

[This hitherto unpublished article by Comrade N Sanmugathasan was written in 1986 to mark the 10th death anniversary of Comrade Mao Zedong. It is presented unedited here in view of its continuing relevance.]

Some Thoughts on Mao's Philosophy

Comrade N. Sanmugathasan

Comrade Mao Tse-tung was not only a great Marxist-Leninist revolutionary but also a great philosopher. It is not possible within the scope of a single article to analyse all of Mao's contributions to philosophy. I shall try to dwell on one or two basic points of Mao's philosophy.

On Contradiction

One of Mao's main philosophical works is his essay 'On Contradiction', in which he deals with the universality of contradiction in men and matter and how development takes place as a result of clash of the contradictions that are always present. The first sentence of this essay states: "The law of contradiction in things, that is, the law of the unity of opposites, is the basic law of materialist dialectics". It is a most profound statement.

Simply, this law means that motion is inherent in all forms of matter and that motion, i.e. development, takes place as a result of the development and clash of contradictions that are always present, and, further, between the different aspects of *each* contradiction there is both identity and struggle; and that, through the process of developing contradictions, a thing or a phenomenon changes into its opposite. Thus, Comrade Mao Tse-tung in one sentence explained the basic law of materialist dialectics.

A most systematic exposition of Marxist dialectics by one of the founders of scientific socialism, Engels, is to be found in one of his most famous works 'Anti-Dühring'. This is a very important book because it refutes all forms of fallacies spread so assiduously by Dühring. The most important mistake of Dühring was that he had negated the law of contradiction. He held that contradictions were only artificial.

Engels made a comprehensive criticism of Dühring and refuted his wrong theories. He established the fact that the law of contradiction was an objective law of matter. He stated that movement is contradiction, that is to say, things are moving and developing because of inherent contradictions; and that by the law of contradictions we mean the law of the unity of opposites.

In his book 'Science of Logic', Hegel has stated that there were three basic laws in dialectics. They were (1) the law that qualitative and quantitative changes give rise to one another; (2) the law of the unity of opposites; and (3) the law of the negation of the negation.

These were three basic laws of dialectics put forward by Hegel. Marx and Engels recognised and affirmed these three basic laws, but put them in the opposite order. Hegel had presented these laws as not as the laws of objective dialectics but of subjective dialectics. He did not regard these laws as inherent in objective things but only as the laws governing man's thinking, i.e. in the logic of the thinking of men. In other words, Hegel interpreted dialectics from an idealist point of view.

However, according to Marx and Engels, the law of contradiction, i.e. the law of the unity of the opposites was a law that is inherent in objective things whereas man's knowledge of contradictions is but a reflection of the objective law, in man's thinking. Therefore, Marx and Engels had satirised Hegel and pointed out that he stood truth on its head.

Marx and Engels reversed this position and pointed out that these laws of dialectics are inherent in objective things. This was made clear by Engels in his 'Anti-Dühring' and 'Dialectics of Nature'.

In Lenin's time, the question arose as to which of these three laws is the most basic. Comrade Mao Tse-tung refers to Lenin's article 'On the Question of Dialectics' and points out that "Lenin often called this law (i.e. the law of contradiction) the essence of dialectics.

Although Lenin pointed out that this law was the kernel of dialectics, he did not live long enough to point out the relationship between this kernel and the other two laws of dialectics.

Later, the philosophical circles of the USSR put these three laws in different orders. In 1938, in the 'Short History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union', Stalin put the law of the unity of the opposites as the last one instead of the first one.

Comrade Mao Tse-tung systematically studied the laws of Marxist-Leninist dialectics and has developed Lenin's thesis, in his 'Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People'

In this work, Mao deals with the question of how to handle contradictions among the people as opposed to how to handle contradictions between the enemy and ourselves. He also deals with the theory of how contradictions of different nature can be converted into each other. He also uses the law of contradiction to explain how to deal with struggles between different views and ideas inside the party.

Mao has pointed out in his essay 'On Contradiction', that "opposition and struggle between ideas of different kinds constantly occur within the party; this is a reflection within the party of contradictions between classes and between the new and the old in society. If there were to be contradictions in the party and no ideological struggle to resolve them, the party's life would come to an end".

This was the first time that Comrade Mao Tse-tung used the law of contradiction, the law of the unity of the opposites to explain the question of opposition and struggle between different ideas within a party. This is a creative development of Marxism Leninism.

Class Struggle

Are there still classes and class struggle in a socialist society, particularly after the socialist transformation of ownership of the means of production has, in the main, been accomplished? Do all the class struggles in society still centre round the question of fight over political power? Under the conditions of the dictatorship of the proletariat, do we still have to make revolution? Against whom should we make revolution? And how should we carry out a revolution?

These were questioned raised by Mao, for the first time. Marx and Engels could not possibly have solved this series of major theoretical problems in their time. Lenin saw that, after the proletariat seized power, the defeated bourgeoisie still remained stronger than the proletariat and was always trying to stage a comeback. At the same time, the small producers were incessantly generating capitalism and the capitalist class anew, thus posing a threat to the dictatorship of the proletariat. In order to cope with this counterrevolutionary threat and overcome it, it was therefore necessary to strengthen the dictatorship of the proletariat over a long period of time. There was no other way. However, Lenin died before he could solve these problems in practice.

Stalin strengthened and safeguarded the dictatorship of the proletariat in the Soviet Union. But where he failed was in not recognising on the level of theory that classes and class struggle exist in the society throughout the historical period of the dictatorship of the proletariat and that the question of who will win in the revolution had yet to be finally settled; in other words, if all this were not handled properly, there was a possibility of a comeback by the bourgeoisie. However, the year before he died, Stalin corrected himself on this point in his last work 'Some Problems of Economy in the Soviet Union'.

Comrade Mao Tse-tung paid attention to all the historical experiences of the Soviet Union, where the revisionists had seized power and carried out the restoration of capitalism. That was a bitter experience that deserved serious attention of all Marxist Leninists. It was as a result of studying these experiences that Comrade Mao Tse-tung held that, in as socialist society and under the dictatorship of the proletariat, classes and class struggle exist although the form is different. He correspondingly believed that the capture of state power by the working class was only a beginning. One of the specific contributions of Comrade Mao Tse-tung to the treasure house of Marxism Leninism was his summing up of the revolutions in the Soviet Union, China and other countries and his conclusion that class and class struggle exist throughout the entire historical epoch from socialism to communism; that there existed the

danger of capitalist restoration and the danger of the dictatorship of the proletariat being lost and subverted.

Mao thought that, even under the dictatorship of the proletariat, the working class would have to learn how to lead the class struggle against their class enemies who are still lurking in their midst. By personally initiating and leading the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, Mao showed how this could be done. The Cultural Revolution was, thus, a great class struggle between the revolutionary forces led by Mao and a handful of scabs and traitors led by Liu Shao-chi, who had sold themselves into the service of imperialism and reaction and had wanted to take China back along the path of capitalist restoration, as had happened in the Soviet Union and in other countries ruled by the modern revisionists.

Class Basis of Capitalist Roaders

From where do the capitalist roaders rise in a socialist state? What is their class basis? Lenin said, “Small production engenders capitalism and the bourgeoisie continuously, daily, hourly, spontaneously and on a mass scale”. Mao has explained that they are also engendered among a part of the working class and of the party membership, and that both within the ranks of the proletariat and among the personnel of state and other organs, there are people who take to the bourgeois style of life.

The existence of bourgeois influence, and of the influence of international imperialism and revisionism, constitutes the political and ideological source of the new bourgeois elements. And the existence of bourgeois right provides an important economic foundation for their emergence.

Lenin said, “In the first phase of communist society (usually called socialism), bourgeois right is not abolished in its entirety, but only in part, only in proportion to the economic revolution so far attained, i.e., only in respect of the means of production. However, it continues to exist as far as its other part is concerned; it continues to exist in the capacity of regulator (determining factor) in the distribution of the products and the allotment of labour among the members of society. The socialist principle

‘He who does not work, neither shall he eat’ is already realised; the other socialist principle, ‘an equal amount of products for an equal amount of labour’ is also realised. But this is not yet communism, and it does not yet abolish ‘bourgeois right’, which gives to unequal individuals, in return for unequal (actually unequal) amounts of labour, equal amounts of products”.

Mao has pointed out, “China is a socialist country. Before liberation, she was much the same as a capitalist country. Even now, she practices an eight-grade wage system, distribution according to work and exchange through money, and in all this differs very little from the old society. What is different is that the system of ownership has changed”. He has explained that under such circumstances it would be possible to restore capitalism, because bourgeois right has only been restricted but not abolished.

Mao’s view on this matter has been explained by one of his close followers, Yao Wen-yuan, in his article ‘On the Social Basis of the Lin Piao Anti-Party Clique’. He has said, “In socialist society we still have two kinds of socialist ownership: ownership by the whole people, and collective ownership. This determines our practice of the commodity system at the present time. The analyses by Lenin and Chairman Mao, both tell us that bourgeois right, which inevitably exists in distribution and exchange under the socialist system, should be restricted under the dictatorship of the proletariat so that, in the long course of the socialist revolution, the three major differences between workers and peasants, between town and country, and between manual and mental labour will be gradually be narrowed, as will the differences between the various grades, and so that material and ideological conditions will gradually be created for the closing up of all these gaps. If we do not act in this way but instead call for the consolidation, extension and strengthening of bourgeois right and the partial inequality it entails, the inevitable result will be polarisation, i.e., in the matter of distribution, a small number of people will appropriate increasing amounts of commodity and money through some legal and many illegal ways; stimulated by ‘material

incentives' of this kind, capitalist ideas of making a fortune and gaining personal fame will spread unchecked; phenomena like the turning of public property into private property, speculation, graft and corruption, theft and bribery will increase; the capitalist principle of the exchange of commodity will increase; the capitalist principle of the exchange of commodity will make its way into political and even into party life, undermining the socialist planned economy; acts of capitalist exploitation such as the conversion of commodities and money into capital, and labour power into a commodity will occur; changes in the nature of ownership will take place in certain departments and units which follow the revisionist line; and instances of oppression and exploitation of the labouring people will rise again”.

He further explains: “Why would it be quite easy for people like Lin Piao to rig up the capitalist system if they came to power? Simply because in our socialist society classes and class struggle still exist, and so do the soil and conditions that engender capitalism. In order to gradually reduce this soil and the conditions all the way to their final elimination, we must persevere in the continued revolution under the. Only through the firm and indomitable efforts of several generations can this task be accomplished by the vanguard of the proletariat guided by Chairman Mao's revolutionary line.

These are some of the points through which Comrade Mao Tse-tung has further developed Marxist philosophy to new heights. By establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat in China, by solving the problems of socialist construction and thereafter by solving the whole series of questions concerning how to make revolution under the conditions of the dictatorship of the proletariat, Comrade Mao Tse-tung has raised Marxism Leninism to an entirely new stage.

Marxism, which was first developed to the stage of Leninism, has now been further developed to the stage of Mao Tse-tung thought.
