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Situationist International

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The international association of totalitarian bureaucracies has completely fallen apart. In the words of the Address published by the situationists in Algiers in July 1965, the irreversible “collapse of the revolutionary image” that the “bureaucratic lie” counterposed to the whole of capitalist society, as its pseudonegation and actual support, has become obvious, and first of all on the terrain where official capitalism had the greatest interest in upholding the pretense of its adversary: the global confrontation between the bourgeoisie and the so-called “socialist camp.” This camp had in any case *never been socialist*; now, in spite of all sorts of attempts to patch it up, *it has ceased even to be a camp*.

The disintegration of the Stalinist monolith is already manifested in the coexistence of some twenty independent “lines,” from Rumania to Cuba, from Italy to the Vietnamese-Korean-Japanese bloc of parties. Russia, having this year become incapable of holding a joint conference of merely all the *European* parties, prefers to forget the era when Moscow reigned over the Comintern. Thus the *Izvestia* of September

1966 blames the Chinese leaders for bringing “unprecedented” discredit to “Marxist-Leninist” ideas, and virtuously deplors the confrontational style “in which insults are substituted for an exchange of opinions and revolutionary experiences. Those who choose this method confer an absolute value on their own experience and reveal a dogmatic and sectarian mentality in their interpretation of Marxist-Leninist theory. Such an attitude is inevitably accompanied by interference in the internal affairs of fraternal parties.” In the Sino-Soviet polemic, in which each power is led to impute to its opponent every conceivable antiproletarian crime, being only obliged not to mention the *real crime* (the class power of the bureaucracy), each side can only arrive at the sobering conclusion that the other’s revolutionariness was only an inexplicable mirage, a mirage which, lacking any reality, has now reverted to its old point of departure. Thus in New Delhi last February the Chinese ambassador described Brezhnev and Kosygin as “new czars of the Kremlin,” while the Indian government, an anti-Chinese ally of this Muscovy, discovered that “the present masters of China have donned the imperial mantle of the Manchus.” This denunciation of the new Middle Kingdom dynasty was further refined the following month in Moscow by the modernist state poet Voznesensky, who, evoking the menace of a new invasion of “the hordes of Kuchum,” counts on “eternal Russia” to build a rampart against the Mongols who threaten to bivouac among “the Egyptian treasures of the Louvre.”

The accelerating decomposition of bureaucratic ideology, as evident in the countries where Stalinism has seized power as in the others where it has lost every chance of seizing it, naturally began around issues of internationalism; but this is only the *beginning* of a general and irreversible disintegration. For the bureaucracy, internationalism could be nothing but an illusive proclamation in the service of its real interests, one *ideological* justification among others, since bureaucratic society is the *to-*

the Chinese workers were subjected. The *proletarian* “Mandate of Heaven” has expired.⁹

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[TRANSLATOR’S NOTES]

General notes:

For simplicity’s sake I have left all the Chinese proper names in the Wade-Giles system of romanization that was used in the original SI article, instead of the now-standard Pinyin system. (Peking is now Beijing, Mao Tse-tung is now Mao Zedong, etc.) A few of the alternative forms are indicated in the Index.

For an excellent later and more detailed account of the Cultural Revolution, see Simon Leys’s *The Chairman’s New Clothes: Mao and the Cultural Revolution*.

⁹ The “Mandate of Heaven” is the traditional right of Chinese emperors to rule. When this mandate is lost — as revealed by inauspicious signs expressing the disfavor of Heaven — it is time for a revolution to establish a new dynasty.

tal opposite of proletarian community. Bureaucratic power is based on possession of a nation-state and it must ultimately obey the logic of this reality, in accordance with the particular interests imposed by the level of development of the country it possesses. Its heroic age passed away with the ideological golden age of “socialism in a single country” that Stalin was shrewd enough to maintain by destroying the revolutions in China in 1927 and Spain in 1937. The autonomous bureaucratic revolution in China — as already shortly before in Yugoslavia — introduced into the unity of the bureaucratic world a dis-solutive germ that has broken it up in less than twenty years. The general process of decomposition of bureaucratic ideology is now attaining its supreme stage in the very country where that ideology was most necessary, the country where, because of its general economic backwardness, the remaining ideological pretensions of revolution had to be pushed to their extreme: China.

The crisis that has continually deepened in China since the spring of 1966 constitutes an unprecedented phenomenon in bureaucratic society. The bureaucratic state-capitalist ruling class of Russia and East Europe, continually and necessarily exerting terror over the exploited majority, has of course often been torn apart by rivalries and antagonisms stemming from the objective problems it runs into as well as from the subjectively delirious style that a totally mendacious power is led to assume. But up till now the bureaucracy — which must be centralized due to its mode of appropriation of the economy, since it must draw from itself the hierarchical guarantee to all participation in its collective appropriation of the social surplus production — has always made its purges *from the top down*. The summit of the bureaucracy has to remain fixed, for the whole legitimacy of the system depends on a fixed summit. It must keep its dissensions to itself (as it always has from the time of Lenin and Trotsky). Those who hold office may be replaced or liquidated, but the office itself must always retain the

same indisputable majesty. The unexplained and unanswerable repression can then normally descend to each level of the apparatus as a mere implementation of what has been *instantaneously* decided at the top. Beria¹ must first be killed; then judged; then his faction can be hunted down; or in fact anybody can be hunted down because the power that is doing the liquidating thereby defines who and what that faction consists of and at the same time redefines itself as the sole power. This is what is not happening in China. The persistency of the declared adversaries, in spite of the fantastic raising of bids in the struggle for total power, clearly shows that *the ruling class has split in two*.

A social disaster of such magnitude obviously cannot be explained, in the anecdotal style of bourgeois observers, as being the result of dissensions over foreign policy (on the contrary, the Chinese bureaucracy is quite unified in the docility with which it tolerates the insult of the crushing of Vietnam on its own doorstep). Neither could personal quarrels over succession to power have caused so much to be put at stake. When certain leaders are accused of having “kept Mao Tse-tung from power” since the end of the 1950s, everything leads one to believe that this is one of those retrospective crimes frequently fabricated during bureaucratic purges — Trotsky conducting the civil war on orders from the Mikado, Zinoviev supporting Lenin in order to work for the British Empire, etc.² The man who could have taken power from someone as powerful as Mao would not have slept as long as Mao was still around to come back. Mao would have died that very day, and nothing would have prevented his faithful successors from attributing his death to, say, Khrushchev. If the rulers and polemi-

¹ *Lavrenti Beria*, head of Soviet secret police, was arrested and executed immediately after Stalin’s death in 1953.

² Accusations fabricated during the Moscow Trials of 1936–1938 in which Stalin eliminated virtually all the former Bolshevik leaders except himself.

At the same time, China’s internal crisis reflects its failure to industrialize the country and make itself a credible model for the underdeveloped countries.

Ideology, pushed to its extreme, *shatters*. Its absolute use is also its absolute zero: the night in which all ideological cows are black. When, amidst the most total confusion, bureaucrats fight each other in the name of the same dogma and everywhere denounce “the bourgeois hiding behind the red flag,” *doublethink* has itself split in two. This is the joyous end of ideological lies, dying in ridicule. It is not just China, it is our whole world that has produced this delirium. In the August 1961 issue of *Internationale Situationniste* we said that this world would become “at all levels more and more painfully ridiculous until the moment of its complete revolutionary reconstruction.” This process now seems to be well on its way. The new period of proletarian critique will learn that it must no longer shelter from criticism anything that pertains to it, and that every existing ideological comfort represents a shameful defeat. In discovering that it is dispossessed of the false goods of its world of falsehood, it must understand that it is the specific negation of the totality of the global society. And it will discover this also in China. The global breakup of the *Bureaucratic International* is now being reproduced at the Chinese level in the fragmentation of the regime into independent provinces. Thus China is rediscovering its past, which is once again posing to it the real revolutionary tasks of the previously vanquished movement. The moment when Mao is supposedly “recommencing in 1967 what he was doing in 1927” (*Le Monde*, 17 February 1967) is also the moment when, for the first time since 1927, the intervention of the worker and peasant masses has surged over the entire country. As difficult as it may be for them to become conscious of their autonomous objectives and put them into practice, something has died in the total domination to which

our fertilizing rain.” ... “The Chief of State was judged responsible ... for not having foreseen the about-face of General Chiang Kai-shek when the latter turned his army against the Communist troops” (*Le Monde*, 4 April 1967; this refers to the 1927 coup, which was foreseen by everyone in China but which had to be awaited passively in order to obey Stalin’s orders).⁷ ... A chorale sings the hymn entitled *One Hundred Million People Take Up Arms To Criticize The Sinister Book “How To Be A Good Communist”* (a formerly official manual by Liu Shao-ch’i)... The list could go on and on; we can conclude with this gem from the *People’s Daily* of July 31: “The situation of the Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China is excellent, but the class struggle is becoming more difficult.”

After so much ado the historical conclusions to be drawn from this period are simple. No matter where China may go from here, the image of the last revolutionary-bureaucratic power has shattered. Its internal collapse is added to the continuing disasters of its foreign policy: the annihilation of Indonesian Stalinism;⁸ the break with Japanese Stalinism; the destruction of Vietnam by the United States; and finally Peking’s proclamation in July that the Naxalbari “insurrection” was the beginning of a Maoist-peasant revolution throughout India (this a few days before it was dispersed by the first police intervention). By adopting such a delirious position Peking broke with the majority of its own Indian partisans — the last large bureaucratic party that remained loyal to it.

⁷ On the advice of the Chinese Communist Party, the workers who had revolted and taken over Shanghai in 1927 welcomed Chiang Kai-shek’s army into the city and allowed themselves to be disarmed; after which they were massacred. See Harold Isaacs’s *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution*.

⁸ “None of these disasters, however, are so gross as the bloody downfall of Indonesian Stalinism, whose bureaucratic mania blinded it to the point of expecting to seize power only by way of plots and palace revolution, although it was in control of an immense movement — a movement it led to annihilation without ever having led it into battle (it is estimated that there have been over 300,000 executions)” (*Internationale Situationniste* #10, p. 65).

cists of the bureaucratic states certainly have a much better understanding of the Chinese crisis, their statements cannot for all that be taken any more seriously, for in talking about China they have to guard against revealing too much about themselves. The most deluded are the leftist debris of the Western countries, who are always the willing dupes of moldy sub-Leninist propaganda. They solemnly evaluate the role in Chinese society of the continuation of allowances to the capitalists who rallied to the “Communist” regime, or scrutinize the fray trying to figure out which leader represents genuine radicalism or workers’ autonomy. The most stupid among them thought there was something “cultural” about this affair, until January when the Maoist press pulled the dirty trick on them of admitting that it had been “a struggle for power from the very beginning.” The only serious debate consists in examining why and how the ruling class could have split into two hostile camps; and any investigation of this question is naturally impossible for those who don’t recognize that the bureaucracy is a ruling class, or who ignore the specificity of this class and reduce it to the classical conditions of bourgeois power.

On the *why* of the breach within the bureaucracy, it can be said with certainty only that it was a matter in which the ruling class’s very domination was at stake *since in order to settle it each side remained unyielding and neither hesitated to immediately risk their joint class power* by jeopardizing all the existing conditions of their administration of the society. The ruling class must thus have known that it could no longer govern as before. There is no question that the conflict involved the management of the economy, and that the collapse of the bureaucracy’s successive economic policies is the cause of that conflict’s extreme acuteness. The failure of the “Great Leap Forward” — mainly because of the resistance of the peasantry — not only put an end to the prospect of an ultravoluntarist takeoff of industrial production, but led to a disastrous disor-

ganization whose effects were felt for several years.³ Even agricultural production has scarcely increased since 1958 (the increase of food supplies does not even match the rate of population growth).

It is less easy to say over what specific economic options the ruling class split. Probably one side (consisting of the majority of the Party apparatus, the union leaders and the economists) wanted to continue, or increase more or less considerably, the production of consumer goods and to sustain the workers' efforts with economic incentives; this policy would imply making some concessions to the peasants and especially to the factory workers, as well as increasing a hierarchically differentiated consumption for a good part of the bureaucracy. The other side (including Mao and a large segment of the higher-ranking army officers) probably wanted to resume at any price the effort to industrialize the country through an even more extreme recourse to terror and *ideological energy*, an unlimited superexploitation of the workers, and perhaps an "egalitarian" sacrifice in consumption for a considerable segment of the lower bureaucracy. Both positions are equally oriented toward maintaining the absolute domination of the bureaucracy and are calculated in terms of the necessity of erecting barriers against any class struggles that threaten that domination. In any case, the urgency and vital character of this choice was so evident to everyone that both camps felt they had to run the risk of immediately aggravating the conditions in which they found themselves by the disorder of their very schism. It is quite possible that the obstinacy on both sides is justified by the fact that there is no satisfactory solution to the insurmountable problems of the Chinese bureaucracy; that the two

³ *Great Leap Forward (1958–1962)*: Mao's pet scheme for ultrarapid industrialization, which resulted in economic chaos and famines killing millions of people. Its failure caused Mao to be replaced as president of China by Liu Shao-chi (though he retained the powerful post of Chairman of the Communist Party).

for Vietnam have been seized from freighters in the port, and an undetermined number of individuals have been hung in the streets. Thus China is slowly sinking into a confused civil war, which is both a confrontation between diverse regions of fragmented state-bureaucratic power and a clash of workers' and peasants' demands with the conditions of exploitation that the fragmented bureaucratic leaderships have to maintain everywhere.

Since the Maoists have presented themselves as the champions of absolute ideology (we have seen how successfully), they have so far naturally met with the most extravagant degree of respect and approbation among Western intellectuals, who never fail to salivate to such stimuli. K.S. Karol, in the *Nouvel Observateur* of February 15, learnedly reminds the Maoists not to forget that "the real Stalinists are not potential allies of China, but its most irreducible enemies: for them, the Cultural Revolution, with its antibureaucratic tendencies, is suggestive of Trotskyism." There were, in fact, many Trotskyists who identified with it — thereby doing themselves perfect justice! *Le Monde*, the most unreservedly Maoist paper outside China, day after day announced the imminent success of Monsieur Mao Tse-tung, finally taking the power that had been generally believed to have been his for the past eighteen years. The sinologists, virtually all Stalino-Christians — this combination can be found everywhere, but particularly among them — have resurrected the "Chinese spirit" to demonstrate the legitimacy of the new Confucius. The element of silliness that has always been present in the attitude of moderately Stalinophile leftist bourgeois intellectuals could hardly fail to blossom when presented with such Chinese record achievements as: This "Cultural Revolution" may well last 1000 or even 10,000 years... *The Little Red Book* has finally succeeded in "making Marxism Chinese." ... "The sound of men reciting the *Quotations of Chairman Mao* with strong, clear voices can be heard in every Army unit." ... "Drought has nothing frightening, Mao Tse-tung Thought is

the army” and that “the attacks against the dictatorship of the proletariat in China have come not only from the higher echelons, but also from the lower ones” (*People’s Daily*, August 5). Peking has gone so far as to openly admit that at least a third of the Army has declared itself against the central government and that even a large part of the old China of eighteen provinces is out of its control. The immediate consequences of the Wuhan incident seem to have been very serious: an intervention of paratroopers from Peking, supported by gunboats ascending the Yangtze from Shanghai, was repulsed after a pitched battle; arms from the Wuhan arsenal are also reported to have been sent to the anti-Maoists of Chungking. It should be noted, moreover, that the Wuhan troops belonged to the army group under the direct authority of Lin Piao, the only one considered completely loyal. Toward the middle of August the armed struggles have become so widespread that the Maoist government has come around to officially condemning this sort of continuation of politics by means that are turning against it, stating its firm conviction that it will win out by sticking to “struggle with the pen” instead of the sword.⁵ Simultaneously it is announcing distribution of arms to the masses in the “loyal zones.” But where are such zones? Fighting has broken out again in Shanghai, which had been presented for months as one of the rare strongholds of Maoism. In Shantung soldiers are inciting the peasants to revolt. The leaders of the Air Force are denounced as enemies of the regime. And as in the days of Sun Yat-sen,⁶ Canton, toward which the 47th Army is moving in order to reestablish order, stands out as a beacon of revolt, with the railroad and transit workers in the forefront: political prisoners have been liberated, arms destined

⁵ Reference to Clausewitz’s maxim, “War is a continuation of politics by other means,” with perhaps also an ironic allusion to Mao’s saying, “Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.”

⁶ *Sun Yat-sen*: leader of the Chinese nationalist movement until his death in 1925.

options confronting each other were thus equally unfeasible; and that some choice nevertheless had to be made.

As for figuring out *how* a division at the summit of the bureaucracy was able to descend from level to level — recreating at every stage remote-controlled confrontations which in turn incited or exacerbated oppositions throughout the Party and the state, and finally among the masses — it is probably necessary to take into account the survival of aspects of the ancient manner of administering China by provinces tending toward semiautonomy. The Peking Maoists’ denunciation in January of “independent fiefs” clearly suggests this reality, and the development of the disturbances over the last few months confirms it. It is quite possible that the phenomenon of regionally autonomous bureaucratic power, which during the Russian counterrevolution was manifested only weakly and sporadically by the Leningrad organization, found firm and multiple bases in bureaucratic China, resulting in the possibility of a coexistence within the central government of clans and constituents holding entire regions of bureaucratic power as their personal property and bargaining with each other on this basis. Bureaucratic power in China was not born out of a workers movement, but out of the military regimentation of peasants during a 22-year war. The army has remained closely interlinked with the Party, all of whose leaders have also been military chiefs, and it remains the principal training school of the peasant masses from which the Party selects its future cadres. It seems, moreover, that the local administrations installed in 1949 were largely based on the regions traversed by the different army regiments moving from the north to the south, leaving in their wake at every stage men who were linked to those regions by geographical origin (or by family ties: the propaganda against Liu Shao-ch’i and others has fully exposed this nepotistic factor in the consolidation of bureaucratic cliques). Such local bases of semiautonomous power within the bureaucratic administration could thus have been formed by a combi-

nation of the organizational structures of the conquering army with the productive forces it found to control in the conquered regions.

When the Mao faction began its public offensive against the entrenched positions of its adversaries by dragooning and indoctrinating students and schoolchildren, it was in no way for the purpose of directly initiating a “cultural” or “civilizing” remodeling of the mass of workers, who were already squeezed as tightly as possible into the ideological straitjacket of the regime. The silly diatribes against Beethoven or Ming art, like the invectives against a supposed occupation or reoccupation of positions of power by a Chinese bourgeoisie that has obviously been annihilated as such, were only presented for the benefit of the spectators — though not without calculating that this crude ultraleftism might strike a certain chord among the oppressed, who have, after all, some reason to suspect that there are still several obstacles in their country to the emergence of a classless society. The main purpose of this operation was to make the *regime’s ideology*, which is by definition Maoist, appear in the street in the service of this faction. Since the adversaries could themselves be nothing other than officially Maoist, imposing a struggle on this terrain immediately put them in an awkward position. It forced them to make “self-critiques,” the insufficiency of which, however, expressed their actual resolution to hold on to the positions they controlled. The first phase of the struggle can thus be characterized as a confrontation of the *official owners of the ideology* against the majority of the *owners of the economic and state apparatus*. But the bureaucracy, in order to maintain its collective appropriation of society, needs the ideology as much as it does the administrative and repressive apparatus; the venture into such a separation was thus extremely dangerous if it was not quickly resolved.

The majority of the apparatus, including Liu Shao-ch’i himself despite his shaky position in Peking, resisted obstinately. After their first attempt to block the Maoist agitation at the

En-mao; the latter, however, is reputed to have attacked “Maoist revolutionaries” in June. Hupeh was in July in the hands of General Chen Tsai-tao, commander of the Wuhan district, one of the oldest industrial centers in China. In the old style of the “Sian Incident,”⁴ he arrested two of the main Peking leaders who had come to negotiate with him. The Prime Minister had to go there in person, and his obtaining the release of his emissaries was announced as a “victory.” During the same period 2400 factories and mines were paralyzed in that province following an armed uprising of 50,000 workers and peasants. At the beginning of summer the conflict was in fact continuing everywhere: in June “conservative workers” of Honan attacked a textile mill with incendiary bombs; in July the coal miners of Fushun and the oil workers of Tahsing were on strike, the miners of Kiangsi were driving out the Maoists, there were calls for struggle against the “Chekiang Industrial Army” (described as an “anti-Marxist terrorist organization”), peasants threatened to march on Nanking and Shanghai, there was street fighting in Canton and Chungking, and the students of Kweiyang attacked the army and seized Maoist leaders. The government, having decided to prohibit violence “in the regions controlled by the central authorities,” seems to be having a hard time of it even there. Unable to stop the disorders, it is stopping the news of them by expelling most of the rare foreigners in residence.

But at the beginning of August the fractures in the army have become so dangerous that the official Peking publications are themselves revealing that the partisans of Liu are “trying to set up an independent reactionary bourgeois kingdom within

⁴ *Sian Incident*: In 1936 Kuomintang leader Chiang Kai-chek was imprisoned in Sian (Xi’an) by one of his own generals, who was in favor of an alliance with the Communist Party against the Japanese invaders. On Stalin’s insistence Chiang was turned loose in exchange for his agreement to the united front between the CP and the Kuomintang that was effected a few months later.

eration none of its goals has been attained. The bureaucracy is more divided than ever. Every new power installed in the regions held by the Maoists is dividing in its turn: the “Revolutionary Triple Alliance” — Army-Party-Red Guard — has not ceased falling apart, both because of the antagonisms between these three forces (the Party, in particular, tending to remain aloof, getting involved only to sabotage the other two) and because of the continually aggravated antagonisms within each one. It seems as difficult to patch up the old apparatus as it would be to build a new one. Most importantly, *at least two-thirds of China is in no way controlled by the regime in Peking.*

Besides the governmental committees of partisans of Liu Shao-ch’i and the movements of workers’ struggles that continue to assert themselves, the *warlords* are already reappearing in the uniforms of independent “Communist” generals, negotiating directly with the central power and following their own policies, particularly in the peripheral regions. General Chang Kuo-hua, master of Tibet in February, after street fighting in Lhasa used armored cars against the Maoists. Three Maoist divisions were sent to “crush the revisionists.” They seem to have met with limited success since Chang Kuo-hua still controlled the region in April. On May 1 he was received in Peking, with negotiations ending in a compromise: he was entrusted to form a Revolutionary Committee to govern Szechwan, where in April a “Revolutionary Alliance” influenced by a certain General Hung had seized power and imprisoned the Maoists; since then, in June, members of a People’s Commune seized arms and attacked the army. In Inner Mongolia the army, under the direction of Deputy Political Commissar Liu Chiang, declared itself against Mao in February. The same thing happened in Hopeh, Honan and Manchuria. In May, General Chao Yungshih carried out an anti-Maoist putsch in Kansu. Sinkiang, where the atomic installations are located, was neutralized by mutual agreement in March, under the authority of General Wang

university level by setting up effectively anti-Maoist “work groups” among the students, that agitation spread into the streets of all the large cities and everywhere began to attack, by means of wall posters and direct action, the officials who had been designated as “capitalist-roaders” — attacks that were not without errors and excesses of zeal. These officials organized resistance wherever they could. It is likely that the first clashes between workers and “Red Guards”(4) were in fact initiated by Party activists in the factories under orders from local officials. Soon, however, the workers, exasperated by the excesses of the Red Guards, began to intervene on their own. When the Maoists spoke of “extending the Cultural Revolution” to the factories and then to the countryside, they gave themselves the air of having *decided* on a movement which had in fact come about in spite of their plans and which throughout autumn 1966 was *totally out of their control*. The decline of industrial production; the disorganization of transportation, irrigation and state administration (despite Chou En-lai’s efforts); the threats to the autumn and spring harvests; the halting of all education (particularly serious in an underdeveloped country) for more than a year — all this was the inevitable result of a struggle whose extension was solely due to the resistance of the sector of the bureaucracy in power that the Maoists were trying to make back down.

The Maoists, who have virtually no experience with struggles in urban environments, will have had good occasion to verify Machiavelli’s precept: “One should take care not to incite a rebellion in a city while imagining that one can stop it or direct it at will” (*History of Florence*). After a few months of pseudocultural pseudorevolution, real class struggle has appeared in China, with the workers and peasants beginning to act for themselves. The workers cannot be unaware of what the Maoist perspective means for them; the peasants, seeing their individual plots of land threatened, have in several provinces begun to divide among themselves the land and

equipment of the “People’s Communes” (these latter being merely the new ideological dressing of the preexisting administrative units, generally corresponding to the old cantons). The railroad strikes, the Shanghai general strike (denounced, as in 1956 Budapest, as a favored weapon of the capitalists), the strikes of the great Wuhan industrial complex, of Canton, of Hupeh, of the metal and textile workers in Chungking, the peasants’ attacks in Szechwan and Fukien — these movements came to a culmination in January, bringing China to the brink of chaos. At the same time, following in the wake of the workers who in September 1966 in Kwangsi had organized themselves as “Purple Guards” in order to fight the Red Guards, and after the anti-Maoist riots in Nanking, “armies” began to form in various provinces, such as the “August 1st Army” in Kwangtung. The national army had to intervene everywhere in February and March in order to subdue the workers, to direct production through “military control” of the factories, and even (with the support of the militia) to control work in the countryside. The workers’ struggles to maintain or increase their wages — that famous tendency toward “economism” denounced by the masters of Peking — was accepted or even encouraged by some local cadres of the apparatus in their resistance to rival Maoist bureaucrats. But the main impetus of the struggle was clearly an irresistible upsurge from the rank-and-file workers — the authoritarian dissolution in March of the “professional associations” that had formed after the first dissolution of the regime’s labor unions, whose bureaucracy had been deviating from the Maoist line, is a good demonstration of this. In Shanghai that same month the Jiefang Ribao condemned “the feudal tendencies of these associations, which are formed not on a class basis (*i.e., not on the basis of a Maoist total monopoly of power*) but on the basis of trades and which struggle for the partial and immediate interests of the workers in those trades.” This defense of the real owners of the general and permanent

interests of the collectivity was also distinctly expressed on February 11 in a joint directive from the Council of State and the Military Commission of the Central Committee: “All elements who have seized or stolen arms must be arrested.”

While the settlement of this conflict — which has certainly cost tens of thousands of lives and involved fully equipped regiments and even warships — is being entrusted to the Chinese army, that army is itself divided. It has to ensure the continuation and intensification of production at a time when it is no longer in a position to ensure the unity of power in China. Moreover, the army’s direct intervention against the peasants would present the gravest risks because it has been recruited largely from the peasantry. The truce sought by the Maoists in March and April, when they declared that all Party personnel were redeemable with the exception of a “handful” of traitors, and that the principal menace was now “anarchism,” expressed not merely the anxiety over the difficulty of reining in the liberatory desires that the Red Guard experiences had awakened among the youth; it expressed *the ruling class’s anxiety at having arrived at the brink of its own dissolution*. The Party and the central and provincial administration were falling apart. “Labor discipline must be reestablished.” “The idea of excluding and overthrowing all cadres must be unconditionally condemned” (*Red Flag*, March 1967). A month earlier *New China* declared: “You smash all the officials ... but when you have taken over some administrative body what do you have besides an empty room and some rubber stamps?” Rehabilitations and new compromises are following one another erratically. The very survival of the bureaucracy has ultimate priority, pushing its diverse political options into the background as mere means.

By spring 1967 it was evident that the “Cultural Revolution” was a disastrous failure and that this failure was certainly the most colossal of the long line of failures of the bureaucratic regime in China. In spite of the extraordinary cost of the op-