Chapter VII

THE GREAT PROLETARIAN CULTURAL REVOLUTION

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution climaxed the conflict between the Maoist line and other policy lines in China discussed in the Introduction to this study. It should be remembered, however, that our knowledge of the rapid and complex changes after 1966 is still far from complete.

During the sixties the unions had once again become increasingly professionalized as they had up until 1956-1957. This development corresponded with other tendencies in Chinese society during the early sixties. Union structure had become dual again in 1961 with the restoration of vertical responsibility within the union hierarchy. More importantly, the Party had become increasingly bureaucratized and professional, necessitating Mao's use of the Red Guards and, finally, the army to attack the Party itself. While the unions at various levels remained largely under the guidance of corresponding Party committees, changes in the Party itself allowed union resistance to the new line.

The Maoist labor policy, in contrast, can be summarized from his "Constitution of the Anshan Iron and Steel Company," originally written in 1960, largely ignored during the early sixties, and re-asserted beginning in 1965: politics in command, Party leadership, emphasis on the mass movement, interchanging of tasks among cadres and workers, elimination of inhibiting rules and regulations, close cooperation among workers, technicians and functionaries, and technical innovation. The similarity to the Great Leap Forward is obvious. Even technical innovation had been part of the formal strategy of the Great Leap Forward, even if largely ignored in practice. The basic difference was that during the Cultural Revolution
Mao and Mao's thought effectively replaced the Party as the basis for leadership and the contents of political education.

The implementation of this policy began in the factories in 1965 when the unions were called on to "promote democracy in production." As this tendency increased, worker organizations once again came increasingly under Party control. With the advent of the Cultural Revolution, democratic worker organizations took their lead from Mao himself and were divorced from both the Party committees and the unions, actually replacing the unions in many factories in the form of revolutionary rebel groups. Before 1966 these processes evolved slowly. During 1965 Party leadership was emphasized in only one official union pronouncement, a KJJP editorial commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the inauguration of the ACFTU. Even that editorial had not returned to the language of 1958-1959. But by 1966 public directives to union cadres hardly mentioned Party leadership at all; they referred instead to "Mao's works" as more important for successful union work than knowledge of union work itself.

The shift from "politics in command" to "the thought of Mao Tse-tung in command" was formalized at the sixth session of the eighth executive committee of the ACFTU in April of 1966. Since the beginning of the Socialist Education Movement the unions had been referred to by Lenin's phrase, "schools of communism." Now they were to become "a school for the flexible study and application of the thought of Mao Tse-tung." In addition, this communique introduced other aspects of the Maoist policy; union cadres were to continue participating in productive labor, intensify mass supervision of their own work by workers' conferences, and downgrade material incentives. They were also to build a "large industrial army" in which distinctions between workers and peasants would be eliminated.

On June 9, 1966, the ACFTU issued a notice to union organs at all levels to direct all their attention to the Cultural Revolution.
They were to organize the workers to study Mao's thought, participate in criticizing anti-Maoists already under attack, and expose anti-Maoists in union organizations. This was the last communique issued by the ACFTU, although articles did continue to appear over the name of various revolutionary rebel groups within the ACFTU. New committees were established in some factories in early 1967 to take the place of the unions. In the Shanghai Glass Machinery Plant, for example, a "Revolution and Production Committee" was elected and put in charge of "political, production and trade union work."

The unions were eliminated partly because of their opposition to the new line and partly because the new line called for new organizational structures untainted by past policies. On December 26, 1966, a JMJP editorial announced the extension of the revolution to industrial and mining enterprises as a new stage in the Cultural Revolution. In January of 1967 a group called the Shanghai Workers' Revolutionary Rebels issued a "Message to all Shanghai people" announcing the seizure of Shanghai factories by revolutionary rebel, that is pro-Mao, groups. The Red Guards, however, met serious opposition within industrial enterprises. The workers, unions, and management perceived a common interest in opposing the disruption of production and intrusion into the factories by the rebels. The level of violence which resulted threatened production, and in March of 1967 army units entered many factories to restore order and maintain production.

Initially at least, the major concerns of most workers seem to have been potential personal loss due to disruptions in production, acceptance of the authority of Party officials, most of whom were hesitant to abandon their factories and their fate to the Red Guards, and resentment against young students "barging into" the factories. Workers seem almost unanimously to have opposed or avoided participating in Red Guard activity until November and December of 1966 when the Cultural Revolution was officially extended to the factories. When the workers did assume leadership of the Cultural Revolution at
the bidding of one of Mao's "latest directives" in August of 1968, that event seems to have signaled a turning point away from student "ultra-leftism" and the beginning of the end of the Cultural Revolution.  

According to Japanese and Czech correspondents, the ACFTU was replaced on December 26, 1966, by the All-China Rebel General Group of Red Laborers. While no organization continued to function consistently under that title, the date corresponds to the formal introduction of the Cultural Revolution into the factories. According to refugees from Canton and Shanghai, union dues were not collected after early 1967. The ACFTU also abandoned its usually heavy international program and was not represented at international Communist labor meetings after December of 1966.

According to one analysis, the old organization was initially maintained in name, and Liu Ning-yi was retained as chairman for international purposes only. However, although Liu Ning-yi was subsequently attacked by the Red Guards he received significant promotions in the Party hierarchy in both 1965 and 1966, presumably on the basis of his loyalty to Mao on domestic issues. His subsequent disappearance from the ranks of China's elite resulted from the position he took in 1966 on China's foreign policy.

The ACFTU itself came under heavy attack early in 1967. China's previous labor policy was entirely ascribed to Liu Shao-ch'i's influence, and that policy was criticized on three counts. The first was that the unions had been welfare trade unions. Routine welfare amenities, the policy of concentrating on solicitude for the workers, and the awarding of prizes were all condemned as "sugar-coated arsenic." This was an aspect of Liu's economism.

The second general criticism was an attack on the unions as production trade unions. They had concentrated on production, engaging the workers in a constant series of technical courses, lessons in basic work skills, and other production-oriented activities that took them away from studying Mao's works. The third general
criticism was directed at the concept of a trade union of the entire people. The unions had accepted for membership reformed ex-capitalists, landlords and other bad elements, when in fact they should have performed as tools of class struggle.\(^{19}\)

A fourth criticism was introduced in 1968, namely, that in 1958 Liu had been forced to change his line and had therefore resorted to a new trick, advocating the role of docile tools for the unions to facilitate his own control over them. Essentially a description of labor policy during the Great Leap Forward, this criticism was, ironically, later used by rebellious workers who argued that their own initiative in "making revolution" during working hours, helped the workers' organizations from becoming docile tools.\(^{20}\)

The Cultural Revolution was an extreme attack on previous industrial management systems and the Party structure itself, and in that context the total demise of the ACFTU is not surprising. Union opposition to the Cultural Revolution can be taken as prima facie evidence for the correctness of the Maoist attacks. Also, the theoretical principles of Mao's thought as expressed during the Cultural Revolution are in sharp contrast to the implicit theory on which union work in China had been conducted, whatever the precise role of Liu Shao-ch'i.

The basic assumption of that theory was that industrialization was prerequisite to political communization of the people. It was also assumed that attention to workers' livelihood would facilitate successful political education. In practice, a third assumption was employed, namely that in the case of individual workers or work groups, production effort was a relatively valid indicator of political consciousness. Since political education and production were so intimately related in all union activities, and individual unions were evaluated on the basis of plant production records, it would have been very difficult for the unions not to adopt this assumption for practical purposes. During 1965 union cadres began to receive warnings that production achievement was not necessarily
a sign of good political thinking, and that politics should be put first before production. 21

Despite some confusion on this point, generated by claims for the magic of Mao's thought for increasing production, this point was also a central theme early in the Cultural Revolution. Union cadres were also warned at that time not to confuse solicitude and solving livelihood problems with "penetrating ideological work," as they "had in the past."22 Ideally, both the communization of the people and industrial production would occur. "Grasping revolution" would enhance production, but revolution came first. "Our political work is not simply for guaranteeing the success of production; it is first of all for the success of the ideological revolutionization of man."23

From the point of view of internal consistency, the logic of the attack on the unions during the Cultural Revolution was unassailable. Production effort might well be a function of material reward-seeking and thus be antithetical to, rather than indicative of, Communist political consciousness. The disagreement, however, was a result of policy changes in the mid-sixties, centering on the content of political education. Previously the dominant message had been that present deprivation was necessary for the realization of long-range material interests, and Party programs seemed to support that message. That type of political education could also approximate the function of minimizing the alienating effects of proletarianization. That is, political education had been designed primarily to secure worker support for the regime, and the presentation of Party programs and goals had emphasized the material and patriotic benefits eventually accruing to the workers from Party leadership.

In this context the working assumptions prove true. Improvements in livelihood and welfare seem to support the political message received by the workers, and acceptance of the political message induces the workers to work harder and accept temporary sacrifices. Thus, whatever Liu's role in formulating union policy, that policy was susceptible to the charges of economism and production in command.
The unions had also always been a "trade union of the entire people." As early as 1953 Hsü Chih-chen had spoken for the regime against closed doorism in union recruitment. With the nationalization of industry in 1955-1956, many former owners were kept on as salaried factory managers and, having become wage earners, were eligible for union membership. The difference between earlier periods and the Cultural Revolution was once again based on the nature of political education. The function of the unions had been to socialize all employees except hard core counterrevolutionaries to a position of general support for and cooperation with the regime, and only on special occasions to act as tools of class struggle. In the early stages of the Cultural Revolution that conception of socialization was replaced by the attempt to both integrate and revolutionize China's youth and workers to Mao's vision by struggle against specifically designated class enemies.

The new message of political education was, very roughly, that political self-cultivation, through studying Mao's works and Mao's thought, would create a nation of communist men, selfless and devoted, who would work harder and desire no personal remuneration in return. A massive upsurge in production would result, but it would be achieved by concentrating on Mao's thought, not by concentrating on production skills. Moreover, it would be achieved without the sugar-coated arsenic of even the relatively limited personal amenities dispensed in the past so as to avoid contaminating the ideological transformation of men's minds.

It is not difficult to understand why many cadres resisted attempts to apply Mao's vision. It fundamentally threatened Party and other functionaries whose positions and working modes had become increasingly related to technical skills. It appeared as an extreme form of the Great Leap Forward which had precipitated economic chaos and disaster. It also posed a direct and obvious threat to China's workers in its attack on economism.

In practice, the policy involved programs which included an
overall reduction of workers' amenities. The most obvious was the substitution of material incentives with politics in command. A second example, more indicative of the complexities of the Cultural Revolution and policy implementation in general, was the peasant-worker system. In April of 1966 the KJJP reported on the decisions of the sixth session of the eighth executive committee of the ACFTU, instructing the unions to create a large industrial army in which distinctions between workers and peasants would be eliminated. The closest actual policy to this instruction was the peasant-worker system, in which peasants were contracted for temporary factory work and permanent workers rotated places with peasants. This system had also been widely employed in 1958-1959 in a reorganization of labor policy associated with the Great Leap Forward. The system had been in the news since 1962, and large-scale experimentation had begun in 1964. By 1966 the establishment of a permanent rotation system in some industries, such as mining and lumbering and similar rural and suburban operations, was apparently under consideration.

A major advantage of the system was utilization of peasants in industrial roles during slack farming seasons and part-time use of peasants in rural factories as it obviated permanent overstaffing to accommodate emergencies and "heavy days," such as periodic cargo unloading.

In addition to its advantages for allocating resources, the system complemented Mao's plan of geographically dispersing small industry and introducing the peasants to industrial life gradually. It was also ideologically consistent with Mao's efforts to minimize distinctions between workers and peasants, factories and the countryside. However, those employees who were still concerned with individual wages must have seen the system as beneficial to the government at their expense. Temporary workers and contract workers received lower pay and fewer fringe benefits than permanent workers. They were not eligible for union membership or for labor insurance benefits unless they were employed for a certain number of days.
during the year. Since they were primarily day workers, they required no sleeping quarters from the factories. They did not bring dependents with them, but they did bring food rations from their communes, helping to alleviate the problem of urban food shortages. Permanent workers could also be rotated out to communes to avoid payment of pensions. Moreover, by the sixties many of those serving as temporary and contract workers were not otherwise peasants but were urban unemployed.

There were developmental advantages to the peasant-worker system, and many of its worst aspects were due to abuses of the system rather than inherent flaws. Nevertheless, both temporary and permanent workers had grievances against the system as well as its abuses. As a political issue it was manipulated during the Cultural Revolution by Maoists and anti-Maoists in efforts to woo first temporary workers and then permanent workers. It was finally abolished by the Cultural Revolution Group in Peking and condemned as an exploitative scheme of Liu Shao-ch'i and Labor Minister Ma Wen-ju.\textsuperscript{31}