

# EASTERN DIARY

Undoubtedly the criticism of Confucius has assumed the scale of a mass movement in China since the Tenth National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party. Though this has mainly been carried out in universities and among intellectuals, news reports about the campaign to criticise Lin Piao and rectify work style show that Confucius has also come under attack in factories and communes during criticism sessions held there.

Understandably this has roused great interest among China scholars and China watchers in the West. What is the movement for? Why should a philosopher who lived in the sixth and fifth centuries BC become the centre of such an extensive campaign? Surely this must have great relevance to the present-day struggle going on in China, but where does the relevance lie? Is it a continuation of the Cultural Revolution or the beginning of another?

*Guangming Ribao* (a Peking daily which has a big intellectual readership in China) recently reprinted from the *Bulletin of Peking University* (Section of Philosophy and Social Sciences) two articles by Professor Feng Yu-lan, octogenarian historian of Chinese philosophy, the first a criticism of Confucius and at the same time a self-criticism of the author's own adulation of Confucius up till the sixties, and the second an analysis of Confucian thinking in the light of two-line struggles in the ideological sphere. In reprinting these two articles, the newspaper, it seems, has also replied to some of the questions posed in an editor's note, the relevant part of which I translate as follows:

*Confucius was a reactionary thinker who obstinately defended the slave-owning system. For thousands of years, his thinking has been utilised by Chinese and foreign reactionary classes for their own benefit. Swindlers like Liu Shao-chi and Lin Piao also adulated Confucius, and they used Confucian thinking to serve their schemes for counter-revolutionary restoration of the old society. Precisely because of this, the launching in depth of the struggle to criticise Confucius and the criticism of the viewpoints which exalt Confucius but disparage the Legalists have become necessary in the present state of class struggle in China and abroad. These moves have also become an important part of the campaign to criticise Lin Piao and rectify the work style, and a long-term task for socialist revolution in the superstructure.*

*One can see in Mr Feng Yu-lan's articles that his progress has been gained in the Cultural Revolution and the campaign to criticise Lin Piao and rectify the work style. It has also been gained through his active participation in the struggle to criticise Confucius. We welcome the broad masses of intellectuals including those who have been comparatively more seriously affected by the nefarious thinking of Confucius, to take an active part in the present struggle to criticise Confucius, and in the struggle to conscientiously study Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought, to undergo self education, to heighten their consciousness of the two-line struggle, to transform their world outlook, and to endeavour to keep pace with the socialist revolution.*

This is in fact what Premier Chou En-lai called for in his Political Report to the Tenth Party Congress, in which he said:

*We should attach importance to the class struggle in the superstructure, including all*

*spheres of culture, transform all parts of the superstructure which do not conform to the economic base.*

The Confucian tradition for more than two thousand years has been an important part of China's superstructure, and the exposing of Liu Shao-chi and Lin Piao must have revealed to what extent this tradition still maintains its hold in Chinese society today. The importance of the struggle against this ancient gentleman is underlined in Professor Feng's first article where he affirms:

*The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution is developing in depth. In the sphere of the history of Chinese philosophy a new revolution is taking place. It is personally led and given orientation by Chairman Mao.*

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To the Chinese Confucius represents more than the ancient philosopher himself and *The Analects* and the *Spring and Autumn Annals* he left behind. The name also represents the accretions added to it through the annotations, interpretations and developments made throughout the centuries to form, together with the original works of 'Confucius, what is now called Confucianism. In the philosopher's own time, it was aimed at restoring the tottering slave-owners' rule, but in later times it became the ideological mainstay of the feudal hierarchy which followed. It has thus become a powerful retarding influence in the development of Chinese society. It has become a school of philosophy which preaches the restoring of the ancient way. As Professor Feng puts it:

*A basic point in the Confucian thinking is that it argues that the present is inferior to the ancient past. Therefore it is better to be interested in the past than in the present. It exhorts people to worship the past and scorn the present. It teaches people to look backward, blindly follow tradition and have unquestioning faith in authority. It stresses the importance of modelling the present on the ancient past.*

Throughout Chinese history, people who rebelled against feudal rulers or even those who advocated social and political reform were almost always consciously or unconsciously opposed to Confucianism. This became especially so after the Ming Dynasty when Chinese feudal society began to feel the impact of budding capitalism. Philosophers like Li Chih of the Ming period and Kung Tsu-chen of Ching were both very critical of Confucian thinking. The 18th century novel, *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, one of the greatest works of Chinese literature, depicts through its main characters the trend of thinking which went definitely against the Confucian tradition.

The Taiping Rebellion of the mid-19th century was clearly anti-Confucian. Confucius, exalted by feudal rulers as 'the Sage of Sages', was bracketed with the Manchu emperor and his courtiers and generals as incarnations of the devil himself.

The first recognition of Confucianism as a formidable retarding influence upon the development of Chinese society, however, did not come until the May 4 Movement of 1919. Then the slogan rang strong: 'Down with the Confucian junk shop!' But first the northern warlords and then the new warlord Chiang Kai-shek, who knew the worth of Confucius to them, did their utmost to keep alive the worship of the 'Sage of Sages'. The Japanese imperialists in the thirties and forties also saw in Confucius a symbol which could help them to subdue the Chinese people.

Liberation in 1949 did not put a stop to the struggle between Confucians and anti-Confucians. Under the assaults of the latter, the former put up rearguard actions one after another, and whenever they thought that the wind blew their way, they would never miss an opportunity to stage a counter-attack. Liu Shao-chi, for example, called a big conference on Confucius and staged a grand memorial service for him in 1962 in order

to re-establish his authority. To Liu Shao-chi, Liberation was the completion of the Chinese revolution. From then on there should be no more revolution, but a long period of 'new democracy' in which capitalism would not only be tolerated but encouraged to develop. For this he obviously believed that to conjure up the ghost of Confucius would help to throw revolution out of the window and stabilise the social order obtaining at the time. Confucianism, having served the slave-owners and then the feudal rulers, was once again called upon to serve the interests of another class in decline, the bourgeoisie and their friends in the Communist Party—the revisionists represented by Liu Shao-chi and his followers.

But on the other hand, criticism of Confucius never let up. Professor Yang Jung-kuo, for one, as early as 1952 depicted Confucius as an arch-reactionary of his own time who did strenuous ideological work to defend and prop up the rule of the slave-owners. With the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution, the attack on Confucius charged more boldly forth. In the late sixties and early seventies, articles appeared in Chinese publications, including the *People's Daily*, attacking Confucius for the reactionary role he and his thinking had played in Chinese history. One of such articles was written by the Writing Group of the Shantung Provincial Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. (Incidentally, Shantung is the native place of Confucius, where Liu Shao-chi staged the grandiose service to the memory of Confucius.) Entitled 'A Criticism of Confucius' Thinking on Education', the article denounced the ancient thinker as one who tried desperately to defend the slave-owning aristocracy, then in rapid decline and being superseded by an emerging feudal order.

Towards the end of 1972 Professor Yang published in the journal *Red Flag* an article on the two-line struggle waged in the ideological sphere during the sixth

and fifth centuries BC. In the article the Professor depicts Confucius as an advocate for the restoring of the tottering slave-owning society. 'Confucius—a Thinker Who Stubbornly Supported the Slave System', the now well-known article published in the *People's Daily* by the same author, is in fact an expansion of that part of the *Red Flag* article which is concerned with Confucius.

Since then, and especially since the Tenth Party Congress, a large number of articles on the same subject and other related subjects have appeared in Chinese publications. Some deal with various aspects of Confucius and Confucianism. Others are concerned with the ideological and political struggles waged between Confucians and the Legalists, and Chin Shih Huangti, the first unifier of China with the assistance of his Legalist Prime Minister, Li Ssu.

The latest of such articles are the two by Professor Feng cited earlier, entitled respectively 'A Criticism of Confucius and a Self-criticism of My Worship of Confucian Thinking in the Past' and 'The Two-line Struggle Between Those Who Advocated a Return to the Ancient Way and Those Who Opposed It', and an article published in the *People's Daily* by the criticism group of Peking and Tsinghua Universities: 'The Struggles Between Those Who Were Opposed to Confucius and Those Who Worshipped Him During the Past Hundred Years and More'.

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The most important feature of Confucianism is of course its advocacy of a return to the ancient ways; in other words, the reversing of the wheel of history. In his own time, Confucius advocated this and hoped in vain that he would be able to restore the tottering slave system to its former 'glory', to the good old days when all, and especially the slaves, knew their own place and would never attempt any change; when the slaves acknowledged that they were

born inferior and destined to toil in bondage in order to keep their masters in ostentatious luxury; when the masters' words were orders and it was for the slaves to be always at their beck and call with no questions asked; when the social order was like heaven and earth: what was above remained above and what was below remained below, and no change should ever be contemplated.

Confucius exhorted his students to respect knowledge, for 'a good scholar will make a good official'. As to manual labour, this was for the 'little men', the slaves. So when Fan Chih, a student of his, asked him about farming and gardening, Confucius dismissed him and said behind his back: 'What a little man Fan Chih is!' A scholar belonged to the ruling class and so should never soil his hands and bother about such undignified work as farming and gardening!

Confucius preached that 'the people can be made to follow a course, but should never be allowed to understand it.' For only 'those who are wise, possessing knowledge, are the highest class of men' and the slaves should always submit themselves to the rule of these wise men.

These and many other ideas, which Confucius and the later Confucians did their utmost to imprint upon the minds of the people, generation after generation, are obviously anathema to a really socialist society where the common people are the real heroes, the motive force in the making of world history; where labour is acknowledged as the ultimate source of all knowledge; where to rule is to serve the people, not to ride roughshod over them; where revolution goes on uninterrupted and change is the order of the day; where the ideal political situation is one in which there are both centralism and democracy, both discipline and freedom, both unity of will and personal ease of mind and liveliness.

What Confucius taught and his teaching has imprinted upon the minds of the people is that in any society only a few

were born wise and born to rule over the others, while the majority were but robots to do what the few bid. This teaching has helped not only to strengthen the rule of the few, but also to demoralise the majority by making them think that they were helpless by themselves.

But in a socialist society, it is important that everyone takes an active part not only in production but also in the running of the society, that the majority should watch jealously in order to prevent power from falling into the hands of the few again. In order that such a society progresses, and progresses rapidly, the combined wisdom of the people, especially the wisdom of those who are closely connected with practical and productive work, must be given full play. All feeling of superiority of the few and the feeling of helplessness of the majority must be swept aside. Thus it is evident that Confucianism must be thoroughly criticised so that a minority of people will never succeed in usurping political power or any leading positions in the future.

The Cultural Revolution was meant to be a revolution in the superstructure, the ideological sphere. What Liu Shao-chi and Lin Piao did served only to sharpen the realisation of the importance and urgency of such a revolution, and the part Confucianism had played in all counter-revolutionary moves. The conclusion the Chinese people have drawn from all this has been well expressed by the criticism group of Peking and Tsinghua Universities in an article published in the *People's Daily*. They write as the conclusion to their article:

*The Tenth Party Congress called upon us: We should attach importance to the class struggle in the superstructure, including all spheres of culture, transform all parts of the superstructure which do not conform to the economic base. The history of the struggle on the ideological front during the past hundred years has told us: An important spiritual pillar of the old superstructure has been Confucius and Confucianism.*

*In the past two thousand years the reactionary ruling classes have been incessantly instilling the reactionary thinking of Confucius deep into the minds of the people. Some comrades, though they have never read any works of Confucius, have however been influenced by this or that aspect of Confucian thinking. Therefore to deepen the revolution in the superstructure, in the ideological sphere, the criticism of Confucius must be taken up as a long-term task. We must actively participate in this struggle and wipe out all the influences of the belief in the restoration of the old way and conservatism, in order that we may win victory in the revolution in the superstructure.*

*Throughout the historical period of socialism, there have been classes, class contradictions and class struggles: two-line struggles within the Party which reflect domestic and international class contradictions will occur ten, twenty or thirty times. Wang Ming, Liu Shao-chi and Lin Piao had all poisoned*

*the people with Confucian thinking in different ways. In the future when people like them appear again, they will again wield Confucian thinking, but under different disguises, as a tool to oppose the dictatorship of the proletariat and restore capitalism. We must fully recognise that the struggle to criticise Confucius is strenuous and complicated. Under the correct leadership of the Party, and with as our guideline the invincible revolutionary theories of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought, we are confident that we shall win the final victory, that we shall definitely win.*

In this sense the nationwide criticism is in fact an immunisation against future attempts at using the lingering Confucian thinking in the minds of people for counter-revolutionary purposes besides freeing society from the retarding influence the ancient ideology has exerted.

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