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Anonymous tr. Jason E. Smith [Attributed to Louis Althusser]

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On the Cultural Revolution

Anonymous [attributed to Louis Althusser]

[The text that follows is the translation of an article that was published unsigned in the November-December 1966 issue of the *Cahiers marxistes-léninistes*. The journal was founded in the latter part of 1964 by students in the *École Normale Supérieure* section of the Communist Students Union (UEC), its first issue appearing in December 1964. In December 1966, the journal became the “theoretical and political organ” of the Communist (Marxist-Leninist) Youth Union, a group that formed after a split within the UEC. The journal will, with the November-December 1966 issue, assume an increasingly antagonist position against the “revisionism” of the French Communist Party. The first two issues of the journal published after the split will, in turn, be devoted to “The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.” In the first of these two issues, the following text appears. It has been subsequently attributed to Louis Althusser.

— Jason E. Smith]

Whatever position he or she takes on the Chinese Cultural Revolution, no communist is permitted to simply and automatically “deal with” this matter, with no other form of examination, as a mere fact among others, *as one argument among others*.

The C.R. is not, first of all, an argument: it is first and foremost an *historical fact*. It is not one fact among others. It is an *unprecedented* fact.

It is not an historical fact reducible to its circumstances, it is not a decision taken “in light of” the Chinese Communist Party’s struggle against “modern revisionism” or in response to the political and military encirclement of China. It is an historical fact of great importance and long duration. It is a part of the development of the Chinese Revolution. It represents one of its phases, one of its mutations. It plunges roots into its past, and readies its future. As such, it belongs to the International Communist Movement in the same way the Chinese Revolution does.

It is therefore an historical fact that must be examined for itself, in its independence and depth, without pragmatically *reducing* it to this or that aspect of the current conjuncture.

It is, moreover, an *exceptional* historical fact. On the one hand, it has no historical precedent and, on the other hand, it presents an intense *theoretical* interest.

Marx, Engels and Lenin always proclaimed it was absolutely necessary to give the socialist infrastructure, established by a *political* revolution, a corresponding—that is, socialist—*ideological* superstructure. For this to occur, an ideological revolution is necessary, a revolution *in the ideology of the masses*. This thesis expresses a fundamental principle of Marxist theory.

Lenin was acutely aware of this necessity, and the Bolshevik party made great efforts in this direction. But circumstances did not allow the U.S.S.R. to put a *mass ideological revolution* on the agenda.

The C.C.P. is the first party to take itself and the masses down this road through the application of new means, the first to put this mass ideological revolution—designated by the expression “C.R.”—on the agenda.

This convergence of a Marxist theoretical thesis that up to this point remained in a theoretical state with a new historical fact which is this thesis’s *realization* should obviously leave no communist indifferent. This rapprochement cannot but arouse intense interest, both political and theoretical.

Of course, the novelty, originality, and unexpected forms the event has taken are necessarily surprising and disconcerting, raising all sorts of questions. The contrary would be astonishing.

Given these conditions, it is impermissible to come to take a position without a serious examination beforehand. A communist cannot, from the distance where we stand, make pronouncements about the C.R, and therefore *judge* it, without having analyzed, at least in principle, the *political* and *theoretical* credentials of the C.R. based on the original documents he or she has available and in light of Marxist principles.

This means:

1. we must first of all analyze the C.R. as a political fact, which requires considering, together, the following:
 - the political conjuncture in which it intervenes,
 - the political objectives it establishes,
 - the methods and means it acquires and applies.

2. we must then examine this political fact in the light of Marxist theoretical principles (historical materialism, dialectical materialism), asking ourselves whether this political fact is, or is not, in conformity with these theoretical principles.

Without this twofold analysis, at once political and theoretical — an analysis we can only briefly schematize here — it is simply not *possible* for a French communist to *judge* the C.R.

I. Political Analysis of the Cultural Revolution

a. *Conjuncture of the Cultural Revolution*

The C.C.P. has, in its official declarations, underlined the *fundamental* political reason for the C.R. (cf. the “16 Points,” summarized by the C.C., the editorials of the *Renmin Ribao*).

In socialist countries, after the more or less complete socialist transformation of the property of the means of production, *there is still this question that remains*: what road is to be taken? Is it necessary to go all the way to the end of the socialist revolution and gradually pass over into communism? Or, to the contrary, stop halfway and go backwards toward capitalism? *This question is being posed to us in a particular acute manner.* (Editorial of the *Renmin Ribao*, August 15, 1966).

The C.R. is thus unequivocally presented as a political answer to an extremely precise political question. This question is declared “acute” and “crucial.”

This crucial question is a factual question that is posed to the C.C.P. in a defined political conjuncture.

Which conjuncture?

In its essence, this conjuncture is not, as some commentators believe, a “global” conjuncture, namely the serious conflict provoked by the American aggression against the Liberation Movement of South Vietnam, against the socialist State of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and by the threats leveled at China. The conjuncture that explains the C.R. is *in its essence* internal to socialism.

But this conjuncture is also not, *in its essence*, constituted by the “conflict” between the C.C.P. and the C.P.S.U. This “conflict” is, as far as the C.R. is concerned, relatively marginal. The C.R. is, above all, not a “response” to the “conflict,” an argument made by the C.C.P. against the C.P.S.U. The C.R. responds to *another* fundamental *question*, of which this conflict is only one aspect or effect.

The conjuncture of the C.R. is constituted by the Chinese socialist Revolution’s current problems of *development*. The C.C.P. speaks of China when it says: “the question is being posed *to us* in a particularly acute manner.” In fact, the C.C.P. does not pose this question to other socialist countries, nor does it suggest they undertake their own C.R. But it is also quite clear that the conjuncture of the C.R. is not restricted to the Chinese Revolution’s problems of development alone. Through the Chinese conjuncture, it is the conjuncture of all socialist countries that is at stake. The Chinese conjuncture appears, in fact, as a particular case of the conjuncture of socialist countries in general.

To understand the fundamental, crucial problem that forms the basis of the political conjuncture of the C.R., we have to search for it where this problem gets posed. *We must not be mistaken about the conjuncture*. We must not search for this problem either in the “global” conjuncture (imperialist aggression) or in the conjuncture of the “C.C.P./C.P.S.U. conflict.” We must search for it in the conjuncture of the Chinese socialist revolution and, more generally, *within the internal conjuncture of the socialist countries*.

Let’s recall what a *socialist country* is.

It’s a country where a *political* socialist revolution has taken place (seizing power in historically different conditions, but leading to the dictatorship of the proletariat), then an *economic* revolution (socialization of the means of production, establishment of socialist relations of production). A socialist country thus constituted “builds socialism” under the dictatorship of the proletariat and, when the moment comes, prepares for the transition to communism. It is a long, drawn-out process.

Now, in the eyes of the C.C.P., a critical examination of the “positive and negative experiences” of socialist revolutions—their victories and failures, their difficulties, their progress, their degree of advancement (in the U.S.S.R., in the socialist countries of Central Europe, in Yugoslavia, in China, in North Korea, in North Vietnam, in Cuba)—shows that every socialist country has found itself, or finds itself, or will find itself, even once

it has “more or less” completed the socialization of the means of production, faced with a crucial problem: that of the two “roads.”

The problem is the following. We are going to state it in the form of questions.

In the different phases of revolutionary transitions that make a social formation of capitalism pass over to socialism then to communism, does there not exist, in each of these phases, an objective risk of “regression”? Isn’t this risk the result of the *politics* pursued by the revolutionary party, its correctness or falseness; not only its general line, but also the specific ways it is applied? In the way the hierarchy and articulation of objectives is determined and in the *objective mechanisms* (economic, political, ideological) put into place by this politics? Is there not a logic and a necessity to these *mechanisms* such that they can cause the socialist country to “regress” “toward capitalism”? Moreover, isn’t this risk exacerbated by the existence of imperialism, by its means (economic, political, military, ideological), by the support it can draw on from certain elements within a socialist country, by occupying some of this country’s voids (cf. ideology), by using its *mechanisms* to neutralize and utilize it politically, then dominate it economically?

Considering this general risk, and using the terms currently deployed by the Chinese Communist Party, is the future of socialism in a country completely, that is to say, definitively, irreversibly, 100 percent assured based on the mere fact that this country has achieved a twofold revolution, both *political* and *economic*? Can it not regress toward capitalism?

Don’t we already have an example of such a regression: Yugoslavia?

Is it not possible, then, that a socialist country might conserve, even for a long time, the outward *form* or *forms* (economic, political) of socialism, all the while giving them a completely different economic, political and ideological content (mechanism of restoration of capitalism), all the while letting itself be progressively neutralized and then used politically and dominated economically by imperialism?

This problem is of a piece with the C.C.P. thesis on the risk that a socialist country might “regress” toward capitalism. It is on the basis of this general thesis that it is possible to say that socialist countries constantly find themselves confronted with an alternative between “two roads.” This alternative can, in certain circumstances, become particularly critical, even

today. *Two roads*, then, open up before the socialist countries, in view of the results obtained in their revolution:

— the revolutionary road, which leads beyond the obtained results, toward the consolidation and development of socialism, then toward the passage to communism;

— the regressive road, which falls back on this side of the obtained results, toward the neutralization then political utilization then economic domination and “digestion” of a socialist country by imperialism: the road of “regression back toward capitalism.”

The alternative between two roads, then, is this: either “stop half-way,” which really means regressing, or do not “stop half-way,” that is, keep moving forward.

In the official Chinese texts, the first road is characterized, in shorthand, as the “capitalist” road (it is a question of “leaders who take the capitalist road”), and the second road is characterized, again in shorthand, as the “revolutionary road.”

Such is the dominant political problem posed by the political conjuncture of the C.R.

b) *Political objectives of the Cultural Revolution*

For China, the C.R. offers an answer to this question, a solution to this problem. *For China*: but it is clear that this solution as well as this problem infinitely surpass the Chinese conjuncture both in their import and their effects.

The C.C.P. says: we are at a crossroads. We must choose: either we stop half-way, in which case we in fact, even if we claim the contrary, take the road of regression, the “capitalist road,” or we decide to move forward, we take the necessary steps, and then we head down the “revolutionary road.”

It is precisely at this point in the Chinese conjuncture that the C.R. intervenes.

The C.C.P. declares that in order to reinforce and develop socialism in China, in order to assure its future and protect it in a lasting way from every risk of regression, it must add a third revolution to the prior *political* and *economic* revolutions: *a mass ideological revolution*.

The C.C.P. calls this mass ideological Revolution the proletarian Cultural Revolution.

Its ultimate aim is to transform the ideology of the masses, to replace the feudal, bourgeois and petit-bourgeois ideology that still permeates the masses of Chinese society with a new ideology of the masses, proletarian and socialist — and in this way to give the socialist economic infrastructure and political superstructure a corresponding *ideological superstructure*.

This ultimate aim defines the distant objective of the C.R. The C.R. can only be a long, drawn-out process.

However, this ultimate aim *from this day forward* hinges on the essential, dominant problem of the conjuncture: the problem of the crossroads, the problem of the two roads.

The articulation of this aim stands out quite clearly in all of the official Chinese texts establishing the hierarchy of *current objectives*: “The movement underway *takes aim primarily* at those who, in the Party, hold leadership positions, and have taken the capitalist road.” It is therefore within the Party, on which everything depends, it is with the Party itself that the C.R. should begin, while at the same time unfolding in all other domains. The C.R. poses, in an immediate and direct way, a question to the leaders, the *essential question*, the question as to which road they are taking, the road they intend to take: “capitalist road” or “revolutionary road.”

This *essential* objective unequivocally indicates the central problem to which the C.R. responds.

Of course, the C.R. has, from this point on, other objectives. Just as ideology is present in all practices of a given society, the C.R. bears just as much on the forms of ideology that intervene in economic practices, political practices, pedagogical practices, etc.

In all of these spheres, the C.R. defines near-term objectives, posed with a view to its distant aims. They are all articulated in the final instance in view of solving the *essential* problem: the problem of the two roads.

c) *Means and methods of the Cultural Revolution*

As for the means and methods of the C.R., they rest on the principle that the C.R. should be a *revolution of the masses* that transforms the ideology of the masses and is made by the masses themselves.

It is not simply a question of transforming the ideology or reforming the understanding of some intellectuals or a few leaders. It is not even a question of transforming the ideology of the communist Party alone,

supposing such a thing were necessary. It is a matter of transforming the ideas, the ways of thinking, the ways of acting, the customs [*moeurs*] of *the masses of the entire country*, several hundred million men, peasants, workers and intellectuals.

Now, such a transformation of the ideology of the masses can *only be the work of the masses themselves*, acting in and through *organizations* that are *mass organizations*.

The politics of the C.C.P. consists, then, in making the widest possible appeal and having the greatest confidence in the masses, and in inviting all political leaders to follow, with no hesitation and even with a certain audacity, this “mass line.” It is necessary to let the masses speak, and have confidence in the initiatives of the masses. *Errors*, inevitable in every movement, will happen: they will be corrected within the movement, the masses will educate themselves in and by acting. But we must avoid at all costs holding back or restraining this movement *in advance*, under the pretext that errors or excesses are “possible”: this would break the movement. It is also necessary to foresee that there will be *resistances*, sometimes considerable, to the mass movement: they are normal, since the C.R. is a form of the class struggle. These resistances will come from representatives of the formerly dominant classes and might also come, in certain cases, from poorly-led or poorly-handled masses, and might even come from certain leaders of the Party. It will be necessary to treat all of these cases *differentially*, distinguishing enemies from friends and, among adversaries, distinguishing among the hostile, irreducible elements, the leaders who are stuck in their ways or confused, those who are hesitant and those who are spineless. In no case, even against the bourgeois class enemy (crimes being punished by law), should one come to “blows” and have recourse to violence, but always to reasoning and persuasion.

The masses can only act in mass *organizations*. The C.R.’s most original and innovative means are found in the emergence of organizations specific to the C.R., organizations distinct from other organizations of the class struggle (union and party). The *organizations specific* to the C.R. are organizations *of ideological class struggle*.

These organizations seem to have been originally brought about as a result of initiatives from the base (creation of circles, study groups, popular committees). Just as Lenin did the Soviets, the C.C.P. recognized their importance, supported them, and extended their example to the entire C.R., among workers, peasants, intellectuals and the youth.

The C.C.P. is very careful to link these new organizations to older ones, these new objectives to older ones. This is why we are constantly reminded that the C.R. is carried out under the direction of the Party, and that the objectives of the C.R. should be constantly combined, both in the factories and the fields, with already defined objectives for “socialist education,” that the student organizations should not intervene in the factories nor in the peasant sectors, where the workers and peasants will carry out the C.R. themselves, that the C.R. should not hinder production, it should assist it, etc.

At the same time, the C.C.P. declares that these are mass youth *organizations*, principally urban youth, therefore made up for the most part of high school and university students, and that they are *currently* the vanguard of the movement. It is a factual state of affairs, but its political importance is clear. On the one hand, in fact, the teaching system in place for the education of the youth (we should not forget that school deeply marks men, even during periods of historical mutation), was in China a bastion of bourgeois and petit-bourgeois ideology. On the other hand, the youth, which has not experienced revolutionary struggles and wars, constitutes, in a socialist country, a very delicate matter, a place where the future is in large part played out. The youth is not revolutionary solely by the fact of being born in a socialist country, nor from growing up hearing stories of the exploits of its elders. If, despite all the energies of its age, it finds itself, due to political failings, abandoned to an ideological disarray or “void,” it is then given over to “spontaneous” ideological forms that ceaselessly fill in this “void”: bourgeois and petit-bourgeois ideologies, whether inherited from its own national past, or imported from without. These forms find their natural points of support in the positivism, empiricism and “apolitical” technicism of scholars and other specialists. In return, if a socialist country assigns its youth a great revolutionary task and if it educates them for this action, not only will the youth contribute, in the C.R., to the transformation of the existing ideology, it will educate itself and transform its own ideology. It is on the youth that ideology, of whatever sort, has the most impact. The question is that of knowing *what* ideology should act on the youth of a socialist country. The C.R. responds, in general, to this question. The youth organizations of the C.R. answer it for the youth.

Finally, it should be pointed out that the call for the C.R., the appeal to the masses, the call for the development of the mass organizations of the C.R., its methods, including the conditions of the criticism of leaders who “take the capitalist road,” *are made by the Communist Party*, which therefore remains the key, central and leading organization of the Chinese Revolution. It should also be noted that the Party established, with the greatest insistence, the theoretical and practical law of the C.R., its supreme law: “Mao Tse-tung *Thought*,” that is, Marxism-Leninism applied to the existence of the Chinese Revolution and Socialism, Marxism-Leninism enriched by this experience, and expressed in a form directly accessible to the masses.

The C.R. is, therefore, neither the exaltation of the blind “spontaneism” of the masses, nor a political “adventure.” The appeal to the masses, the confidence in the masses, and the creation of mass organizations corresponds to the needs and possibilities of the masses. But at the same time, the C.R. is a considered, deliberate decision undertaken by the Party; it rests on a scientific analysis of the situation, and therefore on the principles of Marxist theory and practice. Similarly, the supreme law of the C.R. is, in the theory as in practice, Marxism-Leninism.

Such are the conjuncture, objectives, means and methods of the C.R.

2—CULTURAL REVOLUTION AND MARXIST THEORETICAL PRINCIPLES

Naturally, this political analysis of the C.R. poses a whole series of *theoretical* problems.

The C.R. proposes, with its decisions, a number of new political theses: risk of “regression” of a socialist country toward capitalism, continuation of class struggle in a socialist regime after the transformation, more or less, of the relations of production, necessity for a mass ideological revolution and mass organizations specific to this revolution, etc.

Do these new political theses conform to *Marxist theory*?

a) The central thesis, which poses the most important theoretical problems, is *the thesis concerning the possibility of “regressing”* from a socialist country toward capitalism. The thesis runs up against many convictions

anchored in ideological interpretations of Marxism (religious, evolutionist, economist interpretations).

This thesis is, in fact, unthinkable if Marxism is an essentially religious philosophy of history that *guarantees* socialism by presenting it as *the goal* toward which human history has always worked. But Marxism is not a philosophy of history, and socialism is not the “end” of history.

This thesis would also be unthinkable if Marxism were an *evolutionism*. In an evolutionist interpretation of Marxism, there is a necessary and guaranteed order of modes of production: one cannot, for example, “leap” above a mode of production. This interpretation supplies a *guarantee* that you are always moving forward, therefore excluding in principle any risk of “regression”: from capitalism we can only proceed toward socialism, and from socialism to communism, not toward capitalism.

And when, out of necessity, evolutionism must admit the possibility of “regression,” it thinks that to regress is *to return to the older forms* from the past, that have remained *unchanged in themselves*. But Marxism is not an evolutionism. Its conception of the historical dialectic allows for lags [*décalages*], distortions, regressions without repetition, leaps, etc. In this way, for Marxism, certain countries can “pass on to socialism” without having to “pass through” capitalism. This is why the regression toward a mode of production that has been in principle surpassed is *possible* (cf. Yugoslavia). But it for this same reason that this regression is not a pure and simple reversion to the past, toward an intact past, toward older forms: it occurs by way of a different process, the insertion of new (formally socialist) forms in a system of the capitalist mode of production, producing an *original* form of capitalism beneath socialist “appearances.”

The “regression” thesis would, finally, be impossible if Marxism were an *economism*. In an economist interpretation of Marxism, the abolition of the economic bases of social classes is all that is necessary to confirm the disappearance of social classes, and with them, class struggle and the dictatorship of the proletariat’s necessity, and therefore the class character of the Party and the State—in order, in other words, to be able to declare that the victory of socialism has been “definitively assured.” But Marxism is not an economism.

b) *A social class* is not defined, in fact, solely by the positions of its members in the relations of production and therefore by the relations of

production: it is also defined, at the same time, by their position in political and ideological relations, *which remain class relations* long after the socialist transformation of the relations of production.

There is no doubt that the economic (the relations of production) defines a social class *in the last instance*, but class struggle constitutes a system and is at work at different levels (economic, political, ideological); the transformation of one level does not make the forms of class struggle at the other levels disappear. In this way, class struggle can continue quite virulently at the political level, and above all the ideological level, long after the more or less complete suppression of the economic bases of the property-owning classes in a socialist country.

It is, then, essentially in relation to the forms of political and especially ideological class struggle that *social classes* are defined: depending on the side they take in political and ideological struggles.

This does not mean that the determination of social classes by the economy is bracketed. In socialist countries, depending on the stages of their history, certain economic relations persist (at least small-scale commodity production, which preoccupied Lenin so much) that constitute an economic basis for the distinction between classes and for class struggle. Also, notable differences in income can serve as economic supports for the distinctions necessary for the survival of a class struggle that is played out primarily elsewhere than in the economic sphere: in the political domain, and above all in the ideological domain.

c) This is the essential point: the “regression” thesis supposes that, in a certain conjuncture in the history of socialist countries, the *ideological* can become the strategic point at which everything gets decided. It is, then, in the ideological sphere that the crossroads is located. The future depends on the ideological. It is in the *ideological class struggle* that the fate (progress or regression) of a socialist country is played out.

This thesis concerning the possibility of a *dominant* role for the ideological in a political conjuncture of the history of the workers’ movement can only run up against economic, evolutionist and mechanistic “Marxists,” that is, those who know nothing about the Marxist dialectic. It is surprising only to those who confuse the principal and secondary contradiction, the principal and secondary aspect of a contradiction, the reversal of primary and secondary contradictions and aspects, etc., in short, *those who confuse the determination in the last instance of the economic with the*

domination of this or that instance (the economic, political or ideological) in this or that mode of production or this or that political conjuncture.

Deciding for, and carrying out, the C.R. amounts therefore to proclaiming two theses:

— 1. In a socialist country, the process of “regression” can begin with the ideological; it is through the ideological that the effect that will progressively touch the political, then the economic sphere, will pass.

— 2. It by undertaking a revolution in the ideological sphere, in leading the class struggle in the ideological sphere that it becomes possible to impede or reverse this process and steer a socialist country in the other direction: the “revolutionary road.”

Formally, the first thesis means: once a socialist country has suppressed the economic bases of the old social classes, it might think it has suppressed classes and therefore class struggle. It might think that class struggle has been overcome, even though it continues to play itself out in the political domain and above all in the ideological domain. *Not seeing that class struggle can unfold in its purest form* [par excellence] *in the ideological sphere* is to abandon the sphere of the ideological to bourgeois ideology, to abandon the terrain to the adversary. If the adversary is on the battlefield without being identified and treated as an adversary, then it is calling the shots, and we should not be surprised when it takes territory. What can follow is the installation of ideological, political and economic mechanisms leading to the restoration of capitalism. What can follow is the political neutralization, then political utilization, then the economic domination of the socialist country by imperialism. It is, in fact, unthinkable that a socialist country could remain socialist for long if it is indeed based on this contradiction: a socialist infrastructure and a bourgeois ideological superstructure.

The C.R. draws its conclusions from this contradiction: we must undertake a revolution in the ideological in order to give a socialist country furnished with a socialist infrastructure a socialist ideological superstructure.

This thesis is not new. It is constantly recalled in Marx and Lenin. Marx said that for each infrastructure there should be a “corresponding” superstructure of its own, and that in a socialist revolution it is not only the political and economic that should change their bases and forms, but the

ideological as well. Lenin spoke openly of the vital necessity of a cultural revolution.

What is new is that this theoretical thesis is today on the agenda of the practical politics of a socialist country. For the first time in the history of the workers' movement, a socialist country finds it *necessary* to put this thesis in action, and finds itself *capable* of doing so.

It is not enough to say that this thesis is, at its core, classical. The *practice* of its putting into action is something completely new, clarifying in turn this theoretical thesis and the principles on which it is based. It is impossible to undertake a mass ideological revolution without learning something new about both ideology and the masses. We are beginning to see that the C.R. does not simply pose theoretical problems with regard to existing theoretical theses: it directs our attention to the new theoretical knowledges that its practice produces and requires.

d) It is this sense that the C.R. puts into play Marxist principles concerning the nature of the *ideological*.

Cultural Revolution means, in effect, revolution in the domain of the ideological.

What is the domain of the ideological?

The Marxist theory shows that every society comprises three specific levels, instances, or domains:

— the economic	----->	infrastructure
— the political	----->	superstructure
— the ideological		

These “levels” are articulated with each other in a complex manner. It is the economic that is determining in the last instance.

When we use an architectural metaphor (that of a house: infrastructure/superstructure) we say that the ideological represents one of the levels of the superstructure. We do this to indicate its position in the social structure (superstructure and not infrastructure), its relative autonomy with regard to the political and the economic, and at the same time its relations of dependence with regard to the political and the economic.

If, instead, we want to suggest the concrete form of existence of the ideological, it is better to compare it to a “cement” rather than to a floor of a building. The ideological seeps, in fact, into all the rooms of the building: in *individuals'* relation to all their practices, to all of their objects, in their

relations to science, to technology, to the arts, in their relations to economic practice and political practice, into their “personal” relations, etc. The ideological is what, in a society, *distinguishes* and *cements*, whether it be technical or class distinctions.

While the ideological regulates individuals’ “lived” relations to their conditions of existence, to their practices, to their objects, to their classes, to their struggles, to their history and to their world, etc., the ideological is not individual or subjective in nature.

Like all “levels” of society, the ideological is made up of *objective social relations*. Just as there are social (economic) relations of production, there are also political social relations and “ideological social relations.” This last expression is used by Lenin (in “What the ‘Friends of the People’ Are”). It must be taken literally. In order to know the ideological, we must know these social relations and what these relations are made of.

What, in fact, are these relations made of? There are not only made up of systems of ideas-representations, but systems of conducts-behaviors as well; therefore, both “theoretical” and “practical” systems. The ideological includes not only systems of ideas (*ideologies* in the strict sense), but also systems of practices of conduct-behavior (*mores* or customs [*moeurs*]).

Ideas and customs are related dialectically. Depending on the class situation and the conjuncture, there can either be a partial or general identity, or a *discrepancy* [*décalage*] or contradiction between ideas and customs. In the ideological struggle, it is very important to recognize the ideas and customs that the party of the ideological adversary incarnates, just as it is very important to know how to make the necessary distinctions between ideas, or between ideas and customs. The great revolutionaries have always known how to make these distinctions and keep what is “good” from the past while rejecting what is “bad,” in the realm of both ideas and customs. Whatever the case may be, an ideological revolution should necessarily be a revolution not only in ideas—or ideologies—but also in practical conducts and behaviors—or customs.

This twofold nature of the ideological allows us to understand that ideological tendencies can be inscribed in certain behaviors and in certain *practical* conducts as well as in *ideas*. It allows us to understand that certain “customs” or “work habits” and “leadership habits,” a certain “style” of leadership, can have an ideological signification, and be contrary to the revolutionary ideology, even when they are the actions taken by socialist

leaders. Bourgeois ideology can therefore find support in certain *practices*, that is, in certain political, technician, bureaucratic, etc., *customs* of socialist leaders. If these “work habits” and “leadership habits” multiply, they are no longer personal “quirks” or foibles: they can be or become signs of social distinction, a taking of sides (unconscious or not) in the ideological class struggle. For example, the bureaucratic or technocratic behavior of leaders, whether they be economic, political or military leaders, can constitute so many points of support, within the ideological domain of a socialist country, for the ideological offensive of the bourgeoisie.

If the C.R. takes this threat seriously, it is because it is in conformity with the Marxist theory of ideology. But at the same time, by taking it seriously, it is obliged to deepen this theory, and therefore to take it further.

e) Finally, the C.R. puts into play the principles of Marxism with regard to its forms of organizations.

The thesis of the C.C.P. in fact supposes that there are mass organizations *specific to the C.R.*, and therefore that these organizations are distinct from the Party.

What clearly poses a problem, for many communists, is the existence of these new organizations that are distinct from the Party.

The question of the organizations of class struggle, and their distinction, is an old question of the workers’ movement.

It was settled by Marx, Engels and Lenin insofar as it was a matter of the organization of economic class struggle (the union) and the organization of political and ideological class struggle (the party). This functional distinction corresponded to a distinction in terms of form. The union was a *mass organization* (without democratic centralism). The Party was a *vanguard organization* (with democratic centralism).

Up to this point, the Party has been responsible for both the political struggle and the ideological struggle. The C.R. adds this astonishing innovation, creating a new, *third type of organization*: an organization specific to the ideological mass struggle. It is no doubt called upon to apply the decisions of the Party. But it is distinct from it. Moreover, this type of organization distinguishes itself from the Party insofar as it is, like unions, a *mass organization* (it is not governed by democratic centralism: it is said that the leaders of the organizations of the C.R. should be elected “like the deputies of the Paris Commune”).

But is this astonishing innovation in conformity with the theoretical principles of Marxism?

Formally, it can be said that the distinction between organizations reflects the distinction between instances or levels of social reality. A mass organization for the economic level (union); an avant-garde organization for the political level (the Party); and a mass organization for the ideological level (the organizations of the C.R.).

But perhaps we need to go further and ask *why* this third type of organization, which did not exist before, and which Marx and Lenin did not anticipate, is from here on out indispensable in a socialist country.

We can suggest, prudently but not without reason, that the answer to this question can be found in the change in position of both the party and union with regard to the State in a socialist regime.

After the first revolutionary seizure of power, during the dictatorship of the proletariat, the Party must assume leadership of the State, State power and the State apparatus. In this case, a partial but inevitable fusion will occur between the Party and the State apparatus.

In this way, a serious problem is posed, one that Lenin outlined in dramatic terms in the texts from the end of his life (“Purging the Party,” “How Should We Reorganize the Workers’ and Peasants’ Inspection?”): *how do we regulate the relations between the Party and the State in order to avoid the pitfalls of bureaucracy and technocracy as well as their serious political effects?*

Lenin sought the solution to this problem in an *organism*: the workers’ and peasants’ Inspection. This organism was an emanation of the Party. It was not an organization properly speaking. Much less a mass organization.

The problem posed by Lenin in dramatic terms (he was aware that his solution was beyond the historical forces currently existing in the U.S.S.R.), was answered, forty years later, by the C.C.P. with the C.R.

It answers this question by establishing not a organism for monitoring the relations between Party and State, but by establishing a mass movement and mass organization whose “principal” task today consists, in the C.R., in identifying and criticizing leaders who cut themselves off from the masses, who behave in a bureaucratic or technocratic manner, who by their ideas or their “customs,” habits of life, work and leadership, abandon the “revolutionary road” and “take the capitalist road.”

The C.R. adds a completely new solution to the problem posed by Lenin. The third type of organization, responsible for the third revolution, must be distinct from the Party (in both its existence and its organization form) in order to oblige the Party to *distinguish itself* from the State, in a period during which it is in part forced, and in part tempted, to *merge with* the State.

If these analyses are, despite their schematic nature, correct in principle, it is clear that the C.R. is of interest, directly or indirectly, to *all* communists.

The great political and theoretical interest of the C.R. is that it constitutes a solemn reminder of the Marxist conception of class struggle and revolution. The question of socialist revolution is not definitively settled by the seizure of power and the socialization of the means of production. Class struggle continues under socialism, in a world shadowed by the threats of imperialism. It is then above all in the ideological sphere that class struggle decides the fate of socialism: progress or regression, revolutionary road or capitalist road.

The great lessons of the C.R. go beyond both China and the other socialist countries. They are of interest to the entire international communist movement.

They remind us that Marxism is neither a religion of history, nor an evolutionism, nor an economism. They remind us that the domain of the ideological is one of the fields of class struggle, and that it can become the strategic place where, under certain circumstances, the fate of the struggle between classes is played out.

They remind us that there is an extremely close link between the theoretical conception of Marxism and the ideological class struggle.

They remind us that every great revolution can only be the work of the masses, and that the role of revolutionary leaders, while giving the masses the means to orient and organize themselves, while giving them Marxism-Leninism as compass and law, is to attend the school of the masses, in order to help them express their will and solve their problems.

It is not a matter of exporting the C.R. It belongs to the Chinese Revolution. But its theoretical and philosophical lessons belong to all communists. Communists should borrow these *lessons* from the C.R., and benefit from them.

— translated by Jason E. Smith

