may have intensified this process of bureaucratization, it was facilitated by the fact that the Communist revolution had destroyed old elites. As Weber has demonstrated at considerable length, "every process of social leveling creates a favourable situation for the development of bureaucracy,"⁵³ and this was no less true in post-1949 China than it has been elsewhere.

Given Mao's extreme Populist hostility to all forms of bureaucracy—a phenomenon which he first condemned almost four decades ago as the greatest of all social evils⁵⁴ and which he has continued to condemn—is not difficult to imagine how intolerable this potential bureaucratic institutionalization of the revolution must have seemed to him. Equally unbearable was the accompanying emergence of social patterns and value orientations which threatened to increase the economic and cultural gulf between the intelligentsia and the masses, especially the peasantry, and at the same time increase the separation between the cities and the countryside—the very gaps both Marxism and Populism demanded be closed. What Mao feared in the mid-1950s was not that economic development was proceeding too slowly but that it was proceeding in a fashion that threatened to preclude the communist goals of the revolution.

What is distinctively Maoist in Chinese communist thought and action may appear less irrational than it is usually pictured if it is seen in the perspective of the Maoist confrontation with the dilemma of means and ends, as a conscious attempt to pursue economic and social development in a way consistent (at least in the Maoist view) with the achievement of Marxist goals. In the realm of theory, the most significant attempt to reconcile means and ends was the explicit recognition (which at the same time implicitly rejected both Leninist and Stalinist strategies of post-revolutionary development) that the existence of presumably "socialist relations of production" combined with economic development do not by themselves assure the realization of a socialist society, much less the transition from socialism to communism; rather, they must be accompanied by "continuous" processes of the transformation of social relations and the transformation of consciousness. This has been formulated in various ways, but most notably in the doctrine of "uninter-

⁵³ Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York, 1964, p. 340.

⁵⁴ "This great evil, bureaucracy, must be thrown into the cesspool," Mao typically demanded in 1933. *Selected Works* (London, 1954), Vol. I, p. 135.

rupted” or “permanent revolution.”⁵⁵ The most important innovations in social and economic policy are consistent with this doctrine and generally reflect the concern with the dilemma of reconciling the means and ends of revolution. The original aim of the people’s communes, it should be recalled, was not only to release the productive energies of the masses, but also to combine industry with agriculture, reduce the gap between the cities and the countryside and thereby prevent the separation of the intelligentsia from the masses. The policies requiring intellectuals and Party cadres to engage in productive labour in rural areas, the *hsia-fang* movement, the various work-study schemes for combining education with productive activities, and the constant exhortations that the masses must make themselves masters of science and technology—all these were intended (by Maoists if not necessarily by other Communist leaders) to forestall the differentiation of a bureaucratic-professional vocational ethic from the communist political ethic and to prevent the stratification of new urban elites separated from the peasant masses.

The means which Maoists have employed to achieve what they perceive to be ultimate communist ends are unprecedented in the history of Marxism-Leninism. They reflect a distrust of “revolution from above” in favour of spontaneous mass action from below and powerful egalitarian and anti-bureaucratic impulses which are more characteristic of Russian Populism than Russian Leninism. And there is nothing Leninist, much less Stalinist, in the Maoist willingness to sacrifice economic development to preserve what are seen to be essential social and ideological prerequisites for socialism—and even to abandon the Party itself as the indispensable means to Marxist ends.

It would be unfair to Lenin (even if not to “Leninism”) to suggest that he was wholly oblivious of the social consequences of his political actions. On his death bed he was haunted by the old Populist fear that the revolution he had made might have accomplished little more than providing new forms for old methods of autocratic rule; a “bourgeois, tsarist mechanism” with “only a Soviet veneer” was Lenin’s bitter comment on the Bolshevik regime. But in spite of these doubts, and even the sense of moral guilt, he was not willing to recognize the profound inconsistency between the revolutionary means he had devised and the revolutionary ends he sought. In his last assessments of the reasons for the bureaucratic corruption of the revolution, he does not refer to the implications of his scheme of party organization, but concentrates on Russia’s isolation and economic backwardness and, more specifically, on Russian cultural backwardness; it was above all the lack of

⁵⁵ For a definition and brief discussion of the concept, see Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung*, pp. 98–101. A fuller analysis is provided by Schram in *La ‘Révolution permanente’ en Chine* (Paris: Mouton, 1963).

“*kulturnost*” which had allowed old Tsarist bureaucratic traditions to overwhelm the Bolsheviks.

Whether Mao is consciously aware of the bureaucratic implications of Leninist organizational principles is problematic; even if he has arrived at such a conclusion, it would be impossible for him to acknowledge it without renouncing the entire Leninist heritage to which he lays claim and within which he claims to have made creative innovations. But Mao has adopted new means and methods which implicitly reject the institutionalized, bureaucratic pattern of post-revolutionary development that so logically flows from Leninism, and Mao is sufficiently non-Leninist to question the revolutionary legitimacy of the Leninist party itself. Mao's particular concern with the problem of reconciling means and ends probably derives more from his sense of historical indeterminateness than from any profound moral crisis. While Lenin's Marxian faith in “history” was shaky, Mao's is virtually non-existent. He is no more confident in the historical inevitability of socialism than were the Populists. In the Maoist view, China, two decades after the victory of the revolution, can as easily revert to capitalism as proceed to communism; it depends entirely on the consciousness, the wills and the activities of men. Mao, as did the Populists, believes that men are free to choose their ends and from this it follows that they must choose means which are consistent with the ends they seek. Whether the means Mao has chosen will lead China to the Marxist goals he envisions is quite another matter. But whatever the future may bring, Mao is unique among communist leaders, both past and present, in his confrontation with the dilemma of means and ends.

IV. CONCLUSION

Although there are certain remarkable similarities between Maoism and classical Russian Populism, Maoism is scarcely the twentieth-century resurrection of this creed. The relationship of Maoism to Marxism is entirely different to that between Maoism and Populism. Mao is the conscious heir of Marx and Lenin and the author of what is proclaimed to be a new and higher stage in Marxist-Leninist revolutionary theory. For all his Marxist-Leninist unorthodoxies, Mao's goals and categories of thought basically derive from this intellectual and political tradition with which he consciously identifies. Mao shares with Populism, on the other hand, something unacknowledged and unperceived. Those aspects of the Maoist mentality which have been described as “Populist” in the preceding pages are perceived by Maoists (in so far as they are recognized) as part of “Mao Tsetung Thought,” a body of ideas which is in

turn celebrated as the most advanced expression of Marxist-Leninist theory.

While the Maoist self-identification with the Marxist-Leninist tradition is a supremely important influence on thought and action, it does not preclude the possibility that Maoists may be the unconscious bearers of beliefs and concepts which are common to (but not necessarily derived from) non-Marxian intellectual and political traditions. What has been suggested in this article is that much of what is distinctive in the Maoist version of Marxism-Leninism can be attributed to essentially Populist-type beliefs and impulses and that this Populist component of Maoism has had especially crucial implications for what has too easily been assumed to be the purely "Leninist" character of Chinese communist theory and practice.

The Populist strain in Maoism is an indigenous Chinese phenomenon which developed despite (not because of) the political and intellectual impact of the Bolshevik Revolution. Although the possible influence of traditional Chinese intellectual sources is a matter that deserves investigation, an explanation for the emergence of this Populist strain is more likely to be found in factors present in the modern Chinese historical environment. Here it might be useful to note briefly certain general conditions which have typically fostered the appearance of Populist-type ideologies and movements: a traditional peasant-based society disintegrating under the forces of modern capitalism introduced from without and generally perceived as alien; the absence of a viable indigenous bourgeoisie; the emergence of an intelligentsia alienated from traditional values and existing society; and the desire of members of that intelligentsia to bridge the gulf that separates them from society by finding roots in the vast peasant masses and speaking on their behalf. In the broadest sense, Populism can be seen as a protest against modern capitalism and its human and social costs, particularly as those costs are borne by the peasantry.⁵⁶ It is not a peasant ideology, but a protest ideology of intellectuals speaking for the rural masses. And perhaps especially pertinent to the Chinese situation, it has been noted that Populist tendencies typically spring "both from the tension between backward countries and more advanced ones, and from the tension between developed and backward parts of the same country."⁵⁷

Viewed from these general perspectives, the Maoist combination of

⁵⁶ Although it is difficult to employ "Populism" as a general socio-historical concept, the difficulties are no greater (and perhaps less misleading) than the widespread use of such terms as "nationalism" and "modernization" as general concepts. Peter Worsley has made the most fruitful attempt to define and apply Populism as a general socio-historical term. See *The Third World* (London, 1964), esp. Chapter 4; and "The Concept of Populism" in Ionescu and Gellner, *Populism* pp. 212-250.

⁵⁷ Angus Stewart, "The Social Roots," in Ionescu and Gellner, *Populism*, p. 181.

Marxism and Populism appears as a not illogical outcome of the history of Marxism in an economically backward and largely peasant land threatened by foreign capitalist political and economic forces. In Maoism, Marxist and Populist elements reinforce each other in opposition to the external capitalist order, both as that order has impinged on China in the past and as it threatens China in the present. Internally, the Populist component in Maoism reflects the tension between the backward (but relatively revolutionary) countryside and the relatively economically advanced (but non-revolutionary) urban areas, and (both before and after 1949) expresses a revolutionary bias in favour of the former against the latter. Moreover, the Populist strain has served to fashion Marxism into a revolutionary ideology that addresses itself to modern Chinese historical realities; in typically Populist fashion, Maoism is primarily concerned with the relationship between intellectuals and peasants, the two dynamic social groups in modern Chinese history, rather than with the traditional Marxist focus on the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, relatively weak classes in modern Chinese society and only marginally involved in the communist revolution.

What is unique in Chinese revolutionary history is not the emergence of a Populist strain, but its appearance actually within the Marxist movement rather than before it or in opposition to it. And it is this historical coincidence that is responsible for much of what is unique about "Marxism-Leninism" in China. For however much Mao may share with Lenin, he does not fully share the most significant feature of Leninism—the intellectual assumptions on which the organization and role of the Leninist party are based. Nor does he share Lenin's "technocratic bias." And Maoism explicitly rejects the bureaucratic and elitist tendencies which these aspects of Leninism foster.

It is interesting to note here that a Populist-type hostility to capitalism is often accompanied by ambiguous attitudes towards modern life in general. Lenin described Russian Populist theory as "a Janus, looking with one face to the past and the other to the future."⁵⁸ For Lenin, the *Narodniks* were "progressive" in that they challenged the existing social order but "reactionary" in so far as they attempted to maintain traditional forms of production in opposition to modern capitalism. Many recent writers have also commented on the "Janus quality" of Populist ideologies, usually in terms of the Populist desire to preserve traditional cultural values and social forms in confronting "the modernization process."⁵⁹ While in some cases this may involve a rejection of modern

⁵⁸ "The Economic Content of Narodism," in V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works* (Moscow, 1960), Vol. I, p. 503.

⁵⁹ See, for example, Stewart, "The Social Roots," in Ionescu and Gellner, *Populism*, pp. 186–191.

technology and industry in general, it is most typically manifested in an attempt to reach some sort of ideological synthesis between "traditionalism" and "modernity." In this realm, Maoism is not typically Populist. Explicitly anti-traditional and deeply committed to modern economic development, Maoism presents not a "Janus-face" but a basically progressive one. While Populist tendencies and dilemmas have contributed to a profound concern for the social costs and consequences of modern technology and industrialization, Maoism does not reject industrialization but the forms it has taken in the western capitalist world—and now the "bourgeois" Soviet world as well.

Yet there are disquieting similarities between some Populist aspects of Maoism and a recurring and purely reactionary syndrome of beliefs that Barrington Moore has labelled "Catonism." Where commercial relationships (and in modern times, specifically capitalist relationships) have begun to undermine a peasant economy, Moore has noted that "the conservative elements in society are likely to generate a rhetoric of extolling the peasant as the backbone of society." And the ideological rhetoric of this particular anti-capitalist response involves a celebration of the "organic" life of the countryside, a deep hostility to the city and its "conspirators," an emphasis on the need for moral regeneration and the desirability of "comradeship" and "community," anti-intellectualism and the praise of the martial virtues, anti-foreignism and a condemnation of "decadent" and "rootless" cosmopolitans, artistic notions which centre around folk and provincial art, opposition to "mere technical expertise" and to industrialism in general.⁶⁰

Although it is easy enough to detect resemblances between "Catonism" and certain Populist features of Maoism, several crucial distinctions need to be made. In modern times, Catonism is part of a reactionary ideological response to capitalism by the upper landed classes intent on preserving as much as possible of a traditional and oppressive agrarian social order; the celebration of the "rural virtues" is accompanied by a horror of social change. As Moore has pointed out, seemingly similar beliefs arise among the radical right and the radical left in the countryside when the traditional order is in a process of disintegration, but "the main distinction depends on the amount of realistic analysis of the causes of [peasant] suffering and on the images of a potential future. Catonism conceals the social causes and projects an image of continued submission. The radical tradition emphasizes the causes and projects an image of eventual liberation." The crucial differences centre on the way these beliefs are combined and especially the ultimate purposes they are intended to serve.⁶¹

⁶⁰ For a discussion of "Catonism," see Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), pp. 490-496.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* pp. 494-495.

For the time being at least, Maoism remains firmly within the radical tradition. The Populist elements of Maoism are combined with Marxian social theory to promote revolutionary social change to realize a future egalitarian socialist society. Yet it is not inconceivable (even though unlikely) that very different social and political circumstances may develop in a post-Maoist China where these Populist elements (selectively interpreted) may become a dangerous and irrational "Maoist" ideological legacy easily turned to reactionary social ends.

In any general consideration of the history of Marxism-Leninism in China, one observes a paradox within a paradox. If it is paradoxical that China, "the most archaic of nations," adopted Leninism, "the most modern of revolutionary doctrines," then it is more paradoxical still that within the Maoist version of "Marxism-Leninism" there have emerged powerful "pre-Leninist" Populist-type ideas and beliefs which Lenin long ago consigned to the dustbin of revolutionary history. If "Mao stands on Lenin's shoulders," he does so with an ideology that expresses many of those "romantic" revolutionary notions and intellectual orientations which Lenin and Leninists time and again have condemned as "reactionary" and "utopian." While Lenin expressed great admiration for Herzen and Chernyshevsky and regarded them (although not most of their Populist successors) as progressive men for their time, for Lenin and for Marxist-Leninists their time and the time for Populism had long since passed.⁶² In strictly Marxist-Leninist terms, Populist tendencies constitute a petty bourgeois revolutionary heresy. And not too surprisingly, it is precisely with this sin that Mao has been charged. As early as 1930, Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai, echoing Comintern complaints, accused Mao and his small band of revolutionaries of being "petty bourgeois populists" who had turned their backs on the urban proletariat.⁶³ And the accusation has been revived by Soviet ideologists in more recent polemics.⁶⁴

Yet, it is quite possible that a Leninist ideological heresy may have been proved—and may yet prove—to be something of a Marxist revolutionary virtue. Had it not been for the Populist orientations which drew Mao to the countryside in the first place and also provided him with that very non-Leninist faith in the spontaneous revolutionary

⁶² "Once progressive, as the first to pose the problem of capitalism," Lenin wrote in 1897, "nowadays Narodism is a *reactionary* and *harmful* theory which misleads social thought and plays into the hands of stagnation and Asiatic backwardness." "The Heritage We Renounce," in *Collected Works* (Moscow, 1960), Vol. II, p. 516.

⁶³ "Chung-kuo ko-ming ho nung-min yün-tung ti ts'e-lüeh" ("The Chinese Revolution and the Strategy of the Peasant Movement"), *Pu-erh-sai-wei-k'e (The Bolshevik)*, Vol. III, Nos. 4-5 (12 May 1930), pp. 114 and 141.

⁶⁴ For example, the *Pravda* article "Scientific Socialism and Petty Bourgeois Ideology" (24 October 1966), in *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, Vol. XVIII, No. 43, pp. 4-6.

creativity of the peasant masses, it is most unlikely that there would have been a successful Communist revolution in China. And it is precisely the Populist aspects of the Maoist revolutionary mentality—particularly the hostility to bureaucratic elitism, the distrust of formal institutions and the special concern with the dilemma of means and ends—which have been the crucial factors in thus far preventing the bureaucratic degeneration of the Chinese revolution. If this has not led to anything resembling a Marxist dictatorship of the proletariat (as Maoists would have it), it has so far prevented a dictatorship of bureaucrats, as many foreign observers would seem to like to have it. If Maoism has not created a genuinely socialist society in China, it has created a situation of permanent revolutionary ferment which keeps open the possibility of attaining (or, at least, pursuing) Marxian socialist goals. In China, the revolution has not yet died, however strange the forms it has taken and may yet take. If Marx's injunction to change the world rather than simply interpret it, is any standard by which to measure the credentials of a revolutionary Marxist, then Mao may perhaps eventually be judged a better Marxist than a Leninist. That indeed would be something of a paradox in view of all that Maoists and non-Maoists have written about Mao's "Leninism." And it could be the strangest paradox of all if Mao's anti-Leninist (and non-Marxist) Populist notions were somehow to facilitate the Chinese quest for the utopian social goals which Marxism prophesies.