

9. The Extreme Left

All the political forces and social groups in the whole country had now joined in the Cultural Revolution. But each of them included certain elements which did not respect 'revolutionary discipline' and encouraged agitation and extremism. In places the revolutionaries themselves turned against the leadership, and tension led to crisis, as when the revolution was too drastically suppressed at Wuhan or Canton. In Peking and Shanghai too the masses could be worked up very rapidly. There were movements devoted to increasing tension, and some groups went to great lengths to get round the restrictions laid down by the Centre in order to keep activity under control.

We know that there was an anarchistic tendency among the students, and that there were forces even inside the Central Committee's Cultural Revolution Group pressing for the revolution to be intensified. The Centre issued warnings against the 'ulterior motives' of these elements.¹ The army also had its own problems of extremism, due to the desire of some soldiers, whose duties had brought them into close contact with the revolutionaries, to fight alongside them. Everywhere there were unstable elements who thought they must seize their opportunity, that the revolution was in danger of trampling them underfoot, or that they would have to sacrifice themselves in order to save it.

The movement that had given birth to the first provincial

¹ See Chapter 5, quotation from *Red Flag*, June 20, 1967.

revolutionary committees appeared to have bogged down. Here and there the Centre was bringing in army surveillance. Some Rebels accused the Centre of weakness. They conceded that this was due to the indecision of the masses, but resolved that if the people had not been converted to Maoism through reason, the force of the people's dictatorship must now be clearly demonstrated. The most militant of the Rebels wanted a violent revolution, a witch-hunt against the former 'authorities.' They held up the banner of the struggle against Liu Shao-ch'i, and demanded that it be handed on to the masses.

Tempers began to rise in July. The street mobs were now at flash point, and an incident occurred in Wuhan, where three leaders from the Centre who had been sent to give their approval to the real 'left' were captured and mistreated by some revolutionaries they had refused to recognize. They had come to Wuhan not to condemn these revolutionaries but to restore freedom of action to the Rebels, who had not dared show their faces in public until then: the Wuhan regime had stifled them. Now they began to demonstrate. The army became involved, helping conservative organizations to crush them. Peking's emissaries were saved by the skin of their teeth. Order was restored by uninvolved army units brought in from outside. The local army command was suspended by the Centre and repudiated by the masses.

For the Rebels in the rest of China, who had seen their comrades smashed, the incident was an occasion for a settling of scores and, first, they wanted arms with which to defend themselves. Chiang Ch'ing told them that while they would have to continue thenceforward to attack with words only, they would be allowed to use arms in self-defence. This was printed in the press. Student volunteers enlisted for a crusade to the provinces.

The movement to demand that Liu Shao-ch'i be handed over grew into a month-long siege of Chungnanhai. Many ordinary people were involved without realizing that this was in fact a confrontation with the Centre. Some of the leaders left the Centre in order to take sides with the people in the street. The champions of the extreme left

believed that a new revolutionary situation had developed, and formed links between groups that shared the same feverish enthusiasm. They had not a single headquarters, such as the Centre's Cultural Revolution Group, but several: in the editorial department of the journal *Red Flag*, in the Institute of Philosophy of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and, perhaps, in the army's general staff.

Not content with the ideology that would lead to the reconstruction of the Party, they spoke of overthrowing those in power, a general purge, and absolute obedience. There was a Stalinist current among them. They were preparing for a new series of power seizures that appeared to be aimed at the centre itself. Angry with the government's foreign policy, which they found too moderate towards Great Britain's treatment of the Hong Kong disturbances, they moved to direct action and instigated the burning down of the British Legation in Peking.

The Centre, handicapped by the extremist sympathies of a whole section of the Central Cultural Revolution Group, who were now taking a leading part, used the municipal revolutionary committee to bring the situation back under control. Some of the Centre's leaders went to the meeting of the municipal committee that took decisions essential to the re-establishment of order in the whole of China. Chiang Ch'ing denied the right to armed defence that she had previously advocated herself. Formal instructions were issued that no more weapons were to be distributed and no more seizures of weapons allowed to occur. Once again the restoration of order depended on the discipline of the army.

The Wuhan affair was probably useful to the Cultural Revolution in that, by precipitating a crisis, it hastened the day when those who were deluded in their aims had to admit that they were in an impasse.

Their schemes were supported neither by the Centre nor by the great majority of the people. Their isolated forces consisted on the one hand of students, intellectuals and revolutionary cadres whose extremist demands could never be satisfied, who wanted all or nothing, but rarely had a practical political programme. On the other hand

they included military men who saw the army as a force for renewal that needed purging first. Since they were responsible for dividing the army, they were the architects of their own weakness. Finally, there were the supporters of Liu Shao-ch'i, who had a national network, but whose ideas did not attract the mass of the people. The Cultural Revolution was genuinely popular to the extent that it was against them.

Although they were not really united, the leaders of the Cultural Revolution were therefore not faced with any real enemy on a nationwide scale. They gained confidence when the Wuhan affair appeared to have been cleared up without difficulty, and the most dangerous ultra-left organization had been crushed by the public security forces.

Of the three elements mentioned above, the military one remained the most dangerous. These incidents, instead of giving the army a sense of its own supremacy, were a source of humiliation to it. Wholesale self-examination was prescribed, and it would be foolish to believe that the army accepted this without considerable efforts by their leaders. Moreover, the Wuhan events had repercussions in the Northeast, Sinkiang, Chekiang, Honan, and, above all, in Canton, where developments took a potentially more serious, because more confused, turn.

However, one of the advantages of the self-criticism policy was that, albeit for different reasons, it satisfied both elements in the army.

The Rebels in the army saw in the self-criticism the conditions for the purge they wanted to make; while the Central Committee's Military Commission believed that the soldiers would be moved by their self-criticisms to pull out of political struggles and revert to their role as a disciplined army, at present obedient to the Centre and at a future date to the Party. Unlike the first group, the second publicly commended the official Mass Line. The serious contradiction between the two was finally brought into the open, although the Centre decided that the events of the summer did not provide sufficient grounds for a purge of the army.

The new attack by the extremists

In May of last year militant pseudo-left tendencies appeared, sometimes taking an extreme leftist form—left in appearance but right in reality. . . . These people did not keep us informed and did not ask our advice; they wanted to keep us out so that we would be in the dark about the plots they were hatching behind our backs. They have done a great deal of damage. Some of them tried to exploit certain events in order to deny the successes of the Cultural Revolution and the achievements of the revolutionary masses. . . . They were able to deceive some of the people. At that time we took some precautionary measures against them to prevent them causing any more trouble. We separated Wang Li from Kuan Feng. We acted differently with regard to Ch'i Pen-yü. This was why we intensified the measures we took against him; he had always been a problem.²

This was what Chiang Ch'ing had to say in March 1968, giving in a deliberately simplified form the story of a faction that had for a time seemed triumphant until the Centre sacrificed it. A simplification it must be, for it is hard to believe that the Centre had early adopted a united policy towards the group. Ch'i Pen-yü, Wang Li and Kuan Feng were all members of the Centre's Cultural Revolution Group. The position of these three men at the head of the editorial board of the theoretical journal *Red Flag* and, in the case of Kuan Feng, of the editorial board of the *PLA Daily*, gave them not only great scope for action but also widespread popularity among the revolutionary masses. This carried them away to the point where they believed that their policies would succeed both with the people and with the leading group. The Centre was careful to avoid the appearance of any splits within itself during the political interregnum, so that the ultra-radicals

² Speeches by leaders of the Centre on March 27, 1968, at a rally in the Peking Workers' Stadium, according to the paper *Tungfanghung* of the Geological Institute's Tungfang-hung group, special issue of March 29, 1968.

were as much the leaders of the revolution as those who worked with them then and later claimed to have been suspicious of them at the time. The top leaders had shown a certain weakness for them on account of their revolutionary popularity and Chiang Ch'ing, who condemned them in 1968, had herself come under their influence in 1967.

In May and June splits could be observed in the alliances that had made the formation of Peking's revolutionary committee possible, and which were embodied in 'congresses.' In the provinces, similar dissensions among revolutionaries were making a great deal of trouble for the leaders on whom the Centre was counting to bring about the formation of alliances. Sung Jen-ch'ung,³ the leader responsible for the Northeast of China, somewhat discouraged at the failure of his appeals to the revolutionary organizations, had tried to take a tougher line by cutting off all subsidies to Red Guard bodies, thus making himself the target of virulent abuse from extremist groups.

The Centre had made a tactical decision to concentrate criticism in mass rallies, aimed at such targets as P'eng Chen, Lo Jui-ch'ing, and the old Peking Municipal Party Committee, all 'ghosts and monsters' at whom revolutionaries could rage without causing any new splits in their own ranks. This policy was doubtless the best way of uniting revolutionaries of good will in alliances from which a movement to support and rejuvenate the Party might emerge.

The ultra-radicals, however, aware that these mass rallies were not arousing a fighting spirit, wanted action in small meetings at unit level, to 'deepen the criticism' and 'take the Cultural Revolution forward.' The victims were to be the ordinary cadres that the Centre wanted to win over *en masse* for the revolutionary committees. Chou Ching-fan,⁴ one of the ringleaders of rebellion in the uni-

³ A cadre who had come over in January and kept his position as First Secretary of the Central Committee's Northeast Bureau.

⁴ A leading member of the Institute of Philosophy and Social Sciences of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, secretary of the

versities, and a deputy chairman of the Peking revolutionary committee, wrote that there should be many small struggle meetings.

We have already seen in Chapter 5 how some liberal interpretations of the Liu Shao-ch'i criticism had been made from March onwards, and how Lin Chieh demanded the totalitarian application of the proletarian dictatorship in June. The criticism of Liu Shao-ch'i remained an activity in which the most left-wing politicians involved Red Guards and Rebels, hoping that the Centre would itself be obliged to exclude all moderates from it.

On June 3rd demonstrators from the Institute of Architecture established themselves outside the west gate of Chungnanhai, and announced that they were going to keep up their struggle until Liu made a public self-criticism. They put up an awning, under which they displayed the slogan, 'Drag Liu out and burn him!' They claimed to have 'very strong support from over seven hundred revolutionary organizations,' most of which had been affiliated to the old Third Red Guard Headquarters. Working in shifts, they held out for thirty-one days and nights until, at 3.30 a.m. on July 4th, Ch'i Pen-yü came to see them under their shelter. According to what they later wrote,⁵ he told them that the Standing Committee and Premier Chou had agreed that Liu Shao-ch'i should be ordered to bow his head and confess his crimes before them.

The Red Guards were exultant at the decisive step Ch'i Pen-yü had taken: 'What Comrade Ch'i's presence has given us is the unmatched interest and support of the Central Committee and its Cultural Revolution Group for the struggle to drag Liu out.'⁶ But there was nothing to show

Institute of Philosophy's Party committee, member of the Institute's unified Red Guard detachment, secretary-general of the Peking Revolutionary Committee, and head of its political bureau.

⁵ See *Hsin Payi*, no. 13, July 15, 1967. A special self-criticism for the Institute of Architecture may have been thought justified by the close interest Liu Shao-ch'i had shown in the Work Team there.

⁶ *Ibid.*

unambiguously how the Centre, and Chou En-lai in particular, had given their consent. What mainly reassured the Red Guards was that Ch'i Pen-yü, a member of the Central Committee's Cultural Revolution Group, had joined them and started to direct their action.

Ch'i had been a leading exponent of the struggle against Liu Shao-ch'i from the beginning. An article he wrote on a historical theme in 1963 had been, according to Cultural Revolution tradition, one of the first attacks on those responsible for the renunciation of the arrested Communists in 1936.⁷ When the Central Committee allowed criticism of the works of Liu Shao-ch'i, he was the one who opened the firing on April 1, 1967, with the article, 'Patriotism or National Betrayal?'⁸ Ch'i Pen-yü was much admired by the young revolutionaries. The Centre was still allied with the *avant garde* of the Cultural Revolution, and it could not easily end its solidarity with him even if he had gone a little too far.

Another self-criticism was successfully demanded from Liu Shao-ch'i as a complement to the inquiry that was being made into his case. On July 9th he wrote a letter to the students of the Institute of Architecture that was published on posters on July 12th. The next step was to have him 'dragged out.' In his letter he explained briefly his position on the matters that, in his view, concerned the students. The Rebels and Red Guards were speechless with rage and the papers of the Peking and Shanghai revolutionary committees fulminated:

This grandiose intriguer reckons that he can totally deny his crimes. He has not a word to say about his counter-revolutionary activities over several decades. He is silent on his opposition to the dictatorship of the proletariat and his criminal activities to restore capitalism. He merely condescends to say in pointless terms that during

⁷ And thus against Liu Shao-ch'i and some of his political friends. This article had been reprinted in the *People's Daily* on July 24, 1964, although Ch'i Pen-yü was not a well-known historian at the time.

⁸ See Chapter 5.

a period of some fifty days he made some mistakes of line and orientation.⁹

The leaders of the Centre met around July 17th and continued in session until the first news arrived from Wuhan.¹⁰ Nothing suggested that their tactics *vis-à-vis* Liu Shao-ch'i had altered. There may have been a new alignment of the left and the moderates against the more right-inclined members of the Political Bureau. Lin Piao declared that the 'small handful' constituted a danger because of their 'important political potential.'¹¹

There was talk about the 'reactionary line in the Cultural Revolution.'¹² This stressed that the Centre was making a deep analysis of the opinions of people with whom it had been allied until then. This was no doubt the time when decisions were made after the 'February counter-current,' given the inevitable delay in procedures. In addition to obtaining the formal condemnation of T'an Chen-lin, the radical leaders also succeeded in having several of the deputy premiers, including Ch'en Yi, warned.

So, while the leftist militants were beginning to put the Centre to the test, thus presenting it with its most serious challenge to date, the Centre itself was preoccupied with regulating its right wing. But Ch'i Pen-yü's success was superficial. Now that the reactionaries in the leadership had been identified, it would be possible later on to denounce the extreme leftist line in the Cultural Revolution.

The first time the central press used the term 'extreme left' in this context was in August after Sunama, the permanent representative of the Japanese Communist Party, and Konno, the correspondent of *Akahata*, finally left China. They were both very violently treated by Chinese

⁹ *Wenhui Pao*, July 17, 1967.

¹⁰ See the following section.

¹¹ These remarks by Lin Piao quoted by 'Red Pioneer,' a revolutionary mass organization of the air force, must be attributed to this meeting at the Centre. See New China News Agency release for July 22, 1967.

¹² 'Proletarian revolutionaries unite in the struggle against the Chinese Khrushchev and his agents,' New China News Agency, July 19, 1967.

and Japanese Red Guards at Peking Airport. The *People's Daily*, however, wrote on August 6th: 'We have noticed that some people have, for their own ulterior motives, adopted an ultra-leftist position on the presence of Sunama in China, taking our Party to task for not having expelled him.'

The article concluded that extremists had wanted to push the Party into a trap by giving the leaders of the Japanese Communist Party, who were already hostile to the Cultural Revolution, arguments to back their anti-China case.

The Wuhan affair

At the end of the first week in July some of the leaders of the Centre were sent on a mission to the cities of south-west China in which serious quarrels between revolutionary organizations were leading to bloody confrontations. Hsieh Fu-chih, the Minister for Public Security and a deputy premier; Wang Li, a member of the Central Committee's Cultural Revolution Group; and Yü Li-chin, the political commissar of the air force, went with some Red Guards from the Institute of Aviation to Chengtu and Chungking in Szechuan, and then to Kunming in Yunnan, before arriving on the afternoon of July 14th in Wuhan, where the military command was ruling with absolute power. In the triple conurbation, whose inhabitants included about half a million industrial workers, Rebel organizations had almost been silenced and forced to yield to organizations more amenable to the army. Fighting caused such heavy casualties that the Peking wall-papers printed the figures: over thirty dead on June 23rd, over forty the next day. The army had arrested over three thousand people in May and June.¹³

The envoys of the Centre made enquiries about the recruitment, conduct, and real beliefs of the revolutionary

¹³ See Konno, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-62, for all the figures he collected from notices in Peking on casualties at Wuhan before July.

organizations. They visited the group which had the army's backing in Wuhan, and which bore the striking name of the 'Million Heroes' Army,¹⁴ and cautioned its leaders over their taste for violence. On the morning of July 19th they went to the headquarters of the Sankang (the 'three steel organizations'), a grouping of workers that claimed persecution from the local military authorities, but which was at the heart of the Rebel movement in Wuhan.¹⁵ The same day they held a meeting for these workers at the local stadium, and the orators from Peking stirred up their revolutionary ardour.

During the afternoon they stopped at the regional military command, and explained to the army that it had failed to recognize where the left wing lay in Wuhan. This reveals the extent to which the Centre had let things ride until then. Wang Li handed over a directive from Chou En-lai ordering them to support the Sankang forces and ordered that it should be published in the town. Those of the revolutionaries who felt thwarted by this were soon accusing Wang Li of having written the directive himself.

In the small hours of the morning of July 20th the 'Million Heroes' and some of the regular troops occupied the civil and military airfields, stations, docks, main roads and key buildings.¹⁶ The soldiers involved belonged to an independent division, Unit 8201, which had been entrusted with running the Cultural Revolution in the Wuhan Military Region by the local military command. A battalion of this unit surrounded the guest house where the envoys

¹⁴ The name *Paiwan Hsiung Shih* is taken from a Mao Tse-tung poem and refers to the PLA forces that crossed the Yangtse in the spring of 1949 (translator's note).

¹⁵ These forces comprised the Sankang, the Sanlien ('Three allies') and Sanhsin (The 'Three New,' including the students of the New University of Hupei).

¹⁶ The Wuhan affair was described in detail in several Red Guard publications, especially the Aviation Institute's *Hungch'i*, published by an organization several of whose members were there with Wang Li (*Hungch'i*, no. 55, July 29, 1967); and in *Wuhan Kang Erhszu*, no. 38 (published in Huichou on August 22, 1967), a paper brought out by workers in one of the Wuhan steel companies.

of the Centre were sleeping. Ch'en Tsai-tao, the officer commanding in Wuhan, refused to intervene, on the pretext that he had been instructed to avoid confrontations. He even withdrew the sentries from the army staff offices, and allowed some of his troops to hunt down Rebels in the streets of the city.

The 'Million Heroes' forced their way into the hotel. Hsieh Fu-chih was locked in a room. Wang Li was taken away by men of Unit 8201, beaten up, and some of the Red Guards with him were wounded.

Peking did not conceal its wrath. The naval forces stationed at Wuhan (a nodal point for inland waterways) came out against Ch'en Tsai-tao that afternoon. Another army unit demanded that Wang Li be handed over to it, and Unit 8201 had to yield. But the local army command, which wanted to make him withdraw the directive, would not permit his release. The Sankang forces then took the offensive in the city. Armed with any weapons they could lay their hands on, they invaded one district of the city and arrested the provisional revolutionary committee. The growing risk of civil war persuaded other units to apply pressure for the release of the Peking envoys. On July 22nd the air force took their side. When the 'Million Heroes,' having discovered Wang Li's hiding-place, prepared to attack the camp where he was being kept, the commander arranged his escape through the woods. Hsieh Fu-chih and Wang Li were able to return to Peking late that afternoon, where they received a triumphal welcome.

A film was shot of their return. It was called *Peking Supports You* and was dedicated to the isolated revolutionaries in the provinces. The scene of their arrival in Peking showed Chiang Ch'ing taking Hsieh Fu-chih and Wang Li by the arm, the latter with a black eye and staggering across the tarmac. But this passage had an air of gaiety to it: it made one feel that the leading group, whose few members were nearly all present, were happy to have their lost brethren back again. For a moment nothing else mattered, and their joy came over clearly.

The film's chief aim was to show that the Centre was united; but it was also intended to bolster the determina-

tion of Rebels suffering in the provinces by showing them the strength of the revolution in the big cities. It showed enormous demonstrations against Ch'en Tsai-tao in Peking, and an important mass meeting by the armed forces in Shanghai in which the troops were told about the crisis and the risks that had been involved. The units decided to help the revolutionaries in Wuhan, and climbed into their lorries as if going into battle, to the delirious enthusiasm of the audience at the army taking sides in this way.

For the sake of propaganda, Hsieh Fu-chih and Wang Li were treated as conquering heroes, but in the eyes of the nation their adventure faded away somewhat by comparison with the ordeal of the Wuhan Rebels, formerly oppressed and now fighting back. The army tried to make up for the reactionary part it had played in Wuhan by recognizing the courage of the Rebels.

The affair was built up to epic proportions. But Wang Li's mistake was to think that he, rather than the Sankang, was the hero of it. The Shanghai troops were ready to set out to their rescue as soon as the word was given. On July 25th the command of the Eastern Fleet proclaimed:

Our great leader Chairman Mao has given us rifles, artillery, boats and aircraft. We must be ready to crush the class enemies *at home* and abroad. . . . We are resolutely determined to support the proletarian revolutionaries of the Wuhan region.¹⁷

However, from July 21st booths had been set up in Peking for volunteers to enlist, offering their lives if necessary to defend Mao Tse-tung and the Cultural Revolution Group. This movement showed that youth was prepared to accept the possibility of civil war.

For in Wuhan the fighting continued. The 'Million Heroes' did not accept their condemnation, and they drew reinforcements of peasants into the city. The army, which the day before had been using its tanks and lorries to defeat the Sankang, was now patrolling the streets to drive

¹⁷ *Wenhui Pao*, July 26, 1967. Author's italics.

back the 'Million Heroes' or, if necessary, to crush them. This switch of alliances was bitterly resented by some of the military, and a quarrel went on among the army's top men between those who believed that the mistakes should be paid for and those who tried to excuse them.

Ch'en Tsai-tao and his political commissar Wang Jen-chung, one of T'ao Chu's barons, were replaced. Was this enough? The Rebels in the army were not satisfied with dismissals. 'Those responsible must be completely overthrown politically and ideologically, as well as organizationally,' they wrote in the *People's Daily* on July 22, 1967. In other words, they wanted a purge.

The article quoted in the previous paragraph was written by the *avant garde* of the air force staff, probably Yü Li-chin, one of the Centre's envoys in Wuhan. The *People's Daily* hesitated to print it, frightened perhaps of taking the initiative for a purge that the Centre had not yet approved. 'This article has raised an important question,' wrote the editorial board.

But the Centre was taking its time to decide its policy. Meanwhile, the movement for a purge in the army was growing in strength. However, when the oracle finally spoke, it ruled against purges. Apart from the dismissal of a number of leaders, the Centre chose self-criticism—a very different matter—for all who had been implicated in the affair. The only punishment for the troops was that they now had to do their utmost to help the very people they had been fighting.

'We must have the courage and the breadth of spirit needed to emancipate the deceived masses.'¹⁸ The self-criticisms were actually carried out, and the new political commissar at Wuhan made one on behalf of the troops.¹⁹

¹⁸ Point 4 from the 'urgent notice of the proletarian revolutionary command of the Wuhan region,' July 31st, printed in the *People's Daily*, August 2, 1967. This urgent notice followed a five-point letter to the command from the Central Committee, State Council, Military Commission, and Central Committee Cultural Revolution Group.

¹⁹ Liu Feng, 'Remain faithful to our great commander-in-chief, Chairman Mao,' in New China News Agency's Chinese-language bulletin *Chin jih Hsinwen*, July 31, 1967, p. 14 ff.

But the fighting still had to be stopped. The Wuhan Proletarian Revolutionary Headquarters urged Rebels to bury the hatchet.²⁰ Only the leaders of reactionary organizations were to be dealt with strictly.

But Wang Li maintained his position that drastic changes would still have to be made in Wuhan.²¹ Part of the army staff was with him: they wanted such changes throughout the army. The *People's Daily* had to protest, and it did not mince its words.

If comrades in the army have made mistakes, they are still sound, provided that they have corrected them. These mistakes should not be treated as if they were of irremediable political gravity. One should not prevent others from making revolution too.²²

Why was it necessary for the paper to spell this out? It became known later that Yang Ch'eng-wu, the acting chief of the general staff, was himself committed to the extremist tendency.

'Beating the dog in the water'

August was a month to remember for the Cultural Revolution. In 1966 it had brought Mao Tse-tung's *tatzupao*, the Eleventh Plenum of the Central Committee, Lin Piao's elevation to the position of successor, and the introduction of the Red Guard to the country.

In 1967 the enlistment of volunteers in Peking went hand in hand with the growing demand for a public trial of Liu Shao-ch'i. In June and July the Red Guards of the Institute of Architecture had installed themselves in the road to the west of Chungnanhai, and in August over five hundred other organizations were copying their example.

²⁰ Urgent appeal from the Rebel headquarters, broadcast on the morning of August 1st.

²¹ Remarks by Wang Li and Yao Teng-shan on August 7th, according to a leaflet published in October 1967 by the Tientsin *Hungch'i Ping t'uan* organization.

²² *People's Daily*, August 4, 1967.

This road, which a year earlier had been the site of joyful processions celebrating the return of Mao Tse-tung, was now full of open-air political forums. It was as lively as a fairground.

On August 1st, Army Day, the papers reprinted Lin Piao's article on people's war. This may have been an indirect invitation for the people to take to the streets for a final assault on the 'authorities.' The next day Peking was in ferment. Revolutionary organizations erected hundreds of stalls in the road to the west of Chungnanhai and the southern gate. Lorries brought workers and peasants in from the suburbs shouting, 'Down with Liu Shao-ch'i.' The road was resplendent with colours: red flags with the names of different organizations sewn on them, open-air posters, and countless caricatures. At every stall leaflets, sometimes printed on the spot, were being distributed. The richer groups had loudspeakers blaring out proclamations. There were hunger strikes, brilliant orators, singers. Organizations had pickets out at the gates of Chungnanhai, making it difficult to go in and out. Rumours flew around: T'ao Chu and Ulanfu had escaped. They were with Ho Lung, who was leading a counter-revolution with some insurgent soldiers. This mood of panic pressed the revolutionaries to demand death penalties.

August 5th was the anniversary of Mao's *tatzupao*, 'Bombard the Headquarters,' and the revolutionary organizations demanded that Liu be handed over to him before midnight on the fourth. They wanted to organize a great confrontation with him, for which they believed that they had the consent of the revolutionary committee of Peking. This put the Centre in a dilemma. The persistent pressure of the extreme left was widening the gap between its leaders and the Centre, which would have preferred to form closer links with them in order to unite the left. If the Centre had allowed itself to be provoked by the agitation into using its power to repress the extreme left, it would have lost the confidence of many of the revolutionaries. The Centre therefore adopted the tactic of banning all mass trials, thus avoiding the problem of how to ensure Liu's personal safety.

Three hundred thousand people had already assembled in the huge T'ienanmen Square. The revolutionary committee persuaded them to disperse by making the false promise that Liu would be handed over at midnight, and notice was given that the criticism meeting would take place the next afternoon at 4 p.m. Liu Shao-ch'i would not be leaving Chungnanhai, but he would be criticized by his colleagues. The crowd outside were to follow the meeting as it was relayed over the public address system in the square. Liu himself, wherever he was, could hear the reactions of the crowd over loudspeakers.

At the set hour Chou En-lai, Ch'en Po-ta, and Chiang Ch'ing had taken their place on the T'ienanmen rostrum, overlooking the multitude. The crowd adopted a resolution that they would carry the struggle against Liu, Teng and T'ao Chu through to the end. Then the debate inside Chungnanhai was relayed, under conditions that a small group at the Centre had arranged by themselves. But from then on the leaders who belonged to this little group, and who had until then marched in a line at the head of the rebellion, now appeared separated from the tribunes of the extreme left. There was now a split between the Party's real chiefs, the promoters of the revolution, and the majority of the militants in the Central Committee's Cultural Revolution Group. The latter doubtless felt that they were being discriminated against by the old Party hands, who in the last resort seemed to be showing more solidarity with Liu Shao-ch'i than with the revolution.

The slogan: 'beat the dog in the water,' went up louder than ever from the Rebels. The government, and the surviving group of Party leaders, arranged that their differences with the extreme left should not be too apparent. But press, radio, the New China News Agency and even the national papers often gave the impression that they had sold out to the militants. Official information media were no longer like those normally found in Communist countries. They avoided holding a monopoly, and made themselves available to a proletarian dictatorship which wanted total power for rebel organizations. To deduce the government's policy from the press at that period was to

risk reaching the mistaken conclusion that power lay further to the left and in more revolutionary hands than was in fact the case.

On the other hand, the Red Guards were unable to mark a triumphal celebration of their official birthday, August 18th. They made a lot of noise, but nobody in power called the rally on which they had been counting. Nobody spoke up in favour of it in the Centre, surrounded as it was by all the din. On the contrary, a number of rather severe articles, inspired by the Centre, began to appear in papers that had hitherto been overflowing with enthusiasm. One of their themes was that, compared with Red Guards, who were full of fire but short on experience, revolutionary cadres who had both were 'national treasures.' For the time being the Centre needed to loosen the Red Guard hold on Peking. It let it be known that the students should learn to criticize themselves and reform themselves according to the Thought of Mao Tse-tung.²³

In the provinces the army was going through a crisis of confidence in the leaders at the Centre after its setback, and was in danger of going over to the Rebels; and in the capital, control was impeded by extremist pressure. News from Canton, Hangchow and Urumchi was full of accounts of growing anarchy and army repression. In Canton especially the troops were taking sides to such an extent that the command was suppressing the Rebels in the army.

Canton was a battlefield for two factions: that of the 'Red Flag,' of which the 'Revolutionary Workers' Alliance' and the Third Red Guard Headquarters were the kernel, and that of the 'Red Defence Brigades,' which included paramilitary organizations (as in Shanghai) such as the well known and still operational 'Joint Action Committee.' One of the unusual aspects of the situation was that all the organizations of the poor and middle peasants of the suburbs had joined the second faction. They made their choice not on ideological ground, but in order to throw their weight by force against any development in the revolution that was not in their interests. Both factions had obtained

²³ *People's Daily*, August 18, 1967.

arms and entrenched themselves in strategic positions. Peasants dug trenches and laid ambushes in which even the army lost men. But the latter held its hand, perhaps because the peasants had joined the wrong side: the 'elect' of the masses had gone astray. Instead of preventing conflict between the factions, the army allowed it under certain conditions: state inquests on street violence, no reinforcements to be sent in, and neutrality of the peasants, according to the seven-point agreement reached by revolutionary organizations on July 26th, and signed in the presence of the army. But in August the military commander, Huang Yung-sheng, suppressed the Revolutionary Rebels in the army, whom he described as 'delayed action bombs.' See the Canton leaflet *Kungan Chanpao*, August 11, 1967.

In Chekiang a mob of real gangsters seized control of the railways during July. In Sinkiang a movement in the Production Corps repressed workers affiliated to the Second Headquarters in the way the 'Million Heroes' had tried to do in Wuhan.

In the absence of any encouraging sign of progress, the political leaders of the revolution needed rare patience to persist in their plan to rebuild the Party.

In this time of great crisis all they asked of the people was to keep cool and rational. Rather than parrot the slogan, 'everything is contained in the Thought of Mao Tse-tung,' which the militants had improperly used to demand absolute obedience, they stressed the need for reflection.²⁴

Hsieh Fu-chih, the minister in charge of the police, made no mention of the forces under his control in his frank announcements of these reverses, or the suppression of Maoists in the provinces, or the sporadic uprisings of peasants who had been incited to surround some towns. The lessons he drew from these events were expressed in purely moral terms.²⁵ Ch'en Po-ta said that Peking was

²⁴ 'Excel not only in fighting but also in thinking. Keep a cool head in all circumstances, and carry out ideological and political work among the masses with all diligence.' *People's Daily*, August 8, 1967.

²⁵ Speeches by leaders of the Centre, August 10, 1968.

becoming so intolerably noisy that it was impossible to work there, and he would have to go to the countryside.²⁶ Everyone needed some time to reflect and consider. After all, why should the left-wing groups not settle down and resolve their differences with less trouble than had accompanied the incorporation of the revolutionary organization?

This call for reflection brought on a kind of renewal for the revolutionary masses. 'Comrades who have gone wrong must rid themselves of their burdens,' wrote a Shanghai paper,²⁷ incidentally using a Buddhist expression. It would now be possible to make a fresh start in the Cultural Revolution with all men of good will who had now come over, with Red Guards prepared to abandon the pursuit of their own glory, and with these 'national treasures,' the true revolutionary cadres.

Polycentrism

A number of the leaders of the extreme left did not politically survive August. But for the Centre to have been able to discredit and eliminate them, they must have made mistakes.

The best known of these were journalists who, as members of the Centre's Cultural Revolution Group, themselves had the responsibility for censoring others. They abused this charge when they succumbed to the temptation to urge the masses to launch fresh attacks. Without the approval of the Centre's leaders they wrote contentious articles that stirred up civil strife. But they could not be condemned except by a meeting of the leadership that was not, in the circumstances, feasible.

These men were mistaken over the role of the revolutionary committees. They thought that they should be local revolutionary governments. As they saw it, the committees and preparatory groups for committees could rapidly

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Editorial in the *Tachung Jihpao*, reprinted in the *People's Daily*, August 10, 1967.

have achieved the aims of the Cultural Revolution if they had been given their heads. They would have represented new and pitiless regimes, ceaselessly attacking their opponents and chastising the half-hearted. Beyond that, they had in mind ideological links with all revolutionary movements through civil war and even, perhaps, uninterrupted revolution.

They did not see that the revolutionary committees were not so much governments as schools of government. Cadres, soldiers, and ordinary people were there to learn to know themselves rather than to share in local government. The main component in the committees were cadres, and it was they who benefited from having soldiers and ordinary people with them. From these crucibles good new Party cadres were to be cast. It was an article of faith that there could only be one guiding and apostolic party. In trying to prolong the autonomy which the 'provisional organs of the proletariat' had had to be given, the leftists were guilty of the heresy of propagating polycentrism.

It was not, of course, until much later that the Party's defenders identified polycentrism explicitly.²⁸ The term itself was not much used, and it did not refer to a fully worked-out political programme. It was only used in criticizing the phenomenon after the event.

Ch'i Pen-yü, Wang Li, Lin Chieh, Kuan Feng, and Mu Hsin were acting as if they constituted an independent Centre. They exercised arbitrary control over news. They established close links with an organization known as the '516' (May 16), which the leaders of the Centre did not like. Without referring to the Centre they decided that the Rebels in government departments should take the initiative, which was tantamount to new and opportunist seizures of power. 'For some time . . . small groups have been in existence . . . which no longer operate through the Centre or seek the authorization of the Prime Minister,' said K'ang Sheng in September.²⁹

²⁸ Polycentrism was condemned in the slogans put forward by the Centre's Cultural Revolution Group for October 1, 1968.

²⁹ See the excerpts from K'ang Sheng's speech at the September 1, 1967, conference of the Peking Revolutionary Com-

In acting thus, they were trying to enforce a system by which revolutionaries did as they wished in the sectors where they had power. This was virtual polycentrism, tending to increase pressure on the Centre just when it was being threatened with splits.

The career of the '516' organization may have begun on August 3, 1967, the day on which the 'Metropolitan 516 Red Guard Corps'³⁰ was inaugurated, but all its detractors included in its record the criticisms that had been levelled at Chou En-lai since January. This *a posteriori* version of the story was intended to give the impression that the authors of the insidious attacks that had harassed the Prime Minister for short spells during the Cultural Revolution had now all been unmasked, and that his loyalty to the revolution was unimpeachable.

'Ambitious' revolutionaries were determined to overthrow Chou as he had too much of a tendency to support men who wanted order, at the cost of satisfying the immediate demands of the revolutionaries. When they did not dare to attack Chou En-lai himself, they took on men in power in the provinces and members of Chou's own team in Peking, especially the Foreign Minister Ch'en Yi, who had never shown much respect for the Red Guards, and had once asked them, 'Who are you rebelling against? Against me! How is it that you haven't gone to Vietnam to rebel against the Americans?'³¹

He was a perfect target. His accusers presented him as an actor playing his role, indifferent to the conflict between the proletarian and the capitalist ways, and unwill-

mittee, together with those of other leaders from the Centre in *Hungch'i Ping'uan*, October 1967, p. 5 (published by the Hungch'i Printing Works, Tientsin).

³⁰ This was an amalgamation of groups recruited mainly among intellectuals, especially at the Further Education College, whose leading lights were the 'Group of Seven' in the Institute of Philosophy and Social Sciences of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. One of these was the Chou Ching-fang, mentioned above as the author of an article in favour of small struggle meetings and the revival of the Cultural Revolution in the units.

³¹ Quoted in *Hungwei Chanpao*, April 8, 1967.

ing to be converted to the Cultural Revolution. Ch'en Yi had even been criticized in important public meetings,³² but Chou En-lai had always defended him, even at the risk of his own popularity.

At the head of the '516' organization was a group of power-hungry and probably unscrupulous intellectuals.³³ They believed that a critical examination of the Foreign Minister would expose his weakness, and that if the extreme left brought him down this would be a shock for Chou En-lai, who was now being indirectly charged with toleration of the army in Wuhan and delay over the formation of new revolutionary committees.

A combination of circumstances, some of them deliberately provoked, brought the struggle against Ch'en Yi to a particularly virulent level at the beginning of August. There was the new wave of revolutionary attempts to seize power in the British-ruled territory of Hong Kong; the influence in the Foreign Ministry of diplomats who had been withdrawn from Indonesia after the anti-Chinese riots in Indonesia; and the sudden rise of the '516' organization that was leading the Rebels in the Foreign Ministry. The Rebels claimed that they had new evidence against him, and were successful in demanding that Ch'en Yi be obliged to explain himself to them. There were tumultuous meetings at which his critics used every demagogic trick against him. It was impossible to prevent the suspending of the Foreign Minister for a fortnight.

Enquiries made later by other revolutionaries led to the charge that Wang Li had coveted the post of Foreign Minister for himself during this period of anarchy. During an important conversation which the 'hero' of Wuhan held with the Rebels in the ministry on August 7th, he had

³² E.g., in front of 10,000 people on January 24th. See Konno, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

³³ Before the inauguration of the '516' organization, those who were to become its leaders conceived the notion of establishing, in conjunction with the Further Education College, a body to investigate the organizations of the Central Committee in March 1967 (according to a pamphlet published in September 1967 by the 'Steel Industry Revolutionary Rebels' Commune').

encouraged them to seize power boldly.³⁴ The details of what happened between then and Wan Li's fall are not known, but a climax was reached with the burning of the British Legation on August 22nd after a Chinese ultimatum had expired without reply. The Chinese news media said nothing of these reprisals except that 'angry demonstrators undertook vigorous action against the office of the British Chargé d'Affaires.'³⁵ Nor was there any reminder that there had been an ultimatum demanding complete freedom of action for the Hong Kong revolutionaries. The Centre acted as if there had been no diplomatic activity during the enforced absence of Ch'en Yi.

The only way the Centre expressed its disapproval of what had happened at the British mission was to publish a six-point list of prohibitions governing demonstrations against foreign diplomatic missions.³⁶ But there was a more vigorous reaction against organizations of the extreme left. Mu Hsin, the chief editor of the *Kwangming Jihpao*, and Lin Chieh, editor of the *Red Flag*, were arrested in the last days of August. Chao Yi-ya, chief editor of the *PLA Daily*, was also arrested, which sheds a confused light on the influence of the Central Group's extremists upon the army. After it was legally proscribed, the '516' organization was searched, and as a result Wang Li, Kuan Feng and Chou Ching-fang were put under surveillance.

The case of Ch'i Pen-yü was a more difficult one to establish, as he had tried either to involve Chiang Ch'ing with him or else used her to save himself. Despite advice not to associate too closely with Wang Li and Kuan Feng, Mao Tse-tung's wife was rather too much in sympathy with them. In November, when the storm was over, she decided to take a rest.

³⁴ 'Important Speeches of Central leaders at the September 1, 1967, Meeting of the Peking Revolutionary Committee,' Tientsin, September 10, 1967, p. 10. On the strength of August 7th, Wang Li was given the nickname Wang Pa-chi, which also carries an insulting reference.

³⁵ New China News Agency, English language series, no. 082225, 1967.

³⁶ See *Asahi Jyanaru*, vol. 9, no. 52, December 17, 1967, pp. 21-22, Minoru Takeuchi, 'Shüonrai no yakuwari.'

The methods Mao Tse-tung had recommended to show a change of policy—a notice, a directive, an editorial in the papers—have been mentioned above. This was the period when the workers and peasants were being drawn into the revolution too hastily, as a result of Red Guard provocation. During the ascendancy of the extreme left Mao Tse-tung himself was absent on a journey to central and east China. A warning was given by Chou En-lai and K'ang Sheng in their speeches of August 30th. Directives were issued by the Peking and Shanghai revolutionary committees. The Centre—the Central Committee, State Council, Cultural Revolution Group, and Military Commission—only issued a purely technical order forbidding the seizure of arms.³⁷

It would have been difficult to call a meeting of the Political Bureau in Mao Tse-tung's absence for the lengthy discussions that would be needed to resolve a number of delicate questions. The main directive came from the Peking Revolutionary Committee on September 1st. It dealt with many other problems³⁸ and many other organizations besides the '516,' which it banned. It amounted to a reprimand for the extreme left in stronger terms than for the masses who had gone astray. Could it have been that the directive was intended to avert civil war at the calculated risk of coups against the minority groups. At all events, while many organizations could be saved, the '516' was not one of them.

There was also the publication of an article by Yao Wen-yuan attacking 'two books by T'ao Chu,' and in this indirect indictment it was implied that behind the '516,' there were other top leaders who had not yet been exposed.³⁹ The Central Committee's Cultural Revolution Group had been set up at the time when T'ao Chu was in charge

³⁷ Mentioned by Chiang Ch'ing in her talks at the third reception for delegates from Anhwei on September 5, 1967.

³⁸ E.g., the maintenance of salaries (see Chapter 6) and the ban on all arming of revolutionaries (see Chapter 8).

³⁹ *People's Daily*, September 8, 1967. See also 'Comments on T'ao Chu's Two Books,' *Peking Review* no. 38, September 15, 1967, pp. 7-17.

of propaganda, and he had put some of his own men into the Group who now had to be eliminated. People in the know now understood that those who had come to power with T'ao Chu were to be weeded out.

All the staffs of the main papers and the journal *Red Flag* were abruptly purged of the intransigents who had too often printed their incendiary pieces alongside the ones demanded by the moderate Centre. *Red Flag* ceased publication for a time, and all editorial initiatives were restrained in the *People's Daily*.

However, at a time when the crisis appeared to have deeply undermined the Cultural Revolution, the Centre was declaring with more assurance than ever that the revolution had won.

The crisis in the army

Until the Wuhan affair, the measures taken to limit the army's involvement in the Cultural Revolution had, on the whole, worked. With the exception of a few specified units, the soldiers were under orders not to interfere. An ordinary incident will illustrate the caution they were asked to observe. One day that August a foreigner's car broke down in a remote part of Peking. The driver, who spoke Chinese well, asked two soldiers who were passing to help her push it. They insisted that they did not understand. Then some local people came over to help her start it again, and briefly explained the situation: 'It's quite simple. They're under orders to stand aside. You only need to ask the people.'

Since the Wuhan incident impatient voices had been demanding changes. 'The big new development is that the army has participated in the Cultural Revolution in the civilian sphere,' declared a *New China* editorial of August 2nd.⁴⁰ In the style of the Central Group's extrem-

⁴⁰ In a note accompanying quotations from the military works of Mao Tse-tung, published by the press on August 1st (Army Day).

ists, the advocates of action in the army turned a deaf ear to the Centre's attempts at calming the situation by amnestying the troops and dismissing only a few senior officers.

On August 16th the Centre published excerpts of the resolution condemning P'eng Te-huai in 1959.⁴¹ While this clearly had contemporary significance, there were several possible interpretations, and everyone tried to draw the most advantage from it.

The *PLA Daily* preached a crusade against all the old friends of P'eng Te-huai and Lo Jui-ch'ing,⁴² but we have already seen what side it was on—its editor-in-chief was eventually arrested. Following the familiar routine, by which one article replied to another, and an authoritative source refuted a pamphleteer, the theoretical journal *Red Flag* spoke in its turn. One of its leader-writers wrote that all the army cadres who had come under the influence of rightists and militarists had now rectified themselves. The wise reader would have taken this as meaning that the *PLA Daily* had been wrong to call for a purge in the army.

But when two such well respected publications disagreed over a subject like this, the situation was serious. We saw above how the general staff vacillated over whether armed militiamen should take part in revolutionary action, and then came out in support of the local commanders who had mobilized them.⁴³ This happened on August 18th, the same week. The general staff definitely seemed to be strongly in favour of an active Cultural Revolution, both with and in the army. Its acting head was actually meeting with Rebel elements in the high command. The Chinese learned from their papers on August 24th that 'under the leadership of the general staff Party committee

⁴¹ *Red Flag*, no. 13, August 17, 1967. See *Peking Review*, no. 34, August 18, 1967.

⁴² *PLA Daily*, August 16, 1967, editorial on the 1959 resolution. See New China News Agency (English language series), no. 081613, 1967.

⁴³ See above, Chapter 8.

formed around Yang Ch'eng-wu,' proletarian rebels in the offices of the general staff were acting in the spirit of 'beating the dog in the water.'⁴⁴

Very different was the mood of the Centre, for whom the reference to P'eng Te-huai probably meant that soldiers who put the army before the Party would have to be relieved of their duties. The first victim was Hsiao Hua, who had advocated a straightforward, strong army, though perhaps rather a high-handed one. He was the first to disappear of the medium ranking officers who seemed destined to succeed the original marshals. Yang Ch'eng-wu followed him six months later, but he may have been destroyed by ambition, while Hsiao Hua was the victim of his belief that soldiers were a race apart and the army should stand alone.

From this point onwards Lin Piao gave the impression that he was no longer trying to protect his subordinates. In this case, when his aim was to return to the mass line, he used the stratagem of 'destroying a position on the right when under pressure from the left.' By dismissing Hsiao Hua he decapitated the Cultural Revolution Group in the army, which was then completely reorganized, and Lin Piao's wife, Yeh Ch'ün, was given a place on it.⁴⁵ In order to reassert control of the air force, its commander-in-chief took his place beside them. The air force had been a source of worry ever since its political commissar, Yü Li-chin, had been involved at Wuhan in the same incident as Wang Li. He shared the latter's views, and had demanded a purge of 'the small handful in the army.'

It remained to declare categorically that this misleading slogan should be repudiated for, as we have seen, the criticism of P'eng Te-huai had not succeeded in doing this. Chou En-lai and Chiang Ch'ing declared in September that

⁴⁴ 'Establish with the greatest energy the absolute authority of Chairman Mao and Mao Tse-tung's Thought,' published in the *People's Daily* and *Kwangming Daily* on August 24, 1967.

⁴⁵ Posters in Peking, September 9th. The army's new cultural revolution group consisted of Wu Fa-hsien, the air force chief of staff; Ch'iu Hui-tso, director of the general logistic department; Chang Hsiu-ch'uan, the director of the political department of the naval headquarters; and Yeh Ch'ün.

the propaganda demanding that the 'small handful in the army be thrown out' was 'a mistake.'⁴⁶

But how could the plans of the general staff, who wanted to make the army 'beat the dog in the water,' be thwarted? One effort was the attempt to make self-criticisms into a ritual bringing officers and men closer together. Classes in the study of the Thought of Mao Tse-tung were held at all levels in the army. Papers that reflected the wishes of the Centre explained that the classes should be organized 'with the participation of the servicemen'⁴⁷—i.e., the rank and file. After these meetings, which ended with criticism and self-criticism, it became hard for the partisans of purge to arrest men who had publicly admitted the error of their ways.

Under Lo Jui-ch'ing the army had discontinued the system by which it was possible for men to talk to their officers in the Party committees. These committees were proletarianized. Company cells and regimental committees received the soldiers in their study meetings.⁴⁸ It must be remembered that the Party committees in the army had not been criticized. Their members who took places on revolutionary committees fell into the error of confusing leadership (i.e., with the people) with command (for the people). The return of soldiers to the Party organizations

⁴⁶ Chiang Ch'ing was given the job of being the first to criticize this slogan and the demand for an army purge. This was because she had been the first to demand the right for the revolutionaries to use arms in self-defence in her speech of July 20th (reported, but without attribution, by *Wenhui Pao* on July 23rd). The dangers of this slogan had been demonstrated by the events of August in the provinces. Now she withdrew this right, bringing back the old rule that persuasion must be the weapon in defence as in attack. She did this in her September 5th speech to representatives from Anhwei, in which she also condemned the theory that there was a 'small handful' in the army. This speech was thought important enough for tapes of it to be sent to revolutionaries all over the country. Chou En-lai also told Red Guards of the Peking 'Red Congress' that after July 20th mistakes had been made in the propaganda over the 'small handful in the army.'

⁴⁷ *PLA Daily* editorial, December 12, 1967; New China News Agency (French language series), no. 121209, 1967.

⁴⁸ *People's Daily*, December 12, 1967.

revived the simple ideal of the Party's social and political role in the country that was incompatible with any rivalry for power.

Although this policy was based on a desire for unity, it was not applied flexibly. It was carried out very strictly towards military cadres, and the projects of the extremists, whose power extended as far as the general staff, did not leave much room for freedom of action. If some dismissals were to be a substitute for a purge, they had to be real ones. The Centre approved the dismissal of military commanders in Peking, Wuhan, Lanchow, Chengtu and Huhehot. A conference of delegates from seventeen military regions was held in Peking in the second half of September. At the cost of a certain amount of criticism and self-criticism, the conference strengthened the unity of the People's Liberation Army and confirmed its support for Mao Tse-tung.

The revolutionary committees in the balance

After the first revolutionary committees had emerged in a somewhat brief burst of enthusiasm at the beginning of the year, only one more had come into being—for Chinghai—by August.⁴⁹ Two others appeared belatedly, one in Inner Mongolia and the other in Tientsin,⁵⁰ but these were not very significant achievements. The movement to which the Centre attached such importance was stagnant, and therefore a matter of concern for the leaders and contention for the extremists.

According to some on the extreme left, the 'institution' was already corrupt. Discarding even the arguments which

⁴⁹ On August 12, 1967. Chinghai is a sparsely populated, mountainous province on the borders of Tibet and Sinkiang, crossed by key lines of communication. The founding of its revolutionary committee was regarded not as a revolutionary event but the renaming of an organization intended to ensure the control of a strategic province.

⁵⁰ Inner Mongolia, November 1, 1967; Tientsin, December 6, 1967.

had led others to polycentrism, certain of these maintained that the revolutionary committees had already fallen into the hands of 'bourgeois usurpers.'⁵¹ Chiang Ch'ing referred to this school of thought in her famous speech of September 5th to the Anhwei delegates.⁵² Malcontents, she said, were even demanding the reorganization of all the revolutionary committees that had been approved by the Centre.

One of the reasons why so little progress was being made in setting up committees was probably because the masses, at one time passionately involved in politics, were now to some extent standing aloof. The man in the street was becoming disillusioned with the embittered quarrels between revolutionary groups (nearly always the same ones), the decay of the 'Peking congresses,' and the violent excesses in almost all parts of the country during the summer. Revolutionary organizations were not attracting new members, and although they were much spoken of, they were not sufficiently representative of the masses to give the revolutionary committees any balanced support.

Hsieh Fu-chih drew up a table of revolutionary workers' organizations of Peking in a speech on October 16th. He told members of the 'Workers' Congress' that they should have won the support of a tenth of the capital's 1,100,000 workers. The delegates replied that they represented 17,000 of them. He pointed out that in the railways and the metal and textile industries two rival preparatory groups were trying to set up different congresses. Above all, he condemned 'underground or semi-clandestine organizations' that cut across the boundaries of occupations or companies . . . 'You cannot possibly give secret support to such things. What about organizations like the one in

⁵¹ According to a document published by the Hunan ultra-leftist organization *Shengwu Lien*, even a reformed Party emerging from a conference would inevitably have been 'a bourgeois reformist party in the service of the bourgeois usurpers of the revolutionary committees.' Quoted by John Gittings, 'Student Power in China,' *Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 27, 1968, p. 649.

⁵² See previous section.

Sinkiang whose boss calls himself "Hu the Battler" (Hu Luan-ch'uang)? Can organizations with such people in them be Marxists?'⁵³

However, the instructions that Mao Tse-tung had given after his journey to Central and Eastern China were now beginning to be distributed. They were strict, and stated more or less that 'We have a very simple rule—whenever attacks his neighbour will have to face the consequences.'⁵⁴ They were also optimistic, and the Chairman's words, as always, had a magical power to calm tempers and inspire confidence. A few brawls should not be taken seriously. Even if there were fights going on, there were also things happening backstage, and 'the people backstage have something to say. The disorder is only temporary, and it can be turned into something good. Individuals have to be allowed the right of free speech: the heavens will not fall in if people are allowed to speak. Sometimes it is no bad thing to let things rip.'

These instructions hinted at the role the people would have to play, after the crisis of polycentrism, in putting the final touches to the revolution. 'All aspects of the movement must be transformed gradually. . . . with special attention to the transformation from quantity to quality.' Once the predominance of a single centre—the one of Mao and his associates—over political polycentrism was assured, the masses must be allowed the initiative in reform, criticism and management.

At the time a new movement to give the workers the foremost role among the people was being encouraged, a movement that culminated in the recognition of the leading role of the working class in August 1968. This helped to confirm that, once decision-making was restored to the Party, leadership (i.e., criticism and management) would

⁵³ Hsieh Fu-chih's speech of October 16, 1967, published in *Peiching Kungjen*, October 20, 1967.

⁵⁴ Point 1 of 'Mao Tse-tung's Latest Instructions' as published in the Red Guard paper *Harbin Thunder*, November 15, 1967. It was also here that the Chairman expressed his view that there were no serious conflicts of interest within the working class (Point 6). See Chapter 6 above.

be returned to the masses. What was new about this was that the masses were now to be led by the workers. This was the position that the Kweichow revolutionary committee had defended. Although Kweichow was a backward province, it was perhaps not surprising that it should have led the way in this. At all events, in the October 16th speech quoted above, Hsieh Fu-chih urged his audience to 'follow the example of Kweiyang and the Thirty-seven Instructions of Tientsin.'

A campaign was mounted to overcome the inhibitions of the masses and persuade them to stop withholding their support from the forces that were going to impose their hitherto contested authority. The Centre made it known, in a resolution of October 17th, that all organizations which overstepped companies and occupations would be suppressed; it wanted to bring the revolutionary organizations back to the framework of the 'units'—factories, offices, and people's communes.⁵⁵

The whole story of the Cultural Revolution in Kweichow was one of a team of new cadres who had been transferred to the province after the 1965 purge, and of the leadership of the working class.

Soldiers seconded on Cultural Revolution duties were to bring together workers and peasants, and to get them to hold meetings and study sessions to combat sectarian tendencies. Although this was a new task for them, it was easier than what had been demanded of them when the order was to 'support the left.' Now the army was no longer required to choose between the factions: it simply had to get everybody together in every civilian place of work, and prevent dangerous contacts being made. This was how 'alliances' were to be formed. The soldiers sounded the call to arms, and the veteran cadres responded.

Everything could have worked out well if the army had not still been shaken by disturbances. It had been obliged

⁵⁵ This resolution, quoted in Chapter 8 above, also covered cadre policy and the Cultural Revolution in the countryside. See Takeuchi Minoru, 'Shūonrai no Yakuwari,' *Asahi Jyānaru*, vol. 9, no. 52, December 17, 1967.

to learn from its mistakes, and called Yang Ch'eng-wu to account for encouraging the spirit of revenge, agreeing to arm the militia, and taking the leadership of the Rebels in the general staff who wanted an army purge.⁵⁶ Yang Ch'eng-wu went through the motions of accepting this criticism, but wrote a somewhat aggressive article for the *PLA Daily*⁵⁷ in favour of the personality cult. This appeared in the same issue as the despatch of August 24th reporting his flamboyant action.⁵⁸ He was getting too big for his boots. Curiously enough, another article, unsigned, appeared in the same issue of the *PLA Daily* as an indirect reply to him. This said that absolute obedience was precisely the same exceptionable principle that 'China's Khrushchev' had been blamed for advocating, and that the slogan of 'unity' was not reason enough to have the spirit of criticism suppressed. How is one to account for the two articles appearing in the same paper, when one of them was by the chief of staff himself?

The general staff was not to regard itself either as oracle or arbiter. It was the army itself which had not yet sufficiently understood.

The *People's Daily* established this point conclusively in a leader on November 9th. It was necessary 'really to increase the army's political consciousness' and 'to eradicate the influence of all kinds of non-proletarian ideology in the army, whether from the Right or from the Left.'⁵⁹

The main concern of the authorities was to bring about the emergence of revolutionary committees. Although there was as yet little visible progress, there was already a power structure in the preparatory groups and military

⁵⁶ 'Thoroughly establish the absolute authority of our great Supreme Commander Chairman Mao, and of his Thought'—see *Peking Review*, no. 46, November 10, 1967, pp. 17–24.

⁵⁷ See previous section.

⁵⁸ On 'The Spell of the Golden Circle'—an allusion to the 'monkey pilgrim'—see New China News Agency release for November 4, 1967.

⁵⁹ 'Make a good job of education on the current situation.' The text itself makes it clear that it is education within the army that is being referred to. See *Peking Review*, no. 47, November 17, 1967, pp. 7–8.

control committees, a structure almost entirely within the sphere of influence of the army, which had provided many of its leaders and controlled its communications. The army's behaviour in the revolutionary committees was being watched, and this was being done by the army itself, according to the Chinese method. The masses within the army, non-commissioned officers and men, who had been made to mix with their officers in study courses, could keep a check on the officers' loyalty to the revolution. At a conference of the Peking garrison troops, the deputy local commander insisted that units should 'conscientiously study the conditions in which the troops carry out Party directives.'⁶⁰

It seems likely that the Party committees in the army were strengthened by the appointment of a representative of the ordinary soldiers. This was an early hint of the way the Party congress was to develop. First of all preparations were made to ensure that all the grass-roots organizations sent delegates with Maoist ideas to the congress. As we have seen above, the formula adopted for rural collectives was to purge the committees at *hsien* level. In the army, however, there was no purge; instead, committees were enlarged by co-opting proletarian revolutionaries with the elected members.⁶¹ This was only a temporary arrangement, but it helped to ensure the loyalty of the troops when some of their leaders were being tempted to play politics.

The fifth round

The Centre had undertaken to unite with the revolutionaries by means of the 'alliance,' and to bring the army back to its role of 'serving the people.' It was now preparing to face a colossal task: restoring Party control over

⁶⁰ Peking newspapers, January 17, 1968.

⁶¹ It was noteworthy that when Mao Tse-tung and Lin Piao received the participants in study classes for land and air forces of the Peking region on November 13, 1967, the Air Force Committee of the Party was present in full, enlarged by representatives of the revolutionary masses.

the revolutionary united front and the army. This problem had to be solved if the gains of the Cultural Revolution were to be conserved.

However, there were some circumstances that made this less difficult. To begin with, there was no dispute at all over the doctrine itself, for it was the Thought of Mao Tse-tung. Nor were there any economic interests that had banded together to bring political pressure. Finally—and the war on China's borders made this important—agreement had already been reached that the needs of defence in depth, Vietnamese style, took priority over the needs of economic development.

The tactics that the revolutionary leaders had been using since September were getting results. Each of the two forces that might have lured the Cultural Revolution under its own control, the extreme left and the army, had been cut in half. The extreme left had been decapitated. The mutilated Central Cultural Revolution Group clung more closely to the Centre than ever, so that the rank and file of the extreme left found no more protection from them. As for the army, it had not suffered drastic surgery, but the Centre had regrouped all the forces that were favourable to it in the units which it could influence. The study classes on the Thought of Mao Tse-tung for officers and men together were to be organized throughout the army. This movement culminated in big conferences in at least seven of the military regions before May 1, 1968.⁶²

This activity, which we may call lateral, was complemented by a vertical approach in the different branches of the PLA, and all through the winter gatherings of activists in the study of the Thought of Mao Tse-tung were held, for the air force, the navy, the artillery, the engineers, and all command organs.⁶³ Finally the revolu-

⁶² Chinghai, October–November 1967; Shantung, late 1967; Heilungkiang, December 1967 and January 1968; Kwangtung, March 1968; all the eastern provinces, April 1968 (a big rally in Nanking).

⁶³ Logistic services, some of the artillery, navy, and air force were in the first series; the rest of the artillery, railway

tionaries in the general staff, who had made themselves a little too prominent with Yang Ch'eng-wu on August 23rd, had to undergo a particularly intensive series of conferences.⁶⁴

Up till then the army, as an active and uncriticized body undertaking missions on behalf of the Cultural Revolution, had been supported by the Centre in almost everything it did. From its very formation it had been devoted to the Party, but now the Party was discredited, and those who were supposed to replace it, the Red Guards and Rebels, were unable to mend their own quarrels. It was too much to expect that, in the provinces far from Peking where by force of circumstances the army was given a great deal of authority, it should put itself at the service of revolutionary groups unable to agree among themselves. The disgruntled revolutionaries accused it of looking after its own interests alone, and the leaders at the Centre recognized that this charge was not without foundation.

This was the time when the second group of revolutionary committees were formed. For almost a year most of the country had been waiting for revolutionary committees that would be better united than the first ones. Steps had to be taken to ensure that the new ones that were about to emerge should not be permanently one-sided under the influence of the army.

Yang Ch'eng-wu was dismissed between March 24 and 27, 1968. All sorts of accusations were made against the acting chief of the general staff after his overthrow. He was accused in particular of having been active behind the scenes when Wang Li and Kuan Feng, the leaders of the extreme left, were manoeuvring, and of having col-

corps, engineers, signals, chemical warfare, the PLA Political Commissars Institute and the Higher National Defence Institute were in a second series that ended on March 7, 1968.

⁶⁴ In February 1968 the proletarian revolutionaries of the staff departments attended their third conference since August of the previous year. This was a 'Party-building' conference and it lasted for over a month.

laborated with Ch'i Pen-yü.⁶⁵ He was, in brief, accused of being involved in a conspiracy with them. These accusations were given added weight by the blunder Yang had made in late August which, like their other actions, threatened to compromise the Centre. But at the time of his fall there were two criticisms that outweighed all the others: first, that he had tried to build up for himself a personal authority greater than Mao Tse-tung's, and, second, that he supported 'fragmentation.' Both charges were of course interrelated.

It is not unlikely that there may have been a clique in the army who had originally wanted a purge, and had resorted to conspiracy when the peaceful tactic of study classes was adopted instead. An article in the *People's Daily* on March 21st made clear that there were two conflicting views on the army's role in the revolution: one wanted criticism pure and simple, and the other wanted to combine criticism with attention to the army's other duties. Only the latter view was acceptable. From this it may be assumed that some of the soldiers maintained that the local commanders should be not subordinate to the revolutionary committees, but should give them orders and even criticize them.

The Centre's leaders lost no time in telling the masses why Yang Ch'eng-wu and other military leaders had been dismissed. As Ch'en Po-ta put it, this was the fifth trial of strength for the Cultural Revolution.⁶⁶ It was sparked off by a local problem over the Peking committee.

⁶⁵ 'The fifth stage of our Cultural Revolution was the unmasking of the counter-revolutionaries Yang Ch'eng-wu, Yü Li-chin, and Fu Ch'ung-pi, who were the protectors behind the scenes of Wang Li, Kuan Feng, and Ch'i Pen-yü,' said Ch'en Po-ta on March 27th. Chiang Ch'ing said, 'In November 1967 I criticized Ch'i Pen-yü without mentioning him by name. . . . He was collaborating with Yang Ch'eng-wu.' See *Tungfanghung* of the Geological Institute, March 29, 1968.

⁶⁶ Ch'en Po-ta mentioned five attacks; the first against P'eng Chen, Lo Jui-ch'ing, and Lu Ting-yi; the second against Liu Shao-ch'i, Teng Hsiao-p'ing, and Tao Chu; the third against Tan Chen-lin; the fourth against Kuan Feng, Wang Li, and Ch'i Pen-yü; and the fifth against Yang Ch'eng-wu, Yü Li-chin, and Fu Ch'ung-pi. See *Tungfanghung*, March 28, 1968.

The Peking revolutionary committee was already an anachronism. The organizations represented on it dated from before the period of the 'grand alliance,' and some of them had not agreed to the formation of alliances with their rivals, even within the Units from which they had come. They also participated in the criticisms of the army being made by Rebels in the provinces. Those who had previously wanted a purge in the army naturally sympathized with the radical organizations.

Fu Ch'ung-pi, commander of the Peking garrison, deputy chairman of the municipal revolutionary committee, and a member of the Centre's Cultural Revolution Group, took sides with those of the Rebels who were unresponsive to the Centre's doctrine, and was accused of working secretly against it. There were a number of incidents,⁶⁷ and the upshot was that the leading group penalized Fu Ch'ung-pi together with Yang Ch'eng-wu and the air force commissar, Yü Li-chin, who had been with Wang Li in Wuhan.

As one purge followed another, it became harder than ever to keep together a group of people at the top to represent the Centre. The three last men to fall had, until the beginning of March, been present with Mao Tse-tung and his staff on the ceremonial occasions that served to show the country who were its real rulers. They were soon replaced by the former marshals of the Military Commission.⁶⁸ These latter were doubtless entitled to this position on the strength of their rank, but this switch was still

⁶⁷ Fu Ch'ung-pi had intercepted a letter to the Centre from Red Guard organizations in the universities, whose conflicts were threatening the existence of the Peking revolutionary committee, and had invaded the Central Committee's Cultural Revolution Group with lorries that were probably intended to take their records.

⁶⁸ They were present at the closing session of a conference of activists in the study of the Thought of Mao Tse-tung in the leading organs of the army on March 7th, the seventh of the sort since January 28th. The Central leadership now appeared to consist of Mao Tse-tung, Lin Piao, Chou En-lai, Ch'en Po-ta, K'ang Sheng, Chiang Ch'ing, Yao Wen-yuan, Li Fu-ch'un, and the five former marshals Yeh Chien-ying, Hsü Hsiang-ch'ien, Nieh Jung-chen, Liu Po-ch'eng, and Ch'en Yi.

significant politically. Instead of the Young Turks, veteran soldiers, the pillars of Party rule for over twenty years, were making a come-back. It was naturally thought that they were there to protect the very provincial regimes that the committed Rebels had accused of making military men into the new 'authorities.' Back in 1967 the Cultural Revolution would have been able to block the possibility of rigid and conservative local regimes.

However it seemed there was a need to rearrange the relationships between the revolutionary committees and the army. The army would always be competent to take control in times of crisis, but in normal times the soldiers seconded on Cultural Revolution duties would have to take the orders of the revolutionary committees of appropriate levels.⁶⁹

The supporters of Yang Ch'eng-wu did not give in without causing some trouble. There were cases, notably in Anhwei and Nanking, when soldiers calling themselves 'models in the support of the left' wanted to impose their wishes in one way or the other on the rest of the army.⁷⁰ The Centre was worried, and for good reason, about the possible effects of the humiliation of the army on some revolutionaries who had not been well disposed toward it.⁷¹ The best solution seemed to be to rid it of whatever had caused criticism. Thus the purge, which had previously been condemned in principle, now came about. A certain Ninth Company was given as an example, and it was made clear that it carried out 'small scale, limited operations for the regulation of attitudes.'⁷²

Naturally, this purge was not aimed at the targets that Yang Ch'eng-wu would have chosen. The political power asserted its control over the army. The political leaders

⁶⁹ See the article on military support for revolutionary committees in Kweichow in the *People's Daily*, April 4, 1968.

⁷⁰ See *China News Analysis*, no. 710, May 31, 1968, pp. 6-7; this may also have happened in Kunming and Nanning.

⁷¹ The *Peking Daily* published a threatening editorial attacking all who were trying to divide the army, or turn the revolutionaries against it, in a special issue on the evening of April 22, 1968.

⁷² See New China News Agency release for May 12, 1968.

had been explaining for some time that soldiers sent to help the left would have to be rotated to prevent their new governmental powers from going to their heads. Had not some of them insisted on establishing a new order rather than awakening the masses?⁷³ What was really being done was to remove the final traces of ideas that had raised the spectre of polycentrism.

With the Centre restoring its authority over the army, and the army doing its utmost to earn its privileges, useful progress was being made towards re-establishing order in ideologically classic style. The last extremists turned their wrath on the army, which they now saw as an instrument of discipline. But they were no longer able to find allies for a new rebellion. There was a report that a group of students dressed in mourning were present at the inauguration of the Kiangsi revolutionary committee.

⁷³ On February 14th the Central press explained that study classes in the army should help to rotate the troops helping the left, because some of them with duties in the provisional institutions were forgetting to serve and educate the people, preferring to issue orders.

10. The Victory of Moderation

Mao Tse-tung was now running the Cultural Revolution with a much smaller staff. The group that gave guidance to revolutionaries throughout the country consisted only of a few of his companions. They made use of the press, radio, and the sensitive antennae of the Central Committee's Cultural Revolution Group. Brief talks by some of the leaders, reproduced in the few Red Guard journals that still survived, became the sources of inspiration. A few words or an observation by Mao Tse-tung were published as the 'latest instructions' for the revolution. By referring to a few principles he could, through reversing an urgent order or deflecting the pressure from the revolutionary masses, change a situation. The Central press then took up the theme, developing it at length and illustrating it with models culled from across the country, and from history, in order to show how it could be applied in practice. In the situation these models became very important.

The Centre had, by means of the revolutionary media and the press, called forth political action against divergent tendencies, and built up defences for the Cultural Revolution. Through these means the Centre was setting the building of socialism in China under way once more.

However, in keeping control over so big a country, this tiny staff was not alone in facing the revolutionaries. The Centre had been obliged to commit powerful machinery