A Hammer to Smash the Enemy Part 2[1]

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Part 2 Sheng-wu-lien and the mass militarization



In 1967, a radical left-wing group, Sheng-wu-lien, issued a document *Whither China?*, a take on the first section of Mao's On New Democracy. The document opens by calling into question the May 7 directive by comparing it to the Soviet model of peaceful transition. While there are many faults with this document, we must carry out a scientific evaluation of it in order to parse out right from wrong, reclaiming what is correct in it from revisionists and all other rightists. In general, Sheng-wu-lien are either dismissed as out of touch ultra-leftists (embraced as such by the idiot fringe composed of anarchists, left-communists, and "anti-state Marxists") or treated as simply a historical curiosity, offering nothing of importance to study. *Whither China?*, we must argue, should instead be understood in its dual and contradictory nature. This means it should be read critically, and the kernels of truth it contains must be firmly grasped and reclaimed. This is the scientific process any theory must undergo. Sadly, the theories of the Sheng-wu-lien have been denied such a rigorous process.

[1] https://struggle-sessions.com/2019/11/14/a-hammer-to-smash-the-enemy/

In essence the document argues for the militarization of the masses, something Mao himself promoted: "This document (dated 8-3-1967) may be issued to the whole country. The PLA should separately and in sessions give *military training* to university students and children of middle schools and the upper formers of primary schools. They should also take part in the work of re-opening schools, re-adjusting school organization, setting up leadership bodies of the three-way alliance, and carrying out struggle, criticism, and reform. They should set up experimental points first and then apply the experience so acquired to a wider scope. They ought to convince students and children [to accept] what Marx taught us—'The proletariat must emancipate mankind as a whole before it can emancipate itself.' In military training, they must not reject teachers and cadres who have made mistakes. These people must be allowed to take part so as to facilitate their reform; the only exceptions to this are the aged and sick. All this is quite easy, if it is conscientiously carried on." (directive regarding cultural revolution issued March 7, 1967; emphasis ours)

The authors of *Whither China?*, in contrast to many of those who have distorted their line, were actually defending what they thought was the clear position of Mao Zedong. Like the Shanghai Commune, the authors viewed cultural revolution as a process of power seizure. Left-wing "communists" will of course frame this call for power seizure as something that "frightened Mao," ignoring the Maoists who led these very power seizures. The authors themselves express an understanding of this fact.

It can be easy to undervalue Sheng-wu-lien's merits. We who have the advantage of hindsight, knowing how capitalist restoration played out in the ending of the GPCR after the arrest of the Four, should not downplay the striking foresight they demonstrate here:

> "Any revolution must necessarily involve the army. Since a Red capitalist class is already formed in China, the army of course cannot detach itself from this reality. Yet the January storm has not touched in any way the vital problem of all revolutions—the problem of the army. Thus it may be seen that the revolution lacked depth and remained at a low stage of development. The degree of maturity of the political thought of the revolutionary people, too, was in conformity with this low level revolution—it too remained at a very immature stage."

Again, the contradiction between the GPCR and the military asserted itself as early as 1967, and the astute young authors could already detect this only one year in. They follow this incredible insight with a logic similar to that of the wreckers and revisionists who hold that the Commune is an impossibility:

> "The putting forward of three-in-one combination amounts to reinstatement of the bureaucrats already toppled in the January revolution. Inevitably it will be the form of political power to be usurped by the bourgeoisie, at which the Army and local bureaucrats are to play a leading role."

On top of the fact that their subjectivism did not withstand the test of reality, we can say that in essence they are making the defeated argument of the absolute equalitarians that including any Party cadres would result in a bureaucratic imbalance at the expense of the revolution. As we saw in the previous part, this is ahistorical: while Zhang and Yao were part of the Party Committee, they were also the foremost leaders in overthrowing it. In the maelstrom of political subversion and mass uprisings, where everyone claimed the banner of Mao publically, it is easy to understand how youth at this time could be confused into taking a line in good faith that could be intentionally utilized by rightists to promote capitalist restoration. Taking this perspective allows us to focus less on Sheng-wu-lien's shortcomings and more on the strengths and radical foresight of their document.

It is important to grasp certain universal laws in the dialectic between revolution and reaction. The historical record leaves no ambiguity here: revolution is always followed by flare-ups of reaction (this is the very reason it is called reaction—it reacts negatively to progress), and reaction can likewise spur revolution. Reactionaries often bide their time until some moment when revolutionaries face a setback. We can also recall how the newborn USSR was bombarded and invaded, the White Army leading its campaign of White Terror, prompting both War Communism and Red Terror in response. Before that, there is the example of Paris after the defeat of the Commune, when the bourgeoisie inflicted reaction upon the masses of people. Before this even there was the Thermidorian Reaction to the Jacobins once Robespierre was overthrown. Resistance and reaction are locked in a struggle of opposites, and one must overcome the other.

This is a general law, holding true on the largest scale as well as the smaller. The failures of the Commune brought with them a wave of attempted bourgeois reaction that took place in the uncharted twists and turns of the chaotic GPCR. (In the case of the Commune, this was due to internal contradictions in the Commune as well as the external conditions of socialist China.) In another display of foresight, looking far beyond many of the adherents of Mao Zedong Thought outside of China, Sheng-wu-lien identified Zhou En-lai as the chief capitalist agent. They asserted that:

> "…intoxicated by his victory of February-March, Zhou En-lai—at present the general representative of China's Red capitalist class—hurriedly tried to set up

> revolutionary committees in all parts of the country. If this bourgeois plan had been fulfilled, the proletariat would have retreated to its grave. Therefore, without waiting for the establishment of all the revolutionary committees, the Central Cultural Revolution Group issued the order to hit back. After that the great August local revolutionary war in the country began to ferment."

In the years to come, the claim that Zhou was a secret rightist proved painfully true with his rehabilitation of Deng Xiaoping, the arch-revisionist who led capitalist restoration. Revisionist historian Raymond Lotta too places Zhou at the center of the right:

"The struggle against Lin Biao in the period starting in late 1968 and intensifying in 1969 temporarily brought together two forces within the Chinese Communist Party. There was the Left headed up by Mao, having as its base leaders of the Cultural Revolution [editor's note: i.e., the Four]. The other force was the old guard from within the Party center, the State Council and *the regional and central military hierarchies*, who continued to be an influential and numerically powerful section of the Party. *These were grouped around Zhou En-lai*. The Cultural Revolution had exposed and removed Liu Shao-chi and the leaders close to him. Thousands of cadre had been criticized and overthrown in the course of the struggle against Liu. But there were many in the Party who, while basically holding to Liu's policies, were not directly in his camp and had escaped some of the harsher criticism. Others went along with the Cultural Revolution but did so in order to save their hides, while never really accepting its basic tenets." (*And Mao Makes Five* emphasis ours)

> "Zhou had haltingly and grudgingly supported the mass movements of the 1950s and '60s but never really united with and gave leadership to them because, like other bourgeois democrats, he saw such movements as disruptive of making China powerful and modern. If Zhou was ambivalent in the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, as it developed further he actively opposed it. His sheltering of many rightists as Liu went down contributed to the development of a new bourgeois headquarters which increasingly had Zhou, the consummate bourgeois politician, as its prime sponsor. That the revisionists ruling China exalt Zhou while lashing out at Mao's line indicates exactly what Zhou was up to for some time, perhaps even going back to 1949—promoting and protecting the interests of the Right."

Not only did the right led by Deng exalt Zhou, but upon his death they led riots against the revolutionaries that even the highly conservative PLA had to put down. This was

due to their loyalty to him and his crucial role in protecting the top rightist leaders. Lotta goes on:

> "Deng could not have been brought back without strong backing from Zhou, who from the beginning sought to unleash Deng against the Left. Zhou's Confucian 'care and concern' for people and institutions criticized during the Cultural Revolution and Deng's unrestrained arrogance suited the Right's needs well in their bid for power."

In the first quotation above, Lotta identifies the contradiction between the GPCR revolutionaries and the PLA authorities and likewise connects them to Zhou. Sheng-wu-lien elaborate: "In the struggle to hit back at the February adverse current, the important sign of the revolution's entry into a higher stage was that the problem of the Army really began to make itself felt. The revolutionary people had very childish ideas about the Army during the January revolution, believing that as soon as the local capitalist-roaders were overthrown, the armed forces would unite with the revolutionary people to suppress the capitalist-roaders in accordance with Chairman Mao's order of union from the upper to the lower levels."

They mention here Chairman Mao's "order of union," which did exist, as mentioned in the last part. In the same month of February 1967, Mao issued another directive regarding the GPCR:

"The PLA should actively give support to the truly proletarian revolutionary groups and resolutely oppose the rightwing." And before that, on January 27, 1967, he said, "The great revolution is being ferociously developed in the regions and the struggles for power are continuing. *Our armed forces should support the left-wing revolutionaries there in their power struggle*, and therefore they must not be involved in local cultural revolutions." (emphasis ours) On January 23, 1967, before the Lin Biao Affair, Mao wrote instructions to Lin Biao, who was then the leader of the PLA: "You must dispatch troops to support the broad left-wing revolutionary masses. Later on, whenever true revolutionaries need support from the PLA, you should do likewise. The so called 'non-interference' is untrue. [The PLA] has been involved for some time. I think on this matter you should issue new orders; the old ones should be cancelled." In the above quotation Mao is accounting for the fact that he has been ignored and pointing out the falsehood of the claims of "non-interference." What is more, with few exceptions these directives from Mao were ignored, which explains a bit of the frustration and militancy in the language of *Whither China?*.

Acutely aware of the experimental nature of "socialist new things" as well as the influence of the right wing, Sheng-wu-lien attempted to theorize how to thwart capitalist restoration—by advancing the GPCR into an armed struggle: "It is now seen that the Army now is different from the people's army before the liberation. Before the liberation the army and the people fought together to overthrow imperialism, bureaucratic capitalism, and feudalism. The relation between the Army and the people was like that between fish and water. After the liberation, as the target of revolution has changed from imperialism, bureaucratic capitalism and feudalism to capitalist-roaders, and these capitalist-roaders are power-holders in the army, some of the armed forces in the revolution have not only changed their blood-and-flesh relations with the people that obtained before the liberation, but have even become tools for suppressing revolution. Therefore, if the first great proletarian Cultural Revolution is to succeed, a radical change in the army will be necessary. … It is now seen that a revolutionary war in the country is necessary if the revolutionary people today want to overcome the armed Red capitalist class."

As early as 1967, Sheng-wu-lien were, in spite of their left-in-form,-right-in-essence errors, identifying the process by which the PLA was turning into its opposite. This transformation is one of the most painful lessons in our history, but it has given rise to the theories of Party militarization and concentric construction of the three instruments of revolution, which are foundational to Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, principally Maoism. These will be discussed in part 3. While misunderstanding the role of the revolutionary three-in-one combinations and hence not understanding well how the forces of Zhou and company distorted these and used them to their advantage, Sheng-wu-lien were correct to rebel against Zhou's headquarters as Maoists.

A basic and fundamental principle of People's War is that it is people and not military technology that are principal. From this understanding follow the tactic and strategy of snatching arms from the enemy—using the enemy as a supply line, as has been demonstrated by every PPW up to the present day. This took place in China at various times during the GPCR as well. This principle finds a special importance in the context of Mao's stance, mentioned above, that PPW should resume if the GPCR failed, with the revolutionary but less-well-armed masses turning to guerrilla warfare against a People's Army that had become a tool of capitalist restoration.

The arms seizures that took place were not at all times correct, often owing to the impulsiveness of some youths, but nonetheless Sheng-wu-lien give us a striking portrayal of what Gonzalo later called the sea of armed masses:

> "The arms grabbing movement of August was great. It was not only unprecedented in capitalist countries; moreover, it accomplished the fact of turning the whole nation into soldiers for the first time in socialist countries. Before the Cultural Revolution the bureaucrats dared not really hand over arms to the people. The militia is only a facade behind which the bureaucrats control the armed strength of the people. It is certainly not an armed force of the working class, but a docile tool in the hands of the bureaucrats. In the arms-seizing movement, the masses, instead of receiving arms like favors from above, for the first time seized arms from the hands of the bureaucrats by relying on the brute force of the revolutionary people themselves. For the first time the workers had their 'own' arms. Chairman Mao's rousing call, 'Arm the Left!' was an intensive concentration of the courage of the working class."

In many ways Sheng-wu-lien acknowledged that their politics and analysis were too far ahead of the consciousness of the masses at that time, and one of their major and most glaring shortcomings was the lack of analysis regarding China's enemies in the USSR and the US, who according to Mao, were

> "making use of our great Cultural Revolution to carry on their anti-Chinese activities. For instance, the Soviet Union is suppressing [our] students; [Soviet] airplanes near the Sinkiang border are more active; and [Soviet] ground forces are mobilized. All the armed units stationed in the big military districts along the frontiers such as Tsinan, Nanking, Foochow, and Kunming should be alerted and made ready. Therefore the time schedule of the great Cultural Revolution must be slightly postponed on account of the general situation, but it will be carried out in future."

For their part, looking to the future, Sheng-wu-lien claimed,

> "The thought of Mao Zedong, which is carrying out a new social revolution in China, will gradually wake up the masses from all contradictions of the past. The revolutionary people are beginning to understand gradually in practice why revolution is necessary, who are to be liquidated in the revolution, and how revolution is to be carried out. Revolutionary struggle begins to change from the stage of spontaneity to that of consciousness, from necessity to freedom."

In ways the above is prophetic, because by 1980 the thought of Mao Zedong had spread across the world and ignited new revolutions that seriously engaged with Mao Thought and the contradictions of the past to synthesize a third and higher stage.

We can now argue here that the mistakes of Sheng-wu-lien were corrected and their virtues lived on in the synthesis of Maoism. While the Sheng-wu-lien fancied themselves the modern form of Soviets, who would rid the country of all bureaucrats, their ambition and self-assessment never lived up to their concrete conditions. Their fundamental flaw was a failure to resolve their own contradictions with the theory of the Party (or its nature) and the PLA. Instead of trying to cut out the sickness to save the patient in a desperate invasive procedure, they would rather throw out the patient, in many ways keeping the sickness. We must cut them a little slack because it took decades for comrades to offer the much-needed theoretical corrections in the form of the militarization of the Party, the concentric construction of the three instruments of revolution, and People's War until Communism. Laden with bad ideas of turning all China, beset on all sides by her enemies, into a massive "Paris Commune" (that had no standing army) and their even more faulty conception of "a dictatorship of the masses," they could not but fail. What is remarkable—and even more so given their liquidationist impulses—was that the document was mainly authored by a ninenteen-year-old mathematics savant. It pointed to several crucial concepts, including the need to prevent the army from turning into its opposite and being wielded to destroy the revolution by the rightists, Zhou's betrayal of the revolution, and the need for a sea of armed masses who can carry out People's War to prevent restoration.

References

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