



Chairman Mao in the midst of the teachers and students of the Shaoshan School in 1959.

'YOUNG PEOPLE ARE THE MOST ACTIVE AND VITAL FORCE'

Chairman Mao's contributions
to the revolutionary youth movement

by The Communist Youth Organization

Mao Tsetung's teachings and exemplary practice in guiding the revolutionary youth movement in China have provided immortal lessons to revolutionary youth and students throughout the world.

Throughout his life, Chairman Mao attached great significance to the revolutionary role and aspirations of the masses of young people. Speaking to a group of Chinese students in 1957, he expressed his views in the following words:

"The world is yours, as well as ours, but in the last analysis, it is yours. You young people, full of vigor and vitality, are in the bloom of life, like the sun at eight or nine in the morning. Our hope is placed on you. . . The world belongs to you. China's future belongs to you."¹

Chairman Mao had considerable personal experience in the struggle of China's young people. As a young revolutionary, he actively built the May 4th Movement of 1919, a struggle of historic importance to China's new-democratic revolution. Beginning as a student uprising against imperialist aggression and unequal treaties, the May 4th Movement involved thousands of young people from various patriotic classes and strata—workers, peasants, intellectuals and the national bourgeoisie—mobilizing them in the struggle against imperialism and feudal reaction. One of the most significant developments was a strike of over 90,000 Shanghai workers, whose action virtually shut the city down and pointed to the leading role of the proletariat in China's revolution.

Within this general upsurge, the young Mao Tsetung founded the New People's Study Society. It was one of several groups of young intellec-

tuals who took up the study of Marxism and dedicated themselves to the formation of a communist party. This showed Mao's early understanding of the revolutionary qualities and desires of China's youth to be builders of a new world, free from foreign bondage and feudal dictatorship. He called upon the Chinese youth to break with narrow self-interest, pleasure-seeking and the flabby life of isolated intellectuals. Instead, he promoted political and scientific education and debate, rigorous physical exercise and other cultural activities to enable young people to participate in building a new China. What was needed, Mao said, was "youth who were hardened and determined to make sacrifices for their country."²

The New People's Study Society was an active force in organizing night schools for the political education of the workers, investigating factory conditions and organizing anti-imperialist demonstrations. It led its members to go among the masses of the laboring people and to rely on them to sweep away the "three big mountains" of oppression—feudalism, imperialism and bureaucrat-capitalism.

TWO MAIN LESSONS

"The greatest force is that of the union of the popular masses," Mao Tsetung taught its members, "We are awakened, the world is ours. . . We should not fear heaven, nor ghosts, nor the dead, nor bureaucrats, nor the militarists nor the capitalists. . ." ³

The May 4th Movement moved China's revolution forward and still provides a rich experience and inspiration to young people everywhere to this day. While it was not able, on its own, to overthrow the "three big mountains," it provided two main lessons to China's revolutionary youth. First, was the need for a communist party to lead the Chinese revolution and, second, was the need for the revolutionary youth to integrate themselves with the masses of workers and peasants. Chairman Mao pointed this out clearly during a speech on the anniversary of the May 4th Movement in 1939:

"How should we judge whether a youth is a revolutionary? How can we tell? There can be only one criterion, namely, whether or not he is willing to integrate himself with the broad masses of workers and peasants and does so in practice. If he is willing to do so and actually does so, he is a revolutionary; otherwise he is a nonrevolutionary or a counter-revolutionary. If today he integrates himself with the masses of workers and peasants, then today he is a revolutionary; if tomorrow he ceases to do so or turns around to oppress the common people, then he becomes a non-revolutionary or a counter-revolutionary."⁴

Why did Chairman Mao attach such importance to this point? A key reason was to oppose erroneous views that had arisen as a counter-current in reaction to the spontaneous upsurge in the youth movement. Some forces, caught up by the massive nature of the struggle, fell for the line that only the youth were revolutionary, and that they could make the revolution mainly on their own. Other forces, who actually opposed the

revolutionary action and ideas of the youth, tried to belittle their role and separate them from the workers and peasants.

Chairman Mao corrected both these views with his explanation of the relation between the concepts of "vanguard role" and "main force" as they pertained to the youth in the Chinese revolution:

"What role have China's young people played since the May 4th Movement? In a way they have played a vanguard role—a fact recognized by everybody except the diehards. What is a vanguard role? It means taking the lead and marching in the forefront of the revolutionary ranks. In the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal ranks of the Chinese people, there is a contingent composed of the country's young intellectuals and students. It is a contingent of considerable size and, even if the many who have given their lives are not included, it now numbers several million. It is an army on one of the fronts against imperialism and feudalism, and an important army, too. But this army is not enough; we cannot defeat the enemy by relying on it alone, for when all is said and done, it is not the main force. What then is the main force? The workers and peasants. Our young intellectuals and students must go among the workers and peasants, who make up 90 percent of the population, and mobilize and organize them. Without this main force of workers and peasants, we cannot win the fight against imperialism and feudalism, we cannot win it by relying only on the contingent of young intellectuals and students. Therefore, the young intellectuals and students throughout the country must unite with the broad masses of workers and peasants and become one with them, and only then can a mighty force be created."⁵

APPLYING MAO TSETUNG'S TEACHINGS

This important teaching of Mao Tsetung's applied not only to the Chinese youth movement in the 1920s and 1930s, but to the youth movement during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in the 1960s as well. Nor did it apply only to the youth of China. During the 1960s here in the U.S., many revolutionary activists in organizations like SDS studied these works of Chairman Mao's in order to combat various bankrupt lines claiming that they should not look to the U.S. working class for leadership or as the main force of the American revolution.

The youth and students in China took up Chairman Mao's line and played a leading role in the liberation of their country. They made up 80 percent of the ranks of the People's Liberation Army, and countless youth sacrificed their lives. In Yenan during the struggle against Japan, the youth conscientiously studied Marxism-Leninism, engaged in agricultural production, and became a model for all Chinese youth in integrating themselves among the masses.

Throughout the new-democratic revolution and afterwards, under the conditions of the dictatorship of the proletariat, Chairman Mao's revolutionary line on youth developed through sharp struggle against the bourgeois line. China's bourgeoisie, playing on the young people's inexperience

in the class struggle, has tried to lead the youth down the capitalist road. They tried to divorce the students from the masses and productive labor and get them to seek personal fame and gain.

This struggle sharpened over the years and reached a high point some 17 years after liberation had been won. This two-line struggle in the youth movement was essentially the same as that occurring in all the institutions of Chinese society, namely, which class would be served and which class would be suppressed.

Liu Shao-chi, then a hidden traitor within the upper ranks of the Chinese Communist Party, pushed the line that the youth and students, the schools and the state apparatus should serve the bourgeoisie and suppress the workers and peasants of China. The schools taught the students to study so they could become officials and bureaucratic overlords dictating to the masses of the people. The revisionists kept the students in the classrooms for 50 to 60 hours a week and separated them from the masses. Liu Shao-chi's line championed an increase in the division between mental and manual labor, books and practical life, students and the masses. It is no mistake that these are among the evils of feudal China and are also characteristic of capitalist society.

To criticize this revisionist path, the masses developed a saying about the youth under its influence: "The first year they are still country folk, the second they are tainted by the bourgeois style of life and the third year they turn their backs on their parents." 6

The purpose of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, initiated by Mao Tsetung in 1966, was to smash the revisionist line which had then set up its own headquarters in the state apparatus. In the educational system, the aim was to place the schools under the firm dictatorship of the working class and to prevent the bourgeois attempts to corrupt China's young successors to the proletarian revolution and restore capitalism through the third and fourth generations of Chinese youth.

REVOLUTIONIZE LEARNING

While the students' main task was to study, Mao Tsetung pointed out, "they should also learn other things, that is to say, they should not only learn book knowledge, they should also learn industrial production, agricultural production and military affairs. They also should criticize and repudiate the bourgeoisie. The length of schooling should be shortened, education should be revolutionized and the domination of our schools and colleges by bourgeois intellectuals should not be tolerated any longer." 7

Through this call a correct orientation on the tasks of the revolutionary youth was established. Over 13 million young people throughout China took up Chairman Mao's call and formed the Red Guard movement. They were dedicated to fighting the revisionist line in all its manifestations, including in the leadership of the Communist Party. It was the revolutionary spirit of China's youth to "dare to unhorse the emperor at the risk of one's life" that enabled the Red Guards to spark a revolutionary

movement of workers and peasants against the attempts at capitalist restoration by the bourgeoisie inside the Communist Party.

The revisionists attacked the Red Guards for rebelling and making revolution in the schools. Mao Tsetung, on the other hand, wrote a letter to the youth, saying: "Express your wrath against and your denunciation of the landlord class, the bourgeoisie, the imperialists, the revisionists and their running dogs. . . it is right to rebel against reactionaries. I warmly support you." 8

Once again the Chinese youth played a vanguard role in fighting to implement Mao Tsetung's line and once again they joined with the broad masses of workers and peasants. Together they deepened their study of Marxism-Leninism and the dictatorship of the proletariat in order to be better able to distinguish between sham and genuine Marxism.

"OPEN DOOR" POLICY

The educational system was changed radically. There was now an "open door" policy where workers and peasants could teach in classes while students would engage in manual labor in nearby factories and communes while attending school. Later, some 12 million of the educated youth went to the countryside after graduation to help in building socialism and to be re-educated by the poor and lower middle peasants. Altogether they made a decisive break with the revisionist practice of being trained to become bourgeois aristocrats over the masses.

Ten years later, the lessons learned in these battles against revisionism enabled China's young people to see through the attempts of Lin Piao, Teng Hsiao-ping and other traitors to reverse the gains of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Teng Hsiao-ping tried to cover his revisionist line with Marxist-Leninist phrases and words so as to confuse the masses of people and youth and restore capitalism. He called for taking the "three directives" of Marxist study, unity and stability needed for pushing the economy forward as the "key link" in consolidating the dictatorship of the proletariat. "Labor is the central task of all important tasks," he claimed. "How long will this concept hold good? Let us say at least for the next 10,000 years." 9

Mao Tsetung exposed this "right deviationist wind" and further deepened the understanding of the masses and the youth as to the source of these revisionist fallacies. He pointed out: "What 'taking the three directives as the key link'! Stability and unity do not mean writing off class struggle; class struggle is the key link and everything else hinges on it." 10

To those who were not clear as to where to aim their fire in the struggle against revisionism, Chairman Mao pointed out: "You are making the socialist revolution and yet don't know where the bourgeoisie is. It is right in the Communist Party—those in power taking the capitalist road. The capitalist-roaders are still on the capitalist road." 11

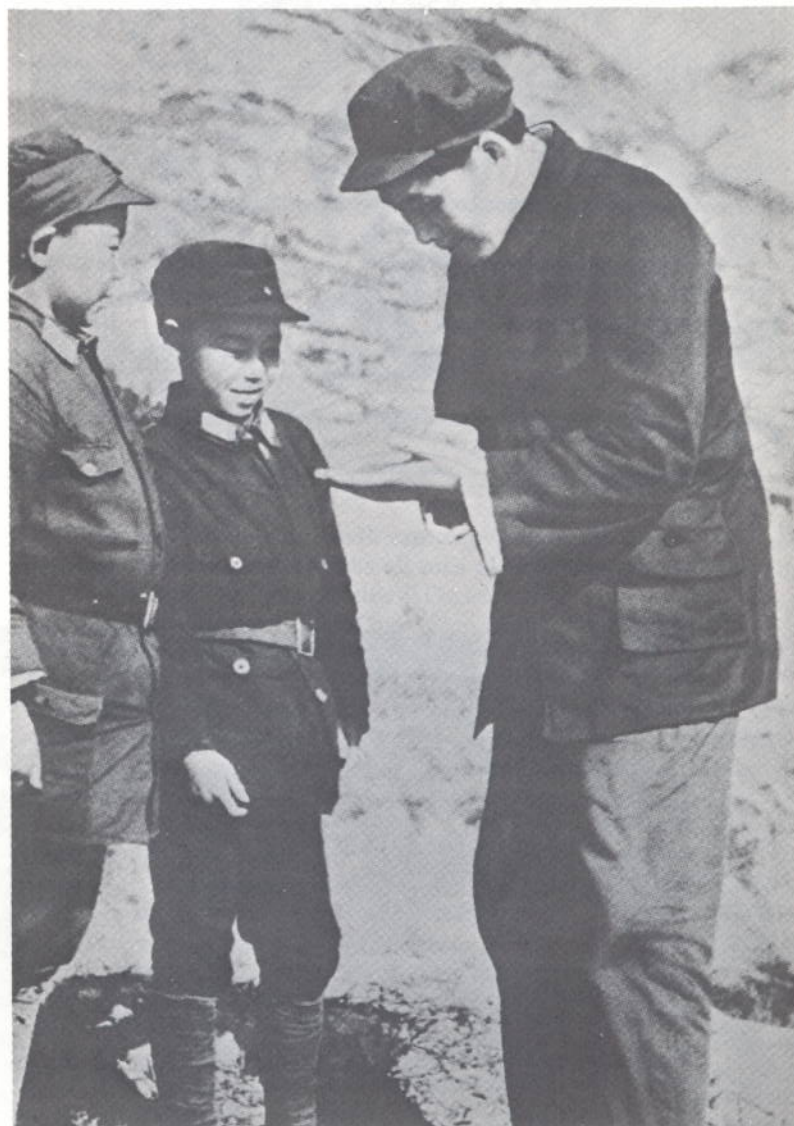
From his leadership of the Chinese youth and people, Mao Tsetung has advanced the political consciousness of revolutionary youth throughout

the world. They are better prepared to accomplish their historic tasks of national liberation and socialist revolution. Young people have been taught and have had glorious examples set for them in being frontline fighters against imperialism, social-imperialism, and the ever-occurring attempts by the bourgeoisie at capitalist restoration. They have learned to continue to rebel against all things reactionary in order that the masses of workers and oppressed peoples will move that much closer to a classless, communist society.

The task facing the revolutionary youth is clear—to continue along the path charted by Mao Tsetung in deepening their understanding of Marxism-Leninism and their ability to distinguish between genuine and sham Marxism, in being vanguard fighters against revisionism and the bourgeoisie inside and outside the communist movement, and in integrating themselves ever more deeply among the masses. In this way young people will surely play their revolutionary role in the front ranks of the world proletarian revolution and firmly uphold Mao Tsetung's revolutionary line on the youth movement.

FOOTNOTES

1. Mao Tsetung, "Talk at a Meeting With Chinese Students and Trainees in Moscow" (November 17, 1957), *Quotations From Chairman Mao Tsetung*, p. 288.
2. Mao Tsetung, quoted in Han Suyin's *Morning Deluge*, p. 53.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
4. Mao Tsetung, "The Orientation of the Youth Movement," (May 4, 1939), *Selected Works*, Vol. 2, p. 246.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 245.
6. Peking Review No. 2, January 9, 1976, p. 14.
7. Mao Tsetung, quoted in Peking Review No. 1, January 2, 1976, p. 15.
8. Mao Tsetung, quoted in Peking Review No. 36, September 3, 1976, p. 16.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
10. Mao Tsetung, quoted in Peking Review No. 10, March 5, 1976, p. 5.
11. Mao Tsetung, quoted in Peking Review No. 36, September 3, 1976, p. 17.



Chairman Mao talking with little fighting soldiers of the Eighth Route Army at Yen-an in 1939.