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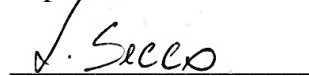
THE WORKERS UNIVERSITY IN THE CHINESE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

Presentata da Andrea Piazzaroli Longobardi

Coordinatore Dottorato

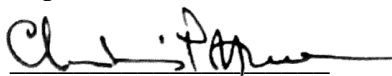
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Supervisore



Lincoln Ferreira Secco

Supervisore



Claudia Pozzana

Esame finale anno 2018

## The Workers University in the Chinese Cultural Revolution

PhD Thesis submitted to the Program of Economic History of the University of São Paulo and to the Department of History of the University of Bologna in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor in History

Area of Studies: History

Advisor: Professor Lincoln Ferreira Secco, Economic History Program, Department of History, University of São Paulo

Co-Advisor: Professor Claudia Pozzana, Department of History, University of Bologna



## Dedicatory

Dedicated to my parents, who supported me so I could have, one day, attempted to write a PhD thesis.

Dedicated to all miners, peasants and workers that had engaged in the Revolution in Education, particularly, to an elderly Beijing miner that recently told me, with sparkling eyes, that: “at that time, everyone studied”.

## Acknowledgments

Production is collective, it includes academic production. This thesis is the result of five years of research, to which many people collaborated. Without the help of many professors, colleagues, friends, I would not have been able to write this thesis.

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Indeed, sometimes, a question asked by someone was the starting point of important decisions concerning this thesis. So I thank those who supported and also those who criticized, because all questions and advices were (and still are) very important to this research.

## **ABSTRACT**

During the Chinese Cultural Revolution, between 1966 and 1976, there were a series of debates inside and outside of the Party, that problematized the basic categories that defined Socialism. Some production units throughout the county set experimental schools in their spaces, summoning workers, peasants, students and cadres to gather in study groups and develop theoretical analysis of the ongoing political economic contexts. This thesis analyze the history of the Workers Universities in China during the Cultural Revolution, the mobilizations it engendered and the materials produced by the workers-students enrolled in these organizations.

**KEY WORDS:** Cultural Revolution, workers, Socialism, education, labor, China

## **RESUMO**

Durante a Revolução Cultural Chinesa, entre 1966 e 1976, houve uma serie de debates dentro e fora do Partido, que problematizaram categorias fundamentais que definiam o Socialismo. Algumas unidades de produção no país, organizaram escolas experimentais em suas instalações, convocando trabalhadores, estudantes e quadros para participarem de grupos de estudo e desenvolver análises teóricas da situação política em curso. Esta tese analisa a historia das Universidades dos Trabalhadores durante a Revolução Cultural, suas problemáticas e desdobramentos, e alguns materiais produzidos por seus estudantes-trabalhadores.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Revolução Cultural, trabalhadores, Socialismo, educação, China

## **Abbreviations**

CC – Central Committee

CCP – Chinese Communist Party

CR – Cultural Revolution

MZDWG – Mao Zedong's manuscripts after the foundation of the PRC

PRC – Popular Republic of China

RC – Revolutionary Committee

SMA – Shanghai Municipal Archive

SMTF – Shanghai Machine Tools Factory

SPC – Shanghai Party Committee

SRC – Shanghai Revolutionary Committee

WPT – Workers Propaganda Team

WU – Workers University

### **Archives consulted:**

#### China:

Cultural Revolution Archive, Fudan's University, Shanghai

Shanghai Municipal Archive (SMA)

#### Italy and UK (during the doctoral exchange period financed by the Brazilian High Education Financial Program PDSE-CAPES):

Pozzana-Russo Archive, University of Bologna (PRA)

SOAS Chinese Library

### **Digital Archives consulted:**

Digital archive of Chinese Studies at the SOAS University of London, consulted the SOAS Chinese Library

The Chinese Cultural Revolution Database <http://ccradb.appspot.com>

Research Net of the Chinese Cultural Revolution (中国文革研究网) [www.wengewang.org](http://www.wengewang.org)

Digital Archive "Ten Years of Cultural Revolution" (文革十年文献库)

<http://www.71.cn/acastudies/classicdoc/CulturalRevolutionLi/>

Banned Thought <http://www.bannedthought.net/>

China Famine 1959-1961 (documents) <http://www.yhcw.net/famine/index.html>

Collection of Mao Zedong's Writings (毛泽东博览) <http://www.mzdbl.cn/maoxuan/>

Marxist Philosophy (Chinese and English Databases)

<http://marxistphilosophy.org/ChinLangPhil.htm>

Marxists Internet Archive [www.marxists.org](http://www.marxists.org)

Mass Line <http://www.massline.org/>

The Black Vault [www.theblackvault.com](http://www.theblackvault.com)

Wilson Center Digital Archive <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org>



## Contents

Introduction.....	11
Chapter 1 - An experiment to reveal our dark side: From the debate on the Democratic Centralism to the Cultural Revolution.....	19
Chapter 2 – From the Red Guards to the Workers University – Outlining the Line Struggle.....	58
Chapter 3 – Construction is within destruction – negotiating proletarian power.....	100
Chapter 4 – Studying theory in production units.....	142
Chapter 5 – Limiting Capitalism.....	167
Conclusion .....	191
Bibliography.....	193



## INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, we attempt to outline the struggle between divergent economical politics during the Cultural Revolution in China (1966-1976). During those ten years, opposing propositions of State administrative organization and production relations unfolded in nationwide theoretical debates inside and outside of the Communist Party. This survey particularly deals on how these debates regarded the organizations called Workers Universities, established in many production units since 1968.

There is a large set of documentation about the Workers Universities, many of it written by its students. These sources are available in many government or university's archives, however, it was scarcely explored by academic scholarships. Claudia Pozzana and Alessandro Russo were the first researchers to call attention to these collections and to the relevance of its content: the articles written by workers that attended the Workers Universities, as well as other documents related to this experience, put forward a singular point of view of the political events of the Cultural Revolution.

The Workers Universities were implemented inside the production units and were co-managed by the workers. This situation favored these texts to develop analysis regarding the national economic planning and political situation from a local point of view.

The history of Chinese political economic debates is well documented and have been studied in many scholarships. However, these surveys normally regard debates carried out by the Party-State leadership.<sup>1</sup> There have been very few studies on how these debates unfolded in other sectors of the society, that is, among individuals and groups that did not integrated the governing apparatuses of the CCP. In fact, this interposes a problematic to the scholarships that focus the Cultural Chinese Revolution, because, especially in that period, national policies were not set only through debates and struggles within the central organs of the Party. As a result of the many study campaigns promoted since 1956, national political economy was debated by many social segments, including popular associations that were not directly connected with the CCP.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, in order to better comprehend the CR, we should take into consideration statements and events that happened inside and outside of the Party-State spheres.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. HOWE, 1978 and HOWE, 1989.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. SCHUMANN, 1971, SHEEHAN, 1998.

The nationwide debates on economic politics strategies were referred as Line Struggle – term that identified a debate inside and outside the CCP, representing a conflict of ideas and practices at the government and leadership levels.

The expression Line Struggle was used, for the first time, during the Civil War (1926-1949) to identify a tactical opposition between the so-called Li Lisan and the Maoist military strategies.<sup>3</sup> After the Liberation, in 1949, and during the First Five Year Plan (1952-1957), the CCP adopted in its constitution, the policy of a General Line, in order to implement a national government planning relatively unified, and this suppressed, for a few years, the debate about the Line Struggle. The General Line was saw as necessary at the first years of the PRC because the new State was built in a country that was still ruled by multiple focuses of power – local administrators that were members of the Nationalist Party and some landlords that still maintain local political and economic power.

It was only from 1956 that the term Line Struggle was used to define a crisis within the Party-State apparatus – crisis that persisted from the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the CPURSS until (at least) the end of 1976. The Line Struggle, in this period, defined the opposition between two theoretical conceptions and strategies regarding the transition phase from Socialism to Communism.

The implementation of rural communes, carried out from 1958 to 1961, was a trigger to the aggravation of this conflict. On the one side, the popular communes increased material conditions of peasants in some regions of the country, and gave rural population conditions to engage in political campaigns and studies. (BALL, 2006) On the other side, the commune system was implemented through a vast bureaucratic structure connected with the Party, what favored the bureaucratization of local administration, and even speculation in the processes of goods circulation and labor power allocation.

Besides, the majority of the CCP defended that the Socialist Construction (or, the transition to Communism) should only start after a satisfactory level of capital accumulation controlled by

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<sup>3</sup> Li Lisan (李立三), 1899-1967, líder do PCC de 1928 e 1930; membro do CC do PCC de 1946 a 1958. a Linha Li Lisan defendia que a Liberação começasse pela ocupação das cidades industriais chinesas mobilizando os operários urbanos, e que a guerra contra o Partido Nacionalista fosse feita com auxílio direto da URSS, utilizando métodos de enfrentamento direto com armamento pesado e linha de frente; por fim majoritária, a Linha Maoísta defendia que o contexto chinês era muito diverso do soviético, e que caberia aos camponeses o papel principal de mobilização popular na Liberação; para enfrentamento do exército Nacionalista, propôs a utilização de estratégias de guerrilha popular.

the State. This was considered a phase that could be damaged if the Party implemented the rural communes anticipatedly, what did actually limit the circulation of currency and merchandise. During the Great Leap Forward, the Line Struggle gradually aggravated and, finally, led to the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. During the CR, these debates regarding the political economy were disseminated throughout the innumerable study groups in the production units of the country.

### *1.1. Periodicity and historiography*

In the last ten years, many scholars have written about the Cultural Revolution adopting a grassroot perspective, that is, attempting to comprehend the period between 1966 and 1976, from the point of view of local associations and individuals that did not integrate the central organs of the CCP.<sup>4</sup> Notwithstanding, these researches focus mainly the initial period of the Cultural Revolution: from the Red Guard movement to the CCP Ninth Congress in 1969.<sup>5</sup> The concentration of studies on the first years of the CR – and the consequent lack of scholarships focusing the period between 1969 and 1976 – have, at least, three important historical reasons.

(1) There is no unanimity regarding the official duration of the Cultural Revolution. Some researchers affirmed that it was carried out only from 1966 to 1969, three years marked by the relatively autonomy of popular associations and acerbic conflicts inside the Central Committee. (DIRLIK, 2005; SCHOENHALS, 1996) Indeed, the Ninth Congress, happened in 1969, indicated an important change for the political campaigns of the Cultural Revolution and, effectively, Lin Biao had proclaimed in the opening session that “the Cultural Revolution was victorious”. By the time of the Ninth Congress, the Red Guards had been suppressed and, in 1970, the focus was shifted to the campaign to reconstruct the Party. These events, and the declared objective to eradicate factionalism, reorganize the national production and government, were sometimes interpreted as a “practical” closing of Cultural Revolution. (BADIOU, 2009)

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<sup>4</sup> Essas pesquisas têm sido desenvolvidas em vários países, mas são muito raras na China. Isso porque o PCC, desde 1978, instituiu a Campanha de Negação Completa da Revolução Cultural, que declarava que só a negação dos dez anos entre 1966 e 1967 tornaria possível o desenvolvimento econômico chinês e sua integração ao mercado mundial. Além dessa campanha, uma série de documentos foram publicados na década de 80 para limitar e padronizar a publicação de textos que mencionassem a RC. Cf. WU, Yiching, *Cultural Revolution at the Margins*, Londres: Harvard University Press, 2014. pp.1-8.

<sup>5</sup> Para uma análise da produção bibliográfica internacional sobre a Revolução Cultural, ver UNGER, Jonathan. “The Cultural Revolution at the grass roots”, IN *The China Journal*, N 57, University of Chicago Press, 2007. WALDER, Andrew G. *The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History*. California: Stanford University Press, 2006.

It is true that in 1969 there is a great shift in national politics: many of the cadres dismissed in 1966 were rehabilitated in 1969 and 1970. But the Cultural Revolution continued. In the Tenth Congress, held in 1973, the same mention was made to “evaluate and summarize the results of the Cultural Revolution” (CCPCC, 1973) and, again, the CC initiated a campaign to reconstruct the Party. Finally, in 1975, Mao Zedong clearly stated that “the Cultural Revolution already lasted for 8 or 9 years” (MAO, 1998(13):483). It was only in 1977, in the Eleventh National Congress, that the CCP officially declared the end of the GPCR in 1976. (KAROL apud FRANCESCO, 2005:169)

Thus, there is, on the one side, a uncertainty in interpreting the declarations made in the Ninth and Tenth national congresses about the CR. Nonetheless, the main argument used to justify the hypothesis that the CR had lasted only three years is the singularity of the political events happened from 1966 to 1969 – a period of a sudden multiplication of social organizations, constituted independently from the Party.

*The criteria [to periodize the CR in two or three years] is the existence of a mass political activity, its slogans, its forms of organization, its spaces (...). Accordingly, there is a “revolution” because there are Red Guards, rebel revolutionary workers, innumerable organizations and “headquarters”, totally unpredicted situations, new political declarations etc. (BADIOU, 2009:67)*

In this research we adopted the period of ten years from 1966 to 1976, according to the official historiography of the CCP. That is because, even though there were important transformations and ruptures in this period, the events focused in this thesis form a sequence of debates, regarding some specific theoretical questions, that started in 1966 and were closed only in 1976.

Furthermore, these ten years can, yet, be subdivided in at least three phases, which distinction may be useful to the interpretation of events and political declarations: (1) a first period from 1966 to 1968, characterized by the pluralization of independent popular associations and by factionalist struggles; (2) a second period from 1968 to 1971, marked by the attempts to reorganize the Party State structure; and (3) a third period from 1971 to 1976, in which factionalism had been majorly solved and the political divergences unfolded mainly in theoretical debates and political experiments in the educational and administrative spheres.

2) Since 1977, the CCP tried a few times to “reinterpret” the Cultural Revolution. Between 1977 and 1978, there were attempts to evaluate the whole PRC history, aiming to separate what had been “effective” and led to a political economic development, from what was “chaotic” and only indicated failed attempts of a *coup d'état* led by the “gang of four”, or signs of a senile mind in the leadership. From 1978, though, official historical discourses again changed, and had as its general tone the economic pragmatism and the official directive to thoroughly negate the ten years of CR. In 1981, after an extensive seminar with the participation of historians and intellectuals from the whole country, the CCPCC issued the “Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China”, which settled an official version and verdict of the CR. Deng Xiaoping, at the time, stated that

*the resolution of historical problems is for unity and for looking toward the future. There is no need to get tangled with the old accounts. It is more appropriate to solve important historical problems in general terms rather than to fuss about the particulars.* (DENG apud WU, 2014:8)

Articles based on the CCP official version of the Chinese history tend to confound the periods of the CR, generalizing the tone of the discourse with an imprecise permanence of the Red Guard factionalism. Because of these discursive operations, new generation of Chinese generally do not have enough information about the Cultural Revolution. The confusion and imprecision of the facts promote a general evaluation of a “period of great chaos” – exactly the term used in the CCP official publications and even by some academical researches in other countries. The result of this discursive maneuvers is that, since 1981, the CR have been referred as a historical negative example, even used to restrict contemporary popular mobilizations:

*Today, the most powerful counter to any attempts at critical analysis of China’s problems (...) is: “So, do you want to return to the days of the Cultural Revolution?” The eclipse of the sixties is a product of this depoliticization: the process of “radical negation” has diminished the possibility for any real political criticism of current historical trends.* (WANG, 2006:31)

Withal, if the CR is often identifies with the events happened in its first three years, it reinforces a depoliticized understanding of the whole period.

3) Finally, there is also a difficulty to deal with the documentation from 1969 to 1976, because in this period there was a long and radical dispute by the meaning of the ongoing experiences.

This reflects in the sources of the period that are often ambiguous and require meticulous and analytical reading, because of the multiplicity of social segments in dispute. In January 1967, for example, the slogan “grasp revolution, promote production” was interpreted by some groups as a summon to the participation in the mobilizations the CR and, by others, as a calling to remain in their work positions and do not leave the production to engage in social uprisings.

Besides, the CR cannot be interpreted only through theoretical paradigms used to study the URSS Socialism. That is because, during the CR, the theory study groups were largely disseminated in China and they often criticized basic categories used in Stalinist discourses. The very notion of a historical linearity and progress, and the tautologic victory of the Revolution were often criticized by Mao Zedong.

### *1.2. Sources and historiography*

This thesis uses a methodological approach, that aims to analyze the historical events of the Cultural Revolution with documental sources of the period, so that it can take into consideration coeval political declarations and actions. (RUSSO, 2006)

*The Cultural Revolution is one of the political events most replete with declarations, all carefully made public and fully documented, to which an investigation of subjectivity should pay the closest attention. (...) Political declarations should therefore constitute the fundamental unit of analysis, in addition to the relationship between what actors declare and what they really do. (RUSSO, 2006:676)*

In order to relate political practices and declarations, the local point of view is privileged. (UNGER, 2007) This thesis, thus, focuses the debates and experiments carried out in a production unit in China, and its relation with the national political economy.

The Workers University was one of the experiments promoted by the Cultural Revolution Small Group and the Central Committee. In these popular universities, workers, miners, peasants and students took part in unprecedented initiatives to reorganize the national education system and, also, the management of production relations.

Since workers participated and administered these universities, the debates carried out by them often extrapolated the theoretical sphere and unfolded in political experiments that proposed radical social transformations. As a consequence, some of these mobilizations destabilized local



government apparatuses; this generated a long and intricate dispute for the future of the Workers University.

As for the sources used in this thesis, we based the research mainly on these three types of documents:

- (1) Texts produced by the workers of the Workers University that dealt with some topics relevant to the research, as: division of labor, production management, workers education, political economy etc. These texts were, mostly, published by popular editing houses, in the form of booklets with collections of articles. Some of it were also published in periodicals as the journal Study and Criticize (学习与批判), the Beijing University Journal (北京大学学报), the magazine Red Flag (红旗), and, sometimes, also in the People's Daily (人民日报). There are also unpublished texts and speeches consulted in the Shanghai Municipal Archive.
- (2) Directives and other documents produced by the Central and local committees regarding the Workers Universities, workers mobilizations and, specifically, the Shanghai Machine Tools Factory. Most of these documents have been digitalized and are available in online archives or university libraries.
- (3) Texts published in coeval journals about national production and labor politics, technological development and the educational system.

## Chapter 1 - An experiment to reveal our dark side - From the question of the Democratic Centralism to the Cultural Revolution

*There are still people who say: “The Cultural Revolution is mainly good, but do we really need to carry it this way? Won't it be better if we don't use the Four Big Weapons, do not use the Big Voice, the Big Liberation, the Big Character Poster or the Big Debate?”. Those who say this do not support that the people, united by the Proletarian Cultural Revolution, seize the power from capitalists that are within the Party. There's the problem: to deny the methods of mobilization is the same as to deny the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Mao Zedong, in a meeting in 1967, said: “In the past we fought for the agrarian reform, for the labor movement, fought for the transformation of the culture, carried the Socialist Education campaign... but we haven't solved the most important problem. We haven't find a way, a public method, an all-inclusive campaign, mobilizing people of all classes, to reveal our dark side. Now we may have found this way, which is the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution”.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, if the Cultural Revolution had not happened, how could we have uncover the betrayal, so well occulted, of Liu Shaoqi? The question of Liu Shaoqi helps us understand an historical aspect: in the past, we could not have revealed and understood the betrayal of Liu Shaoqi, it was only in this Cultural Revolution that the Reg Guard could investigate these problems. (WANG Hongwen, 1974)*

The epigraph is an excerpt of a report written in 1974 by Wang Hongwen – a worker member of the CCP and one of the main leaders of the Rebel Workers in Shanghai since the beginning of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>7</sup> This text was published at the People's Daily and makes an evaluation of the political work carried among cadres of all levels. After summarizing the main national political debates since 1966, Hongwen declared that the historical role of the Cultural Revolution was defined, above all, by its methods of popular mobilization. In saying

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<sup>6</sup> Excerpt of a conversation with an Albanian delegation in February 8, 1967, and later published at the People's Daily, “文化大革命是发动广大群众揭发黑暗面的一种方式”. “Memorandum of Conversation between Chairman Mao Zedong and Comrades Hysni Kapo and Beqir Balluku,” February 03, 1967, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AQSH, F. 14/AP, M-PKK, V. 1967, Dos. 6, Fl. 12-32. Page 3. Obtained and translated by Elidor Mëhilli. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117302>

<sup>7</sup> Wang Hongwen (1935-1992) was a member of the Popular Liberation Army and a worker; in 1950, fought on the war against the United States in North Korea and, in 1951 joined the CCP. Next, worked in Jiangsu, Nanjing and, in 1956, started to work at the N 17 Cotton Mill in Shanghai, one of the most important of the country, as a technical worker. In this factory, he joined the workers political committee, where he had an important leadership role. In 1967, Wang Hongwen was one of the most important leaders of the Shanghainese workers movement and was nationally known by his collaboration for the union of workers associations in the city. In 1969, when the CCP carried the campaign Workers and Peasants in the Central Committee, Wang Hongwen was invited to integrate the CC and the Cultural Revolution Small Group, where he worked until October of 1976, when he was arrested with the other three members of this group. The history of Wang's political role in Shanghai and in the CCP was studied by Elizabeth Perry and Li Xun in the book *Proletarian Power, Shanghai in the Cultural Revolution*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Pres, 1997.

that the methods of mobilization and political experimentation were the kernel of the CR, Hongwen was referring to a fundamental debate of that period: the political organization of people, Party and State – in other words, how to organize a popular government, democratic and centralized at the same time?

This report, as many other coeval documents, affirmed that the methods of political organization may indeed be more important than the nominated targets of each campaign (for example: production, popular education, national economic growth...).

Indeed, the debate about the organization of the State and its relation with common people had been aggravated in China since 1956, with the first repercussions of the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the denouncement of Joseph Stalin (1878-1953) crimes. Twenty years later, in 1976, this debate would be deliberately silenced after the death of Mao Zedong, the imprisonment of Maoist leaders inside and outside the CCP and the implementation of the campaign of Throughout Negation of the Cultural Revolution (彻底否定).

Between 1956 and 1976, then, the question of the Democratic Centralism – a name that defined the method of government within Socialism, according to Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924)<sup>8</sup> – was intensely debated inside and outside the Party, in all China. This debate was not an epiphenomenon or a localized event, instead, it was a debate that took worldwide proportions since the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the CPSU.

### *1.1. Democratic Centralism and the experimental character of the Socialist construction*

In February 1956, Nikita Khrushchev (1894-1971), then commander of the National Defense Council of the Soviet Union, made his discourse entitled “On the Personality Cult and its Consequences”, in which denounced Joseph Stalin for expatriation, conviction to forced labor and death of thousands of cadres and workers, incentive of the personality cult, falsification of documents and popular repressions – among which were insidiously included the collectivization of rural properties (KHRUSHCHEV, 1956). Khrushchev’s discourse was broadcasted in many countries, including China, and provoked the aggravation of a worldwide debate questioning the legitimacy of Socialism. Administrative bureaucracy, national economic

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. TROTSKY, Leon. *On Democratic Centralism and the Regime* (1937). Letter from the editor of the magazine Socialist Appeal. Available in <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1937/xx/democent.htm> (consulted in June 2017).

planning and the very socialist ideological *tessiture* were criticized in light of the crimes committed by the president of a Communist Party in power.

In April 1956, the editorial committee of the People's Daily published the article "On the historical experience of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat". This text was written with direct collaboration of Mao Zedong, then the president of both the Communist Party and the People's Republic of China. This important editorial reiterated the importance of Khrushchev's denouncement, however, it alerted:

*Communists must adopt an analytical attitude to errors made in the communist movement. Some people consider that Stalin was wrong in everything; this is a grave misconception (...). We should view Stalin from an historical standpoint, make a proper and all-round analysis to see where he was right and where he was wrong, and draw useful lessons therefrom (People's Daily, 1956)*

This editorial affirmed that the crimes committed in the Soviet Union actually should be criticized, however, it should not be considered merely as acts of an individual. A few days before the publication of this editorial, the Russian ambassador Pavel Fyodorovich Yudin (1899-1968) had a conversation with Mao Zedong, in which the Chinese leader enumerated what he believed were the main mistakes committed by Stalin:

1. *Unlawful repressions;*
2. *Mistakes made in the course of the war, moreover, in particular in the beginning, rather than in the concluding period of the war;*
3. *Mistakes which dealt a serious blow to the union of the working class and the peasantry. Mao Zedong observed that this group of mistakes, in particular, the incorrect policy in relation to the peasantry, was discussed during Comrade Khrushchev's conversation with [PRC military leader] Zhu De in Moscow;*
4. *Mistakes in the nationality question connected to the unlawful resettlement of certain nationalities and others. However, overall, said Mao Zedong, nationality policy was implemented correctly;*
5. *Rejection of the principle of collective leadership, conceit and surrounding himself with toadies;*
6. *Dictatorial methods and leadership style;*

7. *Serious mistakes in foreign policy (Yugoslavia, etc.).*<sup>9</sup>

This and another diplomatic conversations between 1956 and 1958, can show that the Chinese Party leadership was focused in carrying out a systemic evaluation of Stalin's crimes, that is, to analyze what were the political and economic reasons that allowed it to happen.<sup>10</sup> In a conversation with Marian Spychalski in October 1957, for example, Mao declared:

*One should not hate the mistakes made (literal translation) by the USSR, because this is a thing of the past. We need to take a scientific position and examine them, for example, in the area of the struggle with the counterrevolution. Then we can carefully carry out this struggle. One should not think that if Cde. Lenin were alive now, then there would not be such mistakes in strangling the counterrevolution.*<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, People's Daily editorial of April 4th also stressed the importance of analyzing the problematic from a historical point of view, categorial, defined within the debate about the leadership methods used by the communist parties in Socialism. This way, the debate would focus the relationship between people and State in the particular context of Socialism. Socialism, according Marxism-Leninism, would be defined as an historical period of transition from Capitalism to Communism, characterized by the Democratic Centralism. Yet, it was not something simple to actualize since its very designation refers to a contradiction between centralization of power and popular democracy.

In China, Mass Line was the expression used to define the actual practice of the Democratic Centralism, i.e., the actual relation between people, Party and State, including all hierarchic levels inside and outside the Party. The Mass Line was theoretically systematized between 1942 and 1943, and synthetized by the famous sentence "from the masses to the masses", as stated in the document "Some questions concerning methods of leadership" written by Mao Zedong in 1943 (MAO, 1943).

This method passed through many changes since the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. One example of its application was the organization a

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<sup>9</sup> "From the Journal of Ambassador P. F. Yudin, Record of Conversation with Mao Zedong, 31 March 1956" April 5, 1956, Digital Archive "History and Public Policy Program", Archive of Foreign Policy, Russian Federation (AVPRF). Available in <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116977> (consulted in June 2017).

<sup>10</sup> See "Minutes, Mao's conversation with a Yugoslavian Communist Union Delegation, Beijing, [undated]", September 1956, Digital Archive "History and Public Policy Program", 毛泽东外交文选. Beijing: The Central Press of Historical Documents, 1993, pp. 251-262. Available in <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117035> (consulted in June 2017).

<sup>11</sup> "Notes on Conversation between Polish Defense Minister Spychalski and PRC Leader Mao Zedong" October 3, 1957, Digital Archive "History and Public Policy Program" Available in <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117779> (consulted in July 2017).

conference held in January and February 1962, the Enlarged Central Committee Work Conference (known as the Seven Thousand Cadres Conference), which opening speech explained:

*Comrades, there are among you people from various fields and localities, various provincial, district and county committees, and from the Party committees of various enterprises. There are people from various departments at the Centre. The majority of you have more contact with the lower levels, and should have more understanding of situations and problems than us comrades on the Standing Committee, the Politburo and the Secretariat. Furthermore, since you all hold different positions you can raise problems from different angles. (...) First of all, draft reports are distributed, and those present are invited to submit their ideas and amendments. Then a new report is prepared. When this report is presented it shouldn't be read out word by word, but some supplementary ideas should be expounded and the changes should be explained. In this way we can promote democracy more fully, gather wisdom from all directions, and compare all the different points of view.*  
(MAO, 1962)

This example, although limited to a conference, can elucidate how the Mass Line was conceived: “first the cadres observed and reported fragmented points of view from the masses in their localities (...), then summarized this opinions in reports, which were directed to the committee of each district. The committee then published directives and authority instructions” (DITTMER, 1973).

The Mass Line defined a fundamental difference from the leadership methods used by the CPSU: in the Soviet Union, the Party was considered as a *vanguard* that, in fact, represented the proletariat – this would grant the members of the institution the legitimate power to actualize the political economic project and to conduct the State machine towards “progress” and, eventually, Communism. This way, through the dispositive of representation and based on the idea of vanguard, individual cadres would be those in charge of the project and its accomplishment. It became, hence, a national administration carried “by persons” (SCHURMANN, 1971:113). On the other side, in the experience of the Chinese Communist Party, the Mass Line was partially incorporated to the national administration system, which was theoretically organized in function of political aims – which means that common people kept some power of decision regarding the legitimation of cadres in government positions, in case they were or were not effectively performing their role. Thus, to some extent, in the CCP

the leadership was rather organized in function of “impersonal and objective process”: “If the Soviet theoreticians are concerned in explaining the role of State under Socialism, the Chinese theoreticians stressed the role of masses under Socialism”. (Idem)

However, since the foundation of the PRC in 1949, the CCP had conversely followed the Soviet model of economic development and labor administration. “The entire state apparatus, from the organization of the factories to the universities, was largely imported and often slavishly copied from the Soviet Union”. (RUSSO, 2016:260)

The Soviet system of management was based on work specialization, meticulous division of labor, local administration carried by specialists and centralization of the economic planning.<sup>12</sup> The Responsibility System, for example, a system of administration largely implemented in the Chinese production units (单位), had generated a managerial “caste” that actually held political power. They even administrated, to some extent, policies of wage and organization of labor, and had some representativeness in local Party Committees.

In the last two years of the First Five Year Plan (1953-1957), there were many local conflicts caused by the contradictions between the principles of Soviet management and the Mass Line, well known and disseminated throughout the country. (PERRY, 1994) This was a period with frequent social unrest, mobilizations and strikes, particularly in big industrial cities as Shanghai and Shandong, where there were the largest state industries at the time. These conflicts were objectified in the dispute for power between specialists, local cadres and popular associations.

There struggles became more evident during the Hundred Flowers campaign, launched in 1956 as an unfolding of the debate on Democratic Centralism. The Hundred Flowers campaign, associated a few months later with the Rectification campaign, initially convened common people to publicly voice critiques and carry debates about the policies implemented by the CCP at local and national levels.

*In reality, the Hundred Flowers campaign was a response to the extreme social conflicts that had arisen over the course of the First Five-Year Plan. It merely recognized a dynamics already reaching a boiling point across Chinese society and concealed them beneath the*

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<sup>12</sup> Between 1949 and 1976, China went through many processes of centralization and decentralization of its political, economic and even military structures. For an overview of the topic, see SCHURMANN, Franz. *Ideology and organization in Communist China*, op. cit. and FRAZIER, Mark W., *The making of the Chinese Industrial Workplace*. Los Angeles: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

*complaints of students and intellectuals—figures who could easily be dismissed as vestiges of the old society.* (Chuang, 2016:86)

In September 1956, in a conversation with an Yugoslavian delegation, Mao Zedong stated that the CC cadres were considering the question of how to encourage people to openly voice critiques. Mao explained, then, that the critiques made to Stalin since the 20<sup>th</sup> CPSU Congress have had “positive effects because this destroys myths and open boxes” and, therefore, since then, the CCP could considered itself “free to open up about some questions”.<sup>13</sup>

In the same conversation, Mao stated that the first Rectification Campaign, carried in 1945 and 1946, in fact, had been a mobilization “aimed to denounce the errors committed by Stalin and the Komintern when they were directing the Chinese Revolution”, however, in that period they have not mentioned “nothing about Stalin or the Komintern”<sup>14</sup>. Hence, it is possible to infer that the Hundred Flowers and the Rectification campaigns, carried in 1956 and 1957, aimed – among other things – to solve conflicts generated as a consequence of the direct transposition of Soviet managerial methods in China.<sup>15</sup> In other words, those may have been campaigns to criticize the Soviet model of Socialism, though “without mentioning a word” about Soviet Union.

In October 1956, Liu Shaoqi (1898-1969) asked the ambassador Yudin to consider, with the CPSU, the withdrawal of Soviet political advisers, allowing only the technology specialists to remain in China. He argued that the presence of political advisers “had caused innumerable difficulties” because they “know very little about the peculiarities of other country”<sup>16</sup>.

Moreover, the Central Committee started to directly criticize the Responsibility System, which had become a problem to the communication between different levels of the national government. That is because managers had assumed authoritarian roles in the production units, to the extent of generating conflicts in the relation with workers and weaken the local influence of Party organizations:

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<sup>13</sup> “Minutes, Mao’s Conversation with a Yugoslavian Communist Union Delegation, Beijing, [undated],” September of 1956, Digital Archive of “History and Public Policy Program”, 毛泽东外交文选. Beijing: The Central Press of Historical Documents, 1993, pp. 251-262. Available in <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117035> (consulted in June 2017)

<sup>14</sup> “Minutes, Mao’s Conversation with a Yugoslavian Communist Union Delegation, Beijing, [undated],” September 1956, Op.cit.

<sup>15</sup> See, on this topic, RUSSO, Alessandro. “Egalitarian Inventions and Political Symptoms: a reassessment of Mao’s Statements on the ‘Probable Defeat’”, op.cit; SHEEHAN, Jackie. *Chinese workers: a new history*. London: Routledge, 1998.

<sup>16</sup> “Diary of Soviet Ambassador P.F. Yudin, Memorandum of Conversation with Liu Shaoqi of October 30, 1956”, November 22, 1956, Digital Archive “History and Public Policy Program”, AVPRF f. 0100, op. 49, 1956, p. 410, d. 9, l. 202-03. Obtained and translated to the CWIHP by Austin Jersild. Available in <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116814> (consulted in June 2017).



*The adoption of the FFYP gave power to industrial bureaucrats and factory directors that essentially rendered the party secretary and the party branch powerless to set plans and influence the organizations and activities of workers within the factory.(FRAZIER, 2002:159)*

As a consequence, the whole CCP started to debate the management of production units.

*Many of the problems experienced in China were commonplace not only in the Soviet Union but also in the Soviet satellites to which the system was transplanted. For example, dominance of physical output and quantitative targets over cost, qualitative and input targets. Also, lack of enterprise-level flexibility in financial matters led to obvious irrationalities in investments allocation and undermined worker and managerial initiative. (HOWE and WALKER, 1989:141-142)*

Furthermore, according to some CCP leaders, Stalin's crimes could only have been committed if there were some serious mistakes in national and local leadership methods. As formulated by Mao Zedong, in December 1956:

*The reason why some of the mistakes made by Stalin during the later years of his life became serious, nation-wide and persistent, and were not corrected in time, was precisely that in certain fields and to a certain degree, he became isolated from the masses and the collective and violated the principle of democratic centralism of the Party and the state. (MAO, 1956)*

The "isolation from the masses" was considered a consequence of a political and strategical error made by the CPSU, which is: not to implement political instruments to develop the socialist democracy, which theoretically would be the dialectical pair of the party centralism. In the same editorial, Mao affirmed that, right after the revolution,

*democratic procedures in the political life of the country should have been gradually developed and perfected; the socialist legal system perfected; supervision by the people over the state organs strengthened; democratic methods of administering the state and managing enterprises developed; links between the state organs and the bodies administering various enterprises on the one hand, and the broad masses on the other, made closer; hindrances impairing any of these links done away with and a firmer check put on bureaucratic tendencies. (Idem)*

According to this analysis, the lack of democratic policies would also render impossible to establish the Party centralism, because if the Party isolate itself from the masses, it loses its legitimacy and, thus, its efficacy in administering a country. In declarations in the following years, referring to the Soviet example and the PRC experience, Mao stated that the detachment

of the Party from the masses could indeed lead to the failure of the revolution. That is because it would allow the establishment of bureaucratism, what would eventually prevent people from creating new communist policies.

That is why the problem of the *method* (方式) or, the “democratic procedures in the political life of the country” (as described in the above excerpt), became the center of the debates since the 20<sup>th</sup> CPSU Congress and the following worldwide crises of the epistemology of Communism. The CCP attempts of political mobilizations, in the years after 1956, were precisely the development of a socialist democracy, which would have permitted a “supervision by the people over the state”.<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, the changes in the Soviet economic policy since 1956 – for example, regarding land collectivization or interenterprise competition (cf. KURZ, 2004:63-84) – made clear that Socialism was not determined by the writings of Marx, Engels or Lenin, and that the transition period should still be invented with time, in its theoretical and practical aspects, because there was no univocal project to actualize Socialism.

The idea of a linear and progressive historical project that would have accomplished the transition to communism was formulated in the Soviet experience, although it never really became a consensus among theoreticians and revolutionaries. In the 1938 pamphlet “Dialectical and Historical Materialism”, Stalin enumerated “four principles of the Marxist Dialectical Method”, later also called “laws of dialectics” or “laws of development”, which are: (1) the interdependence and articulation between objects and nature phenomena, (2) constant transformation and development of this articulated set of objects and phenomena, (3) the accumulation of quantitative changes that eventually would provoke a qualitative leap on development and, (4) all objects and phenomena are constituted by contradictions, or pairs of contraposed elements. (STALIN, 1938) According to Stalin, the study of such laws would have allowed to set a safe program of socialist transition, an international “general line” that would guide the economic policy of any communist party in power. “Hence, the party of the proletariat should not guide itself in its practical activity by casual motives, but by the laws of development of society, and by practical deductions from these laws”. (Idem) In this theoretical framework,

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<sup>17</sup> Other critiques to Soviet policies were extensively debated in China from 1957, including theoretical debated regarding the interpretation of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin’s texts. See, on this topic, Mao, Zedong. “A critique of Soviet Economics” IN New York and London: *Monthly Review Press*, 1977. Available in <http://www.marx2mao.com/Mao/CSE58.html> (consulted in April 2017) and SHURMANN, Franz. *Ideology and Organization in Communist China*. Op cit; GURLEY, John G., *China’s economy and the Maoist strategy*. New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1976.

“historical materialism and materialist history” were not so different one from another, and the “laws” of nature were already known and history, through the party vanguard, would merely actualize it. (BANAJI, 1977:2)

In this standpoint, the Communist Party, as the vanguard of a supposed historical linearity, should adjust the economic and political planning to the “laws of development”. However, the crises that Socialism theory went through since 1956, prevented that anyone could declare with certainty that there was one only model of transition to all communist parties, a general line that would have been a logical derivation of the “laws of dialectics”.

In September 1956, Li Fuchun, then the President of the State Planning Commission, published the report “For the sake of socialist construction strengthen planning work throughout the country”, in which he stated:

*We must systematically work to understand and investigate the actual economic conditions of China and make progress towards understanding and grasping the objective laws of economic development. We must carry out our planning work well, keeping close touch with reality and with the masses. (...) As for the objective laws of economic development, insufficient investigation was carried out in particular with regard to the economic characteristics of the transition period. (...) we did not go far enough in implementing the mass line and, as a result, we could not avoid errors of subjectivism and bureaucratism. (Li Fuchun apud WALKER and HOWE, 1989:33)*

In his report, Li Fuchun highlighted the need to know the particular experience of China and to create political instruments that may assure the communication between different levels of the Party and the production units, since the biggest mistakes of the FFYP had happened exactly because of the lack of local flexibility and autonomy. In his view, to correct these mistakes, it was important to consolidate an economic planning using the methodology of the Mass Line.

### *1.2. The debate on the roles of the Party and the State*

Since 1956, the CCP started to debate how would be characterized a Chinese general line, a political economy that would be adequate to the specific Chinese conditions, as opposed to the idea of one international form of transition. However, the search for a national transition program was not only a consequence of the conflicts with the CPSU (and, later, with the CP of Yugoslavia), it was also motivated by new problems happened in China itself.

Even in the theoretical field, Chinese theoreticians were discussing if history was indeed linear and progressive. Mao declared, in his notes to Stalin's "Economic problems of the Soviet Union", that the transition to Communism could not be understood as a progressive unfolding of history, linear and rather tautological consequence of the technological advances of productive forces:

*If you want to know the objective laws of the development of things and events you must go through the process of practice, adopt a Marxist-Leninist attitude, compare successes and failures, continually practicing and studying, going through multiple successes and failures; moreover, meticulous research must be performed. There is no other way to make one's own knowledge gradually conform to the laws. For those who see only victory but not defeat, can't know these laws. (MAO, 1958)<sup>18</sup>*

Mao's statement "those who see only victory but not defeat can't know these laws" was a reference to the question of political experimentation. The phrase "those who see only victory" referred to the conception of planning as a logical and inexorable deduction of the "dialectical laws" – thus, idealistic, because this kind of practice would be configured as a deduction from theoretical concepts. "To see the defeat" referred to the experimental character of politics, since it engenders situations that may be unpredictable during the period of planning, and which can radically transform the initial ideas.

*Situating political militancy in conditions where defeat was a probable conclusion, and discarding certainty of victory as an illusion, undermined some of the key elements of the historic-political horizon – in particular, the formerly inextricable connection of politics to the state. (RUSSO, 2016:189)*

In fact, the split between politics and state was objectified when Mao Zedong abdicated from the position of President of the PRC in November 1958, remaining President of the Chinese Communist Party.

This fact is normally interpreted by historians whether as an individual or voluntarist decision, or as a strategic move resulting from a supposed "loss of charism" of Mao Zedong

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<sup>18</sup> MAO Zedong. "A critique of Soviet Economics", op.cit, p.72. This text was originally published at the compilation "毛泽东思想万岁!" (Long live Mao Zedong's thought!), published at least twice during the Cultural Revolution, in 1966 and in 1968, at the universities of Qinghua and Fudan. It is one of the most important compilation of the period, and an example of the interesting popular press system developed during the CR. Study and debate campaigns, and the liberation of local press in 1966, generated an impressive dissemination of small editorial groups, publishing newspapers, pamphlets, reproducing speeches, directives, and CCP official documents. The objective was indeed to make this contents available to popular associations, so that it would be openly read and discussed.

after the political and economic crises of the Hundred Flower's Campaign and the Great Leap Forward. (DITTMER, 1987) Withal, the documentation of the period indicates a more complex situation.

In the First Session of CCP's 8<sup>th</sup> National Congress, in September 1956, the spokesman Deng Xiaoping stressed the need to collectivize the national leadership, arguing that, in order to avoid the personality cult in China, it would be necessary not to centralize party and state administrations, though both structures should continue to collaborate coherently. (MILLER, 2008:65) At the same congress, the CCP instituted a Standing Committee of its Politburo with seven members (Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Chen Yun, Deng Xiaoping, Lin Biao, Liu Shaoqi and Zhu De), responsible for conceiving macro political strategies and supervise the political direction of the policies implemented by the state. It was also established a General Secretariat, led by Deng Xiaoping, who would be responsible to connect Party and state, formulating general and objective plans to actualize the projects conceived and approved by the Standing Committee of the Politburo.

The General Secretary, therefore, was a position implemented with the aim to be a link between those who propose macro political strategies and the instances for planning and execution of pragmatic policies. This debate is important to comprehend the level of centralization or democratization of the leadership system, which went through many changes since 1956. (CHUNG, 2013)

In October and November of the same year, the Hungary Uprising and, furthermore, the Soviet repression that followed it, had a worldwide repercussion, starting new debates in the CCP. It was urgent to the CCP to take actions in order to collectivize the leadership in the whole country, including the work units. (SHEEHAN, 1999:47-84) As a Chinese newspaper published,

*[in Hungary] some party leaders in their work failed conscientiously to rely on the masses and mobilize the masses, and did not have sufficient concern for the masses... with regard to improving the people's livelihood, they did not adopt effective measures; workers' real wages increased very little.... [These mistakes] greatly damaged links between the party and the masses, restricted the people's democratic rights and hindered improvements in their standard of living.<sup>19</sup>*

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<sup>19</sup> Yi Han, "How to understand the Hungarian Incident" (怎样认识匈牙利事件) (1956) IN *The Chinese Worker Daily* (中国工人报) Apud SHEENAN, 1998:48.

It was in this agitated context that Mao Zedong first proposed to leave the position of President of the PRC. Mao was the president of the Chinese Communist Party since 1942 and he was pointed the president of the Republic in 1954, at the First National People's Congress. Three years later, at the second meeting of the State Supreme Council, Mao proposed to retire as president of the PRC, and even suggested the elimination of an individual position of presidency when referring to the Swiss Federal Council that was, then, composed of seven people. (JIA, 2004) The next day, May 1st 1957, Huang Yanpei and Chen Shutong<sup>20</sup> wrote a letter consulting Liu Shaoqi and Zhou Enlai about Mao's proposition to leave the presidency of the Republic. Liu and Zhou replied against the idea, arguing that the governing structure of the State was recently implemented, and therefore should not change in the following 15 or 20 years.

On May 5th, Mao Zedong wrote again to Liu and Zhou (making notes on their same letter, at the margins of the paper) and proposed to change an article of the National Constitution, which determined that the president and vice-president could be in power until 8 years each. Mao asked if the text could instead delimitate 4 years instead of 8. This way, he argued, Mao could leave the position in 1958 in order to dedicate himself exclusively to the activities as president of the Party. Mao Zedong, then, gave this letter with his request to the Central Committee and to every local Party branch, ordering that this matter should be debated and evaluated until the Second National People's Congress. (apud MAO, 1998:457-461)

The year of 1957 was marked by the Hundred Flower and the Rectification campaigns, (ANDREAS and DONG, 2015) mobilizations carried inside and outside the Party to experiment methods of collective supervision of the policies implemented by the CCP. Indeed, the problem of the collective supervision of the Party and the State was not a settled matter. Part of the cadres firmly opposed the participation of non-cadres in public debates regarding the activities and planning carried out by the Party-State.<sup>21</sup> Liu Shaoqi, for example, declared at April 27, 1957:

*Presently, the contradictions between proletarian and non-proletarian thoughts are mainly inside the Party (...) these are problems that must be solved, above all, inside the Party. (...)*

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<sup>20</sup> Huang Yanpei (1878-1965), founder and president of the Chinese Democratic League, one of the eight parties to integrate the National League. Chen Shutong (1876-1966), occupied different positions in the government of the Qing Dynasty, in the National Republic and in the PRC. In 1957, he occupied the positions of vice-president of the National People's Congress and the People's Politic Consultative Conference.

<sup>21</sup> JIA, Lin. Divergences between Mao Zedong and Liu Shaoqi in the Rectification Movement of 1957 (论毛泽东, 刘少奇在五七整风运动中的认识分歧), article published by the History Department of the CCP in June of 2007. Available in <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/64172/85037/85038/6910151.html> (consulted in May 2017).

*It is wrong to use vulgar methods to solve ideological contradictions inside the Party.* (LIU, 1957)

Indeed, even before political crises started in 1956, it was not clear if there was any distinction between the roles of the state and of the party. In January 1955, for example, Mao Zedong had made three corrections to the manuscript of the United Front Work Program, which would be published the next year and determinate some general directions to the work of the Central Committee: 1. He first substituted “President Mao” by “Comrade Mao Zedong”; 2. Raised the minimum of meetings an enterprise should carry with the representatives of its local Party branch, from 1 to 4 times an year; and 3. Required that the following excerpt be included in the program:

*It is important to note that, regarding the question of the United Front to straighten leadership and democracy, one must not forget the principle of contradiction between union and conflict. Among the people, and in democracy, there are still political and ideological conflicts, besides actual mistakes. It is necessary to use methods, for a certain time, to expose these contradictions, evaluate and criticize them, study it deeply to raise our level of consciousness and then correct the mistakes. It is necessary to recognize that democracy, under the leadership of the United Front, may even wish for union, but to deny conflict would be a serious mistake. Our duty is: to oppose the deviations of a narrow ultra-left and also oppose the deviations of a rightist ideology of peaceful coexistence.* (MAO, 1998(2):2-3)

The fact that the debate about the Party-State structure continued after 6 years since the foundation of the PRC, may indicate that the CCP struggled to consolidate a form of government because of internal and external conflicts. We may infer that, at least since 1956, there was an evident clash between the negativity of the revolutionary movement and the positive character of the construction of the Party-State apparatus. That is, within that context, it became clear a contradiction that Alain Badiou called “disjunctive synthesis” (BADIOU, 2012:23): the opposition of two contradictory movements, which are, on one side, the revolutionary mobilization and, on the other side, the construction of a fully functioning government.

In January 1958, at the speech “Sixty points about the work method”, Mao Zedong declared:

*This year, we must reflect and consider the idea that I can no longer occupy the position of president of the PRC. You should form groups and debate, first in every local committee*

*and later in every production unit. Then voice your positions and opinions, and see if the majority agrees. (...) This is because if I can abdicate from this position, I can dedicate myself exclusively to the presidency of the Party, visit places and do things that the local committees are asking me to do. (MAO, 1998(7):45-65)*

In this excerpt, it seems the roles of the State and the Party are deliberately distinguished. One of the main duties of members of the Central Committee was, for example, to visit local committees and production unities, with the aim of personally investigate popular campaigns and initiatives, press agencies, education programs. These visits were considered part of the Mass Line, especially after the economic decentralization that started in 1957, since then, members of the Central Committee were frequently asked to visit units and villages, to listen to lower level cadres and to evaluate the implementation of general policies. Local experiences considered effective were, then, reported to departments of the Central Committee and sometimes publicized as “role models” or “national references”, examples to be followed.

In April 1958, during the Fifth Plenary of the 8<sup>th</sup> Central Committee, one more structural element was established in the governing form towards leadership collectivization: the small groups (小组). At first, those were five groups under the leadership of the Politburo, responsible for planning the implementation of approved policies in five different areas: finances and economy, politics and legislation, international relations, science, education and culture.

At the Sixth Plenary session, in December 1958, it was officially instituted the program of collectivization for rural zones and, in one topic of a long speech regarding many aspects of national economic policy, Mao Zedong declared he was abdicating of the position of PRC president:

*The issue of my resignation as the Chairman of the Republic. A formal resolution must be made this time, and I hope my comrades will agree, I ask that within three days, the provinces hold a telephonic conference to notify the regions, counties, and people's communes. The official report will be published three days later, so that the lower levels will not find it a total surprise. Things are really odd in this world! One can go up but not come down (能上不能下). I expect that a part of the people will agree and another part disagree. People do not understand, saying that while everyone is so full of energy in doing things, I am withdrawing from the frontlines. It must be clearly explained. This is not true. I am not withdrawing. I want to surpass the U.S. before I go to see Marx! (MAO, 1958)*



The phrase “one can go up but not come down” referred to his abdication but, besides it, was a critique to the opposition most cadres demonstrated against the method of “coming down” (下放), which meant temporally or permanently to abdicate from an administrative position at the governing structure and go to a production unit to work together with common people for a few months or years. Indeed, the same expression “one can go up but not come down” continued to be used by other members of the Party at least until 1964, in speeches and articles that established policies against the “bureaucratism” (官僚主义). (DENG, 1962) In describing his own abdication as “to come down”, Mao Zedong indicated that the role of the Party should be closer to the people and to the local political experiences.

Finally, in December 1958, Mao officially resigned from the position of president of the PRC. The position would be occupied again only in April 1959 by Liu Shaoqi.

Mao’s resignation, if analyzed as an isolated episode, may indicate merely that, in 1957, when the idea was first proposed, there was a resistance by a part of the Central Committee in changing the national administrative structure because it was newly established, but later, when the collectivization campaign had started, including decentralization policies implemented in the very CC, Mao could leave the position without affecting political balance.

Nonetheless, Mao’s request to abdicate was discussed for about two years and the debate it unfolded was imbricated with other problematics, for example, the question of the relation between Party and State. The roles of these two organizations were, in fact, gradually distinguished, even though sometimes the same individuals would occupy different positions in each of the instances. In this regard, Mao proposed an interesting correction to the circular that implemented the small groups, in June 1958:

*General political directives are made by the Politburo [of the Central Committee] and its actual developments are defined by the General Secretary. (...) General political directives and actual developments, therefore, are united, Party and State are not separated. Strategies to implement policies and specific decisions are made by the State and by the Party. The Party and the State, together, have the authority to implement politics and concrete policies, but the Party Central Committee has the power of decision. (MAO, 1998(7)268-269)*

After the FFYP, the decentralization campaign gradually rendered some political power to local Party branches, which assumed a role of supervision and even organization of the labor

in production units. To give an idea of the impact of the decentralization, along 1957, in a major industrial city as Shanghai, 480 from the 536 local enterprises collectivized in 1953 were transferred to the direct administration of the municipal Party Committee. (FRAZIER, 2001:204)

*(...) the GLF formalized the devolution of power to Party committees within the workplace, which often operated through mass mobilization campaigns. But the campaigns in this period went beyond the scale of their previous counterparts. Rather than simple workplace meetings or top-down management by the factory director, the methods of labor deployment during the GLF entailed total mobilization. Cadres and technicians participated in physical labor while all members of the enterprise participated in some degree of management. Bonuses, piece-rates and other material incentives were eliminated (...)* (Chuang, 2016:90)

This kind of popular mobilization, coordinated by local committees, had two main purposes: on the one side, try to solve the remaining conflicts of the innumerable unrests and strikes happened in 1956 and 1957; on the other side, these mobilizations also aimed to increase production through the political engagement of workers against the material incentives.

At the beginning of the GLF, the chairman of the Propaganda Department of the CC, Lu Dingyi (1906-1996) stated, in an article called “Education must be combined with productive labor”: “In order to avoid big errors and make less mistakes, people should study politics and philosophy.” (LU,1958) This article was one of the main references for the GLF and recommended to set schools and study groups in Production Units, periods for professors, teachers, cadres and students to experience manual labor in agricultural and industrial sectors.

In Shanghai and in other industrial centers of the country, the CC set the campaigns “half work, half study” (半工半学) and the Technological Revolution (技术革命), as described in the following example of a machine tools factory in Shanxi (山西机床厂) that set the “Red and Specialist College” (红专大学) in June 1958:

*(...) we set the Red and Specialist College to implement the “half work, half study” campaign, thus we can train workers to be specialists. (...) 117 people had already started to study. (...) Before, the factory leadership only knew how to reach their hand towards the government to ask for graduated students, and when the State did not send them, they only knew how to complain: “Why the country does not make more universities?”. But could factories build their own universities? Could they train their own specialists? Those were questions nobody dared to make. (...) “College” is a word that scares people, when one speaks about “college”, everybody thinks is something unattainable. And inside a factory,*

*where everyone is surrounded by the noise of the machinery and going from one side to another, how could be possible to make an university? Would it affect production? Where the professors would come from? How would be the fees and payment? All of these questions made people overwhelmed. But following the Party line of Socialist Construction, people's thought was liberated. (...) Among factory employees there are graduated students, high level technicians that had even taught in universities, why not gather them to teach? (...) This way, besides officially to write "red and specialist college" on a sign, we are using none of the national assets and were able to implement a real university." (YAO,1958)*

The article continues explaining the advantages of this kind of training and education of workers, emphasizing that the satisfaction to have a college built inside a factory could increase the dedication of workers without the need to increase material incentives. Besides, the college could train more specialists that eventually would integrate the planning committees within production units.

In campaigns like these, local committees assumed leading roles, since they were responsible for the articulation between people and Party-State structure, and responsible by the first two phases of the Mass Line: analyze local experiences and synthesize it in reports to the Central Committee.

### *1.3. Mass Line and economic development*

At the end of the 1950, there was a major topic of debate in all China: would it be technology or politics to impulse the development of the socialist economy?

This question had already been discussed in China before the Republic, during the Yanan period (~1935-1947), when the CCP administered a region at the Northwest of China, a rural area mainly composed of desert lands. It was in that context that the CCP had constituted most of its ideological fundamentals and defined the Mass Line. The Yanan period was marked by utopia, egalitarian popular experiments, agrarian reform and new practices of adult education.<sup>22</sup> Specially between 1935 and 1940, surrounded by the Nationalist Party and in combat against the Japanese army, the CCP used to set new communities through a process of land

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<sup>22</sup> SELDEN, Mark. *The Yanan Way in Revolutionary China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971; BOSHIER, Roger e YAN Huang. "More importante than guns: Chinese adult education after the long march" IN *Adult Education Quarterly*, 2010, n.60, pp. 284-302.

redistribution, organization labor cooperatives and building schools (which taught from literacy and theater to agricultural and military training).

The Komintern, then, did not support the policies carried by the CCP, arguing that revolution could only be achieved through the military occupation of urban centers and that the war against Japan could only be fought with arms of high technology. However, the United Front, eventually won the war against Japan using, above all, techniques of popular organization and guerilla. (ANDERSON, 2010)

During the Yenian period, the question of the economic development of the communist areas was largely debated. In view of the intermittent support of the Komintern and the frequent threats made by the Nationalist Party, the CCP could not have organized its economical bases with “the common techniques of savings and investment” – it was only through the “liberation of the powerful energies and latent abilities” of the people that they could organize local productive forces. (GURLEY, 1976:24) Egalitarian political experiments had a central role to this purpose, because the labor cooperatives were established and administered through popular mobilization. It was in this period, that Mao Zedong, in a speech in 1945 in Yenian, recalled a phrase of the poet and professor Wen Yiduo (1899-1946) that later became a motto to the CCP political discourses: “self-reliance to a better production” (自力更生 *zili gengsheng*, literally, “one’s own force produces more”).

This phrase was recalled in 1945 (and later in 1956) with a specific political aim: to establish a parallel with another historical context. Wen Yiduo had used the expression in a speech in 1933 – a period of many defeats to the CCP, when the Nationalist Party had just made an agreement with the Japanese government, granting part of Manchuria in exchange of a brief truce, in order to attack the communist soviets built in Jiangxi. It was in that period that the Red Army had decided for a strategical retreat towards Shaanxi deserts. Wen Yiduo, between 1930 and 1933, had radically changed his political allegiance, supporting the communists while still working at the Kunmin University in Yunan. His speech, replete of a romantic and idealistic tone, described the last defeats of the CCP and the contempt people received by their own government. He urged people to self-organize to defend the country against the Japanese invasion and the despotism of feudalistic coronels.

*Remember that we, the people, should overcome the Japanese. If ten thousand enemies attack us, if only a few defend us in this power struggle and refuse to use force to resist*

*against the enemy, we can still use our own way. We must not be afraid, it does not matter how are the others. We, the people, have always been smart. And if we are smart we can create strategies. (...) Where is force? Force is in people, force is upon us, the people! Today the government do not gives us freedom because it does not wish, one day, we achieve victory. But self-reliance can make better, and can make us powerful, then, of course the government will look for us. In that day we will say, proudly: 'We cannot support you, but you should lean on us' (WEN, 1933)*

The phrase “self-reliance can make more” (or “self-reliance to a better production”), since 1956 was frequently used in editorials, speeches and mobilization campaigns. It is interesting to note that its last locution, “*geng sheng*” (更生) – here translated as “makes more” or “better production” – is composed by the words “*geng*”, that means “more” or “better”, and “*sheng*”, that means “to produce”, “make”. The meaning of the word “*sheng*”, close to the meaning of the Chinese verb “to produce” (which is also used to compose the word “production”, 产生 *chansheng*), made possible that this slogan was used in different contexts, including to promote local popular mobilization with the aim of increasing production output.

In 1956 and 1957, this slogan was recalled in many campaigns, articles and speeches. Mao Zedong, Bo Yibo, Li Fuchun, Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping, and other members of the Central Committee visited many cities in China to evaluate production units, know better particularities of local management. Newspapers and speeches often reported the conversations carried in those visits, highlighting the technological advances and production indexes. This corroborated to legitimate the decentralization of the national planning, because emphasized the creative potential of local experiments. When Mao Zedong, for example, visited the Shanghai Machinery Factory, in July 1957, the report published in a local newspaper featured his compliments to the school of technical training and to the innovation committee recently established, which included some regular workers:

*That's how we make a factory! (...) It is very good to lean on the worker class to administer a factory, the [socialist] construction can only be made with 'self-reliance to a better production', workers together have a great creative energy! (Labor Daily, 1957)*

Later, in the same day, in a meeting at the Shanghai Party Committee, Mao Zedong stressed the importance of the Rectification Campaign, and talked about the leadership politics:

*There is no reason to fear people. Who are the leaders? The leaders are the coordinators in groups, teams, schools, party secretaries, committee secretaries (...). We all have some political capital, which is constituted by the power to represent a group of people to do some things. Now is the time to set the fire, precisely for it to burn us (现在把火放起来烧, 就是要把我们烧好). We all have some problems, including me.*<sup>23</sup>

“Set the fire” referred to promote public debates to criticize party policies. This method of mobilization was called “Big Voice – Big Liberation” (大鸣大放)<sup>24</sup>.

In the same meeting at the SPC, Mao talked about the relation between technology and politics “(...) education, culture and art are all part of ideology, of the superstructure. Regarding the natural sciences, there are two kinds: natural sciences do not have class, but its application have a class character.” (MAO, Idem) In fact, the contradictions between the Soviet management system and the Mass Line had aggravated social struggle in the field of technology. Between 1957 and 1958, the term “technology mercantilization” (技术商品化) was disseminated in newspapers and pamphlets (SCHURMANN, 1971:279) by those who were against the Soviet management system and in favor of a radicalization of the Mass Line, as a method of economic and political organization.

On the eve of the GLF, the national press often referred to the Yanan period, and the slogan “self-reliance to a better production” was recalled with a two-fold meaning: to increase production through political incentives and to announce a Chinese general line, a national model of transition entitled Socialist Construction Line (社会主义建设路线) – which was officialized in May of 1958, at the Second Plenary of the 8<sup>th</sup> Central Committee. (CCPCC, 1958)

The Socialist Construction Line was conceived in opposition to the Soviet economic policy (particularly, in opposition to the ideas of peaceful transition, national alliance and the permanence of some levels of private property). The divergences between both communist parties eventually collaborated to the problematization of the very concept of development. In China, while lasted the GLF, the development of the production forces was generally explained

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<sup>23</sup> MAO Zedong, “Speech at the People’s Hall [Hall of meeting of the Shanghai’s Party Committee], IN Wang Chaoxing (org.), 毛泽东思想万岁 (Long live Mao Zedong’s Thought), Wuhan University’s edition of 1968. Digitalized collection. Available also in <https://www.marxists.org/chinese/maozedong/1968/index.htm> (consulted in June of 2017).

<sup>24</sup> It is worth noticing that the word *fang* 放 may signify, depending on the combination with other ideograms: “let go”, “release”, “drop”. This ideogram is also used in the word “go down” (*xiafang* 下放), referring, in that historical context, to the leader that abdicates his/her position and engages in manual labor.

as a consequence of the qualitative advance of the production relations.<sup>25</sup> This idea was theoretically opposed to the “laws of development” described by Stalin, which stated that only the raise of production output and quantitative accumulation would result in qualitative revolutions.

At the Supreme State Council, carried in Hangzhou in January 1958, Mao Zedong said:

*Red and expert. Politics and business are one unit of opposites. We should analyze both. The politician administer, but it is not good if he knows nothing about business. Politics and business are like the red and the expert. Those who only engage in politics, when trying to work with business, are troubled. But they have to learn at least some of the principles. (...) This does not mean we should not make politics, it means politics and business cannot be separated. Political thought is the commander, and politics is the guarantee of the business (政治又是业务的保证) (MAO, 1958)*

Thus, in this period, the CCP focused popular mobilization campaigns as a method of qualitatively revolutionize production relations. Furthermore, in May 1958, the CCP defined its general line, officially including the permanence of “the contradictions between capitalism and communism within the production system” and, as way to solve it, the “Socialist Construction Line”.<sup>26</sup>

*Compared to the rigid, centralized economic system that tended to prevail in the Soviet Union, the Great Leap Forward was a supreme act of lateral thinking. Normally, cement and fertilizer, for example, would be produced in large factories in urban areas away from the rural areas that needed them. (...) Rural industry established during the Great Leap Forward used labor-intensive rather than capital-intensive methods. As they were serving*

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<sup>25</sup> LU Ting-Yi. *Education must be combined with productive labour*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1958, pp.14-15; ANDREAS, Joel. *Rise of the Red Engineers*. California: Stanford University Press, 2009, pp.43-54; See also GURLEY, John, *China's Economy and the Maoist Strategy*. Op. Cit. A third proposal of economic policy, criticized either by those that defended the Socialist Construction, either by those who support the Soviet leadership, was systematized by Ma Yinchu (1882-1982), economist and invited member of the Policy Consultative Conference of the People's Republic in 1949. Later named rector of the universities of Zhejiang and Beijing. “Ma also developed his theories on how to reach a ‘general balance’ of the Chinese planned economy. Ma conceived the planned economy as a rotating circle composed of a series of links connected, representing the many sectors of economy (...)”, this included to defend the permanence of small property and the national bourgeoisie under Socialism. Cf. SUN, Lung-Kee. “Ma Yin-qu and the problem of socialist transition in China” IN *Critical Asian Studies*, V.9, N.2, 1977, pp.62-67. Disponível em <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14672715.1977.10406417> (consulted in July 2014).

<sup>26</sup> LIU Shaoqi, “Report on the work of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China to the second session of the Eight National Congress” IN CCPC, *Second Session of the Eight National Congress of the Communist Party of China*. Op. Cit., pp.16-65.

*local needs, they were not dependent on the development of an expensive nation-wide infrastructure of road and rail to transport the finished commodities. (BALL, 2006)<sup>27</sup>*

The GLF also aimed to “consolidate the communist power and reduce its dependence on specialists” that did not integrate the CCP. To this aim, the Party tried to implement technical and political schools in production units, as well as link these training programs with periods of internships for high school and college students. (ANDREAS, 2015:80) To implement these policies, the Central Committee invested in the production units, whose Party committees were responsible to organize these schools and training programs for workers, start technological research projects and build a basic infrastructure of social security to workers and their families (including dorms, hospitals, childcare, restaurants...). Some of the political principles of the GLF specifically aimed to increase social security, reduce wage inequality and material incentives.

In industrial centers, it was implemented a campaign named Technological Revolution. In Shanghai, for example, the Secretary of the SPC, Ma Tianshui (1910-1988), wrote an article to the *Red Flag* in which he said:

*The main modernizations in the labor processes were: (1) to transform old labor processes and simplify the production (...); (2) to substitute old production methods by new ones (...); (3) last year, to deal with the lack of big machines, many factories invented the method of “use little equipment to do big work”(...)*

Ma Tianshui said that, in face of the difficulties to fulfill 1958 annual plan, many factories implemented campaigns to use labor-intensive production methods to compensate the lack of proper technology and large-sized machinery. The municipal secretary described, then, the example of the Shanghai Machine Tools Factory:

*(...) where the engineers dared to give their projects to workers and technicians to debate possible adjustments, and then, as a result, the grinder was modernized: from 721 to 328 parts. Its fabrication time reduced from 537 to 297 hours. The material used to build it was reduced in at least 26% and its cost of production reduced 38%. Its efficiency, though, continued the same. (MA, 1959)*

The decentralization of management, at the beginning of the GLF, was defended as a profitable method of administration, which would result in increase of the output, decrease of

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<sup>27</sup>About the Great Leap Forward, see too GURLEY, John, *China's Economy and the Maoist Strategy*. Op. cit.; HINTON, William. *Iron Oxen – a documentary of Revolution in Chinese Farming*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970.



labor unrest and uprisings, and development of technology through the political mobilization of workers at all levels of each unit.

Besides the industrial modernization campaigns in urban zones, the GLF was efficient in developing infrastructure in the countryside. In rural areas, the rail network was expanded, schools were built, primary health care established, manufacture cooperatives organized, canalization and irrigation systems were set. All of this made possible to many previously abandoned lands to be successfully cultivated.

However, in 1959, GLF policies started to fail in many aspects, especially regarding the balance between industrial and rural productions, currency and goods circulation. Part of the population in the countryside had been directed to small scale industrial production within their own units (the so-called “backyard furnaces” and other similar initiatives) and, in that period, agricultural production output was super estimated. In addition, in 1959 and 1960, there were some atypical draughts. All of those factors combined, severely affected food production. Furthermore, collectivization policies were experimental, resulting in successes and fails, which aggravated the polemic about the transition to Communism and what would be its right method.

In view of these problematics and an significant famine crises, the CCP started a series of meetings in many regions of the country, to study local struggles and create possible solutions. The Central Committee, then, launched the campaign against the “five winds” (五风):

- 1) the “communist wind” (共产风), which referred to the implementation of “too advanced” policies, which were defined by an “idealized communism” as it would have been already achieved. The “communist wind” was characterized by policies that were idealistic, but also authoritarian, since many local cadres used epithets as “red” or “white”, “revolutionary” or “counterrevolutionary”, to label those who adhere or refuse such policies, mobilizing repressive measures against those who did not followed party decisions. In this period, the Central Committee declared local cadres should not “render absolute the method of class ranking”. (WILLIAM 1984:95) From July to December 1959, Mao made many self-criticisms for having promoted economical objectives incompatible with the actual production conditions in the country. (MAO, 1959)
- 2) the “commandism” (命令主义), a practice linked to the “communist wind”, defined as the forced implementation of GLF policies. For example, one form of “commandism”

was named “tail-ism” (literally, “tail system” 尾巴主义), and referred to the practice of blindly accept the demand of a local Party branch.

- 3) The “blind production” (瞎指挥生产), concerned serious mistakes on management made by cadres that did not have any technical or practical knowledge on production. This problematic reinforced the need of a more comprehensive training of cadres, including some study of technology and experience with practical labor. The “blind production” also stressed the importance to know in details each local experience before making it a regional policy.
- 4) the “exaggeration” (浮夸), which referred both to the over-estimated production targets and to reports that falsified outputs.
- 5) the fifth wind was the “cadre privilege” (干部特殊), and referred to financial and political benefits cadres sometimes arrogate themselves, especially with the excuse of compensating their new duties after the decentralization campaign started in 1957.

In 1959 and 1960, the Central Committee attempted to rectify this situation but, for the most part, the strategies used by the party eventually reimplemented capitalist oriented policies. The free distribution of basic food was suspended and payment was again made according to production output. Some levels of property were restored in the countryside. Some of these policies, though, led to the emergence of a national labor market, managed by the very local Party committees that coordinated temporary contracts of migrant workers to compensate the frequent unbalances between planned targets and production output. Hence, some political devices implemented in 1958, with the aim of reduce the expropriation of capital – such as free basic health and education services – started to serve, in practice, as means of capital accumulation. That is because workers temporally hired were generally migrants registered in remote communes and, then, they did not have fully right to use the social services at the unit of their staying for a temporary job. Thus, the units that contracted the temporary workers would spent less in social security, i.e., save assets of the reproduction of labor power.

Notwithstanding, some policies implemented at the beginning of the GLF remained and resulted in the creation of new social organizations, workers associations, popular study groups and committees, peasant schools, literacy programs. Besides, to some extent, remained also the practice to organize public debates and meetings, the use of big character posters and some small

editing houses. Popular study campaigns had set the practice to study political and philosophical topics within production units.

For example, during the GLF, there was a debate about historiography (disseminated also in newspapers and magazines), questioning if history was written mainly based on empirical facts (史 *shi*) or on theory (论 *lun*). This debate continued until, at least, 1965, through articles proposing different correlations between “facts” and “theory” in research and writing methodologies. Until 1976, the predominant methodology, even in common press, was the so-called “though theory present facts” (以论代史). (SCHWIEDRZIK, 1996)

The questions of free distribution of food supplies and the strategies for the collectivization of means of production were also fiercely debated in local units and in national press. In the People’s Daily, for example, between September 1958 and June 1959, there was an intense debate about the “to limit capitalist legal power” (限制资产阶级法权)<sup>28</sup>. Among many articles published in this period, there were some with the following titles: “Dare to break with capitalist concepts”, “To want Communism, not the piecework system”, “Salary system is still essential after the Liberation”, “Open the black box of capitalist system”, “Studying Stalin’s ‘Economic Problems of the URSS’”; “‘Wage according to production’ is not the capitalist principle of salary”, “What is currency circulation”.

Whereas study groups had been set in many production units, these theoretical topics were often correlated with local contexts and practical situations. An example of the application of the methodology “through theory present facts” was a quite interesting text published on November 25<sup>th</sup> 1960, at the Guangming Daily (光明日报), named “A debate about how the law of contradiction acts on machine tools, from the standpoint of an experience with a modular machine”. The article was written by a member of the Party Committee of the Harbin Technical School of Automatized Mechanic. It reported the reformulation of a machine tool’s project, in

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<sup>28</sup> The locution “capitalist legal power”, here, was chosen with the aim to approximate it to its meaning in Mandarin. Actually, the locution 资产阶级法权 (composed of 资产阶级, which means “capitalist” and 法权 which means “right-power” and “law”) refer to the concept “*das bürgerliche Recht*” used in Marx’s article “Critique of the Gotha Program”, and translated in English normally as “bourgeois Right”. However, the word “right” is not really equivalent to the wide meaning of “recht” in German. Even in Mandarin, it was necessary to coin a term to translate this concept: 法权 *faquan*, which combines two ideograms, 法, meaning “law” and “权” meaning “power” and also “right”. A debate about the translation of this term is made at the very People’s Daily in March 28, 1959, at the article “关于资产阶级式的权利问题的讨论对于‘资产阶级法权’一语译法的意见” (“Debating the Capitalist Right model and the right to express ‘capitalist power’ – a point of view”), written by the painter Zhang Zhongshi (1903-1987).

order to expand its functions and increase its production capacity, without the need to invest in buying new equipment. The innovation was created by a committee composed of engineers, technicians and experienced workers, and took two years of research motivated by the scarcity of large industrial equipment in China:

*This machine tool is used to cut and mill. There is a contradiction between the cutting tool and the lathe center, and this is the contradiction that defines the development and transformation of the machine tool, either to mill, to face, to grind, to drill – all of them are the same. Normally, it is said that the engine is the main aspect of the contradiction, however, in some situations, the main aspect of the contradiction maybe the cutting tool. (...) When it comes to the large machine tools, the engine is big, so it becomes the major part of the machine. Regarding the modular machine tool, the committee succeeded to grasp [抓住] the main aspect of the contradiction, they separated the engine from the cutting tool, built a fixed central engine, eliminating the need to move larger parts, and then, the cutting system can use the whole engine capacity. (...) We made a system useful also to small scale machine tools, which can also be used to make big works. We helped to solve the lack of this kind of machine. (...) Thus, we may see that the modular machine tool shows the accomplishment of the law of development applied to machine tools, because it shifts the main contradiction from the engine to the cutting system, and use this shifting to give an universalizing meaning to the development of machine tools, and then the practical experience earns a great value.[重大意义]. (apud MAO, 1998(9):378-380)*

At the end of the article, it is said that it was possible “to recognize development from the contradictions within machine tools” and that this “not only actualize our purpose of technological research, but also allows us to make a complete modernization of the learning-and-teaching process regarding machine tools”.

Mao Zedong read this article and, at December 6<sup>th</sup>, sent a letter to the editorial committee of the Red Flag, asking to reprint it, since the magazine had a wider circulation. Indeed, the text was published at the Red Flag with a longer text, in which was further analyzed the argument regarding the law of contradiction as a development force. At the same number of the magazine, right after this article, the committee published a song that summarized the experience, emphasizing the theoretical aspect of the law of contradiction in the socialist production system,

in which the main driving force would be the labor power.<sup>29</sup> This article had a wide repercussion in other factories of machine tools, promoting the implementation of more innovation committees, mainly composed of workers, technicians and engineers.

This experiment was included in what was called “Technological Revolution”, a series of mobilizations to promote local experiments in technology. Nonetheless, these experiments were limited in the years following the GLF, due to the rectification policies that reestablished hierarchy within production units and some degree of centralization of planning.

#### *1.4. One splits in two – Mass Line as a method for solving contradictions among the people*

*The paramount issue for socialist democracy is: does labor have the right to subdue the various antagonistic forces and their influences? For example, who controls things like the newspapers, journals, broadcast stations, the cinema? Who criticizes? Mao Zedong, 1960*

The problems that aroused when carrying out the GLF policies, and the rectification measures set in 1960 and 1961, aggravated CCP intern conflicts, dividing cadres between those for and against the Soviet political economy. The CPSU had already, at the beginning of the 1958, publicly manifested their critiques against the Chinese communes and their emphasis on production relations. Conflicts between China and USSR parties started to affect some projects in common between both parties and, from 1958 to 1961, debates were often tense, full of threats of interruption of the Soviet financial and technological support.<sup>30</sup>

The leadership of the CCP had tried, since the 20<sup>th</sup> CPSU Congress, to keep discretion regarding any divergences or critiques to the Soviet party. Chinese official declarations and published articles were carefully examined in order to conceal any direct critiques, since the Soviet technological and financial support was still considered indispensable to the development

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<sup>29</sup> The song was named “Ants gnawing a bone” (蚂蚁啃骨头歌), there is its initial verses: “Hey, look! / face, Drew and grind machines / of all kinds/ can pierce and also level/ all at the same time/ cutting on the left/ cutting on the right / cutting and cutting/ it’s sharp!/ A specialists treasure/ does it quick and precise/ one step forward/ the small ant created a new work/ the small ant solved a big problem / Study hard, experiment a lot and the knowledge grows/ Mao Zedong’s Thought sets the direction (...)”. Available in <http://www.wengewang.org/read.php?tid=39872&page=e&fpage=19> (consulted in July 2017). At this page, there is a report of a worker, commenting the above-referred articles, the song and the picture of the modular machine tool.

<sup>30</sup> See the collection “Sino-Soviet Relations” at the *Wilson Center Digital Archive* <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/collection/72/sino-soviet-relations> (consulted in July 2017) and the collection “毛泽东主席外事往来文电，档案汇编” (Archive of President Mao’s telegrams regarding diplomatic relations); Available at <http://www.wengewang.org/read.php?tid=17461> (consulted in July 2017).

of national production. Besides, situation at the Chinese international borders was problematic, there were still threats of war and armed struggles, and thus, to publicly declare political opposition to the USSR, in that period, would lead to a rupture in many agreements of military cooperation at the borders with India, Vietnam and North Korea. The USSR was responsible for most Chinese weaponry supply. “We all live because of your missiles”, said Mao Zedong to Khrushchov in a conversation at July 31, 1958.<sup>31</sup>

In January 1959, though, Khrushchov openly criticized the GLF at the 21<sup>o</sup> Congress of the CPSU, and a few months later in a visit to Polonia, made a critical comment against the communes, which was published at The Pravda’s edition of July 21. In publicizing those comments, the CPSU exposed divergences already significant, indirectly contributing to proclaim the political opposition between members of the CCP itself, especially those regarding GLF’s economic and political fundamentals.<sup>32</sup> Mao Zedong, after reading Khrushchev’s comments in the Russian newspaper, wrote a letter to the Central Committee Politburo, in which enumerated some hypothesis about the repercussion and the political meaning of the event:

*Please, examine these documents, see if CPSU’s comment about the Socialist Construction and the communes are not really an issue [是不是一个东西] (...) I ask the comrades to read the Marx’s preface to the Critique of the Political Economy. Lately, the attacks against the popular communes are been carried using the very scientific principles of Marx, as if they were magic talismans made to attack us. Would you fear this talisman? [法宝]? (...) The Hundred Flowers Campaign, the communes, the Great Leap Forward.... Khrushchev is against these three things or, at least, doubt them. From my point of view, they were disturbed in face of our autonomy, what do you think? (MAO, 1998(8)390-392)*

Mao’s declaration about the attacks against GLF politics being made “using the very scientific principles of Marx”, refers to the critiques formulated with vocabulary, or mottos, of

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<sup>31</sup> “First conversation between N.S. Khrushchev and Mao Zedong, Hall of Huaizhentan, Beijing” July 31 1958, Available in <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112080> (consulted in June 2017).

<sup>32</sup> ZHU Yongjia 朱永嘉, 说说庐山会议这件事--讲一点与李锐不同的观点 (Comments on the events happened at the Lushan Conference – about some contradictory statements on Li Rui), available in <http://www.wengewang.org/read.php?tid=20184> (consulted in July 2017). This article was written by the historian Zhu Yongjia (1931-), and published in 2009 at the “Cultural Revolution Net” (文革网 [www.wengewang.org](http://www.wengewang.org)) and at the periodical Utopia (乌有之乡, closed in 2008 by the CCP). Zhu Yongjia was professor at the History Department of the Fudan University in Shanghai in the 50s, member of the Shanghai Writers Group and of the city’s Party Committee. He wrote many books published in mainland China, but most of his personal interviews and articles are censored, therefore found mainly in international bookstores or digital archives. His writings, though, are valuable to understanding political facts and relations in the CCP between 1950 and 1970.

the Marxist-Leninist literature. The GLF politics had a clear focus on the so-called superstructure as the field where remains the primary force for social revolution. Soviet official interpretation of the texts that integrated the Marxist-Leninist selection, though, defended the prevalence of the infrastructure, as a dominant force that would lead the transition.

Political divergences in the CCP were clearly disclosed at the Lushan Conference in December 1959. This conference was associated to the Eight Plenary of the 8<sup>o</sup> Central Committee, and had as one of its main topics of debate the international situation and the national economic planning. After many evaluation sessions, criticisms and self-criticisms regarding the GLF, some members of the Central Committee reiterated a personal critique against Mao Zedong through a letter written by Peng Dehuai (1898-1974), then China's Defense Minister.

This letter upheld a content similar to the self-criticism made by Mao himself a few days before, and questioned the Party line of Socialist Construction, therefore, rendering evident some of conflicts within Central Committee. Moreover, Peng Dehuai, in the previous months, was in regular contact with Khrushchev and the Soviet Defense Minister, withal, negotiating the implementation of a long distance radio communication system between Beijing and Moscow. Peng Dehuai had, to some extent, become a spokesperson of the Soviet Central Committee, intermediating telegrams and memorandums.<sup>33</sup> As general and marshal of the PLE, Peng Dehuai was part of the military national leadership, among whom were the majority of the cadres opposed to the political direction of the GLF.

Because of the international context extremely problematic, Peng Dehuai's letter at the Lushan Conference was interpreted by some members of the Politburo as a sign of warning for a possible situation of espionage and military coup. At the same Eight Plenary, then, the Politburo decided for Peng Dehuai's dismissal as Defense Minister and, a few months later, in September 1959, Lin Biao (1907-1971) occupied the position.<sup>34</sup> The choice of Lin Biao was

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<sup>33</sup> See, for example, "Report, Peng Dehuai to Mao Zedong and the CCP Central Committee (Excerpt)," June 5, 1958, Digital archive "History and Public Policy Program". Originally published at 毛泽东外交资料, Beijing: CCPCC Editing House, 1994, p. 634. Available in <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117031> (consulted in July 2017).

<sup>34</sup> To read more about the Lushan Conference, see SCHOENHALS, Michael e STONE, Brewer S. "More edited records: Liu Shaoqi on Peng Dehuai at the 7000 Cadres Conference" IN *CCP Research Newsletter* (5), 1990, pp.1-7 (this is an interesting document because it shows a standpoint less Manichean of the Line Struggle within the CCP; in general, Peng Dehuai's dismissal is presented as an authoritative and hyper-psychologized act of the individual Mao Zedong; at this document is possible to see that the general's dismissal was actually debated in the Central Committee and involved many other reasons besides the "letter" criticizing GLF politics); PARK, Henry. *The political economy of Counterrevolution in China: 1976-1988*. Cambridge: Mass, 1985, p.14. [http://www.prisoncensorship.info/archive/books/China/PoliticalEconomyofCounterRevChina\\_Park.pdf](http://www.prisoncensorship.info/archive/books/China/PoliticalEconomyofCounterRevChina_Park.pdf) (consultado em julho

made with the purpose of “to reconstitute the prominence of the political work in the PLE, in face of the possibility of a defense war”. (MASI, 1979:97)

In all, the failure of some GLF politics aggravated some conflicts and debates in China regarding the political “line” of the CCP: to build Socialism towards the implementation of the Communism or to align with the Soviet political economy and follow an international model of economic development, then characterized by the market economy? The debates inside and outside the Party regarded particularly the elements composing what Marx defined as the Bourgeois Right: payment according to production output, circulation of currency, the division between manual and intellectual labor, managerial hierarchy and state bureaucracy. The Bourgeois Right was analyzed by Marx at the article Critique of the Gotha Program (1875), which was often discussed and recalled since 1958 in all China.

These were the debates that eventually outlined the Two Line Struggle, “delimited in 1960 in the programs ‘revisionist’ and ‘revolutionary’ to the management of enterprises, identified with the Seventy Articles and the Anshan Constitution, respectively”. (SHEENAN, 1998:92) The Anshan Constitution was published in 1960 as a result of the political experiments carried in the Anshan Iron and Steel Company, text endorsed personally by Mao Zedong; in general lines, it promoted politics in command of enterprises; the Party leadership in enterprises and in government; popular mobilization within production units; maintenance of GLF’s “two-one-three” policy<sup>35</sup> and Technological Revolution.” (Idem) On the other side, the document called Seventy Articles, published by the CCP in 1961 with the title “Regulation for state industrial enterprises”, declared:

*(...) the primacy of the economic role of enterprises and of production (economics in command, as the Cultural Revolution polemics had it); the authority of the factory director and the chief engineer; strict responsibility systems and regulations and tighter labour discipline; material incentives and some reintroduction of piece-rates; and less political study (...)* (Idem)

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de 2017). MOHANTY, Deba R. “The military’s role in Chinese Politics, 1949-65: some reflections” IN *Strategic Analysis*, V.22, 1998.

<sup>35</sup> The “three-one-two policy” meant “the ‘two participations’ (of workers in management and of cadres in manual labor), ‘one reform’ (of enterprise irrational rules, regulations and systems), and the ‘three-in-one combination’ in enterprises (workers, technicians and cadres working together for the technical reforms and innovations) (...)”, SHEEHAN, Jackie. *Chinese Workers..* Idem, p.86.



The political line indicated in the Seventy Articles was prevalent between 1961 and 1965. It is worth noticing that Mao, for example, had asked the revision of this regulation in 1962, but this request was not accepted until 1965. (SHEENAN, *Idem*, 94)

In August 1960, in a festival carried in the Beijing Workers Club (工人俱乐部), a theater play called “Hai Rui’s memorial” (清官上疏), written one year before, was exhibit a few times. This play was the third piece written by the historian and Beijing’s vice-mayor Wu Han (1909-1969), and recreated an event involving Hai Rui (1514-1587), an official of the Ming Dynasty, a historical character and role model of honesty because of the persecution he suffered by the Emperor. Hai Rui had become an actual historical and literally *topos* that represented the combat for integrity and against corruption. In 1960, however, when the piece was played at the Workers Club, a change was made in its title, which gave it a new allegoric meaning: the title was changed from “Hai Rui’s Memorial” (清官上疏) to “Hai Rui dismissed from the office” (海瑞罢工). This particular change may have shifted the critical target of the play. Hai Rui, until then, was a character recalled a few times to valorize the “daring” approach to expose criticisms against the “five winds” of the GLF. But when this play had its title changed, it referred to another coeval episode: the dismissal of Peng Dehuai at the Lushan Conference. The character that before represented “honesty” and “integrity”, was identified with the general retired in September of 1959; moreover, the “intolerant” emperor that dismisses Hai Rui was, then, a reference to Mao Zedong and to the very political line of the GLF. This play did not awake much polemics in 1960, but was a central issue of debate from 1963 to 1966, which, eventually, culminated in the launching of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>36</sup>

In the beginning of 1962, at the so-called Seven Thousand Cadres Conference, Liu Shaoqi again criticized the GLF, and endorsed the retirement of Peng Dehuai in 1959, arguing that his dismissal from the CCP positions was motivated by the suspicion of a secret alliance with the CPSU. (SCHOENHALS and STONE, 1990) At the same conference, Deng Xiaoping announced policies that integrated a program called “family administration of agriculture and

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<sup>36</sup> The sequence of events related to the play “Hai Rui dismissed from the office” is a problematic topic in historiography. CCP official history narrates facts that are not actually proved by coeval documentation. By the contrary, available documents in Mandarin indicate that it involved a much wider problematic, and that the play was correlated to many topics of debate. With the aim to briefly present the context, we are basing these informations on a collection of articles from the People’s Daily, published between 1962 and 1966, and collected initially by a Red Guard group under the title “Survey material about the play Hai Rui dismissed from the office” (海瑞罢工研究资料汇). This collection (and many others) was generously given to me by a professor of a Chinese university, to whom I here publicly thank, although I can not refer his name, since the topic is still classified to the CCP.

the pragmatism on industrial production”, actions that affected many poor peasants that eventually had to migrate to big cities searching for temporary jobs in industry, aggravating the worker-peasant system. (MASI, 1979:95)

In the same year, Liu Shaoqi introduced the policy named “three freedoms and one security” (三自一包): “three freedoms” meaning the reinstatement some levels of private property of land, free market and profit-oriented small enterprises; and “one security” meaning requiring fixed output quotas on a household basis. (SHENG, 2010:183) The “three freedoms and one security” policy lasted until August 1966.

In February 1963, in a work meeting with the Central Committee, Mao Zedong proposed to launch a Socialist Education campaign. The proposition was accepted, albeit with a clearly contradictory content. Mao Zedong declared that the class struggle should be central in this mobilization and Liu Shaoqi, in the same meeting, stated: “It is not good only talk about the class struggle and do not actually make things”<sup>37</sup>. The campaign, nonetheless, eventually promoted the publication and dissemination of some articles on philosophy, literature and history, mainly limited to the academic field.

As the debate about different political lines unfolded, some pieces in the fields of art and philosophy – among which “Hai Rui dismissed from the office” – became emblematic to the political struggles at the time. In the first semester of 1964, a series of articles were published at the *Red Flag* criticizing the Soviet political economy and openly opposed to the “Proposition of a General Line to the International Communist Movement” published in July 1963 by the CPSU. The articles at the *Red Flag* called the international General Line a “fake communism” and a “revisionist line”.<sup>38</sup> Also in 1964, there was a series of articles published at the People’s Daily that somehow marked a new period for the national political mobilization. This debate lasted until 1964, and tried to answer one fundamental topic of the dialectical materialism: “one splits in two” (一分为二) or “two unifies in one” (二合为一)?<sup>39</sup> These two locutions, actually, referred to the problem of the permanence of the contradiction within the socialist society. In other words, it questioned whether class struggle remained or not under Socialism.

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<sup>37</sup> Official summary of the meeting carried out between February 11 and 18, 1963. Available in <http://dangshi.people.com.cn/GB/151935/176588/176596/10556205.html>. (Accessed in June 2017)

<sup>38</sup> Red Flag’s editorial on July 14, 1964 makes a summary and review of the articles published so far on this matter. See: “Comment on the Open Letter of the Central Committee of the CPSU (IX)” IN Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1964. Available in <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/1964/phnycom.htm> (consulted in July 2017).

<sup>39</sup> CCPCC, *Three major struggles in China’s Philosophical front (1949-1964)*. Pequim: Foreign Languages Press, 1973, pp.19-26. This booklet is available <http://www.marx2mao.com/Other/TMS73.html> (Accessed in July 2017)

In June 1964, due to the increasing radicalization of the theoretical debates vehiculated through newspapers and magazines, the CCP instituted one more small group: the Five People Small Group of the Cultural Revolution (文化革命五人小组). This group, initially led by the mayor of Beijing, Peng Zhen, included also the director of the People's Daily editorial committee, Wu Lengxi (1919-2002); the literary critic and member of the People's Daily editorial committee, Zhou Yang (1908-1989); the Propaganda Minister Lu Dingyi and the member of the Standing Committee of the Central Committee, Kang Sheng (1898-1975). Among other activities, this group, was set to closely direct People's Daily editions and supervise public debates carried specially in big cities.

In November 10, though, Yao Wenyuan (1931-2005), a literary critic and cadre member of the Shanghai Writers Group, published at the Wenhui Daily (文汇报) an extensive critique of the play "Hai Rui dismissed from office". Yao Wenyuan first analyzes the details of its dramaturgy and narrative, comparing it with historical documents and, then, focuses on debating the question "what is the 'realistic meaning' of Hai Rui dismissed from the office, if it was a 'big character poster'?" (YAO,1965). In other words: if the play was understood as political poster (a political declaration), what would it mean? Yao affirmed that the play was, actually, a critique to the GLF and to the communes, in addition to an *apologia* of "bourgeois ideology virtues" and a threat of oppression against the peasants who dare to mobilize in favor of the land collectivization.

With this article, there was an aggravation of the debate about the political character of philosophy, art and technology. Some relations between politics and art became clear and further political struggles within the CCP were unveiled. At first, the editorial board of People's Daily refused Mao's request to print Yao Wenyuan's article and, only after many negotiations, at November 30, the text was published at the most important newspaper of China. This impasse between the publication of Yao's article at the Shanghainese Wen Hui Daily and its reluctant reprint at the People's Daily, made clear a kind of political polarization between Shanghai and Beijing. Beijing, at the time, with Peng Zhen (1902-1997) as its mayor and with the base of the PLE headquarters, was a city in which the organizations of propaganda and press, especially the People's Daily, were under the direction of the conservative wing of the Central Committee. In Shanghai, though, the mayor Ma Tianshui had showed for years an alignment with more radical

politics, and there were many propaganda and press committees affiliated to the Maoist thought, as were the case of the magazine Red Flag, the Wen Hui Daily and the Writers Group.

In fact, the critique written by Yao Wenyuan did not mention specifically the dismissal of Peng Dehui, this correlation would be made on public texts only a few weeks later its publication. However, Wenyuan's text made a detailed analysis of the play, referring each dramaturgical element to the historical context of its production. The text recalled, one by one, many contradictions that have raised at the aftermath of the GLF. Thus, it explained some of those struggles, which actually were not solved by 1964.

Consequently, Yao Wenyuan's article exposed that the question of the transition to Communism was not answered, and that the class struggle remained in the Chinese society.

A month later, in December 1965, in a conference in Hanzhou, Mao declared:

*Marx's Capital starts with an analysis of the double nature of commodity. Our commodities also have a double nature. In a hundred years, commodities will still have a double nature. Things that are not commodities also have a double nature. Our comrades also have a double nature, correct and incorrect. Do you have a double nature? I have it too. (...) It was said that there are three big laws of dialectics, then Stalin came and said it is four. In my point of view, there is only one basic law that is the law of contradiction. (MAO, 1965)*

The permanence of the law of contradiction, that is, the “one that divides in two”, was then proposed as a fundamental characteristic of Socialism, since it would be a period defined by the transition between two antagonist systems. According to the evaluation of the cadres aligned to Maoist politics, the only way to use the state apparatus to serve the transition towards Communism would be to constrain it under the leadership of the Party – which would have to act, then, on the basis of the Mass Line. Indeed, important texts about the “bureaucratism” were written in 1964 and 1965, by Deng Xiaoping, Zhou Enlai, Mao Zedong, Zhang Chunqiao and other cadres. In December 1965, in an internal meeting, Mao said to Chen Boda and Ai Siqi:

*The political work has to be done through the Mass Line. We cannot lean on a “boss”, because how much can one really administer? (...) One can only see in part. That is why we have to mobilize everybody as responsible agents, everyone should open their mouths, everyone must analyze and critique. Mouths and eyes should grow on everyone (...). Democracy happens when people's problems are solved by the people, and here there are two lines: one is lean on one person to do things, and the other is to lean on the people, that [collectively] will do things. We are a people's*

*democracy, a democratic government must be the government of all, and not [some people that] leans on a governing minority (...)*" (MAO, 1965b)

Because of the intensification of the political debate, in November 1966, the Five People Small Group published the "Report and plan about the recent academical debate" (关于当前学术讨论的汇报提纲), which praised the discussions carried until then and promoted the further development of the debate "within the academic field and under the guidance of the Party representatives", since contradictory opinions could be solved according to the principle of "mutual help", because "the opposition to Capitalism and others class struggles" were "excluded from the debate, which is 'non-profit'". (apud People's Daily Historic Archive, 1966)

The report, hence, attempted to exclude any political character of the ongoing debates, restricting discussions to the limits of an academical study supervised by Party committees. At the same week of the publication of this report, in Shanghai, it was carried the Military Work Forum on Literature and Art. The speeches carries out in this forum defended all the contrary to what the Five Person Small Group had declared in its report, and were likewise published in national circulation newspapers. (LEE, 1978:22-23)

In face of the disclose of those divergences, at May 16 1966, the Central Committee issued the first "Circular of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution", which decided for the "dismissal of Peng Zhen, dissolution of the Five Persons Small Group and the formal canceling of all its decisions" and the institution of a Central Group of the Cultural Revolution, led by Chen Boda and Jiang Qing. (DITTMER, 1998:65)

The Cultural Revolution was officially started with the May 16 Circular, which also declared, for the first time, the opposition to "the cadres in the Party leadership who had taken the capitalist line". This circular stated that art and culture integrated the ideological system and, thus, had a decisive role to the formation of a political economic system, and only through the collective engagement with the national political questions China could resolve its social contradictions. (CCPCC, 1967) The trigger for the national mobilization, however, occurred a few days later.

The professor of the Beijing University's Philosophy Department, Nie Yuanzi (1921-), on May 25, wrote a poster denouncing the cadres at the leadership of the university for having act as counterrevolutionaries when they declared public debates during the Cultural Revolution

should be restricted to the academic field, in small meetings and producing articles that could circulate only in formal classes. Nie Yuanzi affirmed that the CR was a popular movement and thus could not be limited to the academic field, therefore, debates should be carried openly, include other work categories, regarding culture from a political standpoint. The Party leadership in the university accused Nie's poster for being counterrevolutionary since it attacked cadres and defied Party leadership. Professor Nie, then, wrote directly to Mao Zedong and asked him to verify whether her poster had political legitimacy or not. Mao personally went to the university and approved her poster, moreover, he ordered its national publicization through the Xinhua News Agency, calling it "the first Chinese Marxist-Leninist poster".

*Looking carefully at the content of that dazibao, the key point, even more than the criticism of the "black line" of the Rector and of the Beida Party Secretary (...), it authorized their own capacity to make autonomous political statements and hence organized their own independent political existence. (...) In the language of the time, the accusation was of imposing restrictions that did not permit the masses to express their revolutionary determination independently.*  
(RUSSO, 2013)

Mao Zedong ratification of Nie's poster had a national impact, since the ongoing struggles were similar in many universities. Party branches attempted to somehow infix associations engaged in political study within the Party-State framework. For example, in June and July 1966, Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping sent members of the Communist Youth League – an organization directly linked to the Central Committee – to universities and schools in order to "coordinate" the debates and writings carried by students and professors. However, only a part of the associations accepted the supervision of those representatives, what aggravated the debate about political autonomy. The epithets "revolutionary" and "counterrevolutionary" were used by virtually all associations, sometimes indicating those who accepted the supervision of the Party, and sometimes regarding those opposed to it. (Cf. WALDER, 2009) Of course, Work Teams clearly failed in their original intent, which is, to keep social order.

The limits between State, Party and common people were in dispute. Some defended an public participation in national politics, and some argued that only the clear division between people and government could result in a ordered society, as formulated Liu Shaoqi: "There is difference between inside and outside. The national secrets should be protected, posters cannot take the streets, there cannot be great mobilizations nor great meetings, one cannot surround the house of the enemies". (Liu Shaoqi apud MAO, 2014:438)

Notwithstanding, at August 1st 1966, the Work Teams were withdrawn by order of the Central Committee. The failure of this operation costed Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping the dilapidation of their political legitimacy, culminating later in their demission from the Central Committee. From August 1<sup>st</sup> to 12, the Eleventh Plenary of the Central Committee worked on defining the general politics and methodology of the Cultural Revolution. During the plenary, at August 5th, Mao Zedong wrote and published a poster named “Bombard the Headquarters – My first *Dazibao*” (MAO, 1966), which regarded the events happened so far, since the publication of Nie Yuanzi poster. Mao’s denounced the Work Teams for attempting to control popular debates and restrict them, qualifying their action as left on the appearance and right in the essence. Finally, at August 8, the plenary issued the 16 Point Decision, which allowed the self-organization of any popular association in schools, universities, communes and production units, defining it as:

*organizational forms created by the masses in many schools and units are something new and of great historic importance. These Cultural Revolutionary groups, committees and congresses are excellent new forms of organization whereby the masses educate themselves under the leadership of the Communist Party. They are an excellent bridge to keep our Party in close contact with the masses. They are organs of power of the proletarian Cultural Revolution.*  
(CCPCC, 1966b)

The 16 Points Decision was divulgated throughout the country. A few days later, at August 18, there was the first manifestation at the Tiannanmen Square with more or less five hundred thousand students, teachers and professors. It was at that rally that those associations formulated the name Red Guard, and asked their legitimation from Mao Zedong.

Mao attended to the manifestation with the Prime Minister Zhou Enlai, the Defense Minister Lin Biao and the member of the Small Group of the Cultural Revolution Jiang Qing.<sup>40</sup> Mao did not make any speeches, only waved at the militants, greeting them with “Long live, comrades!”, to what they responded “Long live, President Mao!”. Mao’s only statement at this event was “Care for the problems of the State”. (RUSSO, 2005:541) The rally served to legitimize the political existence of the Red Guard. Yet, in the following months, these associations received many divergent directions from the Central Committee. There was no

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<sup>40</sup> Quarterly Chronicle and Documentation-1966 IN *The China Quarterly*, N. 28, Outubro-Dezembro de 1966, pp.146-194, p.172.

consensus, not even among the cadres supporting the CR, which would be the role of this newly-established associations.



## Chapter 2

### From the Red Guards to the Worker's University – Outlining the Line Struggle

*Times of extreme oppression are usually times when there is much talk about high and lofty matters. At such times it takes courage to write of low and ignoble matters such as food and shelter for workers; it takes courage when everyone else is ranting about the vital importance of sacrifice. When all sorts of honors are showered upon the peasants it takes courage to speak of machines and good stock feeds which would lighten their honorable labor. When every radio station is blaring that a man without knowledge or education is better than one who has studied, it takes courage to ask: better for whom?*

(...) Bertold Brecht, in “Five difficulties in writing the truth,” 1935

From the aftermath of the GLF to the Cultural Revolution, labor in factories was mainly regulated by the 1961 Regulation for the Work in State Industries, the so-called Seventy Articles (国营企业工作条例), which was formulated to reconstitute specialized administration of production, therefore reifying practices of scientific management. During these years, many articles were published detailing the organization of labor and bureaucracy within enterprises, clearly stating the need to increase output, modernize production and optimize the use of every type of resource.

For example, in 1963, China's Industry Publishing House edited a compilation in eight volumes which presented some of the policies implemented in production units since 1961 throughout the country. The volumes were classified by different aspects of management: (1) leadership and administration systems, (2) planning, (3) technology, (4) labor and salary, (5) material supply and warehouse, (6) complementary services, (7) economic measures and (8) methods of saving resources and increase output through labor incentives and emulation. One of the articles, in the volume regarding technology, was written by the Industry Department of Shanghai's Party Committee and presented some rectification policies implemented in the Shanghai's Machine Tools Plant since 1960.

The article emphasized the superiority of specialized leadership with a “high level of technical knowledge.” It also reported that “some opposition” against the ongoing rectification had occurred and to deal with it, the new factory leadership “carried out meetings for studying the documents of the Ninth Plenary Session of the CCP [of January 1961], talked of “using the method of comparing with the past,” “organized the hierarchy of leadership” and “*made* cadres and the masses recognize that the new products being developed in the factory were a sign of

the effective implementation of the CCP industry adjustment policies.” (China National Industry Department, 1963:130)

This article, as many others published in the compilation, clearly exemplifies what Jackie Sheehan noted about the Socialist Education Movement (1962-1965): a gradual increase of the “discrepancy between the radical leftist rhetoric of the State press and worker’s actual experience of factory life under the Seventy Articles.” (SHEENAN, 1998:96) For instance, in a topic called “make big mass mobilizations, carry work competitions,” it is narrated that the leadership of Shanghai’s Machine Tools Factory (SMTF) had “improved the organization of mass enthusiasm” through competitions that “mobilized every level of the factory” with the aim of producing new technology and to form teams that would be responsible to repair broken machines or instruments. (China National Industry Department, 1963:131) It means that one emblematic topic of the GLF political campaigns – i.e., “mass enthusiasm,” “mass mobilization” – was associated with a practice that was theoretically opposed to it, that is, the “production competitions..” During the GLF, political campaigns had focused on collectivization in all fields, including soil, planning, technical development and production relations. Then, expressions as “mass mobilization” or “mass enthusiasm” were used to define some aspects of the organization of labor opposed to material incentives or piecework system. However, when it was associated with “labor competitions,” the expression “mass mobilization” lost its remaining content of collectivization and egalitarianism proposed during the GLF.

The article also mentioned another key element of the initial GLF campaigns: the committees formed by cadres, technicians and workers. However, in 1961 the purpose of these committees was described as to “improve unification within the factory” in order to resolve more efficiently problems that may occur in the production line. This type of “triple committee” was promoted at the beginning of the GLF as a way to reorganize production according to principles as self-reliance, reduction of the inequality between workers and technicians and the Revolution of Technology. However, none of these arguments was mentioned in the articles written from 1961 to 1963. The “triple committee” had become a way to implement cohesion among different hierarchy levels within a production unit; in other words, to avoid upheavals and struggles.

Another aspect highlighted by the article is that some of the workers who had studied in technical schools had graduated as technicians in different areas, and then had integrated

planning committees with specialists and engineers. Actually, this factory was one of the largest in the country and one of the first to start producing machine tools in the RPC. It had held technical courses and training since 1953. By the January 1966, according to a report written by the Shanghai Party Committee, among the 636 technicians working in the SMTF, 43% were workers from the factory itself who had undertaken specialization courses in the production unit or in other Shanghai's technical schools – they were called “technicians selected from among the workers” or “trained from among the workers..”<sup>41</sup>

In this report written in 1966, there was also an evident contradiction between “radical leftist rhetoric” and the principles of scientific management. This contradiction may be perceived, for example, in the use of the expression “learning to battle in the battle” (从战争中学习战争), which was disseminated at the beginning of the GLF to describe the capacity of learning and developing technology from the empirical experience of work, thus opposing the preeminence of technical knowledge over practical experience. The report used the same expression referring to the periods a student would engage in practical work while attending to technical or engineering courses, and stated that this study method could effectively guarantee the “specialization in command” (专业为主), training technicians who would occupy vacant positions in planning committees of the SMTF and other units.

Actually, many slogans used at the GLF had their meanings distorted since the implementation of 1961 rectification policies. The recurring “self-reliance for a better production” (自力更生) may be an emblematic example: in 1958 and 1959, “self-reliance for a better production” had been mainly used to define the potential of development and creativity that could be liberated by popular mobilization campaigns, i.e., through the actual collaboration between workers and intellectuals in all levels of production and towards the suppression of the division of labour. From 1961 to 1966, though, the same slogan was used to summarize a kind of Stakhanovism, that is, campaigns in which “to mobilize” referred to production competitions, material incentives and policies that reinforced discipline regarding working hours and bureaucratic procedures.

These contradictions may be the onset of what Yi Ching Wu perceived as “a surprisingly robust heteroglossia” at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, when “contests between

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<sup>41</sup> Report written by the Industry Bureau of the Shanghai Party Committee in January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1966, regarding the experience of the Shanghai Machine Tool Factory in training technicians from among the workers. SMA, A36-1-385-1.

centripetal forces of political integration and centrifugal tendencies toward multiplication and transgression continued unabated.” (WU, 2014:14) Indeed, Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia may be useful to understand some discursive topics of the Cultural Revolution – different groups often used the same words and signs to express divergent ideas. Modular expressions such as “self-reliance,” “mass mobilization,” “carry the revolution to the end” and, even more problematic, “Party leadership” and “Socialism,” referred to different signifiers, and eventually to opposing political practices. After all, the slogan “use the red flag to oppose the red flag” was not a mere rhetorical scheme, it was a way to indicate the persistence of contradictory practices often called by the same vocabulary.

It does not seem, though, that divergent political groups used similar concepts to the aim of wittingly confuse the debate, since all those phrases were part of the same framework of vocabulary associated with Marxism-Leninism. The ambiguity of coeval key-phrases was more likely generated because of the political struggles in course regarding which would be the correct “path” of transition to Communism. As stated before, from 1958 to 1960 there was a broad campaign to criticize the political economic practices that integrate what Marx defined as Bourgeois Right<sup>42</sup>, and years later, by 1966, the transition still was not a settled matter. It was at least unconventional to declare that the division between manual and intellectual labour or the piecework system would represent eminent risks of “capitalist restoration” in a Socialist society, since most of the communist parties at the time and many social spheres in China itself were in practice aligned with the PCURSS general line. Actually, Chinese production planning and administration were mostly based on the elements that compose the so-called Bourgeois Right, which means that market oriented policies were considered fundamental to the development of economy. “Far from suppressing the ‘bourgeois right’, the socialist state had inevitably to introject them as a major criterion in its operative system.” (RUSSO, 2012:5)

According to Bakhtin, heteroglossia could only be unveiled if monologism were defied, i.e., if the two or more meanings associated with the same signifier (for example, the same word) were considered equally real to the interlocutors in a debate. In order for this to happen, interlocutors should be able not only to recognize an opposing declaration, but also to

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<sup>42</sup> As detailed in the first chapter, the study of Marx’s “Critique of the Gotha Program” was highly disseminated in China between 1957 and 1959. The main elements integrating the “bourgeois right/power” were: piecework labour, material incentives, production competitions, production management hierarchy, division between manual and intellectual labour and currency circulation.

understand their own speech as a product of a specific political context. Thus, if State, Party, or even Socialism were considered univocal organizations, it would not be possible to publicly recognize polyphony – in other words, if political economy was considered a tautologic derivation of natural laws, political struggle could not be acknowledged as processual practice, as it was actually proposed in 1966 with the reclaim of the line struggle.

When some leaders of the CCP affirmed the permanence of the line struggle within Socialism, the univocity of the Party-State was somewhat fractured and, thus, heteroglossia publicly emerged. In fact, line struggle not only referred to a dispute for power within the Party or to a class struggle in Chinese society. The struggle also addressed the opposition between capitalist and socialist “roads” (路线), which means, between divergent theories and practices of political economy and different understandings of the transition to Communism. Notwithstanding, the limits of such “roads” were not clearly defined and that is why divergent policies were often categorized under the same epithet of “socialist”. One could only distinguish the “line struggle” when examining specific facts or organizations, for instance, three issues that triggered the first debates of the Cultural Revolution: collectivization, socialization of production relations and the right to publicly defy Party members or policies.

### *2.1. Is it right to rebel? – labor and revolution*

From May to August 1966, the methods of political mobilization in the Cultural Revolution were in dispute. Although some popular groups had been formed in schools, universities, and production units, it was not assured that they were legitimate and, eventually, some Party committees limited or suppressed self-organized associations. On July 19<sup>th</sup>, for example, the CC replied to the Shanghai Party Committee about a report received a few days before:

*The report mentions the following. Since the beginning of the mobilizations of the CR, many problems had occurred in Shanghai's industry production: equipment maintenance impoverished, innovation productivity has decreased, technical cooperation was interrupted, the planning for basic construction was not completed, cadres abandoned production (...) In order to guarantee the service to the State, Shanghai proposed four policies of rectification: 1) We must “grasp revolution and promote production” [抓革命促生产], gather special groups, organize the first and the second lines, reinforce the*

*leadership of each Party level, take responsibility for the production and the work; 2) Prioritize the quality of production (...); 3) Strive to guarantee export quality; 4) Reinforce the work on technical innovation, research and design of new products. The cooperation with schools, researchers and other factories has already been interrupted. We must make all efforts to quickly rectify [production]. Regarding these four measures, the CC declares it is reasonable. (CCPCC, 1966c)*

This situation radically changed when on August 1<sup>st</sup>, the CCP recalled the Work Groups from the main universities of Beijing and a few days later, published the “Decision of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party Concerning the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution,” in which the fourth article declared that “people should educate themselves in the midst of mobilization, and it is not allowed to use any method to substitute or represent them..” (CCPCC, 1966b) This document, also called 16 Points Decision (十六条), to a certain extent, resumed an empirical and theoretical debate introduced nine years earlier, in the Rectification Campaign of 1957, when the CC had discussed if the contradictions within the Party should be dealt as internal or public matters; this was referred as the “difference between inside and outside the Party” (内外有别): should people be allowed to criticize the Party itself and its administrative members? And moreover: would they be allowed to politically organize themselves without the supervision and leadership of the Party?

On this matter, there was a clear opposition between Party members. Some cadres – as, for example, Liu Shaoqi – defended the maintenance of a “sharp distinction between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ (...) saying the former is coeval and ‘reflects’ the latter, but precluded any practical relationship between the two..” Other cadres, radicalizing the conception of supervision of the State by the masses, stated, as formulated Mao Zedong in July 1966, that “to say that ‘there is a difference between inside and outside’ is to be afraid of the revolution. It will not do to fix frames for the masses”. (DITTMER, 1973:722)

Moreover, in the text of the 16 Points Decision – a document known as a guideline for all political mobilizations during the CR – the matter of how to balance autonomy and obedience to the Party was not clear, for example, in this contradictory declaration: “the masses educate themselves under the leadership of the Communist Party” (群众在共产党领导下自己教育自己). It was not explicit how both these forces should be combined.

Big-character posters, public debates and self-organization in political committees were permitted by the 16 Points. In addition, it declared that some questions were deliberately unanswered by the CCP: “We should let people, through a big revolutionary mobilization, (...) identify what is right and what is wrong, which practices are correct or incorrect”(CCPCC, 1966b). Such propositions were theoretically opposed to the eminently positive role of the Modern State as a social legislator, which means that “the monopoly of the party-state as the sole legitimate site for politics (...) was seriously challenged” (RUSSO, 2013:11), first by the creation of the independent student organization and then by the organization of relatively autonomous workers’ political associations. In this document, at least at the level of speech, the CCP was abdicating a part of its power as a governing organization. The effects of these declarations were unknown in August 1966, and, in view of such uncertainty, during the next two years all levels of the CCP would publish many documents in order to regulate the political activities of students and workers, as the mobilizations unfolded.

The Exchange of Experiences (串连) was initiated in August 1966 by the Red Guard groups, and included going to villages in the countryside, other schools, universities and factories, in order to participate in productive work, mobilize locals and debate political matters. Despite causing the interruption of regular classes in universities and middle schools for more than one semester, this campaign was considered a way to “carry the real studying,” actually “learn to battle in the battle,” which could be understood as a way to deepen the education experiments carried during the Yenan Period and the Great Leap Forward. When the Red Guards arrived in industrial units and the Exchange of Experiences started to involve workers, the situation aggravated, especially after the CRSG had emitted a circular, on August 22<sup>nd</sup> (and another more incisive one at the beginning of October), forbidding security guards to suppress students mobilizations. (CCPCC, 1966d)

Students, then, were permitted to go to production units and organize meetings with the workers. However, the situation of the workers was more problematic. Since September 1966, the CC and local Party branches repeatedly emitted circulars stating that workers were not allowed to leave the factory to engage in Exchange of Experiences in another municipalities, that they could not vacate their work positions and should restrict their participation in debates and public meetings until after they completed their minimum eight hour daily shift. Some documents even specified that their political activities should be limited to no more than four

hours a day, so that workers would have also time to rest. (CCPCC, 1966d) In September, the Central Committee also published a directive to all local Party committees declaring that workers in industrial units and rural communes should not form autonomous groups, and that those who had already been formed should be “permitted for the moment, but only engage in the mobilizations of the CR, not get involved in struggles with other popular associations nor carry exchange of experiences with other units (...)”. (CCPCC, 1966e)

In Shanghai, it seems that until October, Party authorities had managed to keep the targets of popular criticism restricted to some intellectuals known for their opposition to communism and some former capitalists or landlords. However, the Beijing Red Guard groups that arrived in this large industrial city had already dealt with a fierce struggle regarding the question of whether mass political organizations should be submissive to the directives of the Party. The struggles with the Work Groups had forged Beijing Red Guard’s political view, and thus, in Shanghai they allied with local radical groups and collaborated to shift criticism targets to local Party leaders. At the beginning of November, in Shanghai, Red Guards and workers were debating the self-organization of a workers’ Red Guard or rebel group.

In November 1966 two events resulted in the reinforcement of radical political discourse: the so-called Anting and Liberation Daily incidents – both narrated and explained in detail in recent researches. (Cf. PERRY, 1997) Those two unprecedented events unveiled some aspects of coeval theoretical questions.

The Anting Incident was somehow marked by perplexity. When thousands of Shanghai workers tried to self-organize their first association to take part in CR mobilizations, the Municipal Committee did not approve. Then, they decided to march to Beijing to get the CRSG and Mao Zedong’s approval at the beginning of November, but even railway workers did not know whether they should allow them to take trains for free, as was conceded to Red Guards. Some of these workers managed to take trains to Beijing, others arrived only forty kilometers away from Shanghai, in Anting, and others tried to go by foot. Those who were stopped in Anting wrote to the CRSG asking for their approval to go to Beijing, carry the Exchange of Experiences and present to the CC their organization. Chen Boda, conversely, wrote a telegram requiring them to come back to work, carry out the “grasp revolution and promote production” line and strive to accomplish the national production planning. The workers refused the order by declaring the message was false. A few days later, Zhang Chunqiao personally arrived in



Anting, signed a document recognizing the Shanghai Workers' Revolutionary Rebels General Headquarters (上海工人革命造反总司令部, hereafter WGH) and exempting them from any sanctions for having left the job positions to go to Beijing (under the condition that they returned to their posts from that date). The refusal of Chen Boda's telegram as a false document and, later, Zhang Chunqiao's approval of the WGH, were examples of the political fragmentation in that period. Even within the few individuals of the CRSG there was not consensus of how to carry CR campaigns: the political mobilizations' methodology was to be forged with time, in light of each "new born thing" (新生事物) – the current term to designate unprecedented debates or political experiments. As Wang Li noted in a meeting with the members of CRSG in November of 1966: "Now that workers in enterprises have risen, there are people scared to death (...)". (CCPCC, 1966f)

A first task appointed to the WGH was to support a Shanghai Red Guard group in occupying Liberation Daily's office, at the end of November, in order to request that Shanghai's more influential newspaper be delivered together with a student handbill called "Red Guard Battle News". The support of the workers was decisive to get CRSG acknowledgment and, at the beginning of December, the SPC approved the distribution of the Red Guard's periodical and declared that the workers who participated in the mobilization were exempt of any reprimands for having left their units and joined the occupation. Workers from many factories participated in this mobilization, including the SMTF, however, there was still a considerable conflict between rebel and conservative workers in each industrial unit. A few days later, on December 6<sup>th</sup>, the SPC organized an official inauguration of the Scarlet Guards, with 200,000 people at the People's Plaza – a loyalist organization that outnumbered the Rebel Workers for a few weeks. (SHENG, 2010:269-270)

These events marked a period of polarization between loyalist and rebel workers, outlining some political divergences. It was not only about who was the target of criticism. Another fundamental debate was the actual role of workers, students, peasants and soldiers within a socialist society. Were their roles equal in capitalist and socialist societies? Was Socialism only a matter of material abundance and income distribution? Should students and workers directly participate in State matters? If so, how to organize it? Should workers manage their own labour? Additionally, at that time, China had less technology than it needed – not enough agriculture machines and fertilizers, not enough manufactured and consumer goods –

and the only production system known so far was molded by the organizational strategies that integrated the Bourgeois Right.

To the laborers who had stable work positions (“iron bowl,” as it was said, i.e., social welfare, higher salaries and levels of specialization), rebelling against the Party leadership was not simple. If they “used the method of comparing with the past,” for example in the case of the Shanghai Machine Tools Factory, they would remember that their industry in 1949 was ten times smaller, produced all kinds of tools for agriculture, repaired tractors, was nothing more than two sheds that manufactured iron and steel with 900 workers or so. In 1966, instead, this was a plant with 6484 workers producing high precision machine tools. (SMTF Party Committee, 1966) It is also important to note that machine tools production was strategic for China at the time, due precisely to the demand of intermediate manufactured products, then, in this kind of factory, the number of workers with “iron bowl” was higher than those contracted as temporary laborers.

“Breaking with old ideas” (决裂), a movie produced a few years later and released in 1975, would examine the problem of political engaging of workers. In a scene in its last 20 minutes there is a public meeting organized by a local Party leader to denounce a peasant who refused to accept a market oriented policy implemented in the countryside as part of the rectification program after the GLF. The argument used to denounce that peasant leader is that she had opposed a CC policy and hence was opposing the Party and, finally, Socialism itself. When the Party branch leader enounced this rather tautological argument, the peasants and students assembly stayed silent for a few seconds. The silence represented the perplexity in face of the contradiction between their agreement with the peasant leader and the official enunciation of the Party leadership. There is a moment of doubt before deciding their allegiance. Finally, the new director of the rural school claimed that her decision to oppose the CC policy did not mean a betrayal to the Party nor to Communism, instead, it meant she was loyal and engaged to it.

That brings us to a problematization in Schurmann’s book *Ideology and Organization in Communist China* (1970). In its chapter dedicated to ideology and organization of the CCP, Franz Schurmann proposed that, as opposed to the Soviet Communist Party, the CCP showed “reluctance to accept” the “administration by persons” as a definite mark of leadership in the socialist period. The idea of a governing administration carried “by persons” or “by things” was

summered in a Soviet manual of Marxist Philosophy published in 1958, and referred to Engels assessments on the question of State's role during Socialism. As Schurmann presented, the administration "by persons," according to that Soviet manual, referred to the fact that, during the transition period to Communism, the State would still represent an instrument of suppression of a certain class – the bourgeoisie, in this case – and therefore government would require the positive role of some representatives, who would personally enact the "will of the proletariat" through the bureaucratic organization. According to this Soviet manual (but also in Lenin's "State and Revolution" of 1917), the State would gradually "wither away" during Socialism, as society strives to overcome class struggle. The communist phase, then, would be marked by the "administration by things" or "by productive processes," which meant that State would not be necessary as an authoritative institution, because people's needs and abilities would actually govern society's productive forces, since it would not be interposed by exploitation and struggle. Notably to Marx and Lenin, though, during the socialist period, administration should be based on "the principle of Paris Commune," which means people could recall and dismiss at any time a representative who were not accomplishing the duty to govern according to proletarian interests. Indeed, the "principle of the Paris Commune" was extensively debated in China during the GLF and the CR as one aspect of the "supervision by the people over the state organs" – one element of the Democratic Centralism, as problematized by Mao in 1956.

That is why Red Guard's famous slogan "to rebel is justified" (造反有理) was so emblematic – this phrase did not stand for "any rebellion is right/justified," instead it referred to "there are reasons to rebel".

In the case of workers, "to rebel" meant to reaffirm the political prevalence of production relations over the means of production. By 1966, after years of decentralization, scientific management had become intrinsically related to local Party authority and, especially in larger industries, local Party committees were integrated with the administration of main aspects of production unities, as labour force employment, welfare and hierarchy. Scientific management had also been reinforced since 1960, under the aegis of economy rectification and, hence, better productivity and circulation of consumer goods.

Though when rebels affirmed the preeminence of productions relations (the political aspect of labor) over the means of production, the arguments used to justify self-organization and participation in the CR were mainly related to productivity. The slogan "grasp revolution

and promote production” was used by both rebel and conservative workers to justify different scopes of the mobilizations – each group would stress one side of the binomial, arguing in favor of rebellion or defense of local Party authority.

Even after CRSG recognized the WGH, worker’s roles and participation in the CR were not clear. On December 28 1966, in one of the many meetings held in Shanghai with representatives from the Central Committee, rebel workers and students, some of these main debates were clearly stated:

*Worker representative: (...) currently there is more than 60,000 rebel workers in the city and there are 400 workers from Shanghai in Beijing.*

*Zhang Chunqiao: In the period with the most workers from here in Beijing, there were a thousand more or less. We must decentralize Party power to the bases, this way will be better.*

*Worker representative: Regarding the situation in production, in my factory we achieved the goals for November. Other factories have the same situation. (...)*

*(...)*

*Worker representative: ... one more question: should we or should we not accept Work Groups?*

*Yao Wenyan: Were Work Groups disbanded or not?*

*Worker representative: Yes, kind of. There are still some to disband. About this, there are still ghosts (这里面有鬼).*

*Zhang Chunqiao: We are not clear about this subject. How did they proceed? Did they disperse all the Work Groups?*

*Worker representative: Yes, they did. But the workers asked to set it again after the critiques.*

*Zhang Chunqiao: Then, you do not need it [Work Groups] again, you should debate. But we can also ask them to come back.*

*(...)*

*Worker representative: Factory workers can self-organize their own revolutionary groups or not?*

*Zhang Chunqiao: Before there were directives, now it has no validity.*

*Worker representative: How about using the name “General headquarters,” is it good or not?*

*Zhang Chunqiao: We are a country built by military struggle, people like this kind of names, and names do not matter.*

*Yao Wenyuan: How about something like “association”?*

*Workers representative: No, it cannot be it. People understand the name “general headquarters,” if we change it people will not like it. (Rebel Workers Daily, 1966)*

As can be seen, even by end of December, when this meeting was held, the CRSG was not sure if it was legitimate for workers to self-organize in independent political groups. The reference to the Work Groups, which were officially dismissed in August of that year, and the sentence “about this, there are still ghosts,” indicate that there was still a debate on how the Party would deal with the matter of political participation of workers and students in the CR, if supervision should be exercised or not.

At this same meeting, the question was raised of how a group should organize itself politically or, in other words, the methodology for carrying out political debates and experiments. It is worth noticing that some fundamental issues were deliberately not answered by the CRSG and delegated to workers to decide.

*Workers representative: We think the 12 articles written by the CRSG regarding the mobilization of workers are not very good, the matter is not detailed enough, the problem of production is all based in labor time...*

*Zhang Chunqiao: We had asked Beijing workers to debate, it should be guaranteed a daily shift of eight hours and one weekly meeting regarding production. The rest is for workers to decide.*

*Worker representative: We still think we should regulate production according to the State’s planning, based on labor time and output quality, reducing a little the time dedicated to the big meetings regarding the Cultural Revolution. This way we could correctly grasp revolution and promote production. After all, we, the workers, are the most responsible for national production. Now, some factories leaders are not working enough time in the production line, but they still advise us all the time to “grasp the revolution and promote production.(...)”*

*Zhang Chunqiao: This is experimentation, we should not generalize for everyone. We can make experiments since it does not damage production. The 12 articles still have to go through major corrections, it not even close to a finished document. We wish to write it in a simpler manner. However, if we try to specify each context it becomes too complex. We first thought of writing 8, 9 or 10 simple articles (...) for example: “let’s all engage in revolution!,” “we should maintain quality!,” etc. But then we ended writing about many circumstances in detail.*

*Yao Wenyuan: This document is also an experiment.*

*Zhang Chunqiao: Let the workers of all country debate and manifest their point of view, let's rely on their own experience and mobilization.*

*Yao Wenyuan: Problems will not be solved by a document of a few articles.*

*(...) Zhang Chunqiao: You are not in agreement with the 12 articles, well a lot of people oppose it too! There are people who say: revolution is this, revolution is that... there is a lot of opinions! We have to listen to every perspective.*

*Yao Wenyuan: You have to think from the revolutionary perspective. (Idem)*

In this excerpt of the conversation, the CRSG representatives were clearly stating that workers themselves should take the initiative in discussing and deciding the methods of self-organization and political mobilization within the CR. This implies that the CRSG was somehow proposing a radicalization of the Mass Line, which then would include aspects of popular organization and governmental work.

Also in December 1966, in an enlarged meeting with the Political Bureau of the CCPCC, Kang Sheng talked about the central importance of worker mobilization to the Cultural Revolution and the difficulty in organizing it in a proper way without disrupting national production. He recalls an article “from a Polish worker” that he had just studied, and related its content with the 1958 campaigns to study the “Critique of the Gotha Program” and to criticize the Bourgeois Right:

*[the worker in the article] talked about how a socialist country becomes a capitalist country. (...) We studied in the past, regarding the changing of the Soviet leadership, from Stalin to Khrushchev – this is a bit clearer. Regarding the cultural sphere, we can understand it too. On agricultural production, there is the problem of land market...etc., we also understand it well. But in industry we don't understand clearly how the transformation happens [from a socialist to a capitalist system] (CCPCC, 1966g)*

Zhou Enlai, in this moment, interrupted Kang Sheng with a hypothesis of “how the transformation happens,” saying that “one exploiting class takes the place of another exploiting class.” He then gives an example, regarding the “half studying – half working schools” (半工半读学校), that were carried in many factories until 1966. Zhou says that these institutions were, in practice, only serving to exploit, because the amount payed to enrolled workers was very low, less than a regular worker's salary and, even so, working hours were the same as for a regular

position, 8 hours a day, to which Zhou exclaimed “there isn’t any studying! It is socialist on the appearance and capitalist in the substance.” Kang Sheng, continued:

*The Polish comrade says that the capitalist restoration in industry has many effects, because the factory is the base of economy. (...) We must dig up the roots of revisionism and capitalism, that’s the purpose of the Cultural Revolution; Lin Biao said: ‘Our economic base is new, but the superstructure is old. It won’t do [不行]. This is correct. What is new? I read in the ‘Critique of the Gotha Program’ and in ‘State and Revolution’ that material production changed from private to collective ownership system. But what about the old economic rules in factories, that did not change, what does it mean? Regarding circulation, the price system hasn’t change, salary according to production hasn’t changed, there is still a Bourgeois Right. President Mao said in 1958 that we ought to debate it, but we haven’t researched it enough. (...) In factories, the Bourgeois Right still remains, and this could produce Capitalism, (...) the superstructure has a bad influence on the base, and the base has a bad influence on the superstructure. Thus, [to carry forward] the Cultural Revolution in factories is more important than carry it out in schools. Factories are the base of economy, and the factory also has superstructure. (Idem)*

In this excerpt, Kang Sheng addressed a problem that would become a central topic of discussion: the centrality of workers’ political engagement and mobilization to the Cultural Revolution. The political-economic elements that compose the so-called Bourgeois Right and the “transformation of socialist enterprises into capitalist enterprises” would become two major topics of debate, among workers throughout the country especially starting in 1968,. Kang Sheng, then, highlights the current ambiguous use of the expression “grasp revolution, promote production”:

*In the Soviet economic model, politics are not in command. If we examine, in our factories, politics are not in command. (...) Grasp revolution, promote production – this is not a dualism, it comes from what President Mao said: if you grasp revolution well, then you can promote production. (Idem)*

## 2.2. From power seizure to construction within the superstructure

At the end of 1966 and the beginning of 1967, a last attempt of the SPC to deal with workers’ mobilizations eventually backfired and led to local Party brunch disruption – it was

called the “wind of economism” (经济主义风): a series of attempts to reconcile popular unrest by responding to workers most immediate requests, which were:

1. *Wage compensation and promotion of the wage level (...)*; 2. *Worker’s [participation on the] exchange of revolutionary experiences (串连) (...)*; 3. *Housing occupations. People with housing difficulties would forcefully occupy state or former capitalists’ houses*; 4. *Change of workers’ status. A large number of contract workers, sub-contract workers, temporary workers, and apprentice workers demanded to be treated as full-time workers.* 5. *Enhancement of welfare (...)*; 6. *Change of factories’ status (...)* [because] *wage and welfare in state-run enterprises under the ownership by the whole people was better than enterprises under collective ownership (...)* (SHENG, 2010:275)

Although most of these economic demands were raised after the formation of the WGH, “which inspired many similar groups demanding the right to organize” (WU, 2014:108), the leadership of the Workers General Headquarters carefully avoided placing material demands in its political agenda. (PERRY, 1997:117) Notwithstanding, workers participating in both rebel or loyalist organizations joined economic protests, (SHEEHAN, 1998:116) which were, of course, associated with critical debates of the political economy, such as welfare and wage inequality.

Furthermore, it was not clear yet what was the scope of the Cultural Revolution – financial matters were also in debate, especially among those who had been trapped within the Worker-Peasant System as temporary or piece workers. Since 1964, the number of temporary workers had been deliberately increased, which also meant wage and welfare inequality was aggravated. This situation was perceived as something radically opposed to socialist ideals and purposes, and that is why when worker protests spread at the end of 1966, SPC members were somewhat “compelled to make concessions, releasing huge sums of cash,” and eventually disrupting local financial balance. (WU, 2014:110)

The wind of economism, though, did not accomplish any of its aims (it neither solved wage inequality nor placated social unrest) and further aggravated conflicts. Even after the SPC spent 38 million yuan of Shanghai banks to wage and welfare compensations in the first days of January alone, worker protests were not suppressed. Economic mobilizations tended to be organized using strikes as a principle strategy, which eventually disrupted production planning in many factories. Against such political and economic tribulations, SPC member actions were uncertain and they constantly shifted their support between rebels and loyalists. This aggravated



conflicts between workers' organizations, leading to some confrontations at the beginning of January.

Since many of the mobilizations were organized as strikes and reclamations to participate in Exchange of Experiences in other cities, many workers left their assigned positions, disrupting production processes in their units. To deal with this situation, and also as an attempt to actualize the 16 Articles, some workers associations tried to take over the management of industrial units. One of the first plants taken by the rebel workers was Shanghai Glass Machinery Factory, which worker's declared administered by a workers committee organized "according to the principles of Paris Commune' general election" in December 30<sup>th</sup>. (SHENG, 2010:315) This committee was named the Committee of Grasping Revolution and Promoting Production, and it started a few experiments in management that had a major influence in other Shanghai plants. This committee declared that they refused material incentives, and that the best motivation for their labour was political. In other words, the realization of actual communist policies, such as the abolishment of hierarchical titles and the implementation of collective leadership, which they experimented with for a few months and reported on in Red Guard pamphlets and also in national newspapers.

On January 1<sup>st</sup>, People's Daily published an article signed by the worker Zhang Meihua (张梅华), a member of the Youth League of Shanghai's Party Committee and a worker in the SMTF. The article described in general terms the mobilization within his unit and enumerated the three main campaigns carried by Shanghai rebel workers so far: self-organization or "daring to rebel," the struggle against economism and "seize the power from those in power taking the capitalist road" campaign. (ZHANG, 1967)

As we can see, in January 1967 there was an important debate on the political orientation of the Cultural Revolution, but it also meant a critical examination of Socialist political campaigns in general. The vacillating attitude of the SPC leadership, for example, denoted both a rupture in the Chinese Party-State government apparatus – due to internal power clashes – and a crisis of the theoretical definition of transition to Communism. This is because, from the standpoint of a pacific transition, i.e., a model in which economic and technological development would inexorably lead from a socialist society to a Communist stage, Mao's idea of "probable defeat" could only be a nonsense and workers should actually be led by their representative and vanguard, the Communist Party. Instead, a revolutionary transition would

demand constant and deliberated crises in all fields, from academia to financial management, or even the administration of a factory shed.

On the one hand, economic demands and policies indicated that injustices and inequalities were perceived, and workers were questioning the alleged “natural character” of these relations and their inevitability, claiming to change what was considered a manifestation of injustice. The “wind of economism” presumed that socialist society, although generally correct, had made mistakes that could be corrected if specific political or economic policies were adjusted. On the other hand, rebels who opposed material incentives and advocated political transformation as the core of their mobilizations, were not only aiming to “adjust” or “correct” a political economic system, but to overcome it. It means that by opposing economic policies, rebels were not only condemning injustices or inequalities within Socialism, but also “negating themselves as a class, taking the struggle of all society for its emancipation.”. In other words, they were conceiving themselves not only as groups with particular interests within an established social order, “but also undertaking the historical task of overcoming such social order”. (IASI, 2007:32)

Two important documents published in local and national newspapers on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of January reoriented these conflicts: the “message to all people” and the “urgent notice.” Both these documents were collectively written by some members of the WGH leadership, Shanghainese writers and Red Guard leaders. The supervision and support by members of the CRSG was crucial, because they were responsible to bring these documents – originally produced in Shanghai – to be published in national newspapers, with Mao Zedong’s personal approval. These documents were written as political denouncements, using the same discursive structure as a *dazibao*: first, set the general context of the denouncement; second, enumerate evidence, proofs or references on which the denouncement is based; third, to urge people to follow in a correct political direction, as opposed to the wrong path that was described.

Known as the “message to all people,” the article “Grasp revolution, promote production, and utterly smash the new counter-attack launched by the bourgeois reactionary line,” declared that members of the leadership in the SPC had used the binomial “grasp revolution, promote production” emphasizing only its second exhortation, in order to prevent workers from taking part in political mobilizations and activities with the excuse to “keep labour discipline and production standards.” A second accusation was that the SPC had carried economic policies

and had endorsed mobilizations for “lodging complains” in order to deviate workers from actual political aims.

The journal Liberation Daily, which had its headquarters in Shanghai, at first refused to publish the “message.” This resulted in the occupation of its office by rebels and students, who successfully printed the article on January 6th. Mao Zedong, then, personally ratified it, publishing it in the People’s Daily three days later.

On the 9<sup>th</sup>, another key document was published in Shanghai: the “Urgent Notice.” This article contradicted itself in its discourse and writing process. Signed by 32 different groups and endorsed by the mayor of Shanghai, Chen Pixian – one of those appointed responsible for the “wind of economism” – it railed against spending State funds on economic policies, advised workers to participate in political mobilizations after their daily 8 hours shift was finished, disapproved of strikes as a political mobilization strategy, praised the seizure of public buildings “from within” but not “by force” (an ambiguous directive, to say the least) and, finally, praised the association of workers and students within production units. (Wenhui Daily, 1967) Actually, at the beginning of 1967,

*within the broader community of Shanghai’s rebels, neither opposition to economism nor restoration of production emerged as the dominant political interpretation or mobilizational program, and different political tendencies and viewpoints battled with one another in the fierce factional conflicts characteristic of the Cultural Revolution. This politically open and saturated situation, however, would be brought to a close very soon.*  
(WU, 2014:120)

After all, these two documents outlined some empirical aspects of the “line struggle” in Shanghai, settling some main topics of the debate: material incentives, the role of workers in Socialism, and the balance between production and political mobilization. These two articles summed up events that had occurred in December of 1966 and analyzed them according to the political frame of the line struggle – and, as Zhou Enlai said a few months later, empirical examples were crucial to distinguish the two lines:

*In October 1966, another Central Committee meeting was convened. The question then was clear as far as theoretical matters were concerned. The previous Plenary meeting only mentioned a struggle between two lines. But at this meeting, the two lines were defined as the revolutionary and proletarian line on the one hand and the capitalist and reactionary*

*line on the other. (...) The focus of the work of mobilization is propagandizing the difference between the two lines (...) In order to propagandize we have to set examples. (ZHOU, 1967)*

On January 12, the “urgent notice” was published in the People’s Daily along with a message signed by the CCP praising it, condemning economism, and saying that Shanghai’s “revolutionary actions have set a brilliant example for the working class and the revolutionary masses throughout the country.” (apud WU, 2014:122) The editorial in People’s Daily, on the same day, used the expression “power seizure” and declared it was necessary “to dismiss from their leading posts all those in authority who are taking the capitalist road and so make possible the recapture of leadership for the proletarian revolutionaries.” (People’s Daily, 1967) There were enormous implications in the use of the expression “seizure of power” to define worker mobilizations in Shanghai.

*The statement that there had been a “seizure of power” in Shanghai, referring that is to the conceptual device based on “class struggle,” ended up by obscuring the essence of the situation. (...) [actually] the “working class” had been subjectively divided into those who embodied loyalty to the figure of the worker as a part of the governmental subjectivity and those who sought a completely new way of existing politically; the “representatives of the reactionary classes” were, as is known, the veterans of the Revolution, who (..) fully shared the “classist” conceptual framework (...) (RUSSO, 2013)*

In other words, in declaring the Cultural Revolution and the worker mobilizations in Shanghai represented a “seizure of power,” Mao Zedong and the CRSG recalled a revolutionary experience in which “one class overthrows another,” and specifically, in which the proletariat overthrows the bourgeoisie.

The problem was that, once private property was suppressed, the category of class was dislocated and broadened. Within Socialism, any social analysis would necessarily consider the category of class as not merely defined by property relations, but defined by a power structure that controls the “means of production” or the “production assets.” And it is important to emphasize that class relations, in strict Marxist terms, only exist when the “power over assets [are assigned] *unequally*, so that one group of agents can enforce claims on the productive activities of another.” (CHIBBER, 2008:355)

In *Reading Notes on the Soviet Text on Political Economy*, written in 1961 and 1962 (but published in 1967 and 1969), Mao Zedong talked about the category of class in a revolutionary transition (as opposed to a pacific transition):

*The transition to communism certainly is not a matter of one class overthrowing another. But that does not mean there will be no social revolution, because the superseding of one kind of production relations by another is a qualitative leap, i.e., a revolution. The two transformations - of individual economy to collective, and collective economy to public - in China are both revolutions in the production relations. (...) Consider the development of our people's communes. When we changed from basic ownership by the team to basic ownership by the commune, was a section of the people likely to raise objections or not? This is a question well worth our study.<sup>43</sup>*

Indeed, to define the struggle in course was not a simple task. Even coeval declarations from USSR, North Korea and other socialist countries declared China's political situation as "mad" and "chaotic." The PCURSS even set a special directive to forbid any public news regarding China's situation at the time.<sup>44</sup>

It is evident that the category of class was at the core of that conflict. Before the CR, Mao Zedong also tried to specify what he meant by "social revolution," since he advised that it was "*not a matter of one class overthrowing another*":

*Although classes may be eliminated in a socialist society, in the course of its development there are bound to be certain problems with "vested interest groups" which have grown content with existing institutions and unwilling to change them. (...) Creation never comes without destruction. If destruction is necessary it is bound to arouse some opposition. The human animal is queer indeed. No sooner do people gain some superiority than they assume airs . . . it would be dangerous to ignore this.<sup>45</sup>*

In this case, Mao used the expression "vested interest groups" to try and define how class struggle could appear within Socialism. This debate might recall the famous passage of Marx in the preface to the first German edition of *Capital*:

*To prevent possible misunderstandings, a word. I paint the capitalist and the landlord in no sense couleur de rose. But here individuals are dealt with only in so far as they are the personifications of economic categories, embodiments of particular class-relations and class-interests. My standpoint, from which the evolution of the economic formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history, can less than any other make the individual*

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<sup>43</sup> MAO, Zedong. "Reading Notes on the Soviet Text on Political Economy" IN *Monthly Review*, *idem* p.62.

<sup>44</sup> "Excerpts from a 30 December 1966 Memo of the Soviet Embassy to the DPRK (A. Borunkov) about Embassy Measures against Chinese Anti-Soviet Propaganda in the DPRK," December 30, 1966, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AVPRF, f. 0102, op. 22, p. 109, d. 22, pp. 50-56. Obtained by Sergey Radchenko and translated by Gary Goldberg. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116692>

<sup>45</sup> *Idem*.

*responsible for relations whose creature he socially remains, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them. (MARX, 1867)*

If individuals, according to this definition, could be considered as “embodiments of particular class-relations and class-interests,” it would be only by transforming these relations that class structure and exploitation would be suppressed. Yet, this categorical apparatus was not easy to empirically realize. Starting by its very definition, “class” is a word that refers to “a group of individuals,” for example, as it was defined in the 16 Articles: “the objective is to struggle against and overthrow those persons in authority who are taking the capitalist road.” (CCPCC, 1966b)

It means the crises that emerged at the beginning of 1967 actually had theoretical fundamentals, and sometimes were manifested as clashes for power. Almost every participant in the mobilizations considered themselves to be revolutionaries and true socialists, just as many so-called socialist countries then considered themselves to be truly vanguards of the transition to Communism. “Lately everybody uses the word ‘red,’ the situation is very confused. Some people use the Cultural Revolution to start mobilizations, and some people use the notion of production to attack” - commented Zhang Chunqiao in a meeting with students and workers representatives. (Rebel Workers Daily, 1966)

The question of “power seizure” was crucial at the beginning of 1967. In late January, editorials on the People’s Daily and other newspapers even referred to power seizure as the core of the Cultural Revolution:

*Right from the beginning, the great proletarian cultural revolution has been a struggle for the seizure of power (...) Of all the important things, the possession of power is the most important! This being the case, the revolutionary masses, with a deep hatred for the class enemy, clench their teeth and, with steel-like determination, make up their mind to unite, form a great alliance, and seize power! Seize power!! Seize power!!! (People’s Daily, 1967b)*

A series of meetings were organized in Shanghai with CCP and local Party members, workers, students and soldier’s representatives. As is well known, there was even an attempt of establishing a new form of government inspired by the Paris Commune: the so-called Shanghai Commune, which was aborted two weeks after its proclamation on February 5th. The Shanghai Commune was an attempt to actualize the seizure of power. However, it lacked actual political content, except that of declaring the validity of popular organization outside of the Party.

*The problem was, however, that apart from the references to the events in Paris in 1871, the proclamation of the Commune of Shanghai in reality reflected none of the events there at that time. (...) In a highly doctrinaire tone, the “Manifesto” fully sums up the whole historical vision of the class struggle but says very little about what exactly new had happened in Shanghai. (RUSSO, 2013)*

After a few days of silence from the Central Committee regarding the proclamation of the Shanghai Commune, Mao Zedong declared in a meeting with Zhang Chunqiao and Yao Wenyuan in February 12, that “commune was only a name,” that “names come and go,” and it did not have any kind of power regarding actual political content or revolution.<sup>46</sup> The register of the meeting was published and circulated in every province of China at the period, and debates were organized in many cities, particularly in Shanghai. At the end of February, Zhou Enlai made a speech analyzing the problem of the “seizure of power” after debating with representatives of 23 groups of workers.

*The question of the seizure of power is the most urgent at this stage. Since the revolution in political thinking has progressed, there is the seizure of power. (...) The problem of power seizure is like this: if you seize power from a small group in the Party leadership who are taking the capitalist road or from those who are diehard capitalists or revisionists, you are acting according to the thought of President Mao, but then again it has to be against those who do not want to change, a few in each Party branch, and not against everyone in leadership.(ZHOU, 1967)*

In this speech, Zhou Enlai is clearly reviewing the brief experience of the Shanghai Commune, which was evaluated by the CCP as an “extreme leftist” initiative, because it was based on an ideology “to overthrow all” (打倒一切) or “to negate all” (否定一切). The proclamation of the commune was actually a failed attempt to implement a new government order, but it did aggravate the debate about how to balance local autonomy (popular democracy) and Party leadership (central government). The proclamation of the Shanghai Commune incited a national campaign for the implementation of the Revolutionary Committees, a three-fold local government structure composed of rebels, rehabilitated party cadres and PLE members, selected by a “system of general elections, like that of the Paris Commune,” as defined by the 16 Articles of August 1966.<sup>47</sup> Zhou Enlai, described as follows the main objectives of the CRSG at the time:

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<sup>46</sup> “Meeting” 1967-2-12

<sup>47</sup> Decision.... item 9.

*Since the beginning of this year, the struggle's objective is seizing power by combining the forces of the revolutionary people, the revolutionary cadres, and representatives of the armed forces. They denounce any relationship with capitalist leaders, form Revolutionary Committee's provisional governments in government offices and factories.<sup>48</sup>*

Shanghai was considered as a national reference of this process. Many reasons corroborated this: the fact that in Shanghai factionalist struggles were fewer than in other major cities, the major influence the CRSG had in some of its scholarly and bureaucratic organizations, the invoked tradition of multigenerational workers movements, and the distinctive role of the WGH – which was successful in building partnerships with different social instances, therefore accomplishing a certain degree of cohesion among the groups that had integrated it. In a memorandum from June 28, 1967, Zhou Enlai stated:

*Yesterday I was in Shanghai (...) they are doing quite well, reorganizing well, the factories are well organized, the Party branches and schools are doing very well too. In one year, about 70% of the factories with two or three thousand workers (I am not considering the small ones nor the communes) had well established the Revolutionary Committees, the proletarian leadership is stronger. Factories in Shanghai are old, there were many generations of workers. The good thing about Shanghai factories is that after seizing power, workers themselves organize everything. (...) On the day I visited a factory, they were criticizing the Seventy Articles. (Zhou Enlai apud ZHOU and GU, w/d:1652)*

Two days before this declaration, Zhou Enlai was in a meeting in the recently settled Shanghai Revolutionary Committee, and also affirmed that Shanghai's situation was "very good" compared to what was happening in many other big cities. He then stressed the role of workers in giving direction to the political mobilizations and participation in the Cultural Revolution:

*There are many industrial workers in Shanghai. In this campaign, there were many inventions [creations, 创造] in Shanghai, for example: the big alliance through the big critique [通过大批判推动大联合], the three in one combination. In Beijing there are still poison weeds among the students (...). The criticizing campaigns in Shanghai are great, there are people criticizing the Seventy Articles, in Beijing it has not been criticized, it was Bo Yibo who invited you to criticize it, he is very assertive – that is why is best to rely on one's self. The Seventy Articles are the only material there to overthrow Deng Xiaoping, he*

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<sup>48</sup> "Discussion between Zhou Enlai, Chen Yi, Pham Van Dong and Vo Nguyen Giap," April 12, 1967, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, "77 Conversations", p.4. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112156>



*usually does not work, instead plays Mahjong, does not speak very much, but the Seventy Articles were written by him. (apud ZHOU and GU, w/d:1653)*

In this excerpt, it is clear that one of the main concerns of Mao, Zhou and the CRSG was the development of a political direction and giving content to the uprisings, so that it would not be restricted – and eventually defeated – by factionalism, which was ultimately a dispute for power without an actual political agenda. This implied that after the “destruction” or revolution of some old structures, the question of construction was again crucial, that is, what Zhou Enlai called “inventions” or “creations” (创造) and that Mao Zedong a few months later would call “new born things” (新生事物).

And because the Cultural Revolution was supposed to be a mobilization carried “from the bottom up,” these “inventions” should come from the revolutionary committees and groups of workers themselves. In the same meeting where Zhou Enlai congratulated the situation in Shanghai, Xu Jingxian asked: “Minister, how do we intensify the criticizing campaign?” To which Zhou Enlai replied: “You should invent it!” (你们创造嘛!). (apud ZHOU and GU, w/d:1649)

### 2.3. *Workers in the Cultural Revolution and the construction within the superstructure*

Workers increased in their importance in the first three years of the Cultural Revolution because after the establishment of the first Red Guard organizations, factionalism had spread through many cities of China, and the worst struggles involved student factions. Zhou Enlai, in a memorandum from June 28 1967, observed the roles of workers and students in the Cultural Revolution, describing a scene at the airport as a metaphor for his assessment:

*We left the plane and there were many groups to welcome us, mostly workers and cadres. Then the Red Guards arrived. When we start walking, workers and cadres did not move, but the Red Guards, not caring that there were thousands of people, started to crowd us, surrounded us until guests could not move. After a few minutes of being crowded, I could see that the cadres and workers have not moved, and the work teams also had not moved. Afternoon came and the students had not left, they ate at the airport and then cleaned everything. It was nine in the evening and students stayed there. Schools should be better organized (...). Looking from this viewpoint, if the workers take the lead, they can influence the students. Students are the vanguard of the revolution, they started it, but if they do not ally with the workers, it won't do. (Idem)*

Describing and analyzing the scene at the airport on June 28<sup>th</sup>, Zhou Enlai alluded to an important topic of debate in 1967. In practice, the Cultural Revolution had initiated as a broad mobilization with the Red Guard – what Mao once called “the Red Guard broom.”<sup>49</sup> This had brought down some national and local leaders, disseminated popular press, and settled collective debates. Red Guard groups did it because of their prominent mobilizations, their “no regard for rules,”<sup>50</sup> and the critiques of any policies that tried to suppress or control self-organization. In 1966, “pressure was being exerted on the students, the Red Guards had just been born and the struggle was in its initial stage.” By the second semester of 1967, however, “the situation had changed greatly; the working class had risen to its feet; the majority of the students (...) [were] revolutionaries.”<sup>51</sup> The directive to “carry word struggle and do not carry armed struggle” was frequently broadcast by the CCPCC and carefully debated in meetings in schools, universities and production units. Yet it was not obeyed by all Red Guard groups. Factionalism had spread throughout the major cities and mainly involved student mobilizations. That is why Zhou Enlai affirmed the importance of shifting the political leadership of the Cultural Revolution from students to workers, and to create strategies to bring both groups together.

Meanwhile, the “big critique” (大批判) campaign, initiated with the Cultural Revolution as an unfolding of Mao’s calling to “care about the problems of the State”, was disseminated along with the Four Great Weapons (四大武器, the Great Voice, Great Liberation, Great Critique and Great Debate) as methods of political mobilization. These Four Great Weapons were considered the “weapons” (or methods) of the Word Struggle or Cultural Struggle (文斗) as opposed to an armed struggle or “force struggle” (武斗). The Big Critique and the Four Great Weapons were considered a way to actualize the propositions of Mao’s article “On the correct handling of contradictions among the people” from 1957, because the Cultural Struggle defined a set of practices used to solve non-antagonistic contradictions (between right and wrong).

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<sup>49</sup> MAO Zedong, “Stenographic Note held during the Conversation between Chairman Mao Zedong and Vangjel Moisiu and Myfit Mushi in Shanghai,” August 16, 1967, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AQSH, F. 14/AP, M-PKK, V. 1967, Dos. 47, Fl. 1-8. Obtained and translated by Elidor Mëhilli. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117304>

<sup>50</sup> Mao Zedong in “Stenographic Note held during the Conversation between Chairman Mao Zedong and Vangjel Moisiu and Myfit Mushi in Shanghai”, August 16, 1967, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AQSH, F. 14/AP, M-PKK, V. 1967, Dos. 47, Fl. 1-8. Obtained and translated by Elidor Mëhilli, p.4 e 6. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117304>

<sup>51</sup> Mao Zedong in “Memorandum of Conversation between Albanian Council of Ministers Chairman Mehmet Shehu and Mao Zedong,” September 30, 1967, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Central State Archive, Tirana, AQPPSH-MPKK-V. 1967, L. 19, D. 20. Obtained by Ana Lalaj and translated by Enkel Daljani. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117693>

The permanence of contradictions in Socialism was a topic of debate since 1956, as seen in the first chapter. Nonetheless, the continuity of class struggle within the socialist State was a fiercely disputed idea, because it entailed that the transition to Communism would necessarily be revolutionary instead of linear and progressive. Mao tried to explain it theoretically using the concepts of antagonistic and non-antagonistic contradictions, arguing that each requires different methodological approaches to be solved.

*Since they are different in nature, the contradictions between ourselves and the enemy, and the contradictions among the people must be resolved by different methods. To put it briefly, the former entail drawing a clear distinction between ourselves and the enemy, and the latter entail drawing a clear distinction between right and wrong. (MAO, 1957)*

The “distinction between right and wrong,” then, were to be accomplished with the Four Great Weapons of the Cultural Struggle, as settled at the very beginning of the Cultural Revolution, with Mao’s approval of Nie Yuanzi *dazibao* and the publication of the 16 Articles in August 1966. The *dazibao* campaign initiated in June 1966 eventually proved to be a relatively effective method to seize

*state cultural apparatuses (...) which encompass institutions of culture, press and propaganda, schools and universities, and so on. In fact, more than any individual powerholder, what was disavowed was the very ideological authority of those apparatuses. (RUSSO, 1998:191)*

The dissemination of the *dazibao* may be understood as what Alain Badiou called “an event in the philosophical sense of the term: something was happening but it’s consequences were incalculable.” (BADIOU, 2012:59) According to this theoretical frame, some aspects of the Cultural Revolution, notably those outside the Party, were sequences of actual political events because they could “occur only to the extent that is subtracted from the power of the State,” (Idem, 126) i.e., subtracted from State apparatuses and agenda, since the State could only set limits or definite purpose for political mobilizations. The fact that the *dazibao* campaign was restarted in 1966 by a professor’s poster (approved by a CC leader, but not written by him), marked the introduction of a series of political events that to some extent, *subtracted* from the State form, even though they were imbricated with struggles within the Party-State apparatus.

Yet as long as factionalism prevailed, popular mobilization would still be trapped within bureaucracy. Factionalist struggles for power concerned mainly

*the dismissal of certain local and central party-state functionaries. In virtually every [production unit] two factions were fighting over the dismissal of a certain group of leaders, which was supported by one faction against the opposition of another - and vice versa. Antagonistic alliances were formed, not to claim an independent capacity of political judgment, but primarily to become the steel “nucleus” (...) of a regenerated party-state, (...) and eventually leading to the annihilation of the other faction. (RUSSO, 1998:194)*

This means that after the debates on the legitimacy of self-organization, there was an increasing depoliticization of the Red Guard movement, which finally was almost completely restricted to factionalist struggles. In 1967 and 1968, then, the CRSG and other CC members were trying to define a new political direction for the Cultural Revolution, which should necessarily engage the workers.

The experience of the workers in Shanghai was decisive in this shift of political direction. As stated by many CC members in 1967, Shanghai worker’s mobilization had managed to keep factionalism to a minimum and had actually developed important political experiments on criticizing in detail national regulations regarding industry and management. This was due to the association between workers representatives, cadres, professors and students aligned with the CR campaign. That is why until the end of 1967, Mao Zedong, Zhang Chunqiao and Zhou Enlai speech’s frequently regarded Shanghai as an example of where the CR had produced good results so far.

In a meeting with the WGH leadership on November 22, 1967, Zhang Chunqiao discussed some conflicts that happened during the ongoing organization of the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee. In face of the declared problems workers had in cooperating with rehabilitated cadres, Zhang Chunqiao argued:

*When combating we cannot always fight, it is also necessary to unite a little. (...) The Revolution in Education cannot be done by a minority, it must be carried by the majority. Make a “university of Mao Zedong’s Thought” so that people have the revolutionary spirit of dare to think, dare to speak, dare to rebel. Through studying and debating it will be surely possible to criticize old things, and then new things are certainly going to emerge. (ZHOU, 1967)*

“Criticize old things, and then new things are certainly going to emerge” – a declaration substantially different from that of the onset of the Red Guard movement: “Destroy the old world, construct a new world.” The “destruction,” or the “negative character” of the

revolutionary process, then, was located in the cultural sphere, or superstructure (in Marxist terms). Still, it did not mean a return to the same debates from 1964 and 1965, when the main question was if political struggles should or should not be limited to academic discussions. Instead, it meant the question of “power seizure,” in that context, included actions to change production relations, labour management and national education, in both theoretical and practical instances.

In the Shanghai Machine Tools Factory, two examples of collective critique are examples of how the “word struggle” or “cultural struggle” was carried. On July 30, 1967, a SMTF group published in the local newspaper, *Big Meeting Column* (大会专刊), the article “‘Profit on command’ takes the enterprise in which direction?” (利润挂帅把企业引向何方?), in which they analyze some rectification policies implemented after the GLF and its impact on work relations in the factory. This article declared that the implementation of what they called “the policy of profit in command,” from 1961, had disrupted the collaboration between public enterprises or, in their words, the “big cooperation” (大协作).

*The big cooperation means “less quantity, more variety” in order to supply the sister factories of the country that need machines and replacement items. This kind of production used to occupy 15% of our production capacity. (...) But in 1961, the “Chinese Khrushchev Liu Shaoqi and his running dogs” proclaimed the mistaken slogan “profit should be the cow’s nose” [take the lead], (...) and, basing their arguments on the Seventy Articles for the industry, the new capitalist leadership used the excuse that we should be “specialists” and greatly disrupted the big cooperation between factories. They indiscriminately raised the prices of machines and supplies (...) so that profits would be raised by two times or more. No wonder sister factories referred to these products as “tiger meat.” Some needed to buy only one piece, but they were forced to take a whole pack. Some came to buy only one screw for a few yuan, and we had to sell them a whole pack of parts for a hundred forty yuan, which compelled many sister factories to overstock. (...)*

*Partnerships that did not generate much profit were discontinued. (...) One example was when Chengdu Cutting Tools Factory bought from us a camshaft, then it lost one of its parts and they needed us to produce a replacement. But the capitalists in command in the factory thought it was not our responsibility, and that it would not give us any profit, so we should not produce it. Thus, they caused the sister factory to stop the production with that machine for more than three years, what had a major influence in production. (...) The politics of*

*“profit in the command” damaged the cooperation with the sister factories, and the responsibility is no other than the Chinese Khrushchev representatives in the SPC leadership, Chen Pixian and Cao Duqiu. (Dahui Zhuangke, 1967)*

This article refers to the reinforcement of profit-oriented competitions since 1961, what was described in the 70 articles for the industry as “socialist labour competitions,” (CCPCC, 1961) and was applied for both intra- and inter-enterprise management dynamics. The text raised the problem of competition in a Socialist society, which was a matter of debate since at least since 1917, when Lenin wrote the article “How to organize competition?,” differentiating between Capitalist and Socialist competition. Socialist competition, according to Lenin, “should not be subjugated to a given norm, otherwise competition would not be competition and one would witness its formal re-capitalization (it must be practical but not economic competition).” This means that socialist competition could only be organized “from among workers and peasants,” who would act as “practical organizers of this competition.” (RUDA and HAMZA, 2017) Hence, profit oriented competition would rupture with the “big collaboration” between comrades and factories, ultimately ratifying the mandate of capital, personified by the managerial team.

The configuration of the enterprise leadership was also a target of criticism. “What concerned workers was not only who had authority in the workplace, but also how this authority was exercised.” (SHEENAN, 1998:123) Also in 1967, an article signed by the “Shanghai Machine Tools Plant” titled “After all, what was the use?”, criticized the Seventy Articles’ policies for reestablishing individual management and the responsibility system, through the aegis of the “specialization in command”:

*Chen Pixian and Cao Duqiu, at the time of the “high level Party cadres,” not only intrude in the fields of culture, art and education, but also messed with enterprise administration. About ten years ago, those people in the leadership of SPC disseminated the misguided policy that “a high level intellectual as Party cadre has ten times more use than a worker,” then they took a few followers of the “technological authority,” capitalist intellectuals, feudalists, and put them inside the Party branch. One classic example of this situation was the man appointed to be our project director, Li Gentong (李良同). Let’s see, after all, what was his use. Li Gentong before the Liberation was a rich land owner and a local administrator of the Nationalist Party. After Liberation, he mixed himself in a worker’s group. In 1959, his past was not clearly investigated and his documents were occulted (...)*

*Soon after joining the Party, Li received many bureaucratic titles, was appointed project director of our factory, a representative of our country's "specialists," etc., etc. This multiplied him by ten and dragged him to the sky, placing all proletarian power in his hands. As soon as he had power, he opposed and meddled with popular press and the propaganda of the Thought of Mao Zedong. He wrote an article declaring that the President Mao's directives are not related with planning and managing in enterprises. (Rebel Workers Daily, 1967)*

This kind of critique referred to the Seventy Articles and was an attempt to untangle official propaganda discourse and actual political economic practice. The use of sarcasm and the twist of current expressions was a way to highlight the contradictions in official discourse, and show how it could actually be used to indicate divergent practices. In this case, the aversion to "bureaucratic titles" and to the "technological authority" exercised by "specialists" was a way to indicate that during the rectification period after the GLF, power had shifted from the hands of workers to the hands of bureaucrats, even though private property was still declared abolished. In this manner, some articles inferred that labour exploitation was not defined merely by private property, but actually by political power, what was a few years later qualified by some workers as "political capital."

The article declared that in order to establish individual authority over production processes, this manager had started in the ideological sphere, declaring that President Mao's directives had nothing to do with day-to-day production and economics. This declaration evoked an important debate at the time: the decisive role of the superstructure in Socialism and the relation between politics and economy. To declare that "Mao's directives are not related with planning and managing in enterprises" would be a way to oppose "politics in command," i.e., a way to declare that there is a split between politics and the economy, and therefore that economy could not be led by politics. The text then continues, intending to prove that "economy in command" would actually result in damaging production and wasting resources.

*He then placed himself a superior manager, disrupting the work of the groups inside the factory, because he started to decide everything. He even went to Beijing to decide alone many problems of our factory, made long distance calls to them to give his own instructions. At the end of 1962, this antirevolutionary and revisionist was called to Beijing to take part as a counselor of the application of the Seventy Articles, especially regarding technological issues, then applying these policies in our factory. He put two-thirds of the factory under*

*his personal control. In 1964, he decided to send 400 tons of products to the furnaces, causing a great loss to our factory and wasting national resources... (...) and this is his use after all: follow the antirevolutionary and revisionists Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping, Chen Pixian and Cao Duqiu. Waving the red flag to oppose the red flag, drag the Socialist industrial enterprise to the capitalist direction... We, the workers, must not forget! We have thoroughly uncovered them! (Idem)*

Articles such as these two were evaluated, especially in the second semester of 1967, as evidence that studying and criticizing particular cases could be an alternative to further carry out the Cultural Revolution, after its first months saturated by power seizure campaigns. As formulated by Yao Wenyan and Zhang Chunqiao in a meeting in Shanghai in October 1967:

*Zhang Chunqiao: Grasp revolution, promote production. The time for each of these activities cannot be determined too tight. One should not engage in the Cultural Revolution and in studies only when there is a spare time. It is possible that after the slogan “grasp revolution, promote production” was disseminated, the contradictions and class struggle within enterprises have been exposed. (...)*

*Yao Wenyan: This slogan must be united with the Great Critique and the Debate-Criticize-Transform. To further production, we must first look at the empirical conditions and needs, and after this look at the State’s needs. (CCPCC, 1967b)*

The expression “look at the empirical conditions and needs” (看物质条件,需要) referred to the activities of studying and collectively debating the conditions of work, economics and politics at national and local levels.

By October 1967, the Revolutionary Committees were already established in 97% of the estimated eight thousand factories in Shanghai. According to Xu Jingxian – then one of the secretaries of the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee – only 60 factories remained without the “big alliance,” i.e., without the formation of a three-in-one Revolutionary Committee.<sup>52</sup> The conflicts during the implementation of the revolutionary committees had triggered new debates. Many critiques were made against the recently established revolutionary committees, saying that rehabilitated cadres who took part in it were setting obstacles to the actual participation of worker and student representatives. As Yao Wenyan reported in October 1967: “After new cadres have held power, the main complaint by the workers is that they have seldom mingled with the masses.” (YAO, 1967b)

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<sup>52</sup> Idem.



Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and CRSG members observed several times that factionalism was threatening to also overtake workers mobilizations, and that studying and criticizing empirical situations and carrying local experiments could be a way to overcome it.<sup>53</sup>

#### 2.4. “New born things,” unsolved questions

In December 1967, Zhang Chunqiao declared in a Workers Congress in Shanghai:

*I think our current task is to take the latest directive of President Mao, and really enact it in the fields of thought, work and collective organization. Why do I emphasize the problem of accomplishment? Well, we always study this declaration of President Mao: “It is up to us to organize the people. As for the reactionaries in China, it is up to us to organize the people to overthrow them. Everything reactionary is the same; if you don't hit it, it won't fall. This is also like sweeping the floor: as a rule, where the broom does not reach, the dust will not vanish of itself.”<sup>54</sup> I don't know how many times we studied this sentence. Let's look from this standpoint and analyze if the Chinese Khrushchev' Liu, Deng, Tao, Peng, and so on, were actually overthrown or not. I don't know what the comrades think. I think we may define it like this: they were overthrown and were not overthrown. How come not overthrown? Well, haven't we just said that Chen Pixian and Cao Duqiu did not come to talk here because they were afraid of being criticized? Well, Liu, Deng and Tao, have not come to publicly talk yet. Because had they come, probably they would be beaten to death. (...) In this aspect, they have been overthrown. (ZHANG, 1967)*

Zhang Chunqiao declared in this excerpt that in that first year of Cultural Revolution, power struggles within the Party were carried and effectively resulted in the temporary overthrow of some leaders.<sup>55</sup> However, the events in the preceding months, since the frustrated proclamation of the Shanghai Commune, had shown that “to overthrow those persons in authority who are taking the capitalist road” (CCPCC, 1966b) was not enough to revolutionize the cultural sphere. Conversely, it was leading to the failure of the CR due to factionalism and

<sup>53</sup> Some examples can be read in the following documents: YAO, Wenyuan. Letter to Mao Zedong, 11 October 1967. IN *Issues and Studies (Taipei)*, vol. VII, N.1 (October, 1971). Available in ...; Zhou Enlai in “Zhou Enlai speech in the meeting with the standing committee of Shanghai's WGH” (张春桥接见上海工总司常委时的讲话), November 22, 1967; “Memorandum of Conversation between Albanian Labor Party Delegation and the Chinese Communist Party Leadership,” October 12, 1967, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Central State Archive, Tirana, AQPPSH-MPKK-V. 1967, L. 19, D. 20. Obtained by Ana Lalaj and translated by Enkel Daljani. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117694>.

<sup>54</sup> Reference to one excerpt of “Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong”, in its 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter “Classes and class struggle.” The quotation is originally from the article “The Situation and Our Policy After the Victory in the War of Resistance Against Japan”, August 13, 1945, Selected Works of Mao Zedong, Vol. IV, p. 19.

<sup>55</sup> On the process of overthrow, criticizing and further rehabilitation of cadres, see HONG, Yung Lee. “The politics of cadre rehabilitation since the Cultural Revolution” IN *Asian Survey*, V.18, N.9 (September) 1978:934-955.

the depoliticization of popular mobilization. Then, Zhang outlined some unprecedented questions:

*But we still have to look from the standpoint of political influence. From the standpoint of thought, they were not really overthrown. Their poison lies very deep. They won't willingly fall. It's on to us to stop them. We have to see this type of character, they are on stage for decades. Chen Pixian, for example, came to Shanghai more than fifteen years ago. (...) Could we really say that in only one year of mobilization their influence has been cleaned up? Although they are persons, they are also forces representing the capitalist class. That's their social base. From this point of view, we can't say they are overthrown. (ZHANG, 1967)*

The saturation of the campaigns to “seize power” led the CRSG and other CC members to increasingly emphasize the aim of criticizing the “ideology of the bourgeoisie and all other exploiting classes and to transform education, literature and art and all other parts of the superstructure not in correspondence with the socialist economic base.” (CCPCC, 1966b) The failure of the Shanghai Commune and the radicalization of student factionalist struggles were two major triggers to this political turning point. The focus shifted from individuals to class representation within superstructure – the political economic system itself. As per a declaration of Kang Sheng in December 1966, “I am afraid we have some factories that are, like Lenin has said, capitalist factories without capitalists.”

In the first months of 1968,

*Most of the militants, bewildered by the political crisis of their organizations, had quit all forms of activism and swelled the ranks of the so-called faction of the disengaged (逍遥派), which in fact was not a real “faction.” (...). The more the number of militants decreased, the more the clashes became violent.*

It was only by July 1968 that the CR leadership created an effective strategy to suppress student factionalism and, at the same time, did not demobilize the remaining student or workers organizations. It started with an emblematic and highly didactic scene at Qinghua University in Beijing, where factionalist struggles were well known for their violence and lack of any real political content:

*On Mao's initiative, and following crowded meetings in several factories, tens of thousands of disarmed workers invaded Qinghua University campus peacefully, shouting slogans*

*against the armed struggle, with lines of demonstrators standing between the two factions to prevent them from fighting. (RUSSO, 2005:536)*

After the workers had successfully disarmed the students, not without some conflict, the CR leadership called the five main leaders of the Beijing Red Guard factions to a meeting at the center of Beijing, in a hall at *Zhongnanhai* (中南海). This meeting lasted about 4 hours, was recorded and transcribed, then its minutes were ordered to circulate in every university and Revolutionary Committee of the country. In sending the workers to Qinghua campus and organizing this meeting, in which CC members personally discussed with Red Guards leaders the ongoing CR, Mao Zedong managed to “deal with that situation as a political matter, rather than simply as an unavoidable police operation.” (RUSSO, Idem, 563)

The minutes of this meeting was carefully studied by Alessandro Russo, but it is worth highlighting some aspects of their conversation that help illuminate the general political situation of the CR by 1968, and how the Shanghai Machine Tools Plant became then a new political icon to popular mobilizations nationwide. The main critiques made by the CR leadership against the Red Guard regarded the violent struggles between factions and how they lacked political content:

*You have been involved in the Cultural Revolution for two years now: struggle-criticize-transform [斗批改]. Now, first, you are not struggling; second, you are not criticizing, and, third, you are not transforming. Or rather, you are struggling, but it is an armed struggle. The people are not happy, the workers are not happy, the peasants are not happy, city residents are not happy, students in most schools are not happy, most of students in your own school are not happy. (Mao Zedong apud RUSSO, 2005)*

The slogan “struggle-criticize-transform” was a concise expression that referred to the Cultural Struggle and the use of the Four Great Weapons to “destroy the old and create the new.” When Mao declared that the Red Guards were not transforming anything, he implied that they were not actually engaged in any political mobilization, rather, they were in a struggle close to what he called a “civil war” that had no use for anyone involved. In this meeting, Mao suggested that the “struggle-criticize-transform” would be substituted by the “struggle-criticize-disperse” (斗批散), which was actually the result of that meeting, because the Red Guards were then disbanded and its remaining members sent to factories and rural communes to “learn from practical experience,” i.e., actually engage with workers and peasants practicing what was called

the “three together” (三同): work together, eat together, live together. The Red Guards, then, ceased to exist as an autonomous organization.

However, besides the problem of the student associations, there was another broader issue at stake in this meeting. In 1968 there was a worldwide university crisis. “It was July 1968, the moment of maximum uncertainty for the modern university education.” (Russo, Idem, 558) The category of “student” was in crisis, especially in regard to the gap between university sphere and the spheres of labour and production. This topic was also debated during the meeting. Mao Zedong argued:

*Should we still be running universities? (...) We should still run universities: I have mentioned science and engineering colleges, but I did not say that humanities colleges should not be run. (...) As far as I can see, colleges offer more or less the same basic courses as those offered in junior and senior middle schools and in the last years of primary school. One should go to school only for six years, or at most ten years. (...) As for the basic courses, they are all repetitious. As for the specialized courses, even teachers do not understand. Philosophers are unable to talk about philosophy. What is studying for? (Mao Zedong apud RUSSO, Idem, 558)*

The problem stressed by Mao Zedong concerned the division of practice and theory, and the split and inequality between manual and intellectual labour. On the one hand,

*(...) some of our boys who attended school for more than ten years—said a disheartened Mao—they are so physically destroyed as to be unable to sleep. A boy studies history, but he does not understand the class struggle. (Idem)*

On the other hand, this division between intellectual and manual labour – one of the elements of the Bourgeois Right – could only engender, or at least reinforce, exploitation and class struggle. A way to deal with these problems – the crisis in the education system, the political orientation of the Cultural Revolution and the increasing importance of the role of workers in popular mobilizations – was to shift political focus to the factories. Since December 1966, factories were attaining an increased importance in national politics. At least since the January Storm of 1967, workers mobilizations were crucial to the national political-economy, as was emphasized in July 1968, when teams of workers were able to disarm students and cease struggles that the CC had tried to suppress for months without success.

At the end of the meeting with the CR leadership, one of the Red Guard leaders, Han Aijing (韩爱晶), was visibly confused after realizing their mobilization reached a dead end. He

asked Mao Zedong about the future of the Cultural Revolution. He wanted to know if it should finish or continue, and if it should finish, then what would happen with the ideals of communism, since it was known that capitalism could be restored. Mao Zedong answered:

*If we cannot guarantee the success of this Cultural Revolution, then we should not carry out the Cultural Revolution. There will be twists and turns. We cannot say there will be a new phase. There will be many new phases. But I think the Shanghai Machine Tools Plant may be one new phase.* (Mao Zedong apud RUSSO, Idem, 560)

Indeed, seven days before this meeting in Beijing, the People's Daily published an article originally written by a journalist of the Shanghaiense *Wenhui Daily*, reporting experiences from the SMTF regarding the training and education of new technicians from among regular workers. This article was read by Mao Zedong, who personally ordered its publication in the People's Daily together with this remark:

*It is still necessary to have universities; here I refer mainly to colleges of science and engineering. However, it is essential to shorten the length of schooling, revolutionize education, put proletarian politics in command and take the road of the Shanghai Machine Tools Plant in training technicians from among the workers.* (Mao Zedong apud People's Daily, 1968)

The excerpt was later known as the "7.21 Directive" (七.二一指示), a name which referred to its publication date. It introduced the report on the experience of the SMTF, which related some experiments carried in that production unit since the beginning of the CR:

- (1) Engineers from the project departments had agreed to hand technical information to the workers, putting it "in the form of reference books, available for use by everyone";
- (2) Technicians and engineers agreed to work a few hours every week in the shops alongside with workers.
- (3) Workers were allowed to take part in meetings to debate technical decisions and projects.
- (4) They implemented the "three in one combination" (committees composed of workers, cadres and technicians) to manage each area of the factory.

The report stressed deficiencies in the system in which "those who do mental labour rule, while those who do manual labour are ruled." (People's Daily, 1968) It inferred that an engineer that had no direct practice with the production line was more susceptible to make mistakes in his/her projects, which ultimately would have to be corrected and reformulated many times. On

the other side, a worker that did not understand how to read a project or the technical theory behind the project would probably be in greater risks of doing something wrong, and, moreover, the efforts to repress workers in their position as manual laborers (i.e., denying them the development of their mental skills) was in fact a waste of administrative resources that could be used to expand creativity instead. They used as an example that the workers in that factory had to memorize “170 rules in the ‘Handbook for a Worker in Production’,” which was considered ultimately a wasted time and effort. The article also praised that in training more technical personal from among workers, the FMTS would also be multiplying the technicians in the country.

Further, this report stated that workers trained as technicians tended to have a certain degree of political consciousness, a sense of collectivity that would impel them to evaluate their work as a contribution to society, while engineers could rather cultivate an “individualistic” character, tending to work merely for profit or power. The text analyzed a few examples of engineers that took years to design a machine or engine, and finally needed help by manual workers to correctly produce it. Then, it proposed a few ideas regarding the Revolution in Education (教育革命):

- (1) (...) *Schools must train “workers with both socialist consciousness and culture”* – which means technical education should not be detached of political education and practical experience with manual labour.
- (2) *Schools should have experienced workers as teachers and let workers “take the school tribune.”* [the post of a teacher/professor]
- (3) Choose new students from among the workers to enroll in university and technical education.
- (4) Carry study groups on politics and political-economy with cadres, workers and technical personnel. (People’s Daily, 1968)

On July 22<sup>nd</sup>, Zhang Chunqiao who was integrating the leadership of the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee organized a meeting and gave a speech at the SMTF, with all the workers of the unit present. In his speech, he systematized a kind of “historical process” that led to the national publication of the report the day before, and therefore the political evidence brought to their unit. Zhang even connects that moment in 1968 to the visit Mao Zedong made to the factory in 1957:

*At that time, we were in the middle of the 'anti-rightist campaign', and based on that debate, it became clear that workers should be trained and form a new class of intellectuals, otherwise the Dictatorship of the Proletariat could not be consolidated. (ZHANG, 1968)*

This interpretation of Mao's visit in 1957 is based on the brief sentences the president had reportedly declared regarding the importance of training new technicians from among the workers (which, at the time, was also related to an eminent risk of split with the PCURSS). Zhang continued his speech to evaluate some main topics of debate during the CR, stressing the importance of the Cultural Struggle and new debates that could create and answer new questions:

*The Cultural Revolution is a question human history has not solved yet. Neither Marx, Engels or Lenin had solved this matter. For example, "training technicians from among the workers," is something neither Marx, Engels or Lenin had talked about. If there is not experience, it is not solved. (...) Based on whom we are going to carry the revolution in technology? (...) The Shanghai Machine Tools Factory seems to have answered this problem. Should we then train doctors like this? Intellectuals? Reporters? Philosophers? Artists?... All of them have a problem of which path to take. (...) So, the experience in the SMTF regards not only a problem of how to train technicians, but also of how to cultivate talents according to President Mao's directive ["workers with both socialist consciousness and culture"].*

In this excerpt, Zhang Chunqiao highlighted a topic debated in 1958, which is the uncertainty of how Socialism (the Dictatorship of the Proletariat) should actually work in order to achieve its "historical purpose": propelling a society toward Communism. How would the new society be constructed in its organizational and cultural spheres?

Making an allegoric reference to the history of the CR so far, Zhang stated:

*(...) then, the Revolution in Education is not a matter of schools. It started in schools but then reached the factories, the communes. Mao Zedong claimed that we have to engage in State matters. Well, Revolution in Education is a State matter, it is a matter if power would be consolidated or not, if capitalism will be restored or not in our country. (...) it is very important, it is the superstructure that influences the economic base. (Idem)*

It was by 1968 that the idea of a superstructure influencing and conditioning the economic base (or structure), started to be nationally discussed. We may infer that the Cultural Revolution went through another turning point in July 1968, with the suppression of the Red Guards and the preeminence given by the CRSG to the Revolution in Education, which involved

all kinds of productive, educational and government institutions, but eventually connected all of them to the production units.

*It is remarkable that the main initiatives taken by the Central Group at the end of July 1968 crossed the theme of the university with that of the factories and the workers. The choice to involve the workers and the factories with the educational issues can be considered, using a classical Maoist category, a “strategic retreat.” The retreat would be made only after having identified a terrain to orient themselves, to keep the chances to experience new forms of self-emancipatory politics alive, on the basis of the political energy of the last two years.* (RUSSO, 2005:563)

By 1968, the Line Struggle was becoming clearer in political declarations. In 1966, the CR leadership oscillated between power seizure and inter-individual struggles. However, as the focus shifted to the cultural sphere, it became clearer that oppositions between “vested interest groups” – to use Mao’s expression – would continue to exist in the superstructure. The purpose should not be to overthrow an individual or a group, but rather to distinguish “right from wrong,” the “two lines” – formal non-antagonistic contradictions that became antagonistic contradictions, but that could not be dealt with the instruments and approach of a civil war. As Chunqiao discussed in a speech in 1967: “What have they seized? They seized a few rooms (...) and took the press in their hands (...) I am not sure if it means to seize any power if they speak and nobody listen.” (Zhang Chunqiao, 1967 apud ZHANG, w/d:210-211) It means that simply occupying some bureaucratic positions would not guarantee that the political-economy of Socialism would actually develop towards Communism, because many questions were unanswered, regarding “empirical conditions and needs.” After the establishment of collective and public properties, there was no detailed map of the path to follow in order to the State to “wither away,” per Lenin’s formulation.

In May 1968, referring to and further criticizing Liu Shaoqi’s remark on the divergence between “inside and outside the Party” (内外有别), Mao Zedong wrote in an editorial of People’s Daily: “Out of the Party, there is Party. Inside the Party there are factions. In history, it has always been like this” (党外有党,党内有派.历来如此). (MAO, 1968:317) Outside of the Party, there are real political contents and debates, and inside the Party there is factionalism. When Mao stated that “in history, it has always been like this,” he meant that in every bureaucratized governing institution there is a power struggle, and that politics – in its



epistemological meaning, maybe, what Badiou defined as “political event” – is found mainly outside the formal governing institutions. Though this remark, Mao made an assertive critique to the Socialist orthodox conception of the Party-State as a representative of the people – i.e., an organization that would “substitute” the people in tracing the plans for the transition. Vanguard, to Mao, meant a leadership that could formally allow people to participate politically by themselves. If politics is actually found outside the Party and inversely, inside the Party, one could find “factionalism” – that is, de-politicized struggles and bureaucratization (cf. WANG, 2006) - then the government apparatus could not arrogate itself the role of political vanguard, since actual construction of the new could only come from popular initiative. This refers us to Alessandro Russo’s hypothesis that:

*First, a basic distinction should be stressed between the intermittent nature of politics - (...) which exists only in singular intellectually inventive sequences - and the structural invariance of the state, despite the incessant historical mutations of its particular forms. (...) The hypothesis is that the concrete form of the state in a given moment is the hollow imprint of the last great political sequence, or that it is shaped by a reactive de-politicization.*  
(RUSSO, 2006:674)

Politics, according to this hypothesis, means political inventiveness or, in other words, actual participation of people in inventing possible egalitarian political mechanisms and organization. This is why Mao, especially since the January Storm and the crisis of the “power seizure” often stressed the need to study political-economic theory and “debate empirical conditions and needs.” It was by “creating the new” – as Mao, Zhang and other CC members repeatedly stated – that the Dictatorship of the Proletariat could be understood and actualized. “The whole set of ‘new-born things’ was considered by Maoists as a series of experiments embodying the search for the true political content of otherwise empty concepts.” (RUSSO, 2012:16) Wang Hui also notes that during the CR, there was a great effort to emphasize political events (and inventions) outside the Party, and this was attempted through the dissemination of groups of political-economic studies in every production unit and on the other side, by the invention of policies to deliberately “smash the absolute authority of the party and the state, in order to further the goal of progress toward genuine popular sovereignty.” (WANG, 2006:35)

The group of workers who had entered Beijing Qinghua University on July 26<sup>th</sup> to disarm Red Guard factions and interrupt the struggle between students, was organized by Mao himself and by other members of the CRSG. They were then called “Mao Zedong’s Thought Worker’s

Propaganda Team” (毛泽东思想宣传队). Their successful intervention on the factionalist struggles in Beijing, highly strategic and symbolic, quickly gave rise to a national policy. On August 15<sup>th</sup>, Mao published a directive in the People’s Daily, stating:

*We have seven hundred million workers. The working class is the leadership class. The working class must be in the leadership of every position in the country and of the Cultural Revolution. The working class also has to continuously improve political consciousness through participating in the struggle. (Mao Zedong apud CHENG, 2001:251)*

Worker’s Propaganda Teams became a national directive and, in many cities, groups were formed with those who were most mobilized in 1967. On August 25<sup>th</sup>, the CC issued a circular calling for the formation of Worker’s Propaganda Teams to work in schools, arguing that their “intervention in Beijing universities had proved to give excellent results.”<sup>56</sup> On the same day, Shanghai’s *Red Flag* published an article called “The working class must take the leadership in everything,” a text written by Yao Wenyuan and personally reviewed and complemented by Mao Zedong. This article had a major influence in establishing a new political direction to the Cultural Revolution: to destroy and to invent within the superstructure.

The article emphasized that manual workers, historically confined to production and labour in the structural sphere of society (material labor, as opposed to mental labor), should take the leadership in the Cultural Revolution, for only they could carry out an actual “proletarian” Cultural Revolution. And to take the leadership in the Cultural Revolution, Yao argued, workers not only should take control of the administration of their labor, within production units, but in all spheres of society: schools, universities, government. (YAO, 1968)

By September 4<sup>th</sup>, in Shanghai, there were already 1500 members of the city’s Worker’s Propaganda Teams. Sixty percent of them were former member of the WGH. (Shanghai Party Committee, w/d:432) Their first task in the city was to establish Revolutionary Committees. In the few production units factionalism was still a problem. They formed nearly 300 Worker’s Propaganda Teams (from now on, WPTs) and went to 101 factories to establish Revolutionary Committees. (Idem, 549) WPTs also established offices in the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee.

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<sup>56</sup> CCPCC, “Inform from the CCPCC, the State Council, the Central Military Committee and the CRSG on sending Workers Propaganda Teams into schools” (中共中央、国务院、中央军委、中央文革关于派工人宣传队进学校的通知), August 25, 1968. Available in *The Chinese Cultural Revolution Database*, <https://ccradb.appspot.com/post/538> (consulted in November 2017).

*Yao Wenyuan's slogan calling for proletarian leadership was more than empty verbiage (...) For nearly a decade after the January power seizure in 1967, the core leadership at all levels of Shanghai's municipal government included a substantial number of worker rebels.*  
(PERRY, 1998:145)

WPTs would start a series of political innovations and experiments, inside and outside production units. In 1968 and 1969, many other worker organizations would be created and named according to their political objectives like the Worker's Theory Groups (工人理论队) and the Worker's University (工人大学). The aim was to change who was in charge of administering labor processes and work relations. Mao commented in November 1968, in a conversation with Kang Sheng, Yao Wenyuan, Zhou Enlai and the Australian Communist Party leader Edward Hill, that the Red Guards were able to bring the destitution of some cadres in the high levels of the Party bureaucracy who were "taking the capitalist road." However, from that point on, the task was to change local leadership, "the people who are in charge [of factories, rural communes, schools] have not changed. This is the social foundation for revisionism to prevail in China."<sup>57</sup>

There was, by the second semester of 1968, a new political program for the Cultural Revolution: the engagement of workers in every institution and office part of the "superstructure." By doing so, the CR leadership expected to defy and overcome the division between manual and intellectual labour – which is one of the political-economic factors of the Bourgeois Right, considered then a cornerstone of capitalist system and therefore a step towards the failure of revolution.

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<sup>57</sup> "Conversations between Mao Zedong and E. F. Hill," November 28, 1968, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Chinese Communist Party Central Archives. Translated by Chen Jian, p.2. Available in <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117143> (consulted in November 2017)

### Chapter 3

#### Construction is within destruction – negotiating proletarian power

*If one doesn't destroy, doesn't build either. To destroy is to criticize, it is to revolutionize. In order to destroy, one must justify, and to justify is to build. Destruction comes first, but construction is within destruction. Mao Zedong, May 16 1966<sup>58</sup>*

*The Cultural Revolution aims to solve problems that humanity have not solved yet, problems that Marx, Engels and Lenin have not solved. For example, to train new workers and technicians: Marx, Engels and Lenin talked about it, but they have not experienced it, have not solved it. Zhang Chunqiao, 1968<sup>59</sup>*

Since February 1967, Revolutionary Committees were seen as the new governmental form to be established throughout the country at all levels of administration. However, to organize a Revolutionary Committee was not simple. In each unit, municipality or county, to settle the new structure required a series of meetings and debates in order to select the representatives of each three categories that composed the committee: PLA members, rehabilitated cadres and rebels. Often, factional struggles diffculted the process to select representatives, what could also result in distended organizations, composed of hundreds or even thousands of people. This could undermine the Committee's role as an administrative agency. For example, Yao Wen Yuan, in a letter of October 1967 to the Central Committee, reported an "urgent situation" at the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee (settled eight months earlier):

*at present, there are twenty departments with 3229 employees [integrating the committee], which does not include those of revolutionary mass organizations who have left their production posts. Anyway, the organization is too big (...) (YAO, 1967)*

By July 1968, units or administrative regions that have not established a RC yet, were called "big old difficulties" (老大难) – epithet referring to the problematics faced by the CC and the PLA to overcome local factional struggles and to settle the new administrative apparatus.

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<sup>58</sup> 不破不立。破，就是批判。破，就是讲道理，讲道理就是立。破字当头，立也就在其中了。五一六通知，第六条

<sup>59</sup> 无产阶级文化大革命是解决人类历史上没有解决的问题，是马克思、恩格斯、列宁没有解决的问题，比如讲培养工程技术人员，马克思、恩格斯、列宁都有过论述，但是没有经验，没有解决。In ZHANG, Chunqiao, "Talk in a meeting at the Shanghai Machine Tools Factory" (张春桥在上海机床厂现场会上的讲话), July 22, 1968.

At the meeting of July 1968, with the leadership of the Politburo and the five main leaders of Beijing Red Guard, Mao repeatedly said: “people do not want a Civil War”. “You are not carrying the struggle-criticize-transform, you are not struggling, neither criticizing nor transforming (...) should we carry the struggle-criticize-disperse instead?”, asked Mao, proposing to disperse students organizations, since factionalism was still a problem even after more than an year of propaganda ordering to cease combats and use pacific forms of debate and education. The moto struggle-criticize-transform seems to have been first formulated in July 1966, by Zhou Enlai in a meeting with representatives of universities and colleges regarding the role of intellectuals and students in the CR, when he called it the “three great duties of the Cultural Revolution”:

*When people struggle against people, criticize each other, especially if young people start to criticize, it is very difficult to distinguish debate from struggle. Of course in the middle of struggle there must be debate. But sometimes one raises and immediately becomes nervous, acts wrongfully and starts to beat up someone else. We have been through this before, we all were young once. (...) It is necessary to carry the three great duties of the Cultural Revolution within schools and universities (...) (ZHOU, 1966)*

To invite intellectuals, teachers, professors and students to take part in this three activities meant to mobilize these social categories to engage in actual social politics, going beyond the academical sphere and assuming a role on militancy. Such call, in Marxist-Leninist terms, was based on Marx’s well known 11<sup>th</sup> thesis on Feuerbach: “Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.” (MARX, 1845)

To carry out struggle-criticize-transform, as Zhou Enlai formulated at the same speech, meant to create political forms of popular organization aimed to solve disagreements in local policies and establish new directions of work in teaching, studying, working, assisting, administering.

*With the leadership of revolutionary students people will criticize those in power in education units taking the capitalist road (...), overcome they. After this, we will criticize counterrevolutionary academic authorities. (...) Next, we should transform the education system and the methods and purposes of education. (...) This is what we often call Revolution in Education or Education Reform. (ZHOU, 1966)*

In July 1966, this speech served as a summon for intellectuals and students to take part in political and militant activities. By July 1968, however, Struggle-Criticize-Transform became

a motto not only for students and intellectuals, but also for workers, militaries and peasants. In those two years, the slogan was reformulated a few times by the Politburo, attempting to overcome factionalism and to propose different approaches to popular democracy: struggle-criticize-unite; unite-criticize-unite were some phrases vehiculated by the CCP.

Notwithstanding, it was only with the intervention of the first Workers Propaganda Team in the Qinghua University, in July 24 1968, that the Politburo and the CRSG seemed to have found a strategy to solve the problem of factionalism. Indeed it was not a mere military repressive measure, which would have provoked political demobilization. A few days after the first WPT intervention in Beijing, in August 15, Mao published an editorial stating that “it is needed to fully bring into play the worker class in the Cultural Revolution and in the leadership of all other spheres of work. Workers too must raise their political consciousness through political struggle” (MAO, 1998(12):520). On the next day, Mao wrote to the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee, praising a report about Worker Propaganda Teams that solved other “big old difficulties” (factionalist struggles) in more than 400 units in the city, through propaganda, study, carrying Mao’s directives on using debate as a weapon (instead of actual physical struggle) and collecting guns. (MAO, 1998(12):521)

*Shanghai workers have conditions to organize [teams] and go to “big old difficulties” units, to solve problems; in the city there are more than 400 big old difficulties, but these numbers are still conservative, maybe there are more. Maybe there are some [units] in which [the struggle] has not revealed itself (...) Shanghai has more than more than a million workers, this is our popular base. (ZHANG, 1968c)*

WPT constituted, since then, a new focus for the CR in the whole country. It proved to be an effective strategy against factionalism, even more efficient than the PLA intervention in the previous months. Moreover, the groups of workers could act also to promote political engagement and mobilization, hence, it was a way to deal with another problematic of the period: the growing demobilization resulted from years of factionalist struggles.

### *3.1. Mao Zedong Thought and the Workers’ Propaganda Teams*

The first worker propaganda team was organized in Beijing by the CRSG and members of the Politburo with more than 30 thousand workers from 60 different factories of the capital. It was named Mao Zedong Thought Worker Propaganda Team (首都工人毛泽东思想宣传队).

This name indicated a request, addressed to popular associations, to obey the Central Committee directives on how to carry political struggle within the CR, in a few words, “to carry word struggle, not physical struggle” (要文斗,不要武斗).

By July 1968, the Politburo started to summon study groups and intellectuals to write articles that could analyze the current political situation from a theoretical point of view. That is because they were certain it was a new phase in politics, with new elements that were not theorized nor experienced before.

*Cultural Revolution aims to solve problems that humanity have not solved yet, problems that Marx, Engels and Lenin have not solved. For example, to train new workers and technicians: Marx, Engels and Lenin talked about it, but they have not experienced it, have not solved it. (ZHANG, Idem)*

What could also be called as “new born things” (新生事物), were not mere local experiments of popular organization. The January Storm, the unprecedented multiplication of popular associations, and the fact that Red Guard factionalism had taken so long to be finally overcome, were demonstrations that the CR had become a “furnace” (熔炉) of new political events (to use the expression of Zhang Meihua, worker of the SMTF, in an article published in January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1967).

In August 22 1968, Yao Wenyuan sent to Mao Zedong a draft entitled “Under the leadership of the working class, truly carry the struggle-criticize-transform”, with a note that said:

*Based on your directive asking us to write articles analyzing the current political situation, I wrote this critique, analyzing two of your recent directives, attempting to destroy some wrongful concepts. I don't know if it may be published on the Red Flag. (apud MAO, 1998(12):533)*

After a careful reading, Mao made some notes to the article, changed some excerpts and added some sentences and expressions. The eighth note stated that “the whole process of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution is solely under the leadership of the proletariat. We, the Party, are the vanguard of the Proletariat”. (apud MAO, 1998:528) It proposed a reinterpretation of the vanguard's role within Socialism, according to which the proletariat (that would be represented by the Party) assumed a direct and active participation in politics, and the Party (the administrative organs that would represent the workers) had a complementary role. The

vanguard, thus, did not substitute workers in their duties to construct Socialism. Each part, proletariat and Party, had its specific role. The relation between workers and Party organization, therefore, was not defined by a representation system defined as “one part that acts in the place of the whole”:

*Combining a vanguard system with meaningful participation of the masses (...) is precisely the problem addressed by Mao's famous “mass line”. (...) To Mao, however, cadres were to learn “whole-heartedly from the masses” (...) Cadres and party leaders are still in the vanguard, as Lenin advised, until the consciousness of the masses makes leadership superfluous. (FRAKT, 1979:692)*

The CR consisted precisely in campaigns to mobilize common people to transform culture and work relations, hence, engaging and seizing administrative tasks. That is why, the main moto of the 9<sup>th</sup> CCP Congress was the Party Reconstruction, which meant to reorganize State-Party structure and functioning, including the participation of workers in its organs.

*In this process, the worker class will be exercised through deep and fierce political struggles, thus forming a group of excellent workers that will occupy positions in the organs of the Party in all spheres, in Revolutionary Committees of all levels and also at the leadership of educational institutions. (MAO, 1998(12):531)*

Therefore, the engagement of the workers in struggle-criticize-transform was also considered a form of raise political consciousness and constitute experience as militants, with mainly two goals:

- To reconfigure Party organs, by changing those who occupy leading positions at all levels, hence collaborating to overcome the problem of bureaucratization.
- To transform the leadership in units of all kinds, giving workers place in the leadership of labor processes as well.

In a conversation with Edward Fowler Hill in November of 1968, Mao observed that “those who are in charge” in production units “have not changed”, and that “this is the social foundation for revisionism to prevail in China”.<sup>60</sup> Well, the leadership in production units and in organs of the government had different roles, even if sometimes local policies had to be conceived and implemented by both of them. Leaders in production units had to manage labor processes at the local level. What Mao was implying is that the success or fail of the transition

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<sup>60</sup> Mao Zedong in “Conversations between Mao Zedong and E. F. Hill,” November 28, 1968, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Chinese Communist Party Central Archives. Translated by Chen Jian. Page 2. Available in <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117143> (consulted in January 2018).



depended not only on general and national policies, but also on production relations and political participation of common people in the local level.

Indeed, the Workers Propaganda Teams were, too, a matter of power seizure: the thousands of groups sent to occupy advisory positions in the Revolutionary Committees were meant to grasp power within the superstructure, i.e., assuming leading roles on the spheres of propaganda, media, management of labor processes and education. In Shanghai, most of the WPT were led by members of the WGH, chosen by Wang Hongwen and others leaders of the rebels association. (Shanghai Party Committee, w/d:576)

The WPT were also expected to work for the unification of popular associations and for the end of factionalist struggles, by coordinating the settlement of functioning revolutionary committees and the unification of press media, a campaign

*to combat forms of unauthorized political communication and heretical interpretations, such as “rumors”, “gossip”, “back alley stories”, “lies and slanders”, “fabrication of official documents”, and “misinterpretation of leaders’ words”(…) Dissemination of internal documents and leaders speeches, a common form of political communication in the CR, was declared strictly forbidden (...)* (WU, 2014:201)

It means the WPT had a dual role: to unify and give a specific direction to popular associations, and to reinforce political engagement.

Of course, the complex definition of their duties was built over the months, with the active participation of members of the Politburo. In Shanghai, for example, Zhang Chunqiao and Yao Wenyan had a decisive role in building the social significance of workers associations, such as the WPT and the workers’ universities. For example, right after the publication of Mao Zedong’s statement on July 21 1968, regarding the Revolution in Education (called Directive 7.21) which precisely mentioned the Shanghai Machine Tools Factory as model example for the mobilization of workers and a possible solution for the inequality between manual and mental labor, Zhang Chunqiao organized a big meeting at the factory, with the presence of the secretaries of the SRC and the leadership of the WGH. In his speech, Zhang somehow weaved a progressive historical line that intended to connect the political events happened so far:

*This experience [the “SMTF path of training technicians from among the workers”] started when Mao Zedong visited the factory in 1957, we were then at the Anti-Rightist Campaign, and this idea raised from that struggle (...)* The experience of the SMTP is not only a matter

*of how to train technicians, it is about whether to support Mao Zedong's directives on how to create talents (...)* (ZHANG, 1968)

The historical reference to Mao Zedong's visit to this factory in 1957 – often cited in articles written by workers since then – established a parallel between both contexts, emphasizing a common characteristic of periods marked by the struggle between projects of political economy; contexts when the “one splits in two”. In 1957, when Mao had visited the factory, he praised the local initiative to form new technical personnel from among workers, specially because, then, China was facing a serious threat of losing the support of the PCURSS. However, Mao not only praised the fact that they were able to train new technicians, but specially the methods used to do so, through self-organization and the critique against the prevalence of the “specialists” or, what was called “academical authorities”.

By relating their experience in 1968 with the visit happened in 1957, Zhang also attempted to combine the sanction of a popular mobilization and the leadership of the Party, in other words, a democratic experiment under centralized direction. Zhang continued the speech tracing general political objectives to the initiative. The method of professional training used in the factory was analyzed as a prototype of a national revolution in education because it combined manual and intellectual activities, alternating workers, students and professors in positions of productive labor, studying and teaching.

In the same speech, Zhang Chunqiao made an interesting declaration regarding the changes in the Cultural Revolution since 1966:

*Revolution in Education is not only a school thing. To rely on “school people” to carry Revolution in Education is over! I am not speaking in a polite manner. It means they do not do it well, the best way is to rely on the Party, rely on workers, on poor peasants, on the EPL. Only in relying on the effort of revolutionary factions it would be well done. Therefore, the Revolution in Education is not a matter of school, it started in schools but it entered the factories, the communes. (...) Revolution in Education is related to the economic base, it is very important, because it is the superstructure that influences the economic base.* (ZHANG, Idem)

In this excerpt, Zhang was recalling the political trajectory of the Cultural Revolution. It had started with a debate about the limits of academical production of knowledge, then it moved to a struggle for the right to self-organize, initially for students and, since January 1967, for

workers. Finally, after fierce debates about economism and factionalism, the CR had its focus shifted from the seizure of power to the seizure of power within the superstructure.

The idea that “the superstructure influences the economic base” was not new in China. It was conceived in slogans as “more important than guns” in 1945, and as “politics in command” in 1957 and 1958. This viewpoint was well explained at Mao’s “Reading Notes on the Soviet Text Political Economy”, written between 1961 and 1962 (and published in 1968) where he affirmed:

*The paramount issue for socialist democracy is: does labor have the right to subdue the various antagonistic forces and their influences? For example, who controls things like the newspapers, journals, broadcast stations, the cinema? Who criticizes? These are a part of the question of rights. If these things are in the hands of right opportunists (who are a minority) then the vast nationwide majority that urgently needs a great leap forward will find itself deprived of these rights. (...) There is a variety of factions among the people.<sup>61</sup>*

It is clear that, for those who agreed with Mao Zedong, the superstructure was a fundamental issue for an actual revolution. He continued recalling the example of the Industrial Revolution, explaining that, for example, “bourgeoisie first changed the superstructure and took possession of the machinery of state,” then it “carried on propaganda to gather real strength” and only after all this could the Industrial Revolution happen.<sup>62</sup> That is, the hypothesis was that: first a class takes control of the superstructure government and ideology machinery (state, media, education, art) and only after this, it can change the economic base. Accordingly, the superstructure should be taken “as a guideline for researching the economic problems of socialism”.<sup>63</sup>

That is why mobilizations of the Cultural Revolution were considered critical to the future of Socialism. The campaign meant to establish proletarian power within the superstructure, in other words, carry on a proletarian revolution in culture. Henceforth, the Revolution in Education was a fundamental topic of the CR, especially because it did not only comprehend changes in the school system. In starting the Revolution in Education by the training of new technicians from among workers, the campaign assumed a wider character that involved all spheres of society and placed teaching-learning processes within production

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<sup>61</sup> MAO, Zedong. “Reading notes on the Soviet Text Political Economy” IN *A Critique of Soviet Economics*. New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1977, pp.33-129, p.61.

<sup>62</sup> Idem, p.67.

<sup>63</sup> Idem, p.83.

relations. For example: managers had to periodically “learn from workers” in the production line; experienced workers should “take the tribune” in universities; engineers should teach project techniques to workers.

By positioning workers in conditions to teach engineers and managers, and also to learn from them, the Revolution in Education recalled some political topics of the Great Leap Forward. Particularly, it questioned the prominence of technical knowledge over labor experience and, consequently, the inequality between mental and manual labor. Another topic from 1958 political campaigns stressed in the Revolution in Education was the necessity of workers to manage labor processes themselves, actualizing their capacity to accurately carry technical innovations and enhance production output.

Many articles mentioning the Workers Universities and the WPT since the second semester of 1968, described 1961’s rectification policies as a *coup* led by Liu Shaoqi and other leaders of the CCP – not military, but an political economic *coup d’état* – aiming to reestablish capitalist political economy and demobilize popular associations. This was what Wang Hongwen, in 1974, described as Liu Shaoqi’s “so well occulted” betrayal. (WANG, 1974) It was characterized as an “occulted betrayal” because it was not a military *coup*, but a power struggle carried mainly in the ideological and political economic area. An example of its consequences is narrated in 1971, in an article written by the Party Committee of the SMTF, which related that, by 1960 there were 50 technicians in the factory that were trained from among workers in Shanghai popular technical schools, however, in that year the “technological authorities made 17 of them leave the departments of project and technology”, declaring that they did not have knowledge enough for carrying out project and management work. They only regain their positions as engineers in 1969. (SMTF Revolutionary Committee, 1971)

In July 23 1968, in an article published at the RMRB signed by Wang Defa, a member of the Revolutionary Committee of the SMTF, he stated that 1961’s rectification policies reestablished the prevalence of the technical knowledge over labor experience and, therefore, workers trained as technicians at courses carried in the factory were forced to “come from the factory shed to the office” (Wang Defa, 1968) – which meant to abandon the experiences of three-in-one combination and to restore the system in which specialists manage labor processes and relations of production. Wang Defa calls workers to defy and oppose “technical authority”

and to prove, through self-organization, that the three-in-one combination is a better system of production management.

An editorial in the same volume of the RMRB mentioned that, in July 23 1968, meetings were held at many factories in the country, to debate and to summon local revolutionary committees to engage in mobilizations following the example of the SMTF. This editorial described this mobilization as a way “to achieve actual victory on the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution and to grasp the strongest ‘thought weapon’ in order to truly oppose revisionism”. (Xinhua News, 1968) The “thought weapon” (思想武器) referred to the practice of criticizing and, through debate and active political participation, to forge new strategies for workers to assume positive roles in the education system, in technological development and in labor management.

The Revolution in Education, in this context, comprehended the following initiatives:

- To carry common projects between factories, agricultural communes, schools, EPL and Party organs. To resume the GLF campaign to “intellectualize the worker and ‘manualize’ the intellectual” (劳动人民要知识化, 知识分子要劳动化 – that is, workers should carry study meetings, write, teach, and intellectuals and specialists should periodically take part in manual labor).
- To encourage and support the new born things (political experiments). Political experimentation and creation was considered fundamental because it meant Socialism was actually accomplishing its aim to construct new communist structures and organizations. The editorials and reports published in 1968 about this topic used to justify it by narrating examples of production units that solved problems of resource allocation, technological innovation or organization of labor, by carrying public debates in the unit. The examples usually remembered ideas and initiatives taken by workers themselves, that resulted in the improvement of production output and promoted political equality.<sup>64</sup>

Articles published on this regard in the second semester of 1968, starting from the publication of Mao’s 7.21 directive, were mainly focused in justify and endorse the participation

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<sup>64</sup> We shall analyze some examples further in this thesis. See Xinhua News, “Resolutely take the road of combining with workers, peasants and soldiers in the end the education revolution” Editorial (坚决走同工农兵相结合的道路把教育革命进行到底) IN RMRB, July 23 1968.

of workers in practices of study and labor management. For example, in July 24, an article about Beijing Machine Tools Factory declared that for years the managerial personnel of the factory “did not trust the people, accused workers of having a ‘low level of culture’, ‘being dumb’, ‘have not quality’, and used the methods of ‘management’ and ‘rules’ to oppress the creativity potential of workers, because they did not allow workers to take part in the work to develop new technology.” The article refused these accusations by declaring that, in 1958 and in 1959, during the GLF, innovations were carried and production level raised by initiatives carried by the workers themselves. Thus – they stated –workers without a college degree could also grasp specialized knowledge and actualize it through collective work. (People’s Daily, 1968)

It is worth noticing that most of these articles published in 1968 described the January Revolution (of 1967) as a period in which workers could reclaim the political experiments initiated with the GLF and interrupted by the economic rectification started in 1961.

*Since the ‘January Revolution’, in this factory, the capitalists and the capitalist technical ‘authorities’ have quickly left stage” (...) “factory workers and revolutionary technicians (...) through criticizing Khrushchev’s representatives who defended ‘technology first’, ‘specialists govern the factory’, ‘slavery’ and ‘imperialism’, (...) carried the actual Technological Revolution and restored the creative potential of people. (Xinhua News, 1968b)*

It was only by July 1969 that the first reports on the Worker’s University started being published in national newspapers like the People’s Daily and the Red Flag. By then, the considered first Worker’s University (or University 7.21), set in the SMTF, had carried out classes for workers since September 1968, starting its activities with 52 students chosen from among workers. Professors integrating the initiative were mainly experienced and specialized workers, but also intellectuals that supported the popular university. (Xinhua News, 1969) One of its political slogans was: “cadre teaches soldier, soldier teaches cadre, soldier teaches soldier” (官教兵, 兵教官, 兵教兵), a phrase taken from the Yanan Period, which meant that all bureaucratic and administrative personnel should teach and be taught by those responsible for manual labor.

The Directive 7.21 promoted the creation of many mobilization with similar characteristics, such as the Theory Groups (理论队) and the Philosophy Groups (哲学队). These initiatives, together with the Worker’s University, had similar propositions: one the one

hand, to allow workers to engage in study, technological innovation and labor management; on the other hand, to promote the engagement of specialists and students in manual labor.

Philosophy and Theory Groups aimed to create and exercise theoretical approaches of practical experiences in labor and production; “to realize and to solve contradictions”, “to realize how the law of contradiction is manifested”, because – they stated – in analyzing and criticizing “the struggle within the unity of opposites” in each situation, or even in the technical structure of a machine tool, it would be possible to innovate technology, enhance production and, particularly, to promote political and social equality. (Philosophy Study Group of the Heavy Machines Factory of Dalian IN C.A., 1973)

These mobilizations disseminated in 1968 and 1969 particularly through the work of the WPT.

*Even though schools had moved to production units, some of them still did their limited academical work. Workers Propaganda Teams have realize it, then gathered everybody to study President Mao's Revolutionary Education Line, to criticize Revisionist Education Line, to debate education from the viewpoint of the class struggle, (...) to mobilize intellectuals to engage in the practice of the three great revolutions, within class struggle, production struggle and science-culture struggle. (Qinghua University Workers Propaganda Team IN People's Daily, 1969)*

The WPT carried political propaganda and mobilization stating that workers, even thought were in the national constitution as the leaders of the country, represented by the Party, had not accomplished actual power in the fields of media, politics, labor and “specially in the field of technology”. (Luoyang Tractor Factory, 1969) As formulated the WPT of the SMTF in 1969,

*The fundamental problem of revolution is the question of power. Mao Zedong personally mobilized and led the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution and [exposed] (...) the capitalist headquarters led by Liu Shaoqi. Then, workers seized technological power from the hands of capitalists and academical “authorities”. In the whole city, there are many technical workers that occupied positions in the Revolutionary Committees, and so many others integrated the leadership of production and technological departments in production units. (...) Can workers lead the work in technology and the science? Yes!<sup>65</sup>*

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<sup>65</sup> Xinhua News, “Report: The team of workers technicians of the Shanghai Machine Tool Factory is growing through struggle” (上海工人技术人员队伍在斗争中成长-调查报告), IN RMRB, July 24, 1969.

An editorial published at the Red Flag in 1970, entitled “Actually study President Mao’s philosophical works”, resumed the purposes of the Philosophy Groups in 1968 and 1969:

1. *Starting from the empiric experience, bring together the struggles of class, production and science, carrying out the campaign of the three great revolutions, using dialectical materialism and historical materialism to destroy the seeds of Liu Shaoqi’s antirevolutionary line and revisionism; within struggle to study, within struggle to practice.*
2. *To study carefully the philosophical works of President Mao, to persist in few and important principles, to analyze the main issues of the three great revolutions, particularly to comprehend well its basic concepts, to study and to exercise it repeatedly, and in each time to select one or two empirical situations as examples. To advance from the superficial to the deep level, from the disperse to the systematized.*
3. *To connect the study of philosophy to the reading of the “three great pieces” [On practice, On contradiction and On the correct handling of contradictions among the people]; to correlate the critique against the private and the revisionism to the critique against the idealism; connect appearances and fundamentals. When studying, to put forward one’s own thoughts and experiences; to realize the presence of the capitalist viewpoint in oneself practices; to use the “collective” principle to smash the “private” principle (...).*
4. *In studying President Mao’s works of philosophy, to transform reading in research and analysis, resuming empirical experiences and creating new policies. To develop political consciousness regarding the actualization of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, to reduce [political] blindness.*
5. *Actually engage one’s mind in studying, to form a strong group of quality cadres, grasp exemplary experiences, to mobilize thoroughly.*
6. *To set groups of philosophy study, to carry out meetings and speeches, exchange experiences, (...) to encourage each other (...)*<sup>66</sup>

Some examples of WPT acting are related in the stenographic transcription of a meeting carried out at the late night of September 16 1968, at Shanghai, with representatives of nine major Shanghai factories and Zhou Enlai, Chen Boda, Jiang Qing and Kang Sheng. Zhou Enlai presided the meeting and started by listening to each worker representing the production units. The first representative to speak was Zhang Yusheng (张育生), worker in the Shanghai Machine

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<sup>66</sup> C.A., “认真学习毛主席的哲学著作” (“Actually study President Mao’s philosophical works”), Red Flag editorial, IN 认真学习毛主席的哲学著作, collection of articles. Beijing: Chinese Institute of Science, Politics and Production Editing House, 1970, pp.15-22, p.17.



Tools Factory. He was selected to speak first because of the political *status* of the factory, recently referred by Mao Zedong as a national example. Zhang Yusheng begin by tracing a historical line from Mao's visit to the factory in 1957 to the directive 7.21, then he explained the workers have further developed the "big critique" and the cleansing of class ranks. Zhou Enlai, then, asked:

*Zhou Enlai: Have too many people joined [the meetings]? Have it disturbed production? In each day, how many people usually join [the meetings]?*

*Zhang Yusheng: Many people have joined it.*

*Zhou Enlai: Then it is not good, it will disturb the production. It is better to limit it. Ask one of the military cadres on the technology office to write something to the SRC, [defining] in each day how many could participate, and report it to the CC. The CRSG will pay attention to these reports.*

*Zhang Yusheng: When we were criticizing and seizing the power of the "technological authorities", we, workers, became masters of the technological line, and this year, from January to September, we have already tested 13 new products, among which there are 4 types that work quicker and have high international quality.(...)*

*Zhou Enlai: What is the percentage of your contribution to the national production of machine tools?*

*Zhang Yusheng: I do not know exactly. Around 20%.*

*Zhou Enlai: Before you had two factions within the unit, the union did not last. There are still splits?*

*Zhang Yusheng: A little.*

*Zhou Enlai: Are you graduated in the technical school?*

*Zhang Yusheng: I graduated high school. (...) I entered the factory in 1958.*

*Zhou Enlai: How many members have the technological department?*

*Zhang Yusheng: 1600 people. Now, six technology departments have been shut down. I decreased by a half.*

*Zhou Enlai: Decreased a half? You still have some factional splits, in which issue you disagree?*

*Zhang Yusheng: The factions do not have so many splits, the main problem is that there are still people from the old Party Committee, and it has an influence upon us.<sup>67</sup>*

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<sup>67</sup> CCPCC, "Meeting with the Central Committee representatives of the National Defense Industry, Chemical Industry and Industry Department regarding the 'grasp revolution and promote production' in factories" (中央首长对国防工业部分工厂

Zhang Yusheng continued to answer Zhou Enlai, reporting that their RC do not have any PLA representatives, because after its settlement, they left to work in other units, and that they managed to select 800 workers to form WPT sent to other factories. Zhou, then, addressing to the audience, asked: “Comrades, you all listen carefully. If the SMTF can do it, can you do it?”.<sup>68</sup>

To try and accomplish the complex role of the Workers Propaganda Teams, local Revolutionary Committees have set, in most production units, literacy and writing classes. A number of writing manuals were published, common titles were: “Words easy to mistake”, “Reading and Writing”, “Reading and criticizing newspaper articles”. Furthermore, the presence of university professors and teachers in the production units also contributed to raise the level of literacy among workers.<sup>69</sup> For example, in the SMTF, by September 1969, there were approximately six thousand workers, and since July 1968, a few hundred intellectuals had joined the factory for periods of teaching and working in the production line.<sup>70</sup> Professors and teachers were requested to teach classes to workers, according to their field of expertise. It means that, besides the Workers University, there were a number of initiatives in each production unit, groups and classes mobilized for the Revolution in Education with different aims.

By 1974, about seven hundred workers from the SMTF had gone through courses or formations in project, management, literacy, politics. They claimed that, by grasping the opportunity of studying and mobilize, workers were “joining the construction within the

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和一机部化工部协作厂“抓革命促生产”会议代表的讲话), September 16, 1968. Available in *The Chinese Cultural Revolution Database*, at <https://ccradb.appspot.com/post/3063> (consulted in March 2018).

<sup>68</sup> Idem.

<sup>69</sup> Elizabeth Perry and Li Xun, in the article “Revolutionary Rudeness”, of 1993, have formulated the hypothesis that “many of the articles published in the media in the name of workers were actually authored by (...) former student radicals”, allegedly because “the workers’ rebels were quite limited in their literary abilities” (pages 13 and 14). However, Perry and Li used only a small number of examples to justify this hypothesis (in this article, three), all of them from the first two years of CR – a sample too reduced to consolidate a definitive conclusion on this matter. The fact is that, the language used in political pamphlets and posters at the beginning of the CR goes through a huge transformation along the years. The “rudeness”, characteristic of the first two years of CR, slowly gave place to a more elaborated political language, especially among workers, after the intense campaign to suppress factionalism. From 1968 to 1974, many writing manuals are published by popular editing houses throughout the country and innumerable classes are conducted within production units. The profusion of published didactic materials specifically directed to workers and peasants are an evidence that a great effort was carried out to solve the problem of illiteracy. See PERRY and LI, “Revolutionary Rudeness: The Language of Red Guards and Rebel Workers in China’s Cultural Revolution” IN *Indiana East Asian Working Paper Series*, July 1993, paper 2.

<sup>70</sup> Xinhua News, “Shanghai Machine Tool Factory team of project technicians is growing” (上海机床厂的工程技术人员队伍在成长) IN RMRB, July 21 1969.

superstructure, thus seizing more power of speech” (言权), and raising their political consciousness regarding the revolution within the superstructure.<sup>71</sup>

### 3.2. *The Ninth Congress – unification and struggle in the Party Reconstruction*

In September 22 1968, the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee sent a report to the Central Committee stating that: (...)

*According to President Mao's recommendation "it is necessary to pay attention in policies in order to draw conscious workers to enter the Party, to increase the percentage of workers in the bases of the Party", (...) after two years of CR, now we already have conditions to select from among rebels, those with excellent qualities [political participation and resourcefulness] to enter the Party. (MAO, 1998(12):569)*

Mao replied to this report ratifying their proposal and sending a copy to the Politburo and CRSG members asking them to read it and debate the possibility to develop similar policies in each locality, as part of the preparations to the 9<sup>th</sup> CCP Congress, to be carried out in the following spring. A month later, the 12<sup>th</sup> Plenum of the 8<sup>th</sup> Central Committee was held in Beijing for almost fifteen days in order to start the official preparations for the Party Congress. (DOMES and NÄTH, 1977:16) The 9<sup>th</sup> Congress were to be an important event to decide the policies for Party Reconstruction after three years of Cultural Revolution and a series of disruptive political incidents. It would be the time to discriminate which new-born things should continue to be developed through popular mobilizations and which should be suppressed.

So far, the successful experience with the Workers Propaganda Teams had highlighted the centrality of the political role of workers in many spheres of a socialist society. As Mao formulated: “Is not workers who are the leadership in Socialism? Isn't a Dictatorship of the Proletariat?”, or

*Who is it that gives us our power? It is the working class, the poor and lower-middle peasants, the laboring masses comprising over 90% of the population. We represent the proletariat and the masses and have overthrown the enemies of the people, and therefore the people support us. Direct reliance on the revolutionary masses is a basic principle of the Communist Party. (MAO, 1998(12):546)*

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<sup>71</sup> ZHANG Meihua, “Go firmly through the 7.21 path to straighten the Dictatorship of the Proletariat and to struggle” (坚定不移地走七·二一道路为巩固无产阶级专政而斗争), IN C.A., Advance through the 7.21 path (前进在 7.21 道路上). Shanghai: Shanghai Popular Editing House, 1975, pp.1-8, p. 5.

To bring workers and peasants to occupy leading positions in politics and administrative organs was a crucial next step to select and place the initiatives carried out during the first years of CR. Changes in the structure of Party organs were also necessary, in order to combat bureaucratism and commandism (among the “five communist winds”). Furthermore, the 9<sup>th</sup> Congress had as one of its objectives to officialize and organize the changes led by WPT in the campaign to “cleanse class ranks”.

The PLA intervention in 1967 and 1968, before the prominent role of the WPT, had resulted in a solid presence of military in the newly established Revolutionary Committees. At some levels of the Party administration, especially in RC established in production units, the great percentage of PLA members became a problem. Although militaries had gathered some experience in production campaigns when participated in mobilizations to add labor power when dealing with infrastructure construction, natural disasters, famines, they did not have the technical knowledge to manage specialized production in some units.

*(...) The most unusual aspect of the military intervention during its earlier phases was the major degree to which the PLA took direct responsibility for supervising and policing both agriculture and industry. (...) During 1967 the majority and perhaps all of the military regions played a role in directing the new economic activities of the PLA. But soon the armed forces' missions in industry and, to a degree, in agriculture were primarily delegated down to the provincial military headquarters, which retained their supervisory functions until operational RC were established. (POWELL, 1971:744)*

On the other hand, giving importance to the role of WPT, since July 1968, was strategical to the Party in two aspects: it concentrated some level of political leadership in the hands of the proletariat, and it resulted in the mobilization of many units that were demobilized after years of factionalism. Finally, for the most part, workers had the technical knowledge to engage in activities of technological innovation e management. That is why, one of the tasks appointed to the 9<sup>th</sup> Congress was to increase the membership of workers in the CCP, including in actual governing organs as the revolutionary committees and the Central Committee. During the 9<sup>th</sup> Congress, the CC was thoroughly reorganized, including at least 60% of workers and peasants among its 170 full and 109 alternate members, many of which also occupied positions of leadership in local Revolutionary Committees (KLEIN and HAGER, 1971) – such as Wang Hongwen, since 1969 member of the CC and vice-secretary of the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee.

Interesting to note that some of these workers and peasants that integrated RC and the CC were actually technical workers for many decades, and had acquired some experience in political activism during the Cultural Revolution. Wang Hongwen can be referred as one important example. In 1972, when Wang Hongwen had to return to Shanghai to work at the SRC, Mao personally oriented him to take History and Rhetoric classes with the Fudan University history professor Zhu Yongjia (1931-), so he could have intellectual resources to dialogue in a highly intellectualized and bureaucratized environment of the Party government apparatus. (ZHU,2012:26)

At the beginning of the CR, the PLA was ordered to intervene supporting the rebels and Red Guard but also suppressing armed struggles and factionalism. However, the same PLA was going through important political mobilizations since 1960, including experiments on demilitarization, philosophy and political studies, criticism and self-criticism sessions. As a consequence, there was a great participation of the military in politics and social mobilizations at the first years of the CR, and often they were entangled in political struggle and even in factionalism. During the establishment of the Revolutionary Committees, therefore, PLA members were one element of the “three-in-one combination”, and, moreover, were responsible to supervise the rehabilitation of old cadres criticized in 1966 and 1967. Yet, by 1969, the international situation faced by China was more and more complex and tense. The soviet attack on Czechoslovakia in 1968, the Sino-soviet combats across the border, Nixon’s election in 1969 and the aggravation of US attacks against communist parties, the nuclear threats.... These were some of the grave international issues at stake. By 1969, China was facing threats of war against the URSS, weakening of North Korea’s support due to the international criticism of the Cultural Revolution, and the close danger of an US attack. At the national sphere, industry production was reducing growth levels and the whole governing apparatus had to be organized after three years of extensive political mobilization and experimentation.

*The energetic campaigns launched after the Ninth Party Congress to reinforce the Party’s “centralized leadership” and to rectify the army’ style of work clearly reflect Mao’s sense of urgency that the military was moving in the wrong direction. (...) The Party reconstruction movement started in 1969 demanded an end to the abnormal phenomenon of “military control”, replacing it with the Party committees collective leadership and unified leadership. Meanwhile, the weight of military representation in Party committees and revolutionary committees at various levels was gradually reduced, and the military was*

*asked to withdraw from direct involvement in administrative and managerial control. Within the PLA, it was stressed that “politics must be in command of and lead military affairs, but it cannot replace military affairs” (POWELL, 1971:751)*

The reorientation of the PLA role had also results within the Politburo, which reduced its size from 21 to only 10 members, (DITTMER, 1973:728) and the military representation decreased from 52% to 20% between 1969 to 1973.

The preparations for the 9<sup>th</sup> Congress had started in October 1968, marked by Yao Wenyan’s editorial to the Red Flag (published also in other national newspapers) “Absorb fresh blood from the Proletariat – An important questions in Party Consolidation”. This article had as its epigraph the following quotation of Mao Zedong:

*A human being has arteries and veins through which the heart makes the blood circulate, and he breathes with his lungs, exhaling carbon dioxide and inhaling fresh oxygen, that is, getting rid of the stale and taking in the fresh. A proletarian party must also get rid of the stale and take in the fresh, for only thus can It be full of vitality. Without eliminating waste matter and absorbing fresh blood the Party has no vigor.<sup>72</sup>*

It was a campaign to consolidate the results of recent struggles against bureaucratism, something that may be described as a “rectification campaign” carried out in national level and within a Party-State structure. However, changing the leadership and “absorbing” new personnel in the CC and at local RC, certainly, arouse some levels of power struggle. To have an idea, the new CC officialized at the 9th Congress had 72% of appointees that have never occupied positions in the central organ of the Party. The last time the Central Committee had been reorganized, in 1956, it had included only 36% of new personnel. (KLEIN and HAGER, op.cit) Another strategy related to the campaign against bureaucratism was the decentralization of the Central Committee: prior to the Cultural Revolution, 66% of the entire CC worked in Peking (...) since 1969, there was only 36% of its members in the capital, and 77% of its members occupied concomitantly positions in municipal or county’s Revolutionary Committees.

Moreover, since October 1968, Mao started to emphasize experiments of workers and peasants administering schools, enterprises and technical committees. For example, the report published on Red Flag called “Shanghai technical workers mobilization is growing through

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<sup>72</sup> MAO Zedong apud YAO Wenyan, “Absorb proletarian fresh blood” (1969). Available at <https://www.marxists.org/subject/china/peking-review/1968/PR1968-43c.htm> (consulted in March 2018).

struggle” (上海工人技术人员在斗争中成长), was republished on RMRB, with a note written by Mao Zedong, saying:

*We ask the whole country, each big, medium or small industry or city's Revolutionary Committee to read it with attention, and see if you can also carry out the same experiment among the technical personnel in your own production unit, report it and send it to the CC (...) Indeed, it is a good and promising path this of training workers and technical personnel to engage in ideological work (becoming professors, teachers, scientists, reporters, artists and Marxist theoreticians). (MAO, 1998(12):542)*

This, and many other reports published in local newspapers received close attention from Mao during the following months, who after careful reading ordered its republication on the RMRB and/or sent it to members of the Politburo to read it and to try and apply it in local RCs. The campaign of Party Reconstruction comprehended a certain change of leadership in every level of Party administration, including at local Revolutionary Committees.

The Ninth Congress, looked from a historical point of view, proposed a contradictory situation to Lin Biao, because at the same time it named the Marshall, in the constitution itself, Mao's successor, it also decided for the decrease of military men within the CC, giving emphasis to the workers' role within government apparatus, what could be interpreted as an oscillation of power between civil and military representations.

There was also a polemic between Mao, Chen Boda and Lin Biao about the so-called “three bigs” (三大) :

*The specific question was how Mao and his thought should be characterized in the new Party Constitution. When the draft of the new constitution was being discussed in the fall of 1968, Mao deleted from the draft the three adverbs in the statement that he had “inherited, defended and developed Marxism-Leninism **with genius, creatively and comprehensively**” (天才地, 创造地, 全面地) something he had done in other occasions in this period. (TEIWES and SUN, 1996:116)*

The question regarded, initially, role of the individual in history and politics.

*For Mao, nothing could be accomplished without authority or leadership. Any well-organized modern society, without authority, would fall into disorder or even chaos. (...) Mao did not strongly oppose geren chongbai (个人崇拜 the adoration of the individual; or, as it is usually referred to in Western society, a cult of personality). Mao clearly differentiated between geren chongbai (the adoration/deep respect of the individual) and*

geren mixin (个人迷信 *the cult of the individual, the superstition of the individual, or personality cult*). He stated that the later should be opposed as it left no room for criticism. (SHENG, 2010:449)

The adverbs proposed by Lin Biao and Chen Boda a few times, to some extent, indicated an alienating and superstitious image of the individual and, furthermore, the reification of a bureaucratized hierarchy, embodied in the image of a “genius” (meaning “infallible”) leader. Mao had already referred to Lin Biao as a “militarist”, at the same time he referred to himself as being a “bureaucrat”. It was a way to criticize their own “dark side”, what Mao often did in meetings and conversations with members of the Party itself and with international delegations.<sup>73</sup>

A few months later, in April 1970, Mao sent a note to the main national newspapers regarding an article written by the Xinhua News entitled “It is Leninism or Socialist Imperialism?”. He begun by praising the theoretical issues putted forward in the article, however, asked vehemently to erase some sentences praising his own personality: “This phrases are useless, may attract oppositions. This kind of phrase should not be written, I already said it a hundred times, but no one listens, I do not know why.” (MAO, 1998(13):90)

An empiric problematic correlated with this issue was the debate on the position of State chairmanship. The post had been occupied by Liu Shaoqi from 1959 to 1966, when he was criticized and dismissed by popular mobilizations at the beginning of the CR. Since then, the position was suppressed, and in 1970, Lin Biao proposed to reestablish the position of State Chairman, which would be initially occupied by Mao, who replied objectively: “I cannot do this again, it would not be appropriate.”(MAO, 1998(13)94) During the Lushan Plenum, Mao proposed a change in the constitution stating that the position should be eliminated. Indeed, as we have seen, as early as 1957, Mao had already mentioned the possibility to eliminate the post and establish a committee in its place.

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<sup>73</sup> As in this excerpt of a conversation with Nicolae Ceausescu in June 3 1971: “Now militarism has taken center stage - it is certain that we will no longer reduce [any years]; he (points to Lin Biao) is the head of the militarists. But I too, am part of the militarists and the bureaucrats (...)”. Here Mao refers to the aggravation of international conflicts faced by China and the increasing of military preparations in the face of the possibility of a US or a Soviet attack. “Militarism” was here referred as a “necessary evil” in light of the international situation, and “bureaucratism” in light of the governing role of the Party in the conceived period of transition named Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Nonetheless, Mao ironically refers to them as “militarists” and “bureaucrats” as a self-criticism. See “Minutes of conversation between Nicolae Ceausescu and Mao Zedong in Beijing on 3 June 1971”, June 03, 1971, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, ANIC, CC RCP fond, Foreign Relations Section, file 39/1971, p.3-29; published in *Relatiile Romano-Chineze, 1880-1974 [Sino-Romanian Relations, 1880-1974]*, ed. Ambassador Romulus Ioan Budura, (Brucharest, 2005), pp. 1064/71] Translated by Mircea Munteanu. Available in <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117763>



During the Lushan Plenum, Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai fiercely criticized a letter wrote by Chen Boda, in which he attempted to justify and reaffirm the use of the adjective “genius” referred to Mao Zedong. Chen had enumerated a few quotations in Engels, Lenin and even in Mao’s works, in which they used the adjective. Mao, however, replied in an interesting statement, criticizing Chen’s argumentation and amplifying the debate:

*Me and Chen Boda – this “specialist in the genius theory” (天才论家) – already discussed for more thirty years, and did not agree in many important questions (...). For example, the three times in Lushan. In the first, he joined Peng Dehuai. In the second, when discussing the Seventy Articles (...) he stayed on the mountain only a few days and soon left (...). I am not speaking about someone being or not a genius, I am talking about people’s social experience (...). [The problem is] if heroes create history or slaves [“oppressed people”, 奴隶们] create history; if knowledge acquired by people is previously in heaven (...), if there is an essentialist apriorism or a materialist reflection theory (反映论); we can only stand upon a Marxist-Leninist ground (...) (MAO, 1998(13)114)*

Mao Zedong and Lin Biao continued to work together in most Party activities, despite the disagreements in the field of military strategy and politics. Lin Biao opposed the approximation with the United States or the URSS, but most of CC members by 1969 defended that China should attempt to establish good commercial relations with one of those potencies, due to the aggravation of international conflicts. The coalition with the URSS seemed, by then, the last possibility, since the conflicts between both socialist countries had increased since the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. In that international configuration, it seemed that the cooperation with the US was more likely to succeed because, being declared political opposers, China and the US could maybe collaborate strictly in the commercial field. Regarding Chen Boda, the Party started a campaign to criticize his political views and the Revisionist political economy in February 1971. (MAO, 1971)

The debate on the role of the individual in history also influenced the question of establishing commercial and diplomatic relations with the US. Considering the president Nixon, or even the United States itself, as individuals that could inexorably lead a whole collectivity, was the same as to conceive the idea of representation in which a part substitute the whole – or, in other words, a president or a nation represented the people in a country. This conception could prevent China to establish relations with the US, because it would mean to consider it, as Lin

Biao had stated in the Ninth congress, “the most ferocious enemy of the people of the whole world”. (LIN, 1969) Instead, considering that “the true hero of history is the people”, there were not problems in setting commercial and diplomatic relations with the US because it would not necessarily represented a defeat of the Chinese Communist Party.

Another disagreement between Mao and Lin Biao regarded the topic of an alleged “victory” of the Cultural Revolution. At Lin’s speech during the 9<sup>th</sup> Congress, he used the word “victory” 36 times, eulogizing the battles won by the CCP, among which he included the GPCR. At the same Congress, Mao made a critical comment to the use of this expression, stating that

*We say ‘victory’, but must guarantee the continuity of the proletariat’s leadership, to reunite the masses of the whole country, and go fight for victory. The socialist revolution will continue. There are some things we have not done yet.* (MAO, 1998(13):36)

Mao, then, enumerated current problems that could favor a defeat of the revolutionary aims. He particularly gave attention, in this speech at the Ninth Congress, to the leadership within production units, declaring that even though the government structure had been changed, people in charge in local RC are still following the “the same kind of path as of Liu Shaoqi’s”, which meant, “to use material incentives, putting profit in command, do not mobilize proletarian politics, giving bonus and awards”. (Idem)

*I hope that when you have opportunities in the future you should go down to have a look again, and to study the problems existing in various factories. It seems to me that the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution must be carried out. Our foundation is not solid and stable. (...) in quite a large majority of the factories, the leadership is not controlled by true Marxists, or controlled by the masses of the workers.<sup>74</sup>*

The question of victory, then, referred to the theoretical topic of the linearity of history. As we have seen in the first chapter, Mao advocated that history was not progressive or linear, instead, that development came in waves, and that it is necessary to examine the possibility of failure in each phase. Lin’s language, in many declarations, proposed a tautological victory to the Socialist Revolution.

It is worth noticing that, until 1971, the articles written by workers and students actually contained many expressions indicating a kind of certainty of victory and triumph. It was only

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<sup>74</sup> “Mao Zedong’s Speech at the First Plenary Session of the CCP’s Ninth Central Committee,” April 28, 1969, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao, vol. 13, pp. 35-41. Translated for CWIHP by Chen Jian. Available in <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117145>

after the campaigns “Criticize Chen and Party Rectification” (批陈整风运动 1971), “Study Marxism-Leninism” (学马列主义 1971-1972) and “Big Critique” (大批判 1971-1976) that worker’s articles gradually lost expressions as “the flames of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution have been burned even more, and newer and greater victories have been won!”<sup>75</sup>, or “All the members of the party taking power in the capitalist road, and the death knell of all ghosts and zombie gods have been knocked off”.<sup>76</sup> As the process of consolidation of the new born things advanced, workers articles changed in many aspects, there were many expressions of doubt, questions and more complex argumentations in order to justify the permanence of the political experimentations.

### *3.3. Lin Biao goes, Nixon comes – workers mobilizations after Party Reconstruction and facing international competition*

*“Some are opposing you. In our country also there is a reactionary group which is opposed to our contact with you. The result was that they got on an airplane and fled abroad.”*

*Mao Zedong, in the conversation with Richard Nixon in February 21, 1972*

Since the Ninth Congress, the Politburo promoted the participation of workers in Party organs, settling local training programs so that proletarians could occupy posts at the central organs of government and local managerial teams. “There was a strong emphasis on reliance on the workers in managing socialist enterprises, and the Anshan Constitution was once again promoted as the guiding set of principles for all management work”. (SHEENAN, 1998:139)

However, gradually, from 1970 to 1975, the international market competition (as an external factor) and the “lack of provision for regular reelection of representatives” (as an internal political factor) resulted in undermining participatory institutions. (Idem, 140) Notwithstanding, the remaining popular mobilizations and the “eulogizing of workers’ role as masters in the enterprise does seem to have given them a weapon with which they could resist against a return to pre-1966 management methods”, at least for a few years. (Idem, 143)

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<sup>75</sup> People’s Daily, “Oh, Mao Zedong! Shanghai’s rebel revolutionary faction will always follow you!” IN People’s Daily, January 15, 1967.

<sup>76</sup> People’s Daily, “Investigative report of the Shanghai Glass Machinery Factory’s committee of grasping revolution and promoting production” (上海玻璃机械厂“革命生产委员会”调查报告), IN People’s Daily, January 23, 1967.

Lin Biao's death in September 1971 was publicized a few months later, together with the broadcasting of the so-called "Draft for the Project 571", a document apparently written by Lin Biao, his son Lin Liguo, and some of his supporters as Chen Liyun, Wang Weiguo and Jiang Tengjiao. This booklet presented a series of critiques against the Cultural Revolution, the CRSG and Mao Zedong himself, suggesting a military *coup* to gain power within the Party in order to set a firmer governing order. (TEIWES and SUN, 2007:4)

Initially, the leadership of both Party and PLA relucted to publicize the "Draft 571", since the denouncement of an attempted *coup d'état* co-organized by one of Mao's closest comrades could result in a great damaging of the Party's image. The PLA and Central Committee's member Ji Dengkui was one of the Party leaders to oppose the dissemination of the document 571, however, Mao overruled these concerns and ordered to ordered its release nationally from February 1972. (TEIWES and SUN, 2007:35)

Indeed, the publicization of the document 571 resulted in a loss of prestige of the Cultural Revolution and even of Mao himself. Lin Biao was one of his most known supporters, who advocated for the personality cult even when Mao clearly opposed to it. It was at least demoralizing to declare that a major representative of the PLA and close comrade was secretly planning a military *coup* against Mao e was actually opposed to the politics of the Cultural Revolution. (WU, 2014:205)

Moreover, a possible military *coup* against Mao and against the political campaigns of the CR represented a warning that the Line Struggle was indeed a situation of "life and death" even within the Party itself. It radically aggravated the campaigns to criticize revisionism and Chen Boda's policies carried so far. The question of a "probable defeat" was revived in Mao Zedong, Yao Wenyuan, Zhou Enlai and Zhang Chunqiao's speeches.

On the other hand, the death of Lin Biao and the finding of the document 571 also caused a loss of prestige of the general military policy carried so far, criticized, for a few months after Lin's death, as being "ultra-leftist" or bureaucratized.<sup>77</sup> This opened the possibility of a formal approximation with the US.

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<sup>77</sup> The epithet "ultra-leftist" was used a few times during the CR, and referred mainly to hyper-bureaucratized organizations that would struggle to maintain formal positions and regulations even when it would oppress popular mobilizations and political creation. It was applied, for example, to Red Guard factionalism and to those who practiced the "five communist winds". Bettelheim defined the "ultra-leftist" approach regarding local situations as "The petty bourgeois character of the ultra-leftist line was particularly manifested in the way to deal with questions of labor regulation in factories" IN BETTELHEIM, Charles. *Revolucion Cultural y Organizacion industrial en China*, p.135. After 1971, the "ultra-leftism" was referred as being actually "rightist", because it would indeed act as a counterrevolutionary approach. The term was also used

During the CR, China had lost some of its commercial partners, what corroborated to a loss of production output. That is mainly because of the lack of high technological means of production, such as precision machine tools, warfare, aircrafts, fertilizers, medicine.

*What caused the reversal in Chinese foreign policy? It was the change in the situation of the United States. President Nixon was faced with military stalemate in Vietnam and heavy American losses; the costs of the war were fueling world inflation and jeopardizing the ability of American businessmen to compete abroad (a situation reflected in a steadily weakening dollar and increasing currency instability). Furthermore, opposition to the war was mounting in the United States. It was therefore urgent that the US extricate itself from Vietnam, but without appearing to have been defeated. On the Chinese side, the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 (illustrating the willingness of Moscow to put down rebels within its own “sphere of influence”), and armed clashes on the Sino-Soviet border in 1969, sharply brought home China’s relative isolation. China needed allied and entry to the United Nations, particularly after having allowed external relations to decay during the Cultural Revolution. (HARRIS, 1978:153)*

The need to establish international diplomatic relations even promoted a local campaign to train workers as diplomats. Zhang Chunqiao led this initiative with Zhu Yongjia and the Fudan University’ Workers Propaganda Team. In December 1971 they selected 150 workers, and sent 100 of them to study at the Fudan University and 50 to study in an International Relations School in Beijing. In April 1972, the SRC selected more 113 workers, 80 of which were sent to study International Affairs at the Fudan University and 33 integrated the International Affairs Department of the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee. Ma Tianshui, vice-secretary of the SRC, declared in a later testimony that Zhang Chunqiao had commented: “Today’s ambassadors all wear glasses, there are no young ones. They are all men; there are no women. They are all intellectuals; there are no workers. (...)” (Ma Tianshui apud PERRY, 1998:169)

The initiative, though, did not go further. Although some workers had received the training on international affairs, after their studying period, the SRC contacted the Foreign Ministry of the State Council but they did not respond. The trained workers were, then, placed

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after 1976 against some policies of the CR, normally associated with the “gang of four”, in a way to extirpate Politburo radical policies regarding social revolution as being an anomaly practiced by a group of individuals, rather than an political economy’s project.

in the SRC Department of International Affairs and, after the CR, were sent back to their original posts and units.

The new-born things were not set easily. Experiments as the organization of a worker's university, or group of workers diplomats, were limited to a few workers of each production unit. In Shanghai, the proportion of factories involved in political mobilizations was bigger, because there was a majority of people in the municipal RC that supported the Cultural Revolution and because of the engagement of most production units.

The radicality of the first two years of Cultural Revolution had no place in China's context after 1969. In all spheres, the Chinese Communist Party was facing an unprecedented crises, to which was not enough to propose "political experimentation", since the international situation required military potential of defense and, internally, the political situation required a decisive shift from "destruction" to "construction". The campaign for Party Reconstruction, launched in the Ninth Congress, set the time for the "transform" – last stage of the trinomial "struggle-criticize-transform" (斗批改).

Questions regarding the further development of initiatives started from 1966 to 1968 gained prevalence in ongoing debates. For example, how to combine the activities of productive labor and study in the production units. In the SMTF, in 1970, three workers sent a request to the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee, asking them support to organize limits and rules to the study activities in the unit. They reported that, since the entering in the factory of the "sent-down youth" (or "educated youth", who were mainly Red Guard ex-members but also other students), workers had been participating in studies, a few times a week, during the whole night. The three workers signing the petition ask the RC if they could officially limit the studying period, to guarantee time for working, family and some leisure. (SMTF, 1970)

The first workers university, set in the SMTF in September 5<sup>th</sup> 1968, started with only 52 students, all of them workers of the lowest levels of production hierarchy in the factory and engaged in political mobilizations of previous years. From this group, "the majority had completed only primary education, the minority had finished high school and eight have not finished primary education". (SMTF RC, 1971) The workers did not know, by 1968, how long the courses would take, which didactic materials to use and who were to be the professors. They

initially proposed a course of “more or less two years”<sup>78</sup>. There were many doubts on how to combine time of labor and time of studying and, even, there were doubts if the time working at the production line could or not be considered as a period of studying.

In a meeting in June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1970 with Yao Wenyuan, some representatives of the Shanghai Machine Tools Factory, four universities and eight technical schools (summing up 90 people) debated the difficulties they were facing in implementing the workers universities. Also attended to the meeting the vice-secretaries of the SPC, Xu Jinxian and Ma Tianshui, and the history professor Zhu Yongjia. They started the discussion by evaluating a report written by a WPT of Shanghai about the Revolution in Education.

Regarding the professors and classes, the workers-students agreed with Zheng Shiyi, a professor and worker in Shanghai, that:

*the professors are changing and adapting well, and this makes easy for us to understand what are their problems and help them to grow. (...) But as soon as they begin to teach, they take out the same old set, go through the old path of teaching. To teach project, they still begin by how to sharp the pencil and how to use an eraser. We have already criticized this volume. (...) Some professors think workers only have empirical experience and do not have theoretical knowledge (...) but the truth is that, when we are on stage, professors cannot respond many theoretical questions, but workers open their mouths and explain it clearly.*<sup>79</sup>

This new-born thing, the Workers University, as we see, involved a series of practical and theoretical questions. And to answer to this problematic situation, many meetings and experiments should be carried out, in order to actually select a methodology and a structure adapted to their economic and political aims.

However, at the exact same period, China was facing the need to develop technology of production in order to achieve a minimum equality with the international market. In 1963, a few dozen machine tools had been imported to be studied by the Beijing Machine Tool Research Institute and, a few years later, copied and produced in national territory. (GU, 1999:130) In 1971 and 1972, then, the country was facing another international leap on technology: the high

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<sup>78</sup> See “Meeting in June 2 1970 with Yao Wenyuan and Zhang Chunqiao in Shanghai about the setting of Technical Schools within the Revolution in Education” (一九七〇年六月二日，张春桥、姚文元同志在上海召开了理工科大学教育革命座谈会) IN Selected works of Yao Wenyuan (姚文元文集), chapter 54. Beijing: Utopia Editing Group, w/d.

<sup>79</sup> Zheng Shiyi (former graduate of the Shanghai Qinghua University and professor in a Workers University) IN “Meeting in June 2 1970 with Yao Wenyuan and Zhang Chunqiao in Shanghai about the setting of Technical Schools within the Revolution in Education” (idem)

precision and computer numerically controlled machine tools, a kind of technology that was developed mainly in Japan and in the US. (KOREN, 1997) Indeed, from 1970 to 1978, the Annual Compound Growth Rate of Gross Value Added (GVA) for the Chinese Machine Tools industry decreased by approximately a half (9,18%) of the GVA for the previous period (19,27%), from 1965 to 1970.<sup>80</sup>

Between 1960 and 1970, China's machine tools industry had achieved a substantial development and raised their levels of production output. The country's two main machine tool research centers were set in Beijing First Machine Tools Factory and in the Shanghai Machine Tools Factory. Shanghai research institute became specialized in grinding machines, and Beijing's center in cutting machine tools.

The three-in-one combination and the technological committees were, actually, effective, succeeding in "substantially improving the standard of domestic supplies of precision machine tools", yet, the development of new products took longer than expected: until the end of the CR, machine tools produced in China were still using mechanical technology – CNC machine tools were only introduced in 1978.(GU, 1999:121) This delay, with respect to the international technological development of machine tools, may have caused the decrease in the production growth between 1970 and 1978, which resulted in a urgency for the development of new technology in the field.

That may be one of the reasons why, since the first experiments carried out in the late 1950, and also in the 1970, workers required that their teaching methodology would mix theoretical lessons and practical experiences in the production line. It was researching, testing and producing that they could argument in favor of the political mobilizations in a factory. That is also because, for the most part, the declarations against the establishment of a university inside a factory, were based on the idea that it would not promote production or technological development, and that only specialized personnel could lead technological advances. Since the January Revolution, all political mobilizations in factories were justified, in the articles signed by workers or workers committees, by the improvement of production output and technological innovation.

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<sup>80</sup> Table 2, Annual Compound Growth Rate of Gross Value Added (GVA) in Chinese Industry by Branch, Selected Periods in 1949-97 (in percentage) apud WU, Harry X. "How fast has Chinese industry grown? – Measuring the real outpour of Chinese industry – 1949-1997" IN *Review of Income and Wealth*, Series 48, N.2, June 2002, p.193.



*We set this idea: in a big factory shed, to study project and to study theory, this way students can engage in what they prefer, learn more, speak less and produce more creatively. (...) Some students have not studied mechanics, they do not have the knowledge on mechanical construction, so, for them, it is ok to start from the basic knowledge. (...) I think we must study theory, but sure need to have contact with empirical experience, use the students with more autonomy, and then we can learn quicker. Study, and immediately use it.<sup>81</sup>*

The political mobilizations in production units, although mainly limited to the Revolution in Education since 1970, still promoted debates and changes in the organization of labor processes. For example, Zheng Shiyi, at the same meeting with members of the Politburo and the SRC in June of 1970, brought to light a question that would be topic of debate at least for the next six years: the concept of social classes and its political implications within Socialism:

*As soon as we started the studying, workers said: “we came to seize the power of speech” (or “power of language/culture” 夺文权), occupy the vacuum in science” (...) But when they entered [the studying campaigns and classes], they neglect to change the conceptions about themselves, they thought if one is already from the worker class, comes from a proletarian origin, has practical experience, then he is “naturally red” and do not have to transform their own thought.*

Later in the meeting, Zhang Chunqiao asked the SMTF technical worker Wang Shaoting (王绍庭): “So, everybody is trying to walk your factory’s path. And how are you walking it?”, to what he commented that, in their unit, the problem of the “theory of the natural red” (自红论) was dealt with the following strategies:

*We have been told by comrades of the SRC that the struggles and contradiction of society would reflect within the factory. Then, we promoted a “five-day studying session” in the unit and grasped these struggles. Among the workers, it is normal that some have the idea of being “naturally red”. They think they are workers, which are selected to study and, therefore, their main goal should be to study well project and engineering. Moreover, they have received some influence of the old thought in education, the revisionist line. (...) So, it is important that the studies in the factory continue to be led by the Thought of Mao Zedong regarding the Revolution in Education. (...) on one side to practice and experiment and on*

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<sup>81</sup> Zheng Shiyi (former graduate of the Shanghai Qinghua University and professor in a Workers University) IN “Meeting in June 2 1970 with Yao Wen Yuan and Zhang Chunqiao (...)” Idem.

*the other side to study, learn how to battle in the battle. (...) it is important to study in the factory itself, we do not need to go to your place [the university].*<sup>82</sup>

Wang Shaoting also reported in the meeting that the workers, with a group of professors from the Qinghua University, were preparing to write a new didactic material for teaching machine tool's project techniques.<sup>83</sup>

Age was also a matter of debate:

*when the level of culture is low and the age is high, there are problems in the learning-teaching processes – quick is not ok, slow is also not ok. When they are young, and the level of culture is low, we use the method of “mutual help” and it raises their learning capacities.*

The SMTF had also started a “complementary school” for courses of brief duration (from one to ten months), which gradually increased the quantity of students from 65 (in 1968) to 150 (in 1971).<sup>84</sup> This “complementary school” (业余学校) carried courses regarding politics, philosophy and engineering techniques.

*Last month I talked with the comrade Zhang Meihua, I wanted to listen to him because he is secretary of the factory's Revolutionary Committee and also Worker Project Manager. He wanted to study, but there were no vacant posts [at the Workers University]. So he enrolled for the complementary school. It is a good place to some excellent workers to study together: to study politics, military, agriculture, culture, technology. You can also select some best students of the complementary school to enter the university. You have too few students at the 7.21 University.*<sup>85</sup>

Zhang Chunqiao closed this meeting stating that

*our experience [in Shanghai] is indeed richer (...) we have to analyze and synthesize our experiences, it does not matter if big or small, and compare it after one year. For example, the enrollment of students, the education on political thought, the problem of organize a school inside a factory, the question of writing new didactic materials, the professors, the leadership, etc. In each aspect you gain some experience, you must write about it. This is an experiment that has just started, there is little experience, many problems we still have to research. Do not hurry, our knowledge will follow the time for developing practical experience.*<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Wang Shaoting apud “Meeting in June 2 1970 with Yao Wenyuan and Zhang Chunqiao (...)” Idem.

<sup>83</sup> Three volumes produced collectively by workers and professors were actually published in 1971, 1972 and 1973, entitled “General Machine Tool's Project” (组合机床设计), volumes 1, 2 and 3.

<sup>84</sup> Zhang Meihua, “Training worker class technicians” (培养工人阶级的技术队伍) IN RMRB, February 18, 1971.

<sup>85</sup> Zhang Chunqiao apud “Meeting in June 2 1970 with Yao Wenyuan and Zhang Chunqiao (...)” Idem.

<sup>86</sup> Zhang Chunqiao apud “Meeting in June 2 1970 with Yao Wenyuan and Zhang Chunqiao (...)” Idem.

### 3.4. *The struggle to problematize technology and social relations of production*

*The Workers University 7.21 is a socialist new-born thing, but it did not fell from sky, it is built upon old land. So we cannot avoid but having vestiges of the old school, there may be traces of the old path, and sometimes it may grow “new trash”.*

Zhang Meihua (Secretary of the SMTF Revolutionary Committee), 1975

The first group of workers-students graduated at the SMTF 7.21 Workers University in July 21, 1971. In the directive 7.21, Mao had stated that “students should be selected from among workers and peasants with practical experience and they should return to production after a few years of study”<sup>87</sup>. Indeed, from the group of 52 workers-students (seven of which were women<sup>88</sup>) who started the course in September 1968, “34 returned to their original posts in the factory sheds or in specialized groups, eight people started assisting internal construction, ten people entered the factory’s grinding machine tools research laboratories”.<sup>89</sup> Their course was composed of the disciplines: Mao Zedong Thought, Physical Education, Military and Specialized Classes. The Specialized Classes comprehended “project drawing, mathematics, physics, hydraulic, electric machines, engineering, project of grinder tools and foreign language.”<sup>90</sup>

The graduation of the first group of the SMTF Worker’s University interposed a problem to the continuity of the initiative: if all the workers graduated in the popular universities occupied positions of technical leadership, it would rather represent a ratification of the “difference between manual and intellectual labors” – one of the three big differences against which the WU were set to combat. This problematic fomented nationwide debates about the political objectives of the WU, and between 1970 and 1971, many articles were published analyzing the phrase “Students should be selected from among workers and peasants with practical experience, and they should return to production after a few year’s study” – the final sentence of Mao’s “Directive 7.21”.

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<sup>87</sup> Mao Zedong apud CCPCC, “Take the road of the Shanghai Machine Tools Plant in training technicians from among the workers”. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1968.

<sup>88</sup> SMTFRC, “Advancing through the path of President Mao’s 7.21 directive” (沿着毛主席“七·二一”指示的光辉道路前进) IN RMRB, June 12, 1971.

<sup>89</sup> Xinhua News, “A new team of workers technicians is growing – remembering the first group graduated at the 7.21 Workers University” (新型的工人技术人员在成长 - 记上海机床厂“七·二一”工人大学第一批毕业生) IN RMRB, July 22 1972.

<sup>90</sup> SMTFRC, “Advancing through the path of President Mao’s 7.21 directive” (沿着毛主席“七·二一”指示的光辉道路前进) IN RMRB, June 12, 1971.

In the meeting of June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1970, Zhang Chunqiao urged the representatives of the SMTF Workers University to increase the number of workers-students, because they were “too few”. Indeed, the first group had only 52 students in a factory of more than seven thousand workers. Xu Jingxian, secretary of the SPC, commented that:

*To select new students is a very important matter. The Tongji University, when had to select new students for the workers-peasants group (...), met two types of situations: (...) one, when it was not sufficiently debated by the people, then they selected the students by a quota of each unit, the result was that there were people that did not want to go, even some unit leaders did not go, and some of their comrades decided to go in their place to help them. Another different situation was when the selection of students was better carried out, they first told people about the university and their aims, mobilize the masses to debate it, created excitement, and recommended comrades for students through popular debate. (...) This way is better. The selection of new students is a matter of [political] line, it is necessary to mobilize the masses.<sup>91</sup>*

Consequently, it was not simple to increase the number of students at the 7.21 University because there was no consensus of its quality and actual necessity, not even among the workers in the same unit. Another problematic issue is the fact that those students were selected for political criteria (engagement in political mobilizations, effectiveness in the work position, proportion of selected students in each unit...) and *not* through a regular university entrance test. The leadership of many units in Shanghai were still reluctant to settle workers universities or study groups. Particularly in an industrial production unit, the debate did not involve only questions about administration of labor processes. Those who declared against the implementation of workers universities doubted its usefulness and the capacity of an experimental association to form new technicians among workers, who may have only studied a few years in regular school.

Workers argumentation in favor of the WU proposed a problematic hypothesis: “the field of technology is like any other field [of society], the essence of its two line struggle is a question of power”.<sup>92</sup> That meant technology were to be, too, a field where there is a line struggle (two, or more, opposing propositions of political economy), and that it was defined by who was in charge of its direction.

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<sup>91</sup> Xu Jingxian in

<sup>92</sup> Luoyang Tractor Factory’s East is Red Communication Group and Xinhua News, “Advancing in the direction of autonomy and self-reliance” (沿着独立自主、自力更生的方向前进) IN RMRB, May 20 1969.

*Some cadres think that since we went through the Cultural Revolution, the problem of the political power is already answered, and now the main question is to develop technology, to innovate and increase output. Some workers are influenced by this kind of thought, when they hear that are going to study in an university or join a three-in-one project group, blindly think they have it all, have already changed enough of their thinking and are only needed to study technology. This kind of thought actually may alienate from the proletarian politics and carry out only the “technology in command”, actualizing Liu Shaoqi’s idea that “class struggle is over”(…) <sup>93</sup>*

This debate recalled a topic proposed by Mao Zedong in 1958: “politics in command” or “politics is the guarantee of the technique”<sup>94</sup>. The subject was further analyzed and debated in the next years, until 1976. Yet, during the first years of the WU, until the graduation of its first group, most articles signed by workers, narrated individual experiences of development of new machines or technologies through the combination of work in the production line and time of complementary technical study with engineers and university professors. In these texts, the prevalent argumentation was that it was possible for non-technical personnel to develop skills to create and innovate technology through labor experience and complementary studying, thus effectively collaborating to the production output and quality.

These workers claimed that the innovations produced by themselves and/or through popular mobilization had a different quality: it not only responded to the needs of international competition and national industrial demands, but also could overcome technological challenges that the mere import of ready-made projects could not. At the same time, the three-in-one combination was presented as an alternative that collaborated for the accomplishment of communist political aims, as the consolidation of more equal relations within a production unit.

This argumentation proposed, thus, an intrinsic relation between technology and social politics. Indeed, by 1970, it was a widely debated topic in many countries. The invention of the computer numerically controlled (CNC) machine tools had raised an international debate on a possible third industrial revolution. Among sociologists, the question was how it could transform the labor and labor relations in industries. Harry Braverman, David Noble and Andrew Feenberg, among others, have questioned if there really is an “invisible trail of progress”

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<sup>93</sup> Zhang Meihua (secretary of the SMTF Revolutionary Committee), “Organizing a worker class team of technicians” (培养工人阶级的技术队伍) IN RMRB, February 18, 1971.

<sup>94</sup> Mao Zedong in “” 1958

that would determine technology development; in other words, if the development of technology was “as naturally determined as biology evolution” or politically deliberated.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, these studies have also raised the question of workers political autonomy in a factory which production was controlled by NC or CNC technologies – was there still space for self-management experiences?

To the workers and cadres engaged in consolidating the WU, economy, technology and social politics were confluent questions.

*In the empirical experience, workers have felt that somethings are enchaining their hands increasingly. Technological patterns and models are being brought from other countries, management structure have gradually increased, administration system have been more and more heavy. Particularly in the case of technology, chains are felt even heavier. (...) Workers have no power when comes to designing new products and systems, experimenting or transforming technologies.<sup>96</sup>*

Recent analyzes questioned if the developed of technology by workers would actually result in different products than those created by specialists in an hierarchized organization of production relations.<sup>97</sup> In other words, the question is whether technology itself is a matter of class struggle, if a machine – in its structure or functioning – could lead to some kind of political consequence. Or, on the contrary, if the transformation of the social relations of production could alone lead to the consolidation of equality within a factory and a society, without the need to change technology itself.

The Brazilian scholar Renato Dagnino (2007), based on the works of Andrew Feenberg, have elaborated a frame to qualify some current interpretations in the study of the relations between technology and social sciences. In the following frame, the vertical axis – determining a scale between “neutron” and “social determined” technology – represents, on one extremity “the conception that considers technology as neutron, that is, free of moral, social, political or economic values (or interests)”; on the other extremity, there is the conception of technology as intrinsically related to these values and interests. The horizontal axis, accordingly, represents a scale of “autonomy”, marking, on one extremity, the interpretations that conceive technology

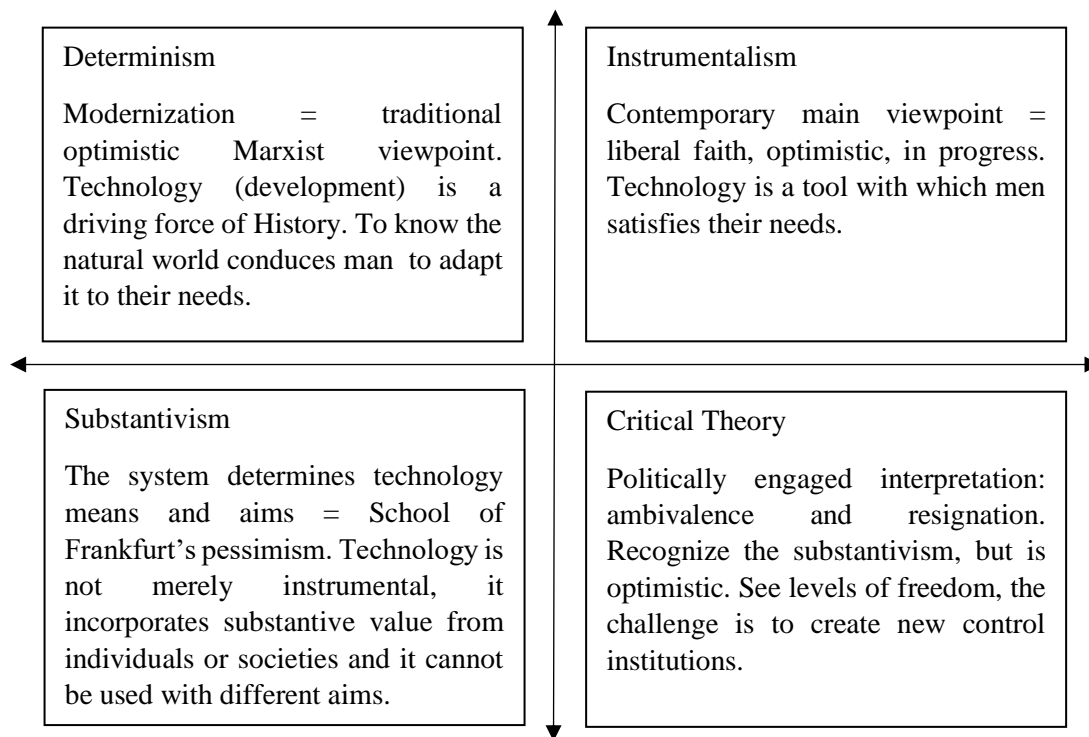
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<sup>96</sup> Luoyang Tractor Factory’s East is Red Communication Group and Xinhua News, “Advancing in the direction of autonomy and self-reliance” (沿着独立自主、自力更生的方向前进) IN RMRB, May 20 1969.

<sup>97</sup> BURAWOY (1990) apud NOVAES, Henrique T. *O Fetiche da Tecnologia*, Idem, pp. 111-115

as an autonomous field of knowledge/ praxis and, on the other extremity, the viewpoint that considers it controlled by men's deliberation.<sup>98</sup>



This frame may help us analyze the critiques voiced by different sectors of the Chinese society, during the CR, regarding industrial production, economic development and social revolution. Workers engaged in the mobilizations for establishing the WU tended to express argumentation close to what Dagnino – with Feenberg – refers as the Critical Theory's view of the imbrication between technology and social relations of production.

*Critical theory recognizes that part of the human actor which overflows any particular network involvement and provides a basis for criticizing the construction of networks. It retains the commonsense notion that human actors have unique reflexive capacities. There capacities make it possible for humans to represent the networks in which they “emerge” and to measure them against unrealized potentialities identified in thought. (...)*<sup>99</sup>

It means that a Critical approach to the “intersection between ideology and technique”<sup>100</sup> and their relation with human beings, could at least

<sup>98</sup> NOVAES, Henrique T. *O Fetice da Tecnologia* (“Technology Fetice”). São Paulo: Expressão Popular, 2010, p.88. The table was conceived by Renato Dagnino (2007) quoted in NOVAES, Henrique, Idem, p. 89.

<sup>99</sup> FEENBERG, Andrew. *Transforming Technology – A critical theory revisited*. New York: Oxford University Press, p.34.

<sup>100</sup> FEENBERG, Andrew. *Transforming Technology* (Idem), p.15.

*emphasize other attributes of technology compatible with a wider distribution of cultural qualifications and powers. (...) They include the vocational investment of technical subjects in their work, collegial forms of self-organization, and the technical integration of a wider range of life-enhancing values, beyond the mere pursuit of profit or power.*<sup>101</sup>

Most articles written by workers engaged in the WU, during the CR, referred to the social organization that controlled technology, yet there are also references stating that a “proletarian control” of the areas of project and engineer would actually result in *different* products. Withal, the articles always stressed that innovations carried out by collective effort were more efficient than technologies created by foreign or national specialists alone (excluding the actual participation of workers). That is why their aim was to transform the technical committees in the factory and the social organization of project design.

By 1968, when the experimental WU started its activities, the SMTF already had 50% of its specialized personnel trained from among workers, mostly graduated in short-term courses in municipal technical schools. The aim was that, with the WU, this percentage would surpass the 80%.<sup>102</sup>

Technical development and product innovation were, often, presented as proves that the changes in the social relations of production actually corroborate to achieve effective results in production output and quality. But these texts also mentioned the possibility of intrinsic differences between products created by specialists or through three-in-one combination.

*The path of training technicians from among the workers, ratified by the President Mao, means the worker class can create its own group and path of technology and science; it is the worker class occupying the field of science and technology (...). They not only create products but, more importantly, use the Mao Zedong Thought to transform the aspect of the technological work.*<sup>103</sup>

Until 1971, articles supporting the consolidation of the WU mainly emphasized the capacity workers have to successfully project and innovate technology, collaborating to the development of the national industry.

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<sup>101</sup> FEENBERG, Andrew. *Transforming Technology* (Idem), p.35.

<sup>102</sup> C.A., Xinhua News, “Shanghai group of workers-technicians is growing through struggle” (上海工人技术人员队伍在斗争中成长) IN RMRB, July 24, 1969. This aim, even after three graduated groups in the WU, was never achieved. We shall study this in the next chapter.

<sup>103</sup> C.A., (SMTF correspondent, reporters from the Wenhui News, Liberation Daily and the Xinhua News), “The team of workers technicians of the SMTF is growing” (上海机床厂的工程技术人员队伍在成长), IN RMRB, July 21, 1969.



*Ten years or so before the Cultural Revolution, the SMTF had 12 “foreign” general managers [“洋”, pejorative word for “foreign”]<sup>104</sup>, and the 54% of workers-technicians in the factory had not seized power of speech yet. This general managers used to follow Liu Shaoqi’s “crawling philosophy”: ten years after the building of this factory, they have not created a single new machine tool. However, right before the CR, a few workers-technicians wanted to design a new machine tool through research and study. Then, they decided to consult one of these high level general managers, but he put out a series of questions: “Do you know, by any chance, the rules of first imitate and, only after, create? If you have not imitated, could you possibly create?”. In this people, the roots of the poisoned “foreign imperialism philosophy” are too deep, they can only crawl after someone else. Now, workers-technicians have grasped the power of technology, they abandoned the old path of “imitate-create”, in only three years created 9 different types of machine tools. Workers-technicians led the process of designing 7 of it.<sup>105</sup>*

In this excerpt, it is clear that one of the main argumentations in favor of the WU was that workers-technicians could actually collaborate with the development of national technological innovations.

On the other side, inside the Party organs there was also a considerable opposition to the WU initiative. In July 1972, for example, when the second group of workers-students were initiating their courses, Zhou Enlai endorsed a critique written by Zhou Peiyuan (周培源, 1902-1993) – head of the Physics Department in the Beijing University – which affirmed that generally, the initiatives of popular technical studies disregarded the basic theory, which could result in poor teaching and lack of theoretical basis for the new graduates. He also affirmed, in his letter, that “professors in universities are afraid to teach the theoretical fundamentals, because they fear to be criticized for ‘departing from concrete experience’”. Zhou Enlai sent a copy of

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<sup>104</sup> The word 洋(yang) was used in this text between quotation marks, a common indication that a word was used with an ironically and pejorative meaning. The word 洋 (yang) refers to “ocean”, “foreign”, in this case, in a pejorative sense, as “foreign imperialist” or “barbarian”.

<sup>105</sup> C.A., Xinhua News, “Shanghai group of workers-technicians is growing through struggle” (上海工人技术人员队伍在斗争中成长) IN RMRB, July 24, 1969.

this letter to the Department of Science and Education of the State Council, asking its members to debate and pay serious attention to the problems referred by Zhou Penyuan.<sup>106</sup>

The objections to projects related to the WU were not limited to the problem of teaching-learning content. Most critiques referred a problem of general efficacy. It was not clear the purpose of a system in which workers would become specialized students and, later, occupy the same positions at the production line. Particularly in a country where there was effectively a lack of specialized personnel in production units and in Party organs.

The workers and cadres leading the WU, though, had a particular aim: to build a society in which there were no differences between manual and intellectual labors, that is, that workers were “able to come up and to come down, able to struggle and to write, able to produce and to speak” (能上能下, 能武能文, 能生能言).<sup>107</sup>

To this aim, leadership should necessarily be collective, organized in committees organized “according to the principle of the Paris Commune”.<sup>108</sup> The collective organization of the committees was part of the “Paris Commune’s principle”, and meant members of the leadership in a determined sphere of the society should be selected from among the people through popular debate and vote, and even after their election, they would be submitted to popular vigilance, aware they could be deposed at any time, or could be asked to “come down” and “learn from workers/ peasants” for a while, participating in manual labor.

The fourth *Red Flag* edition of 1972 published an article of Wang Defa, a worker-technician at the SMTF, entitled “Our mind is a factory shed”, in which he narrated the process of creation of a machine tool as an example of the workers capacity to produce knowledge through political mobilizations and egalitarian organization of labor processes.<sup>109</sup> It is interesting that this article, initially published in 1972’s fourth volume of the *Red Flag*, when

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<sup>106</sup> CCPCC, “Zhou Enlai’s critical comment to Zhou Peiyuan’s letter” (周恩来对周培源来信的批语) July 23, 1972, IN ZHOU Liangyi and GU Juying (ed), *Ten Years of Cultural Revolution* (十年文革中首长讲话传信录) – Documents and speeches, V.3, p.1980-1, IN *Virtual Museum of the Cultural Revolution*, [www.cnd.org](http://www.cnd.org).

<sup>107</sup> C.A.,

<sup>108</sup> MEISNER, Maurice, “Images of the Paris Commune in Contemporary Chinese Marxist Thought” IN *The Massachusetts Review*, V.12, N.3, Summer 1971, pp.479-497 and C.A., *The Paris Commune* (巴金公社) – Special Edition of a Beijing University’s Theoretical Journal called *Historical Knowledge Volumes* 历史知识读物, published in September 1971 by the *Commercial Affairs Printing House and the Beijing University Popular Publishing House*.

<sup>109</sup> Wang Defa, “Our mind is a factory shed” (我们的头脑是一个加工厂), IN *President Mao’s philosophical thought leads our advance* (毛主席哲学思想指引我们前进). Shanghai: Shanghai popular publishing house, 1973, pp.56-62.

republished in the 1973 had the name “Liu Shaoqi” replaced by “Lin Biao” in one of its paragraphs. That is because, in 1973, although “Campaign of Criticizing Lin Biao and Confucius” was not officially launched yet (it officially started in January of 1974), there were already some mobilizations, mainly within the CCP, to criticize Lin Biao’s policies. That is because the political line attributed to Liu Shaoqi until 1972, – defense of a bureaucratic hierarchy, apriorism and material incentives – were considered represented mainly by Lin Biao since 1973.

*Liars of Lin Biao’s [“Liu Shaoqi’s type” in its edition of 1972] type spread the fake ideas of “genius” or “apriorism”, saying that people’s knowledge comes before concrete things, before experience (...) this is entirely relied on the subjectivist essentialism. The actual experience tells us: people’s mind is a factory shed, “all true knowledge derive from direct experience”<sup>110</sup>*

Wang Defa related the process of creation of a new large surface grinder machine tool, officially introduced in May 1968. According to the article, Wang was one the responsible technician for its design; however, as he declared, it was rather a collective project. He was, when the CR started, already a technician in the SMTF, occupying a position in its technical committee. When the Party set the objective for the unit to construct a new large surface grinder, by 1966, he decided “to step out of the office” and join the production line – according to the ongoing mobilization campaigns to establish three-in-one committees. He declares that “workers-professors” had taught him a lot from their many years of experience, and only after this experience he could gather enough knowledge to engage in technological innovation.

*The process of “through experience attain knowledge, through knowledge attain experience” is a process of “to come from the people, and to go to the people”. If one deviates from the experience with the people, there is no real knowledge (...) The influence of the idealist apriorism persist in many situations. For example, in the construction of this large surface grinder: when the project started, we heard the opinions of one or two specialists but did not consulted the people, then we tried a structure but it was designed in a very complex manner. When we tested it, discovered*

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<sup>110</sup> Idem, p.56. Comparison made with the fourth edition of 1972 of the magazine Red Flag, on its page 72.

*it did not work. (...) after collective consultation, the simpler structure was the one to resolve the problems.*<sup>111</sup>

Wang, then, explained that the machine tool had to go through many tests and modifications to finally accomplish a standard for commercialization.

At the beginning of 1969, Wang Defa was chosen by the factory Revolutionary Committee to assume a post at the leadership of the 7.21 University. He declared that the first theoretical problem he found when assuming a leadership position in the WU was: “experienced workers should study theory of technology or not?”. In his article, the answer was that yes, they should study theory, but in a different way. He declared that when they were writing the first didactic material on grinding machine tool’s project – also a collective initiative – the “study of that large surface grinding machine built in 1968” was the main example on the book, which actually clarified the theoretical issues regarding machine tools’ project.<sup>112</sup>

In April of 1971, the SMTF Revolutionary Committee sent a report to the SRC, summarizing the experiences of the 7.21 WU so far, reporting the graduation of its first workers-students group and proposing adjusts to be implemented for the second group initiating in August of 1971.<sup>113</sup> Their aim was to initiate the second group with 100 students, 60 from the SMTF itself and 40 from other “sister factories” (兄弟厂).

They also requested to the municipal revolutionary committee to integrate the WU with the complementary school, which had been set in 1970 in order to develop brief technical and political courses to students who have not had yet the opportunity to enter the university. The complementary school had been created also to complement the political formation of workers and, thus, in unifying it with the WU workers aimed to straighten the political formation in the experimental university. Including the courses of brief duration, they expected to enroll 650 new students between 1971 and 1973. The report stressed the importance to study Marxist-Leninist basic works, history and philosophy, in order to train technicians that would persist politically engaged. They proposed to create classes for: politics, foreign languages, history, philosophy and technology. On the technical field, they proposed the formation of classes for different

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<sup>111</sup> Idem, p. 59-60.

<sup>112</sup> Idem, p.61.

<sup>113</sup> “Report and request regarding to develop the professional teaching in our factory” (关于发展我厂职工教育的请示报告), Shanghai Municipal Archive, document B244-3-307-24.

disciplines: mathematics, electrical mechanics, general mechanics, project of grinder machines, hydraulic pressure.

The report stressed also the importance to maintain literacy classes, because there was still a problem with illiteracy or insufficient reading-writing skills. Finally, the document proposed to the SRC the formation of workers-professors that could gradually take the place in technical schools inside and outside the factory.

In July 23, 1971, the RMRB published an article commemorating the experiences carried out in this first WU, and celebrating that from August a new group of 98 workers-students would begin their studies.<sup>114</sup> Other factories had established workers universities throughout the country and, by 1971, there were approximately X WU in X factories in China, in which X of the national XX workers were enrolled as students. Each production unit organized their WU in different ways and its formation depended much on the revolutionary committees of the unit and the municipality it was localized.

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<sup>114</sup> “The first groups of workers-students graduated from the SMTF 7.21 University” (上海机床厂“七·二一”工人大学首期学员毕业) IN RMRB, July 23, 1971.

## CHAPTER 4 – STUDYING THEORY IN PRODUCTION UNITS

*Therefore, based on these President Mao teachings, we comprehend that the socialist enterprise cannot only produce merchandises, it has to produce cadres, human talents.*

*Many have said that within the socialist factory there is still Capitalism, there is Revisionism, but the main difference between our factory and their enterprises is that in their enterprise workers are still oppressed by the slavery government, which treats workers like horses or cows. But in our factories, workers are the master of the country, not only grasp revolution and promote production, but also train cadres, transform the factory in a fundamental unit of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Thus, our factory not only engage in production, but also in education. Zhang Meihua, worker and member of the Revolutionary Committee of the SMTF, in June 1974<sup>115</sup>*

In a conversation with Edward Fowler Hill, in November of 1968, Mao mentioned the Politburo was planning to publish a book of quotations of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, and since 1970, he often stated that was important to start a new campaign for studying Marxist-Leninist theory, in order to understand China's actual situation and effectively collaborate to its political economic advance towards Communism.

But why a book with quotations? The collection of quotations or aphorisms was already a known text genre in China, a common form to publicize, for example, classic philosophy and literature. After the foundation of the PRC, the CCP had published a book of Mao's Quotations in the 1960's, but since the beginning of the CR, Mao insisted that it was important to publish a collection of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin's quotations, arguing that his writing was mere comments on their work. In 1967, the CCP published a book of quotations of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin (马恩列斯语录), but this was republished in 1971 and 1973 with many revisions, more content and a different selection of references. There had been also earlier attempts to publish similar books, for example, a 1942 edition of "Theory and Methods of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin's Thoughts" (马克思、恩格斯、列宁、斯大林思想方法论) that had a restrict circulation within the CCP. This type of edition was considered useful in two aspects: first, in a country that still struggled with illiteracy, the quotation was a simpler form to present

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<sup>115</sup> Excerpt of Zhang Meihua (张梅华) speech in June 27, 1974, at the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee's conference hall, as part of a meeting for the exchange of experiences with representants of workers universities. Document in the Shanghai Municipal Archive, B173-2-206-34.

a content; second, the quotations were mostly organized by topic, mentioning author, original publication and sometimes accompanied of contemporary remarks, which facilitated its use by study groups, that could select one or more of these sentences and use it as “trigger” for sessions of study and debate.

In march of 1971, the second edition of the quotations of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin was published, when the CCP was engaged in a celebration of the one hundred years of the Paris Commune. Mao, then, published a note in which he voiced the following critique:

*It's been many years our Party does not read Marx, Lenin, does not put [their work] in evidence (...) it allows years of the raising of liars and liars, makes many people even ignore what is materialism and what is idealism, which makes for the big laugh in Lushan. This is a very important taught. From now on, we must pay great attention in publishing Marx, Lenin. (MAO, 1998(13)465)*

In this remark, Mao refers to the “big laugh” in Lushan, making a sarcastic critique against the “genius theory” and the idea to reestablish the position of PRC chairmanship, both brought forth in the Second Plenum of the 9<sup>th</sup> Party Committee, held in Lushan in 1970. Mao affirmed the need to resume the study of basic Marxist works inside and outside of the Party, stating that there had been many mistakes regarding the basic theory of revolution and transition. The campaigns to study theory were highlighted after Lin’s death and the reveal of his critiques against the CR political line.

This unfolded in a national study campaign in which many workers study groups were engaged. Notwithstanding, to study political theoretical concepts and to critique the concrete experience, people required basic knowledges of history, philosophy and, of course, language and writing techniques. That is why, since 1971, the Party promoted many publications on how to systematically study theoretical articles and how to write analytical genres in order to carry out a Marxist critique of the concrete experience. Besides the basic writing manuals to increase literacy among workers, there were advanced writing didactic materials to teach how to write a critical essay, a review or an editorial, among other genres. These manuals were distributed in the main popular education centers in the country, to be used in workers universities, theory study groups and other popular education initiatives.

The results can be verified in an extensive collection of articles, poems, critiques and essays published specially between 1972 and 1976 by worker’s writing groups. These groups were formed by workers from different production units, often with the collaboration of cadres

and university professors. The expressive direction for “grasping the empirical experience” or the “substance” (实质) of analysis,<sup>116</sup> resulted in interesting and significant articles that reveal many concrete aspects experienced by the workers engaged in carrying further the Revolution.

The slogan “continuing revolution under the Dictatorship of the Proletariat” meant to persist in experimenting new forms production relations, which were to be organized according to the principles of Communism. This could only be done if there was a broad national mobilization for studying what really would characterize Socialism, Communism and Capitalism. For only by knowing their characteristics, in many aspects of society, it would be possible to differentiate “what is wrong from what is right”, “what is revisionist from what is revolutionary”.

By the end of 1974, the moto “to limit capitalist legal power” was formulated, resuming and deepening a debate interrupted in 1959 regarding the Bourgeoise Right. This was understood as being the main role of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, that is, the main role of the political form of Socialism, which should work to limit the capitalist structures remaining in society in order to permit the building of new communist structures and organizational experiments.

During this less studied period of the 1970, the campaigns of the Revolution in Education assumed a broad and dispersed form, which cannot be analyzed as “top-down” mobilizations, since many of the fundamental questions at stake were formulated and – sometimes – answered by local popular study groups. The problems faced by the local groups themselves were the main source for new questions that mobilized national theoretical debates, such as: how to enroll new students for the study groups and universities, how to allocate those worker-students graduated from popular schools, how to maintain and deepen the political advances made by workers in the first years of the CR toward a more egalitarian organization of production relations.

These three questions, for example, based most of the articles published from 1971 to 1976, and provoked a broad discussion on what should actually characterize the socialist transition period: would it be specified by the material conditions of production or the human relations of production?

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<sup>116</sup> This topic will be detailed at the next item. See “Only by grasping the substance is possible to deepen the critique against revisionism” (抓住实质才能深入批修) IN Reading and writing (阅读与写作), Vol. 2. Shanghai: Shanghai Popular Editing House, 1973, pp. 1-6.



For example, in 1972, the militants engaged with the Revolution in Education formulated the expression “door open study” (开门办学) to define the series of initiatives being carried out at the time. The “door open study” was an attempt to organize a different education system that would be built in contraposition to the “three centralities” (三中心) of the “old educational system”, which were the centrality of the professor, the classroom and the book. The “door open study” comprehended, among others, the following initiatives: organizing groups of workers, peasants and soldier to enter universities; build schools and universities within production units; organize exchange programs between students and proletarians. All of those initiatives were based on the principle to “serve the people”, which meant to stress the university role of serving the society (besides the aspects of teaching and researching).

Since 1968, and the foundation of the first workers university, the question of how to select students was considered a major topic of debate. That is because, before the CR, students were selected to enroll in technical or graduation courses according to their academical knowledge through entrance exams. Indeed, one should notice that China is one of the first countries to have built a bureaucratic system for entrance in the education system (in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, Iberian missionaries already praised the bureaucratic organization of the Chinese State, particularly noting the system of admission in high education). It was not easy, of course, to break up with this system and to implement another one, not based on academical knowledge but on a general combination of political engagement, a quota of each production unit and the will to study and learn. Moreover, there were not specific criteria pre-formulated to organize such a system – it effectively did change significantly from 1968 to 1975 (in 1975, for example, it was even implemented a study fee and a minimum amount of labor per week a worker should accomplish if enrolled at the WU).

Reading, debating and writing, in this context, had a strategical political role: it was an instrument of political creation, a pragmatic aspect of the struggle-criticize-transform. As an unfolding of the mobilizations “to fight with words” (文斗) or “seize the power of speech” (夺言权), the Politburo supported the writing of analysis of the empirical current situation, since – as debated in the first chapter of this thesis – the CCP had clearly adopted in its general line a particular Chinese process of transition, stating that Socialism was not ready-made in Marxist-Leninist literature because those authors have never been through the struggles of the transition period to Communism.

#### 4.1. Political Light Arms – the tortuous path to seize power of speech

*At that time what happened is that Mao had called the working class to study philosophy, then we formed a philosophy study group, I was leader of the group, continued in this position for seven years, studied a lot of theory. At that time, I had only studied the primary school, and then I went to the Normal University to get some training. When I came back, I united with workers to study philosophy. Something we did not understand well, but studied nonetheless. At that time we discussed many utopic things, we talked about how would be Communism, there was a lot of imagination. Society, at that time, had many fissures. Democracy could grow in these gaps, there was a lot of equality.*

May 2010, Yan Dongchao, current professor at the Shanghai University and factory worker during the Cultural Revolution<sup>117</sup>

Mao's known May Seventh Directive, issued in 1966, was an important document that based a series of initiatives of the CR and of the Revolution in Education. At the time of its publication, Mao asked the CRSG and Zhou Enlai to review and debate its content, since this was considered an important step of the transition towards Communism.<sup>118</sup> This directive was initially a letter to Lin Biao, however, after nationally publicized, pointed a direction for political mobilizations in the field of education, promoting a certain generalization of the national education system, in order to combat the inequality between manual and intellectual labors.

*Dear Comrade Lin Piao,*

*I have received the report from the Rear Service Department which you sent me on May 6<sup>th</sup>. I think it is an excellent plan. Is it possible to send this report to all the military districts and ask them to hold discussions of it among the cadres at the army and division levels? Their views should be reported to the Military Commission and through it to the Centre for approval. (...) Please consider this.*

*In the absence of a world war, our army should be a big school. Even under conditions of the third world war, it can still serve as a big school. In addition to fighting the war, it must do other work. (...) In this big school, the army should learn politics, military affairs, and culture, and engage in agricultural production. It can build up its own middle and small*

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<sup>117</sup> Yan Dongchao (professor of the Technology Department of the Shanghai University), in her speech at the conference "Chinese Revolution and China's current rise" (transcription), carried out at the Contemporary Literature Department of the Shanghai University in May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2010.

<sup>118</sup> According to Qi Benyu's memoir (戚本禹回忆录), published April of 2016 by the Chinese Cultural Revolution Editing House. Available in Chinese in the Marxist Internet Archive, at <https://www.marxists.org/chinese/reference-books/qibenyu/3-04.htm>.

*size workshops to produce goods for its own use and the exchange of other goods of equal value. It can take part in mass work, factory work, and rural socialist education. (...) The army should also participate in the revolutionary struggle against capitalist culture. (...)*

Mao was basing these suggestions on the experience of the Yan'an Period (~1937-1945),<sup>119</sup> when popular education movements were organized in multiple fronts. The document, to which Mao referred, reported the state of the political work implemented in the EPL the precedent years, highlighting the participation of the military in production teams throughout the country.<sup>120</sup> Mao, then, continued the letter amplifying the recommendation to other categories of the society:

*Likewise, workers should, in addition to their main industrial work, learn military affairs, politics, and culture, and take part in the socialist educational movement and in criticizing the capitalist class. Under adequate conditions, they should also engage in agricultural production, following the example of the Daqing Oilfield.*

*The communes do their main agricultural work (...) but they must also learn military affairs, politics, and culture. When circumstances allow, they should collectively set up small-scale factories and take part in criticizing the capitalist class.*

*The students are in a similar position. Their studies are their chief work; they must also learn other things. In other words, they ought to learn industrial, agricultural, and military work in addition to class work. The school years should be shortened, education should be revolutionized, and the domination of our schools by bourgeois intellectuals should by no means be allowed to continue.*

*Under favorable conditions, people in commerce, service trades, and party and government offices should do likewise.*

*What has been said above is neither new nor original. Many people have been doing this for some time, but it has not yet become a widespread [phenomenon]. Our army has been working in this way for decades. Now it is on the threshold of new developments.<sup>121</sup>*

The last phrase of the letter – “now it is on the threshold of new developments” – pointed out that, by 1966 when the CR started and this letter was written, some member of the CCP

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<sup>119</sup> We may quote here three readings about the Yan'an Period: KEATING, Pauline. “The Ya'nan Way of Cooperativization”, IN *The China Quarterly*, N. 140 (Dec/1994), pp.1025-1051, HUANG, Yan and BOSHIER, Roger, “More important than guns: Chinese adult education after the Long March” IN *Adult Education Quarterly*, V.60, N.3, 2010, pp.284-302, and the classic reference SELDEN, Mark. *The Yen'an Way in revolutionary China*. New York: Harvard University Press, 1971.

<sup>120</sup> Second note of “Critique to the report to the Rear Service Department of the Military Commission about improving the army's agricultural work” (对总后勤部关于进一步搞好部队农副业生产报告的批语), IN MZDJGYL, v.12, p.53-56.

<sup>121</sup> Mao Zedong, Idem.

believed it was time to start the Socialist Construction – a phase that would ideally follow the consolidation of the collective property.

One idea putted forward by the May Seventh Directive is that a social class should not be restricted to its main role on society (it's main “work”, as Mao formulated in this document). This was interpreted as a step towards the organization of a society without classes, as was ideally conceived by Marx and Lenin. The division of work, in this context, continued to be a fundamental part of the sociological theory. What he proposed in this letter was not a society without any division of labor, but a context without the restrains of inequality and exclusion.

*We acknowledge the specialization and the division of labor, but we oppose the super specialization, in particular, we oppose that the division of labor and the specialization become ultimate goals. Actually, to divide labor in too specialized tasks, inexorably specialized (分工得那么死), is a capitalist cheap trick: it uses the division of labor to limit the struggle of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie, is a way to ‘unilateralize’ the thought of the young.<sup>122</sup>*

In 1971, when the second group of the WU started, some meetings were organized throughout the country for carrying out general evaluations of the experiences actualized so far. The campaigns to “criticize Chen and Party Rectification” or to “oppose Revisionism”, promoted the multiplication of theory and philosophy study groups.

Directed particularly to industrial workers, there was a “Reading and Writing” manual published in Shanghai in 1973, with a collection of articles written from 1970 to 1973. The first of its texts makes an historical evaluation of the Revolution in Education and its repercussions in local study groups.

*Since the Second Plenum of the Ninth Congress, all Party and all country are engaged in the “criticize Revisionism and Party Rectification” campaign (批修整党). (...) In order to deepen the critique of Revisionism, we must to grasp the empirical experience. (...) In grasping the empirical experience and further deepen the critique against Revisionism, we can correctly answer the line problems [remaining] in the political thought, advance on realizing what is really Marxism and what is revisionism, what is a correct and a wrongful*

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<sup>122</sup> Shanghai Revolutionary Critique Writers Small Group (上海革命大批判写作小组), “Universities of technology and culture for sure must carry out the revolutionary big critique” (文科大学一定要搞革命大批判) IN *Red Flag*, 1970, vol.1, pp.46-50.

*political line. It is only by comparing that we may differentiate the correct from the incorrect [political] line.*

This article, then, recommended that, in order to evaluate an empirical experience and clearly distinguish its political line or, its right from wrong, it was necessary to evaluate it by three aspects: content, objective and class representation. The text even mentioned an important Marxist concept that there is a contradiction between the appearance and the substance of the facts and situations.<sup>123</sup>

Another article published in the manual presented a general definition of the following text genres: editorial, review, ideologic critique, critical analysis, brief critique, art critique and reading notes. Those genres were introduced as modalities of writing through which workers could actually analyze concrete experiences and voice their viewpoint, thus promoting a collective debate. The text initiated by enumerating three aspects of every article: topic, argumentation and demonstration (论点, 论据, 论证), explaining that this last two parts could be developed through the analysis of a hypothesis, a deductive or an inductive discourse. To exemplify this structural analysis, the article used as an example the first text of this manual, detailing and categorizing each of its paragraphs.

It is worth noticing how each text genre and its writing process are explained in this manual. The articles used simple definitions and metaphors to explain complex discourse mechanisms, evidently with the intention to render comprehensible some basic writing mechanisms:

*Normally, an article only has one topic, it is the center of the whole text. (...) The topic commands the argumentation, if the topic is not certain, the argumentation has no use. (...) [For example,] The inductive method may initiate from a mistaken idea and, then, lead the reader, go through the damages it may cause, then conclude with the negation of that initial idea.<sup>124</sup>*

The manual detailed a common text genre of the period, the “brief critique” (小评论), including it among the other writing genres – which were called “light arms of the thought front” (思想战线上的轻武器).<sup>125</sup> The “brief critique” was presented as one of the new born things of

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<sup>123</sup> “Only by grasping the empirical experience is possible to deepen the critique to Revisionism” (抓住实质才能深入批修) IN *Reading and writing* (阅读与写作), Vol. 2. Shanghai: Shanghai Popular Editing House, 1973.

<sup>124</sup> Idem, p. 14.

<sup>125</sup> Idem, p.33.

the CR, and especially useful to popular debate since it was “small, quick and precise”. It was described as a genre useful in debate situations, or in popular publications, because it was directed to deal with particular issues, manifest a point of view, a suggestion or a critique.

Teaching and studying techniques were also debated through the years. The SMTF Revolutionary Committee wrote, for example, an article published in September of 1972 at the Red Flag entitled “Organize the theory studies according to the characteristic of the worker-students” (根据工人学员的特点组织理论教学), in which they declared that workers who had studied with the same techniques of the “old school” have not learned enough and were not capable to answer practical problems of their context – not theoretically nor pragmatically. They declared that “if education’s appearance changes, methodology also has to change”, that teachers should learn how to “use examples of the production itself to explain and exemplify classes, use common workers vocabulary to explain concepts (...) and start technology theory explanation from the reality of workers”.<sup>126</sup> A few years later, this debate continued using, though, more precise epistemological concepts, stating that the education, they should

*emphasize the heuristic method and oppose the method of “teaching by pouring into an empty mind” (注入式); straighten the open door study and oppose the “study behind doors closed”; (...) the class of theory of politics should be led by the practice of debating, stimulating students to think autonomously. (...)*<sup>127</sup>

Additionally, there was a long struggle to balance the time and commitment used by workers in their roles as laborers and students. Some texts praised the Theory Groups or the WU because they stimulated workers to make great efforts achieving good results, for example, in study sessions or research enterprises that developed through entire nights. On the other side, there were also complains of study sessions that were limiting the performance of workers in the production line because it did not let enough time for resting before another work shift. Indeed, this was a topic of debate since the launching of the “half study, half work” factories in 1956, which Zhou Enlai said to be a “scheme to fool workers” because it did not have any quality teaching, extended the hours of dedication and did not give any actual reward to its participants. Until 1976, this was problematic difficult to solve, mainly because it was entangled with the

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<sup>126</sup> SMTF Revolutionary Committee, “Organize the theory studies according to the characteristic of the worker-students” (根据工人学员的特点组织理论教学) IN *Hongqi*, Volume 9, 1972, pp.48-50.

<sup>127</sup> SMTF 7.21 Workers University Revolutionary Committee, in a report sent to the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee in December 17, 1974. Shanghai Municipal Archive, B105-4-1305-52.

debate about the Marxist conception of social economic class categories. Mao had used, in the May Seventh Directive, the expression “main work” (首要工作), to define the main role of each class: to an industrial worker, to produce in a factory; to a peasant, to produce grains and work the land; to a student, to study. However, when “the situation permits” (as Mao stated), every person was summoned to participate in other works, including to study theory, philosophy, politics, analyze the functioning of their own unit. Moreover, since 1968, to study was divulgated as a duty of all workers. In 1975, for example, the Enterprise Committee of the Shanghai Institute of Machine Tools Research and Creation, published an article called “Grasp well the initiative of making studying theory the main service”, reporting that:

*After starting the study of theory, every time the work is heavier, some comrades leave or skip meetings of theory study. They dedicate it all to production and forget to study. Some comrades also create an “opposition” between studying theory and studying technology, they affirm that to study machines is what really will improve production. Of course, some colleagues can look at the process of production, from the project to the merchandise selling, and they see it plenty of class struggle. But some other colleagues are blind to this situation, they easily mistake capitalist situations for socialist things. If a factory is unilaterally seeking profit, for example, some colleagues show emphatic support to this attitude. Some support cases of private contracts, price speculation, carry out capitalist relations of partnership (...) It is important to oppose these politics when they happen or when they are proposed by the administrators. Specially material incentives.<sup>128</sup>*

Accordingly, the WU and the Theory Groups militants were pursuing a way to establish an actual collaboration between productive work and theory study – that sometimes, as they said, were placed in a relation of opposition. In order to balance both activities and actually establish a cooperation between them, they considered of fundamental importance the study of empirical experiences, the practical situations and polemics faced by workers in their daily routine, as contract systems, prices, relation of production, profit.

*To study the Marxist theory of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, besides reading books, it is important to engage in the questions of one’s own unit, to analyze the problems of the department and technological research. (...) Start from the union of the theory and practice to explain these problems (...)<sup>129</sup>*

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<sup>128</sup> In Study and Criticize, 1975, 4<sup>th</sup> volume, 学习与批判, “Making the theory study the main service” (把理论学习当作首要任务抓好). Shanghai Machine Tool’s Project Committee (中共上海市机床制造公司委员会), p.36

<sup>129</sup> Idem, p.38.

In another article, published in 1971 at the Red Flag under the pen name “red rainbow” (红虹), this “cooperation” between theory study and empirical critique was described as important in order to “realize the political aspects of the economic problems”, because:

*Where the economic problems are more serious, the political situation is more complex. (...) [some people] do not distinguish what is a proletarian way of thinking and a capitalist way of thinking; what is a communist cooperation and what is a capitalist exchange; what is a socialist economic planning and a capitalist liberalization; what is a socialist path and a capitalist path.<sup>130</sup>*

In fact, the idea that the study of philosophy, political economy theory, history and literature would be directly useful to workers within a production unit remained at stake until 1976. From 1975 to 1977, as we shall see, the main policies to restrain the initiatives of the Revolution in Education started by excluding the theoretical classes from the program of popular schools and universities, declaring those were unnecessary to the formation of workers, that it merely took their work time and did add up any advantage in order to enhance production. The reports emitted by the WU committees in 1971, 1973 and 1975 (years when many important reevaluation meetings were held and new groups started a course), highlighted the importance to maintain classes of politics, art and culture and philosophy.

An article published in February 1972 at the Red Flag, commented the importance of studying “Chinese philosophy and European philosophy” in order to actively take part in the debate about political thought. It stated that without studying basic theoretical concepts, it would not be possible to distinguish materialism from idealism, capitalist from communist policies, etc. Taking Liu Shaoqi declarations as examples, the article explains that, by studying History of Philosophy, it is possible to understand that the apriorism (先验论), and the idea that “heroes create history” (英雄创办历史) (in opposition to the idea that “people creates history”), were not new ideas but readings of old philosophical concepts, reutilized within Socialism.<sup>131</sup>

The expression “to strengthen the leadership of the Party” (加强党的领导) was used, then, to refer to the political aspect of the WU and other initiatives on popular education. For the case of the entrance of new students, “to strengthen the leadership of the Party” meant that

<sup>130</sup> Hong Hong, “” (认真抓好经济领域的阶级斗争) IN *Hongqi*, 1970, vol.1, pp.57-60, p.58.

<sup>131</sup> Tang Shaowen (唐晓文), “Reading some volumes on Philosophy History” (读几本哲学史) IN *Red Flag*, 1972, vol.2, pp.10-14.



the selection of students should be carried out through the “Paris Commune election mode”: first, debating the meaning of the Revolution in Education with people; then, asking each production unit to meet in big debates and recommend names to be voted as new students; later, to debate each of the selected named and chose a final list, which may be approved in a popular referendum and by the unit’s Revolutionary Committee.<sup>132</sup> Then, in the case of the WU curricula, the expression “to strengthen the leadership of the Party” referred to the permanence of the theoretical classes, particularly, the classes in which workers studied philosophy, Marx, Lenin and Mao’s basic works. Furthermore, in the case of how were allocated the students graduated from the technical schools and the WU, the same expression pointed to the policy of replacing them in positions within the production line (in opposition to giving them new positions as specialists or engineers).

*Graduate from the university and become a technician – how, then, to keep the true colors of a working people? (劳动人民的本色) (...) To keep maintaining working people’s true colors, it is necessary to unite closely with the workers, (...) not to leave the production labor.*<sup>133</sup>

Yet, the directive to return to the original work position, in the production line, after graduating from the WU, was not totally accepted even among workers. In 1975, for example, Wang Defa declared that:

*Regarding the great significance of the 7.21 Directive, at the beginning there were some students that were not content. They said: “Now they call us to return as a worker, then these three years of study were for nothing? Well everyone can be a common worker, I was a common worker, then I studied three years in school what for?” (...) This kind of viewpoint is not correct, because “to become a worker with socialist [political] consciousness and culture” is not easy.*

Wang Defa, then, narrated an example of a worker graduated at the first group of the 7.21 WU. This worker, originally chief of the Department of Internal Repairs at the SMTF shed number two, before entering the popular university “did not like to engage in political work”

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<sup>132</sup> Liyang County’s RPC (中共湖南省祁阳县委员会), “To strengthen the leadership of the Party – actually do well the work to select new students” (认真做好大学招生工作) IN *RMRB*, March 22, 1972.

<sup>133</sup> “Our workers-college students – Remembering SMTF 7.21 University’s graduate worker-student You Guansong” (我们工人的大学生 – 记上海机床厂七二一工人大学生沈关松) IN *We entered university for the people (我上大学为人民)*. Beijing: Chinese Young People Editing House, 1976, pp.9-23, p.14.

and was described as very rude when dealing with the mistakes of the young internees, Defa said he “often scold them, when there were mistakes”.

*When he was chosen by the people to enter the university and graduated, he became a whole other person. He learned how to carry out political work. In the second day after graduating, he gathered many considered comrades and had a sincere conversation, openly exchange ideas with them and, thus, managed to quickly solve the ideological problems he had before. Moreover, he begun to participate in the political work with all enthusiasm. There was one episode about an equipment of that shed that often leaked oil, which was a waste, and even caused comrades to blame one another, affecting their union and cooperation. He, then, started to investigate the biggest machine tool, and found out that an oil pipe joint was not screwed tight enough, it needed only a few minutes for being fixed. But he did not fix it immediately, instead, took a bow and start to collect the oil drops leaking from that joint. He collected leaking oil for four hours, an amount of almost half a kilo. Then he gathered a meeting, and calculated with the comrades the waste tax, investigate the reasons for it to happen, among which there was the distraction of the repair teams. This made everyone to know: to tight well a joint, it is necessary to firstly firmly tight one's thought.*

This kind of analogy – using a word normally of the semantic field of the industrial labor to refer to political ideas – was very common in workers’ texts and articles. That is because those were analogies that rendered the writing easily comprehensible, besides giving a touch of humor and irony to the articles. The focus of the “transformation” of this worker, as narrated by Wang Defa, was the way he dealt with inexperienced workers and internees. In the example above, after going through the WU and its technical and political classes, he learned to better fix the machinery and, also, to better teach others how to pay attention in small details of the mechanics and why it was an important job. Wang Defa continued saying that this worker “did not carry university’s ‘bookish air’ (没有大学生的架子).

*Where the work was heavier, where it was bitter, there he was. (...) The workers said he “moved the pencil when needed to project, moved hands when needed to create, moved the mouth when needed to analyze”.<sup>134</sup>*

This referred to the ideal of being “a worker with socialist consciousness and culture”, capable of doing multiple tasks, including the “chief work” as a technical employee, and the participation on the superstructure – in the unit and in society in general – by “moving the

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<sup>134</sup> Idem, p.12.

mouth”, or, to analyze problematic political situations, which was considered to be a formal role of intellectuals or specialized engineers.

*(...) Through the experience of the 7.21 WU, we trained workers that know how to criticize, to project and to produce, they indeed are manual and intellectual laborers. If there are many of these people, we can reduce the inequality between manual and intellectual labors.<sup>135</sup>*

To unify manual and intellectual labors, tough, was at least a polemic initiative. There were often two types of critique against the WU, coming from other sector of the society and from the workers within the unit itself: on the one hand, the focus on the work and the need students had to engage in manual labor during their study period, were criticized to be a kind of “pragmatism” (实用主义); on the other hand, the study of philosophy and politics was sometimes criticized for being a “loss of resources”, since workers did not need to study humanistic sciences to accomplish their “chief work”.

Wang Defa stated that in 1972 there was a series of critiques against the WU saying it did not teach the “basic knowledge” of a college, accusing it to be a “primary school with secondary school books and an university sign on the front door”.<sup>136</sup> He explained that these critiques brought them a heavy burden and responsibility, promoting the settling of new study groups in the factory specifically to study politics, and thus render them able to respond to those accusations. They carried out a study group of a few months and made a report showing some examples of workers graduated from the WU that had accomplished actual technological innovations, useful to the general production output of the unit.

This report was, indeed, published in the *People’s Daily* in the edition of July 22, 1972, entitled “The new team of workers-technicians is growing – remembering the first groups graduated from the SMTF 7.21 Workers University”.<sup>137</sup> Actually, this report is marked by a contradictory role. It attempted to prove the efficacy and the economic advantages of forming new technicians from among workers, particularly in an university inside a factory. However, the political and social reasons to do so were not easy to be showed through numbers of production output. The reports written attempting to justify the political experiments had a rather

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<sup>135</sup> Idem.

<sup>136</sup> Idem, p.16.

<sup>137</sup> Idem, p.17 and Xinhua News, “The new team of workers-technicians is growing – remembering the first groups graduated from the SMTF 7.21 Workers University” (新型的工人技术人员在成长——记上海机床厂“七·二一”工人大学第一批毕业生), IN *RMRB*, July 22, 1972.

poor argumentation, which enumerated empirical achievements of a few of the worker-students graduated from the first WU group.

*Already having three children, Zhou Hanfei, before having studied only primary school, is a common electrician. After graduating from the 7.21 WU, she was allocated at the group for projecting electronic devices for grinder machine tools. Her first service was engaged in the projecting of an automatic electronic engine for a double surfaced grinder machine. This project required to use an advanced technological device, the silicon-controlled rectifier. Zhou Hanfei, although had worked ten years as an electrician, was not familiar with silicon-controlled rectifiers and, of course, found difficult to participate in its project. She studied with a lot of dedication, often asked questions to old workers and technicians, and finally succeeded in accomplishing that service. To avoid any waste in a trial procedure, she was extra scrupulous in revising each detail of the project, found out some mistakes, and carried out meeting in the shed to try and solve it, which resulted in a successful [innovation].<sup>138</sup>*

The other examples in that report were very similar. In trying to address to the population in general (it was an article directed to answer to the critiques against the WU), and to somehow prove the efficacy of this political invention, the text mentioned examples that did not actually highlighted the particular character of that popular education campaign. The material results shown – for example, a new electrical engine for a grinder machine – could be as easily achieved by an engineer. The actual specificities of the WU project were in the transformations in the superstructure, were within the relations of production. The results in production output were satisfactory but did not show a “surprising” increase compared to the situation of a “normal” management of the enterprises. That is why, the general political attitude towards the WU – and other experiments of the Revolution in Education – were declarations that attempt to qualify those mobilizations as “common” initiatives that did not actualize any innovation to the national economic policy. As Deng declared in 1975, “SMTF 7.21 Workers University is a kind of experience, but it is not a unique experience. It cannot substitute the universities.”<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Xinhua News, “The new team of workers-technicians is growing – remembering the first groups graduated from the SMTF 7.21 Workers University” (新型的工人技术人员在成长——记上海机床厂“七·二一”工人大学第一批毕业生), IN *RMRB*, July 22, 1972.

<sup>139</sup> Deng Xiaoping apud Cheng Jinkuan (程晋宽), *Investigating the Revolution in Education* (教育革命的历史考察). Fuzhou: Fujian Education Editing House, 2001, p.496.

#### 4.2. *Continuing Revolution and criticizing old values embodied in new structures*

The Second Plenum of the CCP Ninth Congress, at Lushan, was held between August 23 and September 3, 1970. This meeting ended provoking a series of mobilizations to reinforce the Revolution in Education, including new study campaigns inside the Central Committee and a national mobilization to study Marxist-Leninist works, world's history and philosophy, and Chinese literature. These mobilizations had as a trigger the proposition, by a group of CC members, to reestablish the position of chairman of the Republic.

Lin Biao, Chen Boda and Ye Qun were among those who putted forward the (already infame) “genius theory” (天才论) and an adjust in the constitution to reestablish the position of chairman of the PRC. It provoked a debate during the Plenum that unfolded in many study campaigns and political struggles in the next years.

A few weeks after the Second Plenum, Ye Qun sent a letter to Mao Zedong with a self-criticism, to which Mao answered with a few comments that circulated within the Politburo. Mao, then, repeated his remark on the importance to study Marx, Lenin and Stalin within the CCP, saying that

*For many years we don't recommend comrades to read Marx and Lenin. That's why now, again, we need to ask Marx and Lenin for help – the topic is, again, the so-called “genius theory”. Have we not discussed it in the [first plenum of the] Ninth Congress? Why, then, it seems to be forgotten?<sup>140</sup>*

After the Second Plenum, Mao repeatedly stated the need to start a campaign for the study of Marx, Lenin and Stalin's works within the CCP, he related it with the Rectification campaigns carried out so far in the Party history. A few days after Ye Qun's letter, Mao approved Zhou Enlai's proposal to develop an intra-Party seminar to the study of Marxist-Leninist selected articles and to carry out a study of the Constitution amendments, specially with local Party Committees.

A month later, in November 1970, Mao approved Zhou Enlai's request to publicize the document “My brief opinion” (我的一点意见), written in August 31<sup>st</sup>. Mao, though, stressed that Lin Biao and Kang Sheng (some of the members of the CCP who had supported the “genius theory”) should read it before its publication. This document would be used, with other texts, as

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<sup>140</sup> Mao Zedong, “Critique and commentaries to the self-criticism written by Ye Qun” (对叶群检讨信的批评和批注) IN MZDJGYLWG, v.13, p.145. Ye Qun's letter was issued at October 13 1970 and Mao's answer at the 15<sup>th</sup>.

a base for the intra-Party seminar led by Zhou Enlai to criticize the “genius theory” and to carry out “anti-Chen and Rectification” Marxist-Leninist studies.

The campaign was initially conceived to last no more than three months. However, by March 1971, other initiatives had been taken to develop seminars to criticize Chen’s proposition at the Second Plenum and to study and carry out Rectification studies in the Party branches. The study and Rectification seminars continued intermittent, based on different selection of documents, until the dissemination of the so-called “document 571”. From December 1971, there were also documents sent to local Party branches promoting the debate and critique of some of Lin Biao’s assessments and political declarations.<sup>141</sup>

In a first meeting with cadres to study and criticize Lin Biao and carry out Rectification, Zhou Enlai explained the substitution of Chen Boda by Lin Biao as the center of the current criticizing campaigns:

*This time we changed the name of our meeting to Criticize Lin and Rectify (批林整风). After the second Plenum of the Ninth Congress, the President Mao repeatedly stated the importance to educate the cadres, and asked to protect Lin, who had to recognize alone his mistakes (...). The document “My Brief Opinion” target the spearhead Chen Boda and his type of liars (...). So, from the Ninth Congress until before the Incident of September 13th, we carried out the Critique of Chen and Rectification. (...) However, in September 13th, a big problem has been exposed and Lin Biao became the head of it. (...) What Lin Biao did was a conspiracy. He for a long time opposed the Party and the President’s Thought. After Liu Shaoqi, he is the main President’s opposition. (...) So this meeting should have the name set as “Meeting to report the campaign of Criticizing of Lin and carry out Rectification” (林整风汇报会议). And we should not speak again of “Lin-Chen Anti-Party Clique”, but instead define it “Lin Biao Anti-Party Clique”<sup>142</sup>*

There were mobilizations to criticize Lin Biao in all spheres of Society, each with different aspects analyzed. In 1972, the Party Committee of the Beijing Military Headquarter, for example, carried out 23 meetings to criticize Lin and study Marxism-Leninism. They have

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<sup>141</sup> CCPCC, “Notice and materials of the CCP Central Committee regarding the organization of groups to debate the ‘Destroy Lin Biao’s anti-Party and counterrevolutionary struggle’ (first material)” (中共中央关于组织传达和讨论《粉碎林陈反党集团反革命政变的斗争》(材料之一)的通知及材料), December 11<sup>th</sup> 1971. Available in *The Chinese Cultural Revolution Database*, at <http://ccradb.appspot.com/post/692> (consulted in March 2018).

<sup>142</sup> Zhou Enlai in “Zhou Enlai’s speech at the First Plenary Meeting for the Critique of Lin Biao and Rectification (excerpt)” (周恩来在中央批林整风汇报会第一次全体会议上的讲话-节录) IN *The Chinese Cultural Revolution Database*, May 21, 1972. Available at <http://ccradb.appspot.com/post/709> (Consulted in March 2018).

debated if Lin Biao's political positions were actually of extreme-left or rightists, the social bases of his conceived *coup*, and his influence in the military.<sup>143</sup>

The initiatives continued and the campaign to study Marx, Lenin and criticize Lin Biao's political line continued through 1973, mainly in intermittent seminars within the Party. After the First Plenary of the 10<sup>th</sup> CCP Central Committee, held in August of 1973 (when Wang Hongwen assumed the post of vice-chairman of the Party), the critique against Lin Biao's political line became, officially, a nationwide campaign. Concomitantly to this First Plenum of the 10th CCP, Mao asked the national publicizing of an article written by the History Department of the Zhongshan University of Guangdong, entitled "Confucius – a thinker stubbornly defending slavery" (孔子-顽固地维护奴隶制度的思想家). This article analyzed some of Confucius' aphorisms and its biography according to a Marxist theoretical background. Mao, then, had commented with Zhou Enlai, Wang Hongwen, Jiang Qing and Yao Wenyuan, that Confucius and Lin Biao's political roles were similar, and that it should be further analyzed.

Many contemporary events colluded for the national launching of the campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius in January of 1974. It's important to notice that Lin Biao and Liu Shaoqi were already criticized, at least since 1971, for having declared or performed political positions based on Confucianist values. The mobilizations to study Philosophy, already being carried out, often mentioned that Liu Shaoqi or Lin Biao supported Apriorism and, consequently, the "genius theory" and the idea that "heroes create history" (instead of the rebel slogan "people (or slaves) create history"). But it was only from the second semester of 1973 that the historical figure of Confucius came to light as a public topic of political debate. In this same year, the CCP published a biography of the philosopher and some editions of the aphorisms attributed to Confucius and Mencius – another known Confucianist thinker.

The critique to these thinkers was carried inside and outside of the Party. Some editions of commented aphorisms were published in 1974 and 1975, organized and noted by writers groups mainly in Beijing and Shanghai. In the same period, text genres typically associated to Confucianism were also criticized by university writers groups, workers and peasants: one interesting example is the publication of the "Workers 'three-words classic'" (工人三字经).

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<sup>143</sup> "CPC Beijing Military Committee's view on carrying out the Criticize Lin and Rectification Campaign" (中共北京军区委员会关于深入开展批林整风运动的意见), December 30, 1972, IN *The Chinese Cultural Revolution Database*. Available at <http://ccradb.appspot.com/post/731> (consulted in March 2018).

The Three-Words Classic, originally a Confucianist dogmatic text, written in verses with three words/ characters in a very rhythmic metric, was used for centuries (and again today) to teach first letters in primary schools. It contains moral codes and praises Confucianist values, particularly reinforcing social order and discipline. During the mobilization to Criticize Confucius, the Three-Words Classic was also criticized by workers study groups, who created parodies using the same metric to write about recent social struggles and mobilizations. In a pamphlet published in 1975, workers even analyzed and commented a “Workers Three-words Classic” published in 1930 in the Jiangxi Soviet.<sup>144</sup>

The popular editing houses, in 1973 and 1974, published some of the “brief critiques” written for the Campaign to Criticize Lin and Confucius in the Workers Universities. As stated in the previous item, this text genre – the “brief critique” (小评论) was normally short and had as its core a very well delimited topic. The critiques written by workers, generally focused at one or two Confucius aphorisms or expressions.

*Confucius said: “self-control and permanence of the rites for benevolence” (克己复礼为仁). It means, to control one-self, to make one self to perform all considered rites, then one has “benevolence”. Evidently, what Confucius defines as “benevolence” is all about permanently serving the slavery system. In his point of view, slaves should obediently serve the power of the slave owners. [They should] Turn upside down to let slave owners oppress as much as they want, then maybe they have a good “self-control” and may be considered “benevolent”. (...) In a class society, there can be only a government of one class upon another class, there has never been a “benevolent government” overcoming all classes.<sup>145</sup>*

One of the common critiques against the Confucian concept of “benevolence” (仁) or “benevolent government” (仁政) was that it was a false concept, because, according to the Marxist-Leninist conceptual frame, a government is necessarily an instrument of control and oppression of a class over another.

*The place where our plant is built, use to be a prison of the Nationalist Party where revolutionary and rebels were kept. The place where we work every day, used to be a cage*

<sup>144</sup> C.A., “Workers-Peasants-Soldier Three-Words Classic published during the New Democratic Revolution Period” (新民主主义革命时期工农兵三字经选). Beijing: Wenwu Chubanshe, 1975. Volume at the Pozzana-Russo Archive at the University of Bologna.

<sup>145</sup> *Collection of articles from the Campaign of Criticizing Lin and Confucius of Shanghai Workers-Peasants-Soldiers* (上海工农兵批林批孔文选), Shanghai: Shanghai Popular Editing House, 1974, p.39. Volume available in the Pozzana-Russo Archive at the University of Bologna.



*for comrade revolutionaries and workers. Under our current auditorium, used to be a water dungeon. But at the front door there was a sign saying “Sense of propriety righteousness, honesty and shame” [礼义廉耻, considered “four social bonds”]. (...) What Confucius falsely spread about “benevolent government”, is an expression of a counterrevolutionary sick dictatorship.<sup>146</sup>*

Another interpretation given by the studies at that time, is that “benevolent government” would indicate practices of democratic alliance, which were evaluated as a retrogression of the revolutionary process and a possibility of establishment of Capitalism and revisionism.

*What Confucius and Mencius said about “benevolence” means “to love people”, but what they loved was slave owners, they did not love slaves, and yet wanted slaves to love slave owners and protect slavery system. Traitor Lin also said that “benevolence” is to “unite”, but he wanted we to unite with land owners, rich, counterrevolutionaries, bad elements, rightists, not with workers.<sup>147</sup>*

The “genius theory” was also often criticized, specially associated with the apriorism and the idea that “heroes create history” or that there is a “mandate of heaven” (天命). In an article called “Mandate of heaven is an ignorant idea” (天命观是愚民观, the title rhymes in Chinese, *tianming guan shi yumin guan*), the SMTF worker Wang Defa stated that:

*Confucius and Lin Biao had one characteristic in common: both used a lot the word “heaven”. Confucius said things like: “mandate of heaven”, “heaven’s path”, “person from heaven”, “heaven’s virtue”. Lin Biao also used words as “horse from heaven”, “heavenly genius”, “piece of heaven.” (...) “Heaven! Heaven! Heaven! It is all lies, lies, lies! This thing of “wise is above, ignorant is bellow”, is a lie to fool people! In fact, who is “wise” and who is “ignorant”? Based on the situation in our factory: who projected a high precision steel surface grinder and cutting machine, filling an important vacuum in the national machine tools industry? Who dared to cut off the soviet “big, stupid and heavy” control boxes and substitute by national modern control boxes? And who fought for our country, (...) and projected three big heavy machine tools? It was the workers armed with Mao Zedong Thought!<sup>148</sup>*

Because Confucianism defends a rigid social hierarchy and because Lin Biao allegedly defended the permanence of specialists as managers of the production and the hierarchy as a

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<sup>146</sup> Idem, p. 39.

<sup>147</sup> Idem p. 33.

<sup>148</sup> Idem, p.45.

strong organizational element of the Party-State, workers were engaged in interpreting some of the attributed declarations as instruments – on the ideological field – of social oppression. In order to become “masters of the factory”, in order to “exercise the leadership in everything”, workers and peasants could not accept a discourse declaring they had to obey the orders of a “wiser” class composed of managers and specialists. Furthermore, the idea that knowledge was something “naturally” attributed to someone – as expressed in the word “genius” (in Chinese, “genius” is a word composed of “heaven” and “talent” 天才) – was radically against the revolutionary line, which conceived that anyone could, through effort, struggle and work, become a specialist in their “chief work” and still could learn about other sciences and practices (as writing, speaking in public, acting, caring for their colleagues, innovating labor processes).

*Who was earlier a child cowherder, today is a technician who projected a high precision grinder machine; an earlier cleaning employee now became an engineer; a common female electrician, after studying in the WU, project the electric engine of a high precision machine tool. (...) All of this, was heaven that did all this? Was it decided by the mandate of heaven? (...) It was not based on mandates, or on heaven, it was all based on President Mao's revolutionary line, all based on ourselves!<sup>149</sup>*

It is worth noticing that, despite the locution in these discourses stating that workers were basing their mobilizations on “President Mao’s revolutionary line”, this was defined as a type of political autonomy. That is because the “revolutionary line” represented, among other things, the “right to rebel” and the “seizing of power” by workers in all aspects of society, specially in the cultural spheres.

Between 1972 and 1975, the Apriorism was fiercely criticized, even promoting the publication of specialized volume dedicated to study its manifestations in Chinese and Eastern philosophies.<sup>150</sup> Lin Biao’s political position, and the critiques made in the Document 571 against Cultural Revolution policies, were considered a result of the remaining Confucianist values in modern society, “deep roots” of the militarism and the bureaucratism, and that is why “to deepen the critique of Lin Biao is necessary to criticize Confucius, if we do not criticize

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<sup>149</sup> Idem, p.46.

<sup>150</sup> Philosophy and History Departments of the Beijing University, *Apriorism in the History of Philosophy* (哲学史上的先验论). Beijing, November 1972.

Confucius, it not possible to further critique the fundamentals of Lin Biao's ultra-rightist counterrevolutionary and revisionist line"<sup>151</sup>

According to those engaged in the campaign to criticize Confucius and Lin Biao, a socialist society, if actually carrying out the transition to Communism, should struggle against the permanence of capitalist elements in all spheres, including in the government form. The existence, for example, of a "head of State" (the Chairman of the Republic) would indicate a permanence of bureaucratism, which could foment a dispute for power and, consequently, political "division instead of union".<sup>152</sup>

This interpretation of the debate regarding the position of Chairmen of the Republic was formulated using what workers advocated as a "materialist reflection theory" (唯物论的反映论), in opposition to what was called "idealist apriorism" (唯心论的先验论).<sup>153</sup> The "materialist reflection theory" defined a methodological approach based on the Marxist historical analysis carried out in the book "The 18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon", that is, to evaluate a certain political context not only focusing the individuals in leadership position but considering the "social bases" of each event and political vector. This accorded with the Marxist definition of individuals as "personifications of economic categories, embodiments of particular class-relations and class-interests".<sup>154</sup> The struggle between Confucianism and Legalism, for example, was described in these terms:

*In the dynasties that followed Chin [Qin, 秦朝], the rule of the landlord class was founded upon its dictatorship over the peasants and other working people. This ruling class adopted a centralized monarchy as the form of dictatorship of the landlord class, which was in conformity with one aspect of Legalist thought. But this landlord class, after it rose to ruling position, came to bitterly hate the other aspect of Legalism, its advocacy of reform. For this reason, the contention between Confucian and Legalist schools continued through China's feudal period, with Confucianism becoming increasingly dominant and Legalism being more and more discriminated against and maligned. (...) From this we can see that the*

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<sup>151</sup> Beijing University's Department of Philosophy, Preface to a commented edition of Confucius Analects published in 1974. This edition was commented by a group of workers-peasants-soldier who had started the graduation in Philosophy in 1970, it was written as a graduation project of this group. 论语批注 – 北京大学哲学系 – 1970 级工农兵学员, 中华书局, 1974.

<sup>152</sup> Idem.

<sup>153</sup> Yao Wenyuan, "The Social Bases of Lin Biao's Anti-Party Clique" (姚文元:论林彪反党集团的社会基础), published as the editorial of the *Red Flag*'s 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of 1975.

<sup>154</sup> MARX, Karl. "Preface to the First German Edition" (1867) IN *Capital*, v.1. The book is published online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/p1.htm> (consulted in March 2018).

*supremacy of Confucianism in the ideological field was established through a process which corresponded to the process in which the landlord class gradually turned reactionary politically.*<sup>155</sup>

Thus, the “materialist reflection theory” referred to a methodological approach to analyze the historical contexts that were basing works of literature, art, philosophy, or even basing political declarations. This also referred to the theoretical debate in the first months of the CR about the historiographical method in which “theory present facts” (以论代史).<sup>156</sup>

In an article entitled “The Path of Lin Biao and Confucius-Mencius”, collectively written by the critique groups of the University of Beijing and Qinhua, it stated that the Campaign was a political struggle

to dig deep the old roots of Lin Biao counterrevolutionary revisionism. (...) From September of 1969 and January of 1970, in this period of three months only, Lin Biao and his buddies wrote four banners in a row: “All things as lenient, this is greatness, self-control and permanence of the rites”. “Self-control and permanence of the rites” is the reactionary program of Confucius slavery restoration. (...)

Then, the article traces a parallel between the late Spring and Autumn Period (771-476BC) and the their contemporary context, in order to analyze the political meaning of Lin Biao’s declarations, using the “reflection theory”:

*The late Spring and Autumn was a period when our country was going through the big transformation from slavery to a feudalist system. (...) slaves often rebelled, emerging landlord class advocated innovation, struggling to seize power from slave owners. (...) The “government of the rites” was completely ruined (...) [Confucius] “return to the rites” (复礼) meant to suppress slaves rebellion (...), to lead society backwards. (...) Lin Biao also wanted to restore [the old], they have a common counterrevolutionary character and political needs. (...) He carried counterrevolutionary policies and the Project 571, which actually had meant [a version of] to “restore the rites” (...) In 1970, Lin Biao for three times directly opposed President Mao’s directives (...) spreading the lie that “a country*

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<sup>155</sup> Lo Szu-ting, “Evolution of the Debate Between the Confucians and Legalists as Seen from Wang An-shih’s Reform” IN *Selected Articles Criticizing Lin Piao and Confucius*. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1974, p. 200-201.

<sup>156</sup> See the first chapter, footnote 80.

*without a head is not a country” (没有一个头，名不正言不顺), but actually eager to become the “head of the country” and foment the struggle within the Party. (...)*<sup>157</sup>

They concluded stating that these policies advocated by Lin Biao represented a tendency to restore capitalism by restoring capitalist political thought.

The articles related to the Campaign to Criticize Confucius and Lin Biao also emphasized the importance to generalize theory study classes among workers. They declared, on the one hand, that workers were able to grasp theoretical debates and carry out philosophical analysis of the empirical context, and on the other hand, that all workers must have the actual opportunity to participate and engage in such study campaigns. One material condition for this to happen was the stability of the labor contracts.

That is because, if a worker had a stable contract, with a fixed salary, and extra-hours were not retributed with material incentives, they were more likely to participate in the political and study initiatives. The system of “earn as much as one works” (多劳多得) were in the way of the generalization of study campaigns and political mobilizations. According to the workers engaged in the WU, if one were engaged in working as many hours as possible in order to receive a higher salary, they possibility would not give up the possibility of more temporary material gains to participate in campaigns of criticism and internal mobilization. This debate promoted a series of initiatives, from 1971 to 1974, to stabilize contract workers. The SMTF, for example, sent at least a hundred requests to the SRC asking to stabilize some of the contract workers within the unit, including an actor and four hair dressers, all approved personally by Ma Tianshui and Chen Pixian.<sup>158</sup>

In fact, the CC had issued, in November of 1971, a few directives to all local Party branches ordering not to contract more with temporary workers and gradually stabilize the ones already under this regime.<sup>159</sup> Between 1971 and 1972, in the whole country about “thirteen

<sup>157</sup> Beijing University and Qinghua University’s Critique Groups, “The Path of Lin Biao and Confucius-Mencius” (林彪与孔孟之道) IN *Red Flag*’s 8<sup>th</sup> edition of 1974.

<sup>158</sup> Requests and SRC approvals in the documents B173.4.624.11 and B173-4-624-2, both of 1972, available in the Shanghai Municipal Archive. There are dozens of requests of this type available for consultation in the SMA.

<sup>159</sup> CCPCC, “Circular of the State Council on Reforming the System of Temporary Workers and Rotary Workers (Summary)” (国务院关于改革临时工、轮换工制度的通知 - 概要), November 30, 1971. Available in *The Chinese Cultural Revolution Database*, at <http://ccradb.appspot.com/post/690> (consulted in March 2018).

million rural contract workers became state employees and urban residents”<sup>160</sup>, and there was a general mobilization to centralize salaries national planning.<sup>161</sup>

The decision to limit temporary workers and stabilize the contract of so many laborers was taken as a consequence of the political mobilizations of the period and, also, as an attempt to reinforce the centralization of national economic planning and reduce salary inequality. The stabilization of salaries and contracts also had the objective to “reclassify” as formal workers, students and trainees that had been assigned to production units during the exchange campaigns initiated in 1966.<sup>162</sup>

These policies were considered an important empirical condition to actually promote the union of workers, an indispensable fundament for disseminating theoretical and technical studies within production units. After all, even though the textual production of the WU and other Theory Groups was relatively large, with articles published locally and in national newspapers, it was still a minority of workers in each factory that had become worker-student. In all China, by 1973 there was only 122 schools organized inside factories, with approximately seven thousand workers-students. By the end of 1974, the number of schools in factories raised to 329, counting 22 thousand workers-students that had been or were about to graduate in its courses.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> KORZEC, Michael. *Labour and the Failure of Reform in China*. London and New York: Macmillan & St Martin's Press, 1992, p.29.

<sup>161</sup> CCPCC, “State Council's "Notice on Strengthening the Management of Wages Fund” (国务院《关于加强工资基金管理的通知》), June 5, 1972. Available in *The Chinese Cultural Revolution Database*, at <http://ccrddb.appspot.com/post/710> (consulted in March 2018).

<sup>162</sup> CCPCC, “Circular of the State Council on Reforming the System of Temporary Workers and Rotary Workers (Summary)” (国务院关于改革临时工、轮换工制度的通知 - 概要), November 30, 1971. Available in *The Chinese Cultural Revolution Database*, at <http://ccrddb.appspot.com/post/690> (consulted in March 2018).

<sup>163</sup> According to a report written by the State Planning Commission and the Ministry of Education to the State Council in February of 1975 (国家计委、教育部关于召开学习上海机床厂 7.21 工人大学教育革命经验现场会的请示报告) IN *Shanghai Municipal Archive*, B244-1-386-1.

## CHAPTER FIVE – LIMITING CAPITALISM

*Why some people do not see the contradictions within Socialism? Does not the old capitalist system still exist? Everybody can see the innumerable small capitalists, can't they? Mao Zedong, 1975<sup>164</sup>*

*I have the impression that the President's directive about theory studying refers to the topic of the capitalist legal power. What is capitalist legal power? Why it has to be limited? How to limit it? What relation it has to the two line struggle? It is still not clear. Yao Wenyan, 1975<sup>165</sup>*

Deng Xiaoping sent a letter to Mao Zedong and to the Politburo in August 1972 manifesting his support to the Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius and asking if he could “engage in some work” in Party organs again. Mao forwarded this letter to Zhou Enlai and the Politburo agreeing with his request and stating that the contradictions Deng had with the Party revolutionary line<sup>166</sup> were not “enemy contradictions” but “contradictions among the people.” (apud MAO, 1998:308) These were concepts coined in Mao's 1957's article “On the correct handling of the contradictions among the people”, respectively defining the struggle between direct opposing political lines and the struggle between some aspects of one political line.

Still, it took nine months to rehabilitate Deng to the Central Committee in the position of First Deputy Premier, what was issued in March 1973. Since then, he assumed roles in economic planning and international relations and, from the beginning of 1975, was promoted to the position of vice-chairman of the Party.

By 1974, there was an evident line struggle regarding national political economy and cultural politics that perpetrated the whole country. Discourses inside and outside of the Party were clearly contradictory in many aspects, including pronounced debates between Mao Zedong

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<sup>164</sup> Mao Zedong in “President Mao's Important Directive” (毛主席重要指示), excerpts written from October 1975 to January 1976, apud MAO, v.13, 1998:486.

<sup>165</sup> Yao Wenyan, in a conversation with the editorial board of the Red Flag in February 5<sup>th</sup>, 1975 (姚文元对《红旗》杂志编辑组召集人的谈话). He is referring here to Mao's important request to the country to study the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. This will be analyzed in this chapter. This meeting was transcribed and is available in the *The Chinese Cultural Revolution Database*, at <http://ccradb.appspot.com/post/3143> (accessed in March 2018).

<sup>166</sup> I use here the expression “revolutionary line” not with the intention of adhering with the political struggles in course, but mainly to define a political line that supported the continuity of the revolution under Socialism, as Mao Zedong putted forward.

and Deng Xiaoping, direct critiques written by workers and intellectuals against national policies and, eventually, these political conflicts unfolded in protests and social upheavals during the whole 1976.

The Campaign to Criticize Confucius and Lin Biao revived some factionalist struggles in many production unites and municipalities. The summon to criticize Lin Biao's "Confucianist" plot to "restore capitalism" referred, among other things, to the rehabilitation – in 1970 and 1971 – of cadres dismissed at the beginning of the CR. There was, among the rebels (then mostly in positions of leadership of local Revolutionary Committees or in Propaganda Teams), a great concern that old political economic policies would be "rehabilitated" together with these cadres, undermining the political experiments carried out so far.

Indeed, the international situation and internal signs of an economic crisis were factors that required China to reform some of its national politics to adapt to a financialized international economy. Moreover, there was a threat of an international nuclear war, and China allied with the United States to propose a nuclear armistice. After Deng's rehabilitation and participation in the UN meeting of 1974, the CCP managed to reestablish commercial and diplomatic relations with France, Japan and Australia.<sup>167</sup>

A few months after Deng was rehabilitated, in Shanghai, a group of writers of the SRC (headed by Yao Wenyuan, Zhu Yongjia, Zhang Chunqiao, Wang Hongwen and Jiang Qing) and Fudan University's Workers Propaganda Team started to edit a new theoretical magazine in Shanghai, called Study and Criticize (学习与批判) – an editorial space to publicize the articles written in the critique campaigns in course, including many articles written by workers.<sup>168</sup> This periodical collaborated with other theoretical journals consolidated during the campaigns to criticize Lin Biao and Confucius, mainly in universities in Beijing and Shanghai, by groups integrating Maoist intellectuals, cadres and workers.

Mao Zedong, in 1974 and 1975, made a series of statements affirming that most Party cadres did not know how to deal with factionalist struggles, and did not know the difference between Socialism and Revisionism. On the other side, he also criticized some of the

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<sup>167</sup> See, for this matter, the collection of China diplomatic conversations and agreements between 1974 and 1975, in the Wilson Digital Archive, available in <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/> (accessed in April 2018).

<sup>168</sup> SPC, "History of the Cultural Revolution in Shanghai" (上海文化大革命史话). Shanghai Cultural Revolution Historic Documents Editing Group (上海“文革”史料整理编纂小组), v.2, 2009:857.



mobilizations carried by Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan and Jiang Qing, saying that they were promoting social disorder and factionalism, instead of unification of the people. He also stressed the importance to publish foreign and national literature, multiply the variety of theater plays and permit intellectuals to manifest their viewpoint through writing and speaking. The contradictions between capitalism and communism, he declared, would still remain years from then, “even for centuries or millenniums”, so it could not be solved at once, for “the path” – he said – “is tortuous”, and political though line is not something to solve all of a sudden.<sup>169</sup>

Also in 1974, a third new group of 109 workers-students started a new engineering course at the SMTF 7.21 Workers University, 60 of which came from other 27 Shanghai factories.<sup>170</sup> The 7.21 WU sent, in February 1975, graduated workers to teach in an rural commune in the periphery of Shanghai’s Municipality, helping them to organize a peasant school in their unit. From the 150 workers graduated in the first 2 groups of the WU, 72 had returned to posts at the production line, 28 had entered technical departments, 21 had become cadres and were leading production teams, and 29 went to serve as technicians and worker political leadership in other factories of Shanghai. Also, around 2000 workers-students from many factories had coursed brief duration courses at the SMTF complementary school, which had been included in the WU in 1972.

It is important to notice that, despite being summoned to enroll a larger number of workers, the SMTF Revolutionary Committee did not succeed in increasing the quantity of WU students. The Shanghai Department of Mechanical and Electrical Industry (municipal department regulating, among other units, the SMTF), in 1974, supervised 350 thousand workers, from which 19 thousand (around 6%) were technicians. From the total of technicians, only 3800 were technicians trained from among workers (Shanghai Department of Mechanical and Electrical Industry in Study and Criticize, 1975(6):80). The mobilizations carried by the WU, even though did not result in much workers-engineers, had multiplied, involving English courses, specialization trainings, partnerships with other Chinese factories and with rural communes.

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<sup>169</sup> Statements of Mao Zedong apud MAO, 1998, v.13, pages 426, 431, 443, 444, 486-490.

<sup>170</sup> Wang Defa, “Persist on putting the Proletarian Politics in command to transform school in an instrument of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat” (坚持无产阶级政治挂帅把学校办成无产阶级专政的工具) IN C.A., “*Advance through the 7.21 path*” 前进在 7.21 道路上. Shanghai: Shanghai Popular Editing House, 1975:10.

The reasons for the workers-students groups be so restrict are not self-evident. The WU had, until at least 1975, the full support of Mao Zedong and, besides, were forming new specialized personnel that effectively worked in production units engaged in mobilizations to innovate technology and increase production output. However, the experiments carried out by these workers and cadres involved, too, propositions of radical changes in the administrative structure of the production units and even of labor processes. Some of the critiques directed against the WU political program may be realized through workers articles published from 1974 to 1976. The rectification policies actualized from 1975 onwards also explain – if read against the tide – the main oppositions some cadres and a large sector of the society had against the experiments of the Revolution in Education.

Even inside the production units, some workers criticized the WU program, mainly because of these two issues: the permanence of the focus in politics – since some defended their focus should be technology and production – and the orientation to return to the production line after the graduation from the WU. The last was particularly difficult to solve, since workers graduated from the WU would not receive any immediate material compensation and, thus, were required to dedicate themselves for an unpredictable future: a society without classes or, Communism. However, as it was very clear, classes continued to exist within a socialist society, which means graduated workers would still be considered “workers” after taking the course in engineering.

To “intellectualize laborers and ‘proletarize’ intellectuals” (劳动者要知识化, 知识者要劳动化) meant to suppress social inequalities: “to become a worker with culture and socialism consciousness is actually to suppress all class inequality, to eliminate obsolete and decadent social relations”. (*Advance through the 7.21 path*, 1975:48) It meant, then, to break up with a class system and create a new social organization yet unknown.

“This new type of graduated, is new in what, exactly?”,<sup>171</sup> or, “some people ask what “position” do I occupy [after graduated]?” (当一个什么“员”, *sic*)<sup>172</sup> The answer to this kind of questions were idealistic: “I believe it is about not to forget I am a worker. (...) Every day, after

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<sup>171</sup> Question formulated by Wu Jizhou, worker and cadre in the SMTF in 1975 IN *Advance through the 7.21 path* (1975):19

<sup>172</sup> Question formulated by Chi Wenhan, worker graduated at the first group of the SMTF WU. IN *Advance through the 7.21 path* (1975):33

class, I go back to the factory shop and work with all comrades (...), when there is a problem, we solve it together” (Advance through the 7.21 path, 1975:33). The objective was rather personal, to become a person actively working in production, political experiments, intellectualized debates, capable of teaching in an university and, also, be “comprehended and welcome by a peasant”. These multiple objectives provoked a discussion: even when a graduated worker agreed in returning to work in the production line, sometimes they did not find how to “fit in” the production unit. Some narratives relate examples of workers who took a few years to actually participate in projecting and managing, and accomplished it only after seizing an opportunity to solve a problem of management or technology.

Even by 1975, only a minority of workers had deeply studied both politics and technology. The control of production units, for the most part, continued in the hand of specialists and engineers graduated from the regular pre-CR colleges. That is why, in January 1974, Wang Hongwen wrote a report published at the People’s Daily stating that

*Specialists managing factories, bureaucracy, unilaterality, oppression, foreign slavery philosophy, all of this was not cancelled. How do workers become masters of the factory? Obstructing the Revisionist line. We are in this iron and steel decade, some enterprises are formally in our hands, but actually in the hands of capitalists, some are even formally in the hands of capitalists (...) How to take power in the hands of the proletariat? (...) Of course we cannot say all of them are bad people, there are some good people, but the thought line is revisionist, is capitalist. (...) The Cultural Revolution already lasted seven, eight years – we must learn how to solve these problems. (WANG, 1974)*

In December 1974, Mao Zedong wrote some comments later published as a summon for the whole country to study the theoretical fundamentals of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. The directive was initially a request to the writers groups collaborating with Zhang Chunqiao and Yao Wenyan.

*Why did Lenin speak of a dictatorship over capitalists? It is necessary to write articles. Tell Zhang Chunqiao, Wenyan to research this topic in Lenin’s works, then print it in big letters and send it to me. Tell people to read it first and then write articles. Zhang Chunqiao should write about it. If this question is not clear, then [China] will become revisionist. It is necessary to tell the whole country. (...) Now we still carry out a system with eight levels of salary, distributing according to production, exchanging currency, this is not much different from the old society. All that changed is the system of ownership. Our country still*

*carry out a commodity system, and the salary system has no equality (...) Only under the Dictatorship of the Proletariat this can be limited.* (MAO 1998(13):413)

This excerpt was synthesized, excluding the personal requests, brought to discussion with the editorial boards of the Red Flag and People's Daily and, then, publicized as a national call for the study of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Yao Wenyuan, in February 5<sup>th</sup> 1975, discussed Mao's statement with the editorial board of the Red Flag, clearly not sure of what exactly meant "to limit" and to study the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. It is important to remember that, by the end of 1974, Mao was already an elderly and had Parkinson's disease, what impaired his capacity to talk and write – most of his comments and notes, since then, were transcribed and very synthetic. Yao, along the meeting, proposed some topics of research, including to resume the study of the capitalist legal power – a debate that had been suspended in 1959.<sup>173</sup> Mao's statement inaugurated, though, a new approach to the study and critique of the "bourgeois right": the idea that it could (and should) be "limited". "The persistence of bourgeois rights, he said, could not be suppressed, but "could only be limited" "under the dictatorship of the proletariat" (RUSSO, 2012:7).

That national call to the study of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, initiating with a question ("Why did Lenin speak of Dictatorship of the Proletariat?") and radically problematizing the results of the revolutionary processes ("this [society] is not much different from the old society"), declared that the Dictatorship of the Proletariat was in fact an obscure topic, "as a necessary precondition so that it could 'be clarified'" (RUSSO 2012:7).

We shall see, in this chapter, how some workers engaged in the Revolution in Education analyzed topics brought up by this national study campaign: the category of class and class relations under Socialism, the permanence of currency and exchange of goods, and labor and wage inequality.

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<sup>173</sup> Yao Wenyuan, "Conversation with the editorial board of the Red Flag, February 5th 1975" (姚文元对《红旗》杂志编辑组召集人的谈话) February 5 1975.

5.1. *Class relations under Socialism and the crisis of the category of class in the Cultural Revolution*

*The most crucial question of socialism, then, is not whether or not a capitalist class exists but whether a proletariat still exists. Moishe Postone, 1978<sup>174</sup>*

In the meeting with the editorial board of the Red Flag, in February 5<sup>th</sup>, Yao Wenyan highlighted that would be important to study “the theory of capitalism without capitalists” in Lenin’s work *State and Revolution* (YAO, 1975b). According to Lenin, Socialism could be defined as a society without capitalists, but in which there would still exist capital and capital accumulation; value, though, would be put in service of the people, the proletariat (the Chinese word for “proletariat”, very clearly defines “the class” - 阶级 – “without means of production” - 无产). However, Mao statements in late 1974 and beginning of 1975 declared, instead, that capitalists were still exist, as well as class struggle and labor exploitation. This disruptive declarations provoked debates that shifted the focus on the distribution of goods and wealth (a common approach for current Socialist countries) to the focus on production relations and the ideal of actually overcome relations of exploitation.

Since 1956, Mao had stressed the importance to study Chinese society under Socialism, since Marx and Lenin did not live to experience a socialist society and, thus, could not have written about its particular problematics. The category of class, for example, central to Marxism-Leninism theoretical frame, went through an irreversible crisis during the Cultural Revolution.

Class, according to Marxist-Leninist definition, would be defined by political economic conditions that determined the levels of autonomy and power within society. A social class would be defined according to how much a group of individuals have, and may actually control, of production means. This could determine, among other things, the amount of power a group would have over another (if it could, for example, establish conditions of labor for another social group). Class relations would necessarily indicate some level of oppression and exploitation (CHIBBER, 2008:355), that is, the existence of a sector of the society that occupies a position that guarantees some advantages – concentrating in its hands political or social resources. When Marx analyzed the capitalist system, he identified the social vector represented by the capitalists

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<sup>174</sup> Cf. POSTONE, Moishe. “Necessity, labor and time: a reinterpretation of the Marxian Critique of Capitalism” IN *Social Research*, 45:4(1978):749-788.

– individuals who had the control of a concentrated quantity of means of production and, thus, would be responsible for its administration and for contracting labor force of others that do not have any means of production besides their physical force.

But, what about the Socialist society? If it, ideally, had abolished private property and, therefore, would not have capitalists, who would be responsible to administrate the means of production in order to generate value and goods that would be distributed throughout the country? The figure of the capitalist would be, then, substituted by the State, which would represent “the major part of the society” (the proletariat) and administrate the production means and output distribution,

Nonetheless, what the revolutionary line defended is that, even under Socialism, production relations were permeated by power struggles, and that relations of class persisted even after the legal foundations of the private property were banned. At the beginning of the CR, “class” was still majorly defined as “groups of individuals” from a certain “class origin” or background. However, the concept of “line” somehow politicized the category, because it stated that a “class” could only be identified by political actions (and not merely by one’s family background). This had been an important debate among Red Guards and the CCP.

The raise of the concept of “line” made the identification of one’s class much more complex. It required, then, a rich documentation and a long process of collective analysis. For instance, one could be identified as in favor of the revolutionary line, but acting wrongfully by ignorance, because they did not know “the difference between capitalist and socialist policies”. In any case, class turned out to be something to be constructed along time, because it was defined mainly for one’s capacity to understand and follow a political line.

The idea of a “political thought line” (思想政治路线) or “political thought path” (思想政治道路) gave more importance to what ideas would be declared or performed by someone, what eventually counterweighted the concept of class merely defined by how much production means one formally possess or control. After the January Revolution in Shanghai (1967), the struggle of workers to actively participate in social and economic politics broke up with the “formula of the ‘classical’ socialist doctrine (...) summarized as the conceptual chain ‘worker-class-factory-party-state’” (RUSSO, 2012:9), because the representative role of the Party was deliberately disrupted to give space to workers to represent themselves, even if within a limited space, through political self-organization.

Later, in 1968, factionalism had spread throughout China and, as it is well known, the conflicts between students or workers factions were related with disputes for power, based on a bureaucratized idea of class and State. There was, then, a saturation of the category of class, used for years as a label – emptied of any real political meaning – in conflicts to seizure bureaucratic power and status (WANG, 2006:33).

When the CCPCC shifted the focus of the CR to the Revolution in Education campaigns, workers were summoned to exercise the leadership in *everything*, in all spheres of society, particularly in propaganda and education. It means their role as “workers” was about to be merged with that of the “intellectuals”. It means the “working class” started to be defined not merely by their “chief work”, but by their political performance as a whole in society:

*The political environment of the WU is good, but it is not a “red security box”. I have the deepest consideration to Mao Zedong policies and towards the Party, but a simple “class feeling” does not substitute the consciousness of the line struggle. (Li Aibao IN Advance through the 7.21 path, 1975:45)*

The experiments on actualizing the May Seventh Directive further deepen this conceptual crises. Indeed, this directive had as its main objective to restrict and suppress the three great differences by “blurring” the limits between them and, thus, by evidencing that the inequalities between manual and intellectual labors, peasants and workers, specialists and uneducated proletariat, were a matter of deliberated policies.

During the national campaign to study the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, the category of class was also analyzed, particularly in its relation with the bourgeois rights. The salary system (divided in eight levels among workers), the payment according to production, and the division of labor, were elements that could generate class exploitation *if* accompanied by the permanence of the three great differences or inequalities. In an enterprise, for example:

*There are two aspects of the production relations (...): the relation between the masses and the leadership, managers, technicians (mental laborers) and workers or peasants (physical laborers). (...) In an enterprise, still there are class relations of exploitation over workers and peasants. (...) [Different from the capitalist enterprise,] in a socialist enterprise, the leadership and the people are, together, owners of the enterprise, they obtain identical profit (...) If labor division is necessary, more necessary is the revolutionary unification: to work and act with a common revolutionary objective. (Political Economy Study Group, 1975)*

This article, published in the 1975' eighth edition of the journal *Study and Criticize*, proposed that, in order to impede that exploitation raised from the existing relations of production, workers and managers must to “unify” for a “common revolutionary objective”, which is, to carry out mental and physical labors together, without excluding people from participating in each of these activities. To this aim, managers, specialists and technicians should not “depart from production”. In other words, even though the division between manual and intellectual labors were still needed, it should be “restricted” by the regular participation of managers in the production line and the participation of common workers in technical and managerial sectors of the unit. This was considered a way to gradually capacitate workers to actively manage production and technology. On the other hand, it was understood as a way to collectivize the leadership of the enterprise, to which knowledge and technique should also be collectivized (*Advance through the 7.21 Path*, 1975:71).

*Association, in a capitalist enterprise, is despotic, (...) capitalists are the owners of the enterprise, and workers and peasants are their slaves. Capital has the roles of commander, manager and regulator in a capitalist enterprise. (...) In a socialist enterprise, workers and peasants become owners of the enterprise, (...) they are the ones to command, manage and regulate (Idem,1975:71)*

To become actual “owners of the enterprise”, and effectively “command, manage and regulate”, it was important “not only to seize political power, but also seize technical power” (Wang Caicai in *Idem*, 1975:39). That is why the experiments of popular education and the three-in-one combination were considered strategies that allowed workers to administer production relations.

To *limit* capitalist legal power, or bourgeois right, meant to use elements of the superstructure to deliberately restrict the inequality between classes. The spheres of the superstructure – education, propaganda, administration, and the “four great weapons” (which were included in the national constitution in 1975) – were the “instruments” to impede that the bourgeois rights became vectors that would aggravate inequality. Moreover, acting in the superstructure, workers were called to construction political devices that would promote social equality and, ultimately, suppress capitalist legal power.

In 1975, the journal *Study and Criticize* published, along four editions, a series of texts debating practical aspects of the directive to “limit capitalist legal power”. The texts were published in the form of an exchange of letters among friends – characters representing different



sectors of the society who talked about how the bourgeois rights manifest in their unit and how they could limit them. It started presenting a situation of a peasant debating in his unit the motto “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs”:

*Xiao Gong,*

*Since we met in Shanghai in the Spring, it has been already ten days. I came back to the production team, (...) and with the comrade peasants entered in a interesting and exciting debate and study of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. (...) Today, when I was leaving the field where we raise the pigs, at break time, we very casually were talking about how to correctly deal with the distribution according to production. One of the comrades asked: ‘to pay according to one’s work, isn’t this almost the same as in the old society, why do we have to still use this principle?’ (...) I heard the old peasant saying this and sincerely responded that to carry the principle of “each one according to his work”, we must bear in mind the “from each according to his ability”. We should not carry out the material incentives. (Study and Criticize, 1975(3):33-34)*

The letter continues, explaining that “to limit” the practice of paying according to production, it is necessary to act in the political and social spheres, by promoting the idea that “production output is a contribution to society”, therefore, that even though the principle of “to each according to his needs” could not be entirely actualized by then, it was necessary to promote the principle of “from each according to his abilities”. The article also says that when production would surpass the planned goal, the unit should not ask for material compensation.

The next letter, in the same edition, shows the case of a retired industrial worker, who – according to the young workers – “deserved” to be classified with the level two. The retired men did not accepted it, deciding to remain with the level six (four grades below, therefore, with a lower salary), declaring he had enough to live a comfortable life. This letter criticized the fact that the differences between levels could ultimately declare that there are types of work that worth more and, others, that worth less. Knowledge and specialization, according to the letter, could not become a criteria to define the level a worker occupies. “In Socialism (...) technology cannot become a private property” (Idem:36), that is, it should not result necessarily in a higher salary.

According to these articles, in the absence of private property, other elements – particularly in the superstructure – could act “as the capital acts in the capitalist society” (Idem,36): engendering exploitation and inequality. Elements like political bureaucratic power

(in the case of cadres and managers) and knowledge (in the case of technicians, intellectuals and specialists) could promote unequal relations that resulted in economic and political privileges or, to others, deficits. The instruments to “limit” or “restrain” this process, were, on the one hand, to actualize the May Seventh Directive and, on the other hand, to be conscious of how inequality could still raise under Socialism.

These studies, nonetheless, continued to represent a minority of the population. Moreover, even though there had been, over the years, a process of politicization of the category of class, expressions as “counterrevolutionary”, “ultra-leftist”, “rightist” and “capitalists” continued to be used until 1976. The methods to deal with the “contradictions among the people” were being experimented, and were not capable to actually solve the struggles that raised between different sectors of the society.

In 1975, Deng Xiaoping started an all-round rectification campaign, reestablishing hierarchy in the EPL and proposing that Chinese industry should be more integrated internationally, raising its exportation and importation levels. To adjust to a financialized international economy, technological devices would have to be introduced, devices that required a specialized management of each sector of the production – including, for instance, the Computer Numerical Control Machine Tools.

Deng led national policies to reinforce the hierarchic organization of economic and political administration. In July 4 1975, in an extended meeting with the Politburo, Deng made one of the declarations that provoked a last wave of critique campaigns of the CR:

*Comrade Mao Zedong has recently given us three important instructions. First, study theory and combat and prevent revisionism. Second, achieve stability and unity. Third, boost economy. These three instructions, being related to one another, form an organic whole and none of them should be left out. They form the key link in our work for the present period. Last year Comrade Mao Zedong said that the “cultural revolution” had already gone on for eight years and that it was better to achieve stability. Now that another year has passed, making it nine years, we should unite and strive for stability. We have a lot to do. There are many aspects of the international struggle that demand attention and there is also a lot to do domestically, especially to raise the level of the economy (DENG, 1975)*

Deng started this speech with a “collage” of Mao’s comments and directives since 1974, what resulted in the so-called “taking the three directives as axis” (以三项指示为纲). As soon as Mao could, he publicly replied to Deng criticizing this formulation:

*What “three directives as axis”? Stability and unity do not mean there is no class struggle. Class struggle is the program [or, “the main thread in the net”], all the rest is are topics [or, “just the meshes”]. On this matter, Stalin committed a great mistake. (MAO, 1998(13):486)*

In this critique to Deng, Mao was criticizing the absence of the “class struggle” as a national program. He also meant that “class struggle” should not be a pragmatic objective, since it would result in “all round civil war”, or factionalism. Mao’s critique is rather synthetic and allowed different interpretations. In Chinese, the word used to define “program” (纲) also means “guiding principle” or “main thread in the net”. The word he used to define “topics” (目) also means “objectives”, “meshes”. Both these words are used also in Biology to define a general family (纲) and a specific order (目). It means that, what he categorized as “topics” are the specific targets of politics and economy, and that these policies should be carried out using as a general guiding principle the class struggle. In other words, the implementation or development of any policy, according to Mao, should be accompanied by an evaluation of its political “line”, i.e., if it leads to reinforce capitalist legal power or to its suppression and, ultimately, to social equality.

The following events showed, though, that this dynamic conception of class – as a “vested interest group” that follows a certain political line – was not accepted by the majority of people. The incidents in Tiannanmen Square and in Nanjing, in February 1976, demonstrated that “class” continued to be rather a saturated and depoliticized category, that could be used to justify factionalist conflicts inside and outside of the Party.

When Zhou Enlai died, in January 1976, his pictures and some statues were installed in central places of Beijing, Nanjing and in many other cities. Some eulogized his support of the revolutionary line, and some eulogized his pivotal role in the CCP and prudence when dealing with social struggles. Different from many other members of the Politburo, Zhou have had a high education in the old school system, and was praised for being an intellectual in the service of revolution and the country. The use of adjectives as “prudent” and the eulogizing of his educational degree, were interpreted, by a part of the population, as a sign of a step backwards, alongside with the rehabilitation of old cadres and the implementation of a national rectification campaign.

Indeed, in the previous six months of Rectification Campaign led by Deng Xiaoping, many rebel leaders had been expelled from the Revolutionary Committees, and this

organizations were ordered to be reduced in size and reorganized by departments (GUAN,1999). Some rebels, in Nanjing for example, were even arrested accused of factionalism (DONG and WALDER, 2014). Specialists had been repositioned as managers of production units and local Party organs were oriented to withdraw the support of popular mobilizations, the “new-born things”.

In Beijing and Nanjing, rebel leaders and other militants decided to organize demonstrations supporting a request from Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan and Jiang Qing to remove the homages to Zhou Enlai. However, when these public demonstrations begin, there was a much larger quantity of people coming to protest against factionalism and the violent excesses happened during the CR.

The same conflict described by Wang Hongwen, in January 1974, was being enacted: on the one side, those defending the permanence of the revolutionary politics under Socialism, and on the other side, those who were against the continuity of critique campaigns carried out with the “four great weapons” (WANG, 1974). Deng was again dismissed in February, when a new campaign started against Revisionism and against the policies implemented by him. This campaign, though, was carried out by restrict groups throughout the country, since most of the local Party organs had been reorganized and were aligned with the Rectification policies.

### *5.2. The circulation and exchange of goods and currency – enterprise management also is social education*

Mao Zedong in 1965 had already proposed that enterprise administration should become a context for social education (MAO, 1965c), that is, that workers should engage in the management of their units, and managers should participate in manual labor. In 1975, when the study of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat resumed the critical analysis of the bourgeois rights under Socialism, the topic once again was focus of a national debate.

In Shanghai, under the personal direction of Wang Hongwen and Zhang Chunqiao, workers committees were formed to actively participate in the administration of industrial production units. Because a major critique against workers experiments was that those were limited to their own units and disregarded national planning, in 1975, some of these workers committees started to study economic planning and enterprise management, in order to participate in the administration of inter-industry relations (Study and Criticize, 1976(9):14-16).

The Shanghai Machine Tools Factory, for example, initiated a partnership with the rural commune of Chaoyang, the Tongji University's May Seventh Commune-School and several medium and small factories in Shanghai. Besides educational exchange programs, they organized committees to study the commercial relations between them and actively take part in its administration.

This was considered a way to limit capitalist legal power, by directly controlling commodities exchange, currency circulation and, also, by restricting the inequality between manual and intellectual labors. A series of articles were published analyzing the current state of commodities production and exchange, and the circulation of currency within Socialism. In that same series of letters, published in some editions of *Study and Criticize* in 1975, the topic is explained:

*In our present socialist society, there are two kinds of public ownership, the state-ownership and the public-ownership. Besides, there are still some residual private-ownership of small capacity. Therefore, there is still need of carrying out exchange of commodities and currency circulation. (...) But we have to be aware of its risk and potential harm, and use the Dictatorship of the Proletariat to limit it, not allowing it to operate freely. (Study and Criticize, 1975(4):33)*

In this letter, the “writer” is a worker in a state-owned store. He narrates an example of a worker in the same store, who wanted to buy a new wristwatch recently produced by a small factory in Shanghai. She had seen the watch with a street vendor, and wanted to buy it because it appear to have a lower price there, than in an state-owned store. However, she was admonished by her colleague, who explained to her this would mean “to open the back door” to illegal commercialization of commodities, what could straighten the autonomous power of commodities and currency, thus reinforcing capitalist political power, instead of limiting it.

*Our store is a state-owned enterprise. This kind of socialist public ownership understands that the produced commodities need to meet the needs of the country and the workers. (...) If we take any of these commodities to ourselves or to our relatives, or even if we sell it in an illegal form, then it would be the same as transforming this enterprise in a property of a small group, or an individual property. (...) The regulation we receive is “first, consider what is planned, and, second, consider the price” [计划第一,价格第二] (Study and Criticize, 1975(4):35)*

The letter continued, explaining individuals and enterprises should “first, consider what is planned” and, only after taking into consideration the State planning and the actual needs of the “sister-unities”, consider the price and profit.

*Liu Shaoqi and Lin Biao’s “profit on command” used to give all the power to prices, so it would regulate production, (...) “to do everything for a high profit, to do a little for a low profit, and do nothing when there is no profit” [大利大干,小利小干, 无利无干], then transforming the socialist commodities production into capitalist commodities production.*  
(Idem)

Another letter, in the same volume, tells the story of a bank worker, who discovered that a factory had set an underground shed. Its products were sold using the name of the official unit, but its profit was concentrated in the hands of a small group in the administration of this factory. The character explains that he discovered the plot when checking carefully the exchange of values between two units, and adverts that

*Old and new capitalists, in certain situations, could transform currency in capital (...) Our work, in a bank, is to administrate currency, (...) we developed a series of procedures to limit capitalist legal power [in our sphere], for example, when administering the circulation of currency (Idem,35)*

In April 1976, Study and Criticize published a report resulted from months of study carried out by a Shanghai workers study group, comprehending a detailed critique to three CCPCC documents, written under the direct coordination of Deng Xiaoping, between March and August 1975.<sup>175</sup> These documents proposed economic policies part of the all-round Rectification Campaign. Each topic of these three directives was carefully criticized by the workers study group.

For example, in the document “Some issues regarding accelerating industrial development”, it was proposed, among other things, to increase the importation of foreign technology, and use it in Chinese industries in order to boost technological advance and increase production output. Against this proposition, the group of workers stated that technology could

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<sup>175</sup> The three documents analyzed in detail by this workers study group were “Report and outline for the work in academy and science” (科学院工作汇报提纲), “On the General Program of the Whole Party’s National Work” (论全党全国各项工作的总纲) and “Some issues on accelerating industrial development” (关于加快工业发展的若干问题).

not be imported and directly applied in Chinese industries, because even technology would have in itself a class character, which defined its use and possible results:

*We must apply the principle of the "one that divides in two" to the [question of] importing foreign technology. The technical projects from capitalist countries serve monopolist capitalists super-profits. It has, thus, an incontestable class stigma. Is it really possible to take it in our service without distinguishing the right from wrong? (Vent d'est, 1976(3):5)*

It meant that, even though foreign technology could be used as a reference, it should not be imported without popular study and discrimination of its possible advantages and limitations.

The national guideline to the rectification of the economy also emphasized the exportation of petroleum and coal, to which these workers replied:

*Let's examine further. The revisionist "Pravda" recently published this proclamation: "Better make use of the natural resources e appropriate foreign capital and experiences, in order to, in the future, to clear up debits contracted during the construction". It is not surprising that this "great policy" vented by Deng Xiaoping is actually "imported" from the revisionist URSS! According to this "great policy" we shall import what we can produce for ourselves and export what we need the most. (...) If one loses its economic autonomy, it is impossible to remain autonomous in the politic sphere.*

This excerpt stated that there must be a political control of economic operations, otherwise, commodity exchange and currency circulation would be the “masters” of the country, and not the workers, as declared Yao Wenyan’s 1968’ article. In fact, this imbricated relation between politics and economy was a central issue of debate during the whole CR and, particularly, in 1975 and 1976. Whilst Mao Zedong and other leaders emphasized that only through politics is possible to workers and the Party assure the political line of the transition, Deng Xiaoping (and, ultimately, the majority of the CCP) defended a theoretical and practical split between politics and economy.

This may be exemplified, at the organizational level, by a policy implemented in 1975, ordering that enterprises should be administered by a new Party organ, separated from the local Revolutionary Committees, and specialized in production technology and enterprise management. In the critique written by the workers, this particular issue was central to their argumentation:

*Separate politics from the Party and the [economic] execution, and to set the revisionist system of an “unique manager”, means to usurp the enterprise administration and transform the socialist enterprise in a capitalist enterprise. (Idem)*

The conceptual and practical split between politics and economy was one of the main targets of critique by the workers in the WU. Corresponding to Mao's statement of 1958, “politics is the guarantee of productive work” (“政治又是业务的保证”, MAO, 1958), workers engaged in criticizing the 1975' Rectification policies affirmed that if there was not a popular political control of economy, enterprises under socialism could actually become capitalist. There were many articles analyzing “how do socialist property becomes capitalist property” (Vent d'est, 1976(1):18), and what would be the specificity of a socialist enterprise.

Workers emphasized that, in order to limit capitalist legal power, and impede its elements to drag “backwards” (towards capitalist restoration) the socialist organizations, it was necessary to straighten three elements: State planning, oppose material incentives and suppress the division between manual and intellectual labors, and, mainly, the active participation of workers in the management sectors.

This was a unprecedented critique coming from a socialist society itself. So far, Marxist critique of capitalism was mainly focused on the sphere of distribution. To consider that the determinants of an economic system may be rooted in the sphere of production, although extensively studied by Marx himself, was not a common critique in socialist countries. Until late 1960, socialist theoreticians had systematically distinguished, as two fundamentally different contexts, “class domination and private property as specific to capitalism, and industrial labor as independent of and nonspecific to capitalism” (POSTONE, 1978(45:4):741). Value and social labor were seen as trans-historical categories, and what was conceived as the particular character of socialist political economy was “the mode of its social distribution and administration” (POSTONE, 1993:124). Also, labor alienation had been, in most socialist theories, interpreted as “the fact that people's objectifications are taken from them” (POSTONE, 1978(45:4):750).

Notwithstanding, the workers in these remaining theory study groups, by 1975, produced theoretical critiques that actually focused the sphere of production as determinant to the actual political economic system. During the campaign to study the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, there were actually ruptures with the interpretation of Socialism as a historical progress of the



capitalist mode of production. The proposition to limit, from the political sphere, capitalist legal power in socialist society, and that this was something that could only be done if workers were the actual owners of enterprises and of the State, shifted the focus of the analysis to the sphere of production.

The frequent attempts to suppress the inequality between manual and intellectual labors, eventually unfolded in the critique of the mode of production itself, and particularly, in a struggle against the objectivization of workers. That is why, the WU programs insisted in keeping politics classes as the fundament of their popular education experiment.

*A socialist enterprise cannot only produce commodities, but also cadres, talents. Capitalism also does industrial enterprises, revisionism too. The main difference between enterprise we make and the capitalist enterprise is that, in their industries, workers are politically oppressed slaves. They treat workers as if they were cattle.*<sup>176</sup>

### 5.3. Socialism and Capitalism are almost the same – the role of workers in the superstructure to limit capitalist legal power

A week after Mao's death, in September 1976, the CCP ordered all production units of the country to give to the local Party Committees any official documents and writings produced in the last ten years regarding political experiments led by workers. Innumerable documents were burned in piles in each unit. Millions of people were persecuted, killed, arrested and committed suicide around the country. Ma Tianshui, in Shanghai, for example, a few years after the end of the CR, was committed to a mental institution, where he died in 1988 (WANG, 2009).

*Putting activists from the Cultural Revolution on trial, in effect meant putting all things related to the CR, and the CR itself, on trial as well. Thousands of Mao statues erected during the CR were demolished or buried underground, usually secretly late at night, without any public discussion. Model operas and films produced during the CR were banned. CR books and materials suffered a similar fate. On January 6, 1977, the Hua Guofeng regime issued an order to burn all books associated with the so-called "Gang of Four" and their followers. Aiming to erase the historical traces of that era, this order detailed various restrictions about publications related to the CR. Almost all important*

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<sup>176</sup> Zhang Meihua, speech in June 27, 1974, at the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee's conference hall, as part of a meeting for the exchange of experiences with representants of workers universities. Document in the Shanghai Municipal Archive, B173-2-206-34.

*theoretical, historical, political books and model opera publications during the CR, as a result, fell into the category of things that were to be destroyed. (SHENG, 2012:17)*

This reversal of national politics was only possible because of the rectification campaign in course since mid' 1975, which started with the reinforcement of hierarchy in the EPL. It was, actually, a process of further bureaucratization and depoliticization of the Party-State structure its governing techniques (which may be traced until a consolidation in the 1989 Tiannanmen Square protests, when it was manifested a deliberated split between military and civil spheres of society) (POZZANA and RUSSO, 2006).

Already in the late 1974, workers engaged in the mobilization for the WU made several declarations showing they had many doubts on how to further develop the political experiments. The ultimate goals were social equality and political sovereignty. However, their force was rather weak when confronted with the financialization of word production.

Maintaining politics as the axis of the WU, and even of the industrial production labor, was not something easily understood.

*Some people ask: to train workers, isn't enough to send them to any national university? Or, isn't enough to train [by acquiring experience] in the practical daily experience? Why is it needed to build an university? We think the universities built by the country are still too few, and are very distant from our needs. Besides, in President Mao's directive about our factory, the first sentence is "we still need to make universities", so we make it! Now, after six years in this experience, we reexamine this question, and understand a little better. (...) The factories that have conditions to do so, should organize universities. This way, not only we solve the problem of the demand for more universities to train workers, but mainly we can break up with the capitalist system of forming intellectuals, it means the working class occupying its space on the educational sphere (...) Of course, the universities in factories are different from those that depart workers from production. Because of that, they still have many limitations. (...) Many people say that the quantity of technicians is already enough (...) in fact, some graduated workers-students do not occupy the position of technicians (...) But I think the WU do not have as its main objective to form only technicians, but it is actually a long term struggle, (...) it is a matter of political line. (...)*  
(Wang Defa, 1975, B173-2-206-34)

It means WU had as its program not only to train technicians and raise the status of workers as co-managers of each unit. The initiative aimed to allow virtually everyone, by raising their educational levels, to actively participate in production, culture and politics. In other words,

to overcome the existence of a proletariat (a sector of the society excluded from deliberative and power instances).

*This new kind of university student, is exactly new in what? (...) You cannot see the bookish air [看不到大学生的架子] (...) After graduating, we become both manual and intellectual laborers, an unified new kind of worker. (Wu Xuzhou in C.A., 1975:19)*

In late 1974, for example, the report SMTF sent to the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee defined the general aim of the WU as being:

*To train and form technicians with socialist consciousness, with theory and practice unified, that can take responsibility for the politics of the city, technical and administration works, that understand the local planning activities, are red and expert, are able to write and to fight. (SMTF Revolutionary Committee, 1974, )*

While the theory studies advanced, and the political economic context restricted this initiative, increasing difficulties were met by the remaining activists. In 1975, Chen Pixian – recently rehabilitated to the Shanghai RC – issued two memorandums to the SMTF Revolutionary Committee, asking them to reduce the size of the factory committees, since it was “confusing the dialogue with the Party-State organs”, and each decision was taking too long to circulate in all departments because in every committee it had to pass through conferences and public meetings.<sup>177</sup> Material incentives, for example, were reinforced in the national program of 1975, but the WU original project could only be carried out if there would be a focus on political incentives to production. The national directives for industry also repositioned specialists in the leadership of production units, restoring the responsibility system and the technical committees in most units of the country.

*When we were studying Marx' Civil War in France (...) we analyzed the struggle between restoration and anti-restoration [forces] in our history since the foundation of the PRC, and evaluated how this organization, the Workers University, is a step to limit capitalist legal power. We researched the relations among people in our factory and how the labor division still maintains bourgeois rights (...) (Zhong Yujing apud Advance through the 7.21 path, 1975:59)*

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<sup>177</sup> According to the official journal of the SMTF Revolutionary Committee (报刊叫—上机情况), published in January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1975, document B173-2-255-61 in the Shanghai Municipal Archive.

Besides, the questions brought up by the experiment itself were not clearly answered, even after eight years of experience. Those were questions that involved consolidated preconceived ideas about the social roles of university, industry and government.

*That kind of university, where you graduate and, for sure, have to occupy a higher level work position, actually is a way to reinforce capitalist legal power, promote capitalist social relations, it is a characteristic of the old society that still reflects in our mind. (Li Aibao apud Idem,1975:48)*

This topic – the return to the production line after graduation – was a question that shattered the very concepts of high education, labor and work management. The basic idea that “a higher education may result in a higher social position” was criticized:

*[In March 1974] we needed to struggle against this kind [of education] that transforms knowledge in commodity, so we organize a [study] group and wrote a dazibao criticizing the “knowledge-private property”. (...) [However] a workers like me, after entering the Workers university and acquiring knowledge, would also privatize knowledge or technology? Wouldn't it mean that after having knowledge, would I lose the working class original color? (Chen Guansong apud Idem,1975:26)*

In fact, particularly from 1975, workers-students often declared that the WU had long-term objectives, emphasizing that those were not restricted to the technological education, but actually were collaborating in transform the whole social organization.

*This is a long term conflict. To support this [our mobilization] you must see the complex character of this struggle. (...) [For instance] We study technology, and want all students to appropriate more and more of technology, but “to put technology in the first place” is not correct. (Wang Defa apud Idem, 1975:17)*

The discourses justifying the 1975 Rectification Campaign, referred to the CR as a phase of political disturbances and chaos. Actually, factionalism had been a problem since its start in 1966. There had been, indeed, repetitive campaigns to evaluate, criticize and, eventually, dismiss and even arrest cadres. Besides, in 1967, 1970 and 1974 there were large mobilizations to reorganize governing structures. In late 1975, Mao asked Deng to carry out a national study campaign to evaluate the Cultural Revolution itself.

*About the Cultural Revolution, a general viewpoint: the fundament is correct, but there are failures. Now we have to examine the aspect of the failures. (...) Culture Revolution committed two mistakes: 1. To oppose all; 2. National all-round civil war. In opposing all, somethings were correctly opposed, like the Lin Anti-Party clique. (...) It is already ten*

*years without war, [and happened] an all-round civil war, it is gun for gun (抢了枪). (...) To bring people to death, to hurt individuals without aid, this is not good.*<sup>178</sup>

Deng rejected the proposition, saying that he was not the right person to start this campaign because he not aware of the events happened since 1967 (RUSSO, 2012:29). Mao had insisted in this invitation several times in October of 1975, and Deng repeatedly refuse to accept it. The explanation to this events was revealed a few years later, when, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, the CCP promoted the campaign of Throughout Negation of the Cultural Revolution, and the building of a “Chinese new order”.

*Deng was unbending in declaring the theoretical debates and political experimentations that Mao was promoting in those months not only worthless but also dangerous sources of disorder* (RUSSO, 2012:31)

“Deng repeated throughout the spring how important it was to tackle ‘disorder’, while never mentioning the true root of the problem” (Idem) – which may be traced not only in the factionalist struggles that had happened, but mainly in the campaign started in December 1974 to study the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. In fact, “disorder”, “mess”, “chaos”, as official CCP history discourses still denominates, indicated also the series of mobilizations and theoretical studies that had undermined the representativeness of the Party and the presumed vanguard role attributed to it. Workers, in their critique of the Rectification Campaign policies, also interpreted the repetitive use of the word “disorder” as a way to mask the mobilizations they were carrying to try and build a new order at local and national levels.

In February 1976, some workers of the SMTF, with support of Ma Tianshui, Wang Hongwen and Zhang Chunqiao, wrote a letter to Mao Zedong, which was also published in a few local newspapers. This letter stated that, since the beginning of the Rectification Campaign in 1975, the Workers Universities had been increasingly attacked by many discourses and policies, particularly by Deng’s declaration about the Workers Universities in late 1975: “Shanghai Machine Tools Factory 7.21 University is a form, but it is not the only form” (上海机床厂七二一大学是个形式, 但不是唯一的形式). In an intense and dramatic tone, the letter asks for help from the “respected and beloved old comrade Mao Zedong”, saying that Deng’s declaration was actually the foreword for renewed political attacks against the WU.

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<sup>178</sup> MZDJGYL, p.488

*The die-hard capitalists, by declaring the “7.21 path” is merely a “form”, want to restore the revisionist system of selecting students directly from the high school to the university, just like illegal commodities. They want to lock us, workers, again out of the university gates and allow the bourgeoisie to reestablish the control in the field of education. How can we allow the tragedy of history to repeat itself? (Students of the Shanghai Machine Tools Factory, *Hang Zhou’s Daily*, February 20 1976)*

The letter continued enumerating what the workers considered the historical contributions actualized through the WU initiative, particularly focusing the attempt to organize a curricula that actually merged theoretical and practical knowledges:

*Unifying all teaching-learning processes with the three revolutions mobilizations, so that workers, “without losing the mud and oil from their skin, nor silencing the machine noise in their ears”,<sup>179</sup> united with the people, would study Marxist-Leninist and your works, critique revisionism, actualize Socialism, to actually contribute to industry and society by learning after Daqing’s experience. (...) This Revisionist line has only but one objective: to deny the Cultural Revolution, to deny socialist new-born things. (Idem)*

In fact, from October 1976, the leadership of all Workers Universities in China was reorganized. Old rebel leaders were expelled, arrested or sent to occupy positions as common workers in other municipalities. Professors of engineering and other technical disciplines from many universities around the country were appointed as the new leadership of the Workers Universities.

In 1979, the CCPCC issued a directive to change the WU name to “Professionalizing School”. Seventeen new professors were allocated in the SMTF to reorganize the Workers University, all of them coming from universities or technical schools in other municipalities. (CHEN, 2001:496)

In a speech given in July 1977 at the SMTF, the new secretary of the unit’s Party Committee, Wang Shipeng, attempted to trace a historical linearity linking the WU to the schools built in production units since 1949, thus annulling any “revolutionary” content correlated with the political struggles in the previous ten years. He declared that the WU were, actually, a great institution that had trained hundreds of workers; however – he stated – this

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<sup>179</sup> The expression “without losing the mud and oil from the skin, nor silencing the noise of machinery in the ears”, refers to the fact that the WU – and other study campaigns – were carried out inside production units, often inside the factory shed itself. It was understood as a way to deepen the relation between manual and intellectual labor, restricting – by a very empirical aspect – the possibilities of a student to become “separated” from the people.

organization was already in Chinese factories since 1949, and the “gang of four” had carried out a political *coup* when declaring it was a new invention in the 1960. “They attempted to rob the political capital [政治资本] of that experience”. Wang Shipeng declared that all the mobilizations happened in the SMTF and other units since 1968 were result of an attempted *coup d'état* led by four individuals, namely: Yao Wenyuan, Jiang Qing, Zhang Chunqiao and Wang Hongwen. This was a common discursive operation in speeches of late 1976 and 1977, when it was still being carried out a national campaign to criticize and condemn some “excesses” of the revolutionary line. In this speech, the word “disorder” is also frequently used, declaring the 7.21 University was “usurped” by the “gang of four” to create disorder in the political, productive and educational fields, to “mess up the relation between work and education.” (WANG, 1977, B105-9-163-121).

## CONCLUSION

Walter Benjamin, in his second Thesis on the Concept of History, wrote that “the past has with it a secret index to which it is forwarded to redemption” and that, to the historian, the past is pretended with a “weak messianic force” (BENJAMIN apud LOWY, 2005:48). This “weakness” attributed to the content of historical events can be interpreted with a contemporary political meaning: “the melancholic conclusion that Benjamin takes from the past failures and the current emancipatory struggle. Redemption is not entirely guaranteed, it is only a very small possibility that one needs to know how to grasp” (LOWY, Idem, 52).

The Workers University was what we could define as a “weak” political experiment – it had but a very small possibility of success. However, through it, important questionings were made about fundamental ideas of the Socialism itself, raised from within a socialist state. If State, as defined Lenin (and, later, Weber and other thinkers) has as its primary role to consolidate political economic order and shape the political agenda of the people, we may infer that the Workers University was an initiative that allowed some groups to subtract (BADIOU, 2004) an amount of political power in order to theoretically analyze their own experience in Socialism. Some of the problematizations developed by workers questioned their own status as proletariat, threatening to rupture ideological concepts that fundament the Socialist order in which they lived.

The idea that revolution had unfolded in a society ruled by a political economic system that was “almost the same” as that of Capitalism, undermined the ideological apparatuses that based the legitimacy of the Party-State.

On the other hand, the gradually consolidation of an international financialized economy set great obstacles to the autonomous organization of workers, who were required to accomplish determined production goals, and not to “waste” time with experimental politics. Furthermore, the questioning of their own status as proletariat offered a challenge to the Party-State ideological apparatus as ruler of a determined social order.

The Workers University started when the Cultural Revolution had provoked a crises of the category of class. It was an initiative to actualize the May Seventh Directive and, thus, the project for a classless society. Because of its highly utopic objectives, it did not manage to build the bases for an argumentation that effectively justified its existence. The project for the Workers University was focused in a long term future, and therefore was difficult to be attested



in the ongoing situation. Moreover, the results accomplished at the time were actually manifested in the social sphere of the production relations, and interposed a problem to the current trends of production management.

Notwithstanding, in those experimental universities, some workers, cadres and intellectuals had actually carried out analysis that can be considerate – even by now – unprecedented, and that have original theoretical contributions to the study of Socialism and of Capitalism. Some of the questions proposed by workers-students are still not answered and may constitute a relevant material to reexamine the present.

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