

# **CRITIQUE OF MAOIST REASON**

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# Introduction

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In the face of critical passivity and dry formalism we must uphold our collective capacity to think thought. The multiple articulations of bourgeois reason demand that we accept the current state of affairs as natural, reducing critical thinking to that which functions within the boundaries drawn by its order. Even when we break from the diktat of this reason to pursue revolutionary projects, it is difficult to break from the way this ideological hegemony has trained us to think from the moment we were born. Since we are still more-or-less immersed in capitalist culture—from our jobs to the media we consume—the training persists.<sup>1</sup> Hence, while we might supersede the boundaries drawn by bourgeois reason, it remains a constant struggle to escape its imaginary. The simplicity encouraged by bourgeois reasoning—formulaic repetition, a refusal to think beneath the appearance of things—thus finds its way into the reasoning of those who believe they have slipped its grasp. We must always be vigilant in the renewal of our thinking, struggling against the patterns of thought encouraged by bourgeois reason, so to keep our counter-reasoning sharp. Such vigilance is doubly required for the most revolutionary expression of such reasoning to date: Maoist reason. To think Marxism as Marxism now is to also think Maoism.

Lest the title of this book is misunderstood let us begin with a definition of the concept *critique*. Critique is not synonymous with criticism although it can contain multiple criticisms. I am certain there will be those who read this title and misinterpret/misrepresent it as being the kind of negative criticism that implies “rejection” of its object of investigation. That is, the “critique of Maoist reason” will be dishonestly read as a rejection of Maoism, a critical denunciation of this theoretical terrain. Some readers might wonder, then, why I would risk provoking this misapprehension rather than choosing another name. But such a provocation is intentional: as we shall see it is precisely this

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<sup>1</sup> Outside of the imperialist metropolises this training is less hegemonic, which is one reason why revolutionary movements are able to generate a strong counter-hegemony. Even still, due to the export of imperialist cultural production, capitalist ideology saturates the globe.

kind of failure in thought—dogmatic denunciation, semantic formalism, dishonest representation—that this project aims to chart, drawing important demarcations.

Neither pejorative criticism let alone outright rejection, a *critique* is the rigorous examination of its object of investigation. Critical analysis, evaluation, assessment, engagement. For example, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* was an attempt to thoroughly analyze the meaning of reason, an elevation of a curious type of Enlightenment “pure reason” over other claims to reason. Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason* was not a rejection of dialectics but an attempt to rigorously analyze what dialectics was (according to Sartre, to be clear) in opposition to other definitions of dialectical reason. Mbembe's *Critique of Black Reason*, far from a rejection of Black thought, was intended to analyze its vicissitudes and think a unified thought.

Regardless of what we might think of the efficacy of the above projects the meaning of “critique” is clear. Naming my own project a *Critique of Maoist Reason*, then, is somewhat tongue-and-cheek: I am placing myself within this philosophical convention while also being critical of it, quite aware that what I intend to accomplish in this book is neither as ambitious nor misplaced as the corpus of philosophical treatises that name themselves according to this convention.

In many ways my work to date is more accurately a “critique of Maoist Reason” than this book. Indeed, both *Continuity and Rupture* and *Demarcation and Demystification* form a much more rigorous approach to this problematic. Everything I have written to date, including my blog and all published essays, has been concerned with a philosophical critique of Maoism in general in the interest of providing clarity to Maoist reason. In some ways my right to proclaim the “critique” of this theoretical terrain has passed since *Continuity and Rupture* was precisely this project, particularly as it stood in relation to the “prolegomena” of *The Communist Necessity*.

There is a reason, however, that I have chosen to mobilize the name of “critique” now. In the time accrued since the writing and publishing of *Continuity and Rupture* Maoist reason has produced a

variety of expressions that require philosophical intervention. In that time Ajith, one of our clearest contemporary thinkers, was arrested and thus caused our philosophical reasoning to suffer further. But who is this *we* and *our*? On the surface this “we” is the unity of myself and those who are reading this text, together thinking the vicissitudes of thought as they are encountered. More substantially, though, this “we” is the collective subject of Maoist reason who are already convinced that Maoism is the most scientific development of Marxism to date and who, together, are part of the general Maoist International Communist Movement. *We Maoists*: this text is intended to be for those of us who already accept the basic claims about the necessity of Maoism and are engaged in thinking and practicing this necessity. All descriptions and prescriptions of this politics concern the *we who are Maoists*. We are those who militantly struggle for Maoist reason and demand that it be thought as *the* primary thought of revolutionary science.

One significant impediment in developing such a critique, however, is the problem of the polemic. Having inherited a tradition of polemical exchanges that makes up the backbone of many of the great Marxist texts, contemporary Marxist radicals—especially Maoists—have become too enamoured by the form of this genre to understand the importance of the content the great polemical classics always rhetorically contained. Within the Maoist milieu the rhetorical shell of this genre has been used as a substitute for thinking our politics when differences in line have manifested. Such a problem is inherited from the New Communist Movement, where multiple ML grouplets sought to over-inflate their importance through innumerable articles and tracts that mimicked the rhetoric and tone of Lenin. While there were important differences and lines of demarcation that needed to be drawn in that period (as there are in every period) often the over reliance on aping the style of the great texts, and the failure to critically engage, turned non-antagonistic contradictions antagonistic. Hence, some groups from that period—such as the Sojourner Truth Organization<sup>2</sup>—that were frustrated by the fact that the super-proliferation of

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<sup>2</sup> The Sojourner Truth Organization (STO) was a small but significant grouping of

polemical exchanges were creating more division than unity, and often over hair-splitting differences, felt that the genre of the polemic should be abandoned.

Clearly I do not think the genre of the polemic should be abandoned; after all, I have written in this genre. Nor do I think that demarcations should not be drawn and defended, because this is what I have spent years doing and at what this intervention is also aimed. But I do feel that an overreliance on this genre's form functions to undermine what its paradigm examples sought to underscore: the power of critique. When we look at the earliest examples of prolonged Marxist polemics—Marx's *The Poverty of Philosophy* and Engels' *Anti-Duhring*—we are struck by the fact that these texts were also devoted to thoroughly understanding the line they were rhetorically demolishing and, through the power of critique, creatively developing theory. The rhetorical characteristics of the genre served the rigorous thinking of thought.

Unfortunately, the commonplace polemic of today is a dismal echo of the great polemical works of the past. Within the world of Maoist reason we find polemics that, devoted to the style of the past, are designed mainly to escape critique.<sup>3</sup> For those Maoist groups that function within the imperialist metropolises and who are largely younger, this situation is complicated by the conditioning of social media. The rhetorical form of the polemic when it appears on blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and other similar platforms serves as a way to avoid the content

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the US New Communist Movement. Like the RU/RCP-USA they came out of the Revolutionary Youth Movement break from the Students for a Democratic Society that did not follow the Guevarist orientation of the Weather Underground. Originally based in Chicago, they made some important interventions in that period, particularly their interventions on class and race and the question of homosexuality, the latter of which constituted one of the several but important rejections of the homophobic line, best exemplified by the RU/RCP-USA at the time, that gay comrades were ciphers of capitalist petty-bourgeois degeneracy. One of their notable members was Noel Ignatiev who went on to become an important academic in critical race theory.

<sup>3</sup> The Brazilian Maoists' response to the Afghan Maoists' criticism of their May Day statement is a perfect example of how the style of polemic aids in a refusal of thought. In order to preserve their position against critique the Brazilians utilized rhetoric to misrepresent the politics of the Afghans, demonstrating that they were completely misinformed about the controversies in the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement or that they were intentionally misrepresenting these controversies.



of critique, isometric to the practice of “doubling down”, on a position against any and every rational argument that call this position into question. The conditioned need to respond quickly, to read lazily, or to reduce arguments to angry comment wars, results in the impoverishment of critical investigation. So much for the science of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism.

But Marxism-Leninism-Maoism *is* the current name the science of historical materialism bears. And if our reason as cadre is to be scientific then we must recapture the critical thought of critique, refuse to be absorbed by doctrinal thinking that rejects criticism by hiding behind rhetoric that obscures ignorance, and think the content of our reasoning as the third and contemporary stage of revolutionary science.



# Chapter 1

## The Route Charted to Date

When I wrote *Continuity and Rupture* I had three goals in mind: i) to argue why Maoism was logically the third stage of revolutionary science; ii) to clarify the general meaning of Maoism; iii) to clarify the role of philosophy in relation to revolutionary science, particularly its third stage, the practice of which I was using to elaborate all three goals. My aim was to rigorously elucidate the general boundaries of the terrain, contributing the first systematic philosophical intervention upon the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist theoretical developments generated by revolutionary practice.

In a context where former “Maoist” philosophers such as Alain Badiou and Jacques Rancière were becoming popular and using this popularity to speak authoritatively about their Maoist past, it needed to be demonstrated that Maoism-qua-Maoism had passed them by. That is, aside from some early germinal attempts (such as Badiou’s *Theory of the Subject*) their post-Maoism was grossly premature. Unlike the many philosophical engagements with the terrain of Marxism-Leninism that existed up to the point of their break from the trajectory of revolutionary science there was a decided lack of the same kind of engagement with Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. Perhaps the most significant reason for this lack of engagement on their part was, as I argued, that Maoism did not come into being *as Maoism* until the end of the 1980s. Hence, for the Badiou and Rancières of the world, revolutionary science had already run its course and, in their minds, received its final and most thorough philosophical clarification in the work of their teacher, Louis Althusser. Their experience of the political landscape post-1968 France was similar to what the proto-Maoist movements of the larger New Communist Movement would encounter: the limits of Marxism-Leninism, even the most anti-revisionist variants to date. Imagining that the most faithful form of anti-revisionist Marxism-Leninism was not enough, they abandoned what they felt was no longer a live theoretical

option.

There is no reason to speculate further into the thinking and practice that led such thinkers towards their current theoretical positions. The point, here, is that sustained and rigorous philosophical interventions in revolutionary science reached both their apex and nadir with the work of Louis Althusser around the time that anti-revisionist period collapsed. Since then, despite the eruption of Maoism proclaimed by the Communist Party of Peru in the 1980s and globalized by the Revolutionary International Movement in 1993, philosophical practice has lagged behind.

Through its multiple revolutionary movements—specifically the sequence of people’s wars waged in the Philippines, Turkey, Bangladesh, Peru, Nepal, India, and Manipur (of which only the Philippines, India, and Manipur are ongoing)—Maoism has generated a vital theoretical terrain. Philosophy, which is not the same as theory, has continued to lag behind. Although philosophy will always tail theory because of what it is,<sup>4</sup> the philosophical practice of contemporary Maoism is currently impoverished. To be clear, other Marxist tendencies are also philosophically impoverished, all of them relying on past philosophical interventions or eclectic and useless philosophical investigations, and so Maoism is no worse off than other Marxisms on the philosophical front. But since Maoism has been generating a more vital expression of theory through praxis, and because it is the contemporary heir of revolutionary science, it demands and requires superior and rigorous philosophy.

To be clear, dormant and sterile expressions of Marxist philosophy have been generated by non-Maoist fields of theory. Whether they were the result of autonomism, rebel Trotskyisms, pre-Lenin Marxian orthodoxy, or a patchwork of eclectic appreciations of Marxism matters very little. These are philosophical articulations of a defanged and thus meaningless Marxism. What should matter for the philosopher who calls themselves Marxist is a theory that can satisfy the claims of Marxism, i.e. a theory about making revolution. As I argued in *Con-*

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<sup>4</sup> See my arguments about the meaning of philosophy in *Demarcation and Demystification*.

*tinuity and Rupture* this theory is Maoism. The main reason for this philosophical impoverishment is that Maoism is a theory immersed in making revolution and thus, because of this focus, has not had the time or space to generate the kind of philosophical intervention that these other expressions, who lack the vital theory born from revolutionary practice, can masquerade.

This is not to say that there haven't been significant philosophical interventions in the terrain of Maoism; rather, these interventions have been incomplete. Anuradha Ghandy's and Hisila Yami's work on proletarian feminism is one such intervention. The Communist (Maoist) Party of Afghanistan's intervention against Avakianism is another. Ajith's work, however, is probably the most significant. But Ghandy died in the course of struggle, Yami ended up following the rightist line in Nepal that annihilated the gains of its people's war, and Ajith was arrested. We lack a thorough and rigorous philosophical critique of our thought, mainly because those best posed to provide these interventions are subjected to violent state interference.

In order to thoroughly think our thought, though, we must be attentive to the two primary modes of thinking that admit revisionism and thus function to short-circuit Maoist reason: eclecticism and dogmatism.

### **Dogmatism and Eclecticism**

It is wrong to think of dogmatism and eclecticism as two extremes on a continuum. At first glance they do seem to be simple opposites or even a formal contradiction. Dogmatism, characterized by formulaic and religious thinking, is by definition opposed to creative and fresh thinking insofar as it is opposed to anything that strays from doctrinaire analysis. Eclecticism, defined by an unbounded and rigorous thinking where one constantly searches for new and overly creative conceptions (the mixing and matching of concepts without scientific rigour), thus appears to be synonymous with "non-dogmatism". We need to be careful in conceptualizing the relationship of these modes of thinking in such a manner.

Rather, we should think of these two modes of thought as a unity of opposites that, because of their moments of torsion and/or tension, that manifest as: i) opposite extremes, based on their formal definition discussed above; ii) isometric thought patterns, where they mimic each other; iii) intersecting trajectories that overlap. In *Continuity and Rupture* I characterized dogmatism and eclecticism as “characteristic symptoms of the contradiction between revisionism and anti-revisionism.” Thinking of their dialectical relationship I wrote:

In some ways it is now possible to speak of dogmato-eclecticism and eclectic-dogmatism: there will be those who treat their eclecticism as an unquestioned fact, believing without scientific proof that incoherence is a virtue; there will be those who will incoherently mix-and-match every orthodoxy.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, eclecticists can sometimes be dogmatically committed to their patchwork theoretical approach, refusing to consider any argument to the contrary. Similarly, those committed to a dogmatic version of Marxism-Leninism have been known to eclectically incorporate radical feminism, some forms of identity politics, and other non-Marxist conceptions into an orthodoxy of phrase-mongering that refuses to rigorously think through these disparate elements of thought.

On the level of formal appearance, of course, it does appear as if these two modes of thought function as distinct extremes. And on this level, it is correct to presume this is the case. Those defined primarily by a dogmatic attitude will treat all creative interventions as eclectic deviations; those defined primarily by an eclectic attitude will treat all militants faithful to a science as guilty of dogmatism.

Dogmatism as a distinct mode of thinking within Marxist reason possesses three key characteristics. There is what Mao called “book worship”, the habit of treating classic theoretical texts and theoreticians as sacrosanct and beyond criticism: the texts and the thinkers become akin

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<sup>5</sup> J. Moufawad-Paul, *Continuity and Rupture* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2016), 172.

to sacred doctrine and sainted interlocutors—Marx or Engels cannot be wrong, for example, and to even speak their limitations (i.e. their unavoidable Eurocentrism) is treated as heretical. Promoting the idea of a pure Marxism, thus conceptualizing theoretical deviation in terms of religious apostasy, is another characteristic. A third characteristic is the fear of thinking beyond ascetic rigidity, the worry that reading other texts (either by Marxists of other traditions or by non-Marxists) will corrupt cadre. While it is the case that all of these characteristics can be defended as necessary, deemed “scientific” instead of “dogmatic” by the apostle, we know that they are not properly Marxist since the greatest transformative moments in the history of revolutionary science have also been defined by breaking from these dogmatic habits. Those individuals and groups that attempted to hold the science back appealed to book worship, theoretical purity, and rigid thinking (i.e. Enver Hoxha’s criticism of the Cultural Revolution is a classic example of this dogmato-revisionism<sup>6</sup>). While it is indeed the case that some militants dedicated to transformative moments demonstrated similar characteristics in their defence of these ruptures (i.e. finding precedence in Marx and Engels, the appropriate quotes, etc.) this only demonstrates that dogmatism is such a powerful mode of thinking that it forces even its enemies to speak according to its patterns to justify themselves. The state of the science is such that dogmatism is compelling: forced to defend its legitimacy against the hostility of the bourgeois order and all of those ideologies that would deny its scientific status, historical materialism

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<sup>6</sup> Hoxha wrote that “[t]he course of events showed that the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was neither a revolution, nor great, nor cultural, and in particular, not in the least proletarian. It was a palace putsch on an all-China scale for the liquidation of a handful of reactionaries who had seized power. [...] Of course, this Cultural Revolution was a hoax. It liquidated both the Communist Party of China, and the mass organizations, and plunged China into new chaos.” In J. Werner’s classic *Beat Back the Dogmata-Revisionist Attack on Mao Tsetung Thought* ([www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-5/rcp-hoxha/index.htm](http://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-5/rcp-hoxha/index.htm)) Hoxha’s position is analyzed as “dogmato-revisionist”. That is, since it appeals to such a doctrinaire understanding of what the dictatorship of the proletariat should look like—that the party headquarters should never be bombed because the party and the revolution are one—it falls into a dogmatic understanding of Marxism-Leninism that is revisionist because it does not understand how historical materialism must develop according to material circumstances, and when it doesn’t revisionism (i.e. the revisionist line in the party) is allowed to persist.

cannot help but generate rigidly dedicated adherents.<sup>7</sup> Rigid adherents either break, rejecting their convictions and sometimes becoming outright reactionaries, or isolate themselves from the masses so as to sink deeper into their religious illusions.

Eclecticism as a distinct mode of thinking is known by characteristics that are equally damaging to Marxist reason. For example, there is the habit of refusing theoretical continuity in the interest of pursuing what is “new” and “fresh” without any reason given beside the uncritical assumption that what is new is better than what is old. There is also the characteristic of sampling theoretical takes from a variety of traditions, the tendency to create a patchwork Marxism from whatever seems interesting and novel. Another habit is the obsessive need to define scientific reason as rigid and thus pursue a looser and seemingly more creative conception of theoretical rupture. All of the contemporary Marxisms that attempt to preserve Marxism while distancing it from its supposed “rigid” past flirt with eclecticism. Like dogmatism, eclecticism can advance masked by trying to translate its eclecticism into appropriate scientific language. By recognizing that historical materialism is open to the future, that it has always developed by engaging with other forms of thought, eclecticism becomes parasitical upon this correct insight and thus attempts to translate its depredations into scientific language.<sup>8</sup>

In any case, we should treat dogmatism and eclecticism as distinct modes of thought while also recognizing the ways in which they intersect or function as adjuncts of each other. They are not only oppositional extremes in thought but, as aforementioned, meet each other at various points of their manifestation. In the end, all thought that promotes revisionism is united in revisionism. So what ultimately unites dogmatism and eclecticism is that: i) they are both deviations of correct modes of thinking; ii) they both function, in their distinctions and admixtures, to prevent the rigorous and scientific thinking of thought.

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<sup>7</sup> See the second chapter of *Continuity and Rupture*, “Science’s Dogmatic Shadow”, where I discuss this problem in detail.

<sup>8</sup> One very telling example is the way in which the “call out culture” of identity opportunism has often been translated by young Maoist cadre as a new form of criticism/self-criticism. This translation has resulted in distortions of the practice of criticism/self-criticism.



They are together the shadow and eclipse of Maoist reason. A systematic critique of Maoist reason thus begins by understanding those modes of reasoning that it necessarily generates in the course of its establishment—as Marxism-Leninism did before Maoism and Marxism did before Leninism.<sup>9</sup>

The reason why dogmatism and eclecticism are deviations of correct modes of thinking is due to what science is—and if Maoism is a moment in the unfolding of revolutionary science then it will generate the same problems as science in general. Within the practice of science it makes sense to distrust wild creative interventions if they cannot prove themselves, hence the deviation of dogmatism (what I have called “science’s dogmatic shadow”) becomes a real danger when faced with the possibility of scientific advances. This is the reason that the Big Bang Theory was resisted by many scientists when it was first theorized, and for good reason! But this good reason became dogmatic when this theoretical advance generated proof. Conversely, the fact that science develops according to creative interventions can generate an eclectic deviation (another shadow cast before the object rather than behind) where theorists neglect the principle of theoretical conservation and, without rigour, simply invent new and fringe conceptions—as early modernist scientific spiritualists did, for example, with the theory of ectoplasm.

To be clear, both dogmatism and eclecticism in themselves are also and by definition anti-scientific, an eclipse instead of a shadow. Religious dogmatism is the antithesis of science since it is based solely on faith rather than reason; the initiation of the “new sciences” during the European Enlightenment made this distinction clear despite its regional and historical limitations.<sup>10</sup> But eclecticism is also anti-scientific.

<sup>9</sup> Here is a point where I am sympathetic to the PCP’s nominating of Maoism as “Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, principally Maoism”. Although it is the case, as the next section will begin to make clear, that this nomination now serves to designate a particular tendency within the Maoist milieu, initially such terminology made sense. The point was to underscore that the revolutionary stage of Maoism was the principal filter through which the deviations that had accrued in pre-Maoist Marxism-Leninism could be critiqued.

<sup>10</sup> For a more rigorous analysis of the Enlightenment, modernity, and science see my essay *Radiating Disaster Triumphant* ([abstraktdergi.net/radiating-disaster-triumphant](http://abstraktdergi.net/radiating-disaster-triumphant))

tific since science is not an “anything goes” theoretical practice defined by unbounded creativity and imagination; rather it is delimited by clear and stringent conceptions of truth procedures that can be proven in practice.

Since Maoist reason is a form of scientific reasoning—the current and most advanced iteration of historical materialism—it can also generate these two erroneous modes of thinking, along with various admixtures, that undermine its deployment. The problem, however, is that the scientist is not always able to grasp when dogmatism and/or eclecticism manifest. The dogmatist rarely believes they are dogmatic; the eclecticist most often denies the accusation. Indeed, charges of dogmatism and eclecticism can be mobilized by those guilty of these depredations, along with the requisite theoretical terms, to preserve their errors. For example, dogmatic thinking generates an awareness of all the names of important concepts, as well as the appropriate citations, so that calling others “dogmatic” (as well as “idealist”, “anti-dialectical”, etc.) displaces the error on others.

The Maoist scientist is a subject embedded in the theoretical terrain of Maoism, that is the subject militantly dedicated to ensuring the truth procedure of Maoism manifests and develops. The Maoist scientist, if they want their work to matter, ought to be political cadre; the scientific practice is class revolution. But, like all scientists, to be embedded in a theoretical terrain means immersion within its vicissitudes and can result in a loss of perspective due to the ways in which the dogmatic and eclectic modes of thinking are the deviating spawn of correct scientific reasoning.

Hence the significance of philosophical intervention, which is secondary but clarifying, and thus the critique of Maoist reason. In order to pursue such a critique, however, we need to examine the theoretical formations resulting from Maoism’s complications.

### **Anatomy of Maoist Reason**

Since I wrote *Continuity and Rupture* there have been a number

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phant-modernity-and-its-discontents/).

of developments within the milieu of Maoist reasoning that need to be charted. While some of these developments already existed at the time I wrote that book, and were taken into account when it was written, they have developed further since 2016. Other developments, some of which lurked implicitly in germ form in *Continuity and Rupture's* critique, have surfaced and become more acute. Eclecticism and dogmatism characterize many of these developments.

First of all, there are the “post-Maoist” articulations of Maoist reason. While it might seem strange to include these tendencies within the broad category of Maoist reason, they are significant because they claim to be reasonable extensions of Maoism, logical accomplishments of the tradition that bears Mao’s name. This category possesses both dogmatic and eclectic variants. The former is represented by the RCP-USA and the post-RIM groups it has drawn into its orbit (i.e. The Communist Party of Iran [Marxist-Leninist-Maoist] which still claims to be Maoist) with its “New Synthesis” that locates its authoritative status on the personality cult of Bob Avakian. The latter was once best represented by the Kasama Project but, now that the Kasama Project has fallen apart in its eclectic pursuit of its pseudo-Badiouian post-Maoism, is more of a general tendency of formerly Maoist organizations and individuals that want to retain a vague appreciation of Maoism without accepting its scientific status.

Next, there is “Maoist Third Worldism” (MTW) that exists primarily in the imperialist metropolises. This tendency holds that there is no substantial proletariat, or that its existence is relatively minor, in so-called first world nations due to the fact that the first world working class is dependent on the exploitation of the third world working class. Although MTW, by claiming that Maoist reason results in this third worldist analysis, often sets itself in opposition to other Maoist articulations, it still remains tied to the broad Maoist milieu because its organizations and individuals generally support Maoist-led people’s wars.

Thirdly, there is Marxism-Leninism-Maoism (MLM). Either upholding the process of theorization initiated by the Communist Party of Peru (PCP) and concretized by the Revolutionary Interna-

tionalist Movement (RIM), or the adjacent and sometimes intersecting processes of the people's wars in the Philippines, Turkey, and India, this tendency asserts that Maoism is the third stage of revolutionary science. As the Maoism-qua-Maoism that I analyzed in *Continuity and Rupture*, this tendency is the most dominant expression of Maoist reason; it is noteworthy that the first tendency above and the fourth tendency below were initially closer to this baseline MLM.

Fourthly, there is “Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, principally Maoism” (MLMpM). Basing itself primarily on the “Gonzalo Thought” of the PCP, this tendency upholds the people's war in Peru as the primary, if not sole, location of Maoist reason. Despite the PCP's participation in the RIM, MLMpM treats the latter as a rightist expression of the pure Maoism articulated by Gonzalo and the PCP. This expression of Maoist reason is often marked by dogmatism in its nearly uncritical application of “Gonzaloism” to every social context.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, this tendency emerged after the failure of the PCP to complete its revolution and thus takes the term “principally Maoist” to mean more than what it meant for the PCP—an emphasis that Maoism was more than simply “Mao Zedong Thought” which would be codified in the RIM's claim that all non-Maoist variants of Marxism are revisionist—and instead to elevate the particularization of an early form of Maoism to the level of universality. The first full-fledged articulation of this tendency is the Parti Communiste Français (Marxism-Leninism-Maoism) and the small international groups it pulled into its orbit. Although many of the contemporary parties and groups now upholding MLMpM dislike the PCF(MLM) they do not deviate from the core theoretical claims this group has articulated on its website.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Here it is worth noting that the adherents of MLMpM greatly protest whenever they are accused of dogmatism. Rather than seriously think through the reasons why this charge is leveled at them, they resort to the same dismissive polemics that the RCP-USA has used when charged with the same attitude. That is, they claim that the charge of dogmatism is “anti-communist” since anti-communists have historically called communism a religion. They resort to the dry formalism of phrase-mongering (taking quotes from Lenin and Mao out of context) and thus demonstrate the inability to think their thought.

<sup>12</sup> The PCF(MLM) could also be classed as a perfect example of dogmatic eclecticism due to the fact that, beneath their early and dogmatic adoption of “principally Mao-

Finally, there is a trend that admits that Maoism is a third stage of revolutionary science but does not see the PCP, RIM, Philippines or Indian sequences as qualifying for the generator of contemporary Maoism. I want to suggest that this trend is inconsequential because it ends up feeding into one of the four trends above when it comes to defining what Maoist reason *is* and thus its various representatives will end up gravitating to one or other of the above categories when it comes to thinking what Maoism is now. At best, it focuses primarily on what Marx, Lenin, and Mao contributed and treats the PCP-RIM experience, as well as the Philippines and Indian sequences, as secondary curiosities. That is, it often ends up being a Marxism-Leninism-Maoism that seeks the synthesis in the work of these names rather than later revolutionary processes that were involved in synthesizing the theoretical meaning of these names. At worst, it promotes an eclectic understanding of theoretical lineage. Since this trend pleads agnostic to the origin of this terrain, often treating it as auto-generated and the result of a process too complex to coherently map, it occasionally suggests pursuing other sources such as the Union of French Communists Marxist-Leninist (UCFml) in order to think Maoism's meaning. Although we should investigate all of the germinal tributaries from the anti-revisionist period—these faint glimmers of a possible Maoism from the closing moments of the Marxist-Leninist sequence—they do not provide us with much insight regarding the structure of Maoist reason due to the overriding agnosticism.

In any case, it is my contention that the third category *is* Maoist reason and that the other three are deviations overdetermined by dogmatism, eclecticism, or various admixtures of these two modes of thinking. This does not mean that the third category exists outside of such modes of thinking only that its basis is not immediately under-

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ism”, they also harbour some very strange views about veganism, raves, seal hunts, and the adoption of backwards pro-Zionism. Even still their MLMpM line was such that, as late as 2011, they had many of the groups who now sign on to modern “principally Maoist” statements—and who seem to distance themselves from the PCF(MLM)—signing their dogmato-eclectic group's statements. (lesmaterialistes.com/english/international-unity-communists-requires-defeat-revisionism-and-centrism).

mined by them.<sup>13</sup> By pursuing a rigorous critique of Maoist reason we will discover how this category of Maoism is not only the scientific heir of the Marxist mantle but how best it can steer clear of those modes of thinking that encourage revisionism.

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<sup>13</sup> In *Continuity and Rupture* I provided a rigorous argument—with some mistakes, typos, and overstatements—as to why this was the case, demonstrating why other iterations of Maoism (let alone a historical materialism that was not Maoist) could not be historical materialist. To date, the other three categories vying for Maoist reason have failed to produce anything approaching an equally rigorous counter-argument. Rather, the various rejections of the general argument in that book have relied on misrepresentation and/or dogmatic assertions.

## Chapter 2

### Thinking Science

Maoism claims to be the third stage of revolutionary science, the inheritor of historical materialism founded by Marx and Engels. As I argued in *Continuity and Rupture* historical materialism is a scientific terrain, and I explained how and why it was a science as well as how we should understand the meaning of scientific development. Furthermore, in *This Ruthless Criticism of All That Exists* I demonstrated that Marxism's scientific aspect was essential to its theoretical meaning and that to dispense with this qualification (that is, to claim that Marxism is not a science) is to dispense with Marxism's meaning altogether. Hence I will not repeat those arguments in toto here, though I will draw upon them when necessary.

Unfortunately, the Marxist tradition has developed a number of errors when it comes to thinking of itself as a science. These errors have been repeated in every moment of its development including Maoism. The largest error is, as noted above, dispensing with the qualification of science altogether but, as I already suggested for reasons argued elsewhere, this would also dispense with its theoretical significance since it was conceptualized and thus brought into being as a theory *as* a science. The error that concerns us here, since it finds its way into contemporary Maoist reason, is the inability to think the conceptual meaning of science despite consistently proclaiming the name of science. That is, there is a pattern of Marxists who adhere to the notion that historical materialism is a science, and who openly embrace this notion, but seemingly have no idea what it means to call something a science due to the way they understand theory and practice. Contemporary Maoists have often fallen into this same pattern.

Again we are faced with the problem of thinking thought. In this case the problem concerns the fundamental premise of the theoretical terrain as a whole: that it is a scientific terrain, that it generates truth in a manner that is generically identical to other scientific terrains.

Once we recognize that science possesses a strong purchase on what it means to call something “true” and “correct”, however, the error is to use the name of science as a magical wand—that is, in an anti-scientific manner—to wave away all criticism as if we are conjuring the truth into being. Reactionaries do this all the time: they claim their positions are “scientific”<sup>14</sup> when all they are doing is repeating ideological claims, embarking on various sequences of pseudo-science to confuse their audience. Unfortunately, Marxism has a history of treating science in the same anti-scientific manner and this history often finds its way into its Maoist expression.

For example, it is extremely common for those who are the most vocal in repeating the claim that Marxism is a science to “demonstrate” that positions/practices are correct or incorrect by referring to a passage in one or other classical theoretical texts of the science. But to assert the status of science is not an argument from authority: the biologist does not prove the scientific worth of a hypothesis by quoting Darwin, though the process in which Darwin was involved provides the foundational axioms for scientific investigation and intervention. Scientism, where science is accorded the status of religion with sacred texts and prophets, is not scientific.

To claim that Marxism is a science requires a much more rigorous approach to theory than a rhetorical ploy of branding statements and proclamations with the name “science”. The distance between this name branding and the concept of science—what it means for something to be scientific—widens every time former is enunciated for merely polemical reasons. Indeed, the rhetorical use of the term “science” is only rivalled within the Marxist terrain by the rhetorical use of the term “dialectics”. We should know that simply because someone calls something “dialectical” does not make this something dialectical; dialectics means something specific and the same can be said for science. We are required to think what dialectics and science mean and require of us as Marxists so that we can demonstrate that “ruthless criticism of all that

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<sup>14</sup> For example, the return of racial science in backwards rags like *Quillette* where appeals to the Bell Curve and “craniology” (the new word for phrenology) are asserted as scientifically correct.



exists” instead of falling back on rhetorical platitudes.

In today’s Maoist milieu various militants will make claims such as “criticism is a gift” and “many great Marxist texts were polemics.” These claims are generally correct but, as discussed at the beginning of this intervention, they are often made to disguise the failure to produce useful criticisms. For example, much of the work found on the US Maoist website *Struggle Sessions* is paradigmatic of the worst forms of criticism and polemic within the Marxist tradition: misrepresentation, a litany of quotes from classical texts used as arguments from authority, clever rhetoric, fetishism of past people’s wars. Numerous criticisms are only gifts insofar as they teach us how *not* to think. Let us recall that Mao also saw the criticism of reactionaries as its own kind of “gift” because, since “to be attacked by the enemy is not a bad thing,” it provided the opportunity of surgical counter-propaganda. To therefore be ordered to accept malign criticism as a comradely gift by supposed comrades who call other Maoists “revisionists” for not accepting their rhetorical assertions demonstrates a poor understanding of what Maoist criticism should be and what Mao meant by calling criticism a gift. Similarly, while it is true that many great theoretical texts were also polemics this does not mean that all polemics are great theoretical texts. For example, there is a difference between Lenin’s polemics against Kautsky, and what he rigorously established through them, and an October League polemical complaint about the Revolutionary Union in the 1970s. A polemic is judged by its content and not its form; a correct understanding of dialectics and science would grasp the distinction between substance and appearance.

In any case, there is a reason that Marx and Engels claimed that historical materialism was a science, just as there was a reason that successive theoreticians used this term and demonstrated the scientific efficacy of their work. They took this aspect of the theory seriously and did not relegate it to a rhetorical slogan. We undermine the meaning of our theoretical terrain when we fail to grasp its meaning as a science, using the name in place of the concept.

## The Laboratory

The laboratory of Marxism is class struggle and its scientists are the militants engaged in this laboratory. But these militants do not develop the science just as they please, as Marx wrote in *The 18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire*, but in circumstances directly encountered from the past. That is, just as scientists working in other disciplines do not function to reinvent their scientific terrains as they see fit but in fact (unless they deviate into the realm of pseudo-science) work according to the truth procedures already established, the best Marxist scientist works within the constraints developed by the science as a whole. Every science possesses historical constraints, that is the axioms established by previous scientific labour and struggle. For Marxism as it has developed to date, and as I have argued rigorously elsewhere, these constraints are determined by the following instruments: the vanguard party, the mass line, cultural revolution, and protracted people's war.

It is not enough to recognize the constraints and what the practice of Marxism within the laboratory of class struggle has brought into being to date. The point is to practice the science according to the truth procedure so far, utilizing the instruments this procedure has generated, in line with the science's object. That is, just as the object of physics is to demystify the physical structure of reality, the object of historical materialism is to demystify history and society which includes not only understanding class struggle but making revolution.

Moreover, scientists dedicated to other theoretical terrains should not walk into their laboratory so that they can quote previous scientists at their instruments of investigation or refuse to use these instruments to develop further and successive theories. Nor should they enter their laboratory with the aim of ignoring the instruments and theoretical developments already established, inventing new and groundless theories simply because they sound more interesting than what the science already possesses. Scientific development emerges from the rigorous process of a scientific method and not from dogmatism or eclecticism. The scientists who are left behind in their respective fields are those who fail to recognize theoretical transformation when it is upon them (i.e.

all those scientists who refused to accept the Big Bang Theory because it did not accord to the way they chose to understand pre-established concepts), just as the scientists who drift into the weird penumbra of their fields are rightly seen as fringe scientists. Keeping in mind that dogmatism and eclecticism are only formally distant we should also recognize that eclectic fringe theories are often fabricated by dogmatists looking for alternate theories to explain phenomena that threatens tradition (i.e. those who initially rejected the Big Bang Theory in favour of some form of constant continuum tried to explain the phenomena that the Big Bang Theory accounted for with a stranger and unwieldy theory of “little bangs”). We find the same mixture of dogmatism and eclecticism with revisionists who, refusing to accept that China is no longer socialist, either accept or fabricate confused theories about market socialism so as to preserve their faith in “actually existing socialism”.

Thus, for historical materialism to develop as a science requires that its practitioners also understand what it means to practice it as a science. Since this practice functions within class revolution according to the instruments mentioned above to fail in the rigour required means to fail in comprehending and demystifying its object (science and history) which also means to fail in making revolution. Those sequences in the science that have been successful in pushing it further are those where the scientists have been organized and dedicated to the theoretical rigour that every science demands. Those that have failed have either rejected the very concept of this theoretical rigour (which is why all forms of spontaneism, like a self-proclaimed scientist walking into a laboratory and making up practices and concepts on the spot, have produced nothing meaningful) or accept the idea of scientific rigour but who misunderstand its practice as a religious dedication to the idea of science.

The reason Marxists uphold the concept of the vanguard party is because we know that the most advanced elements of the masses, those with theoretical acumen, are like the trained scientists in other scientific disciplines who possess the wherewithal to consciously pursue the science. But Maoist reason provides us with a further insight: the mass-

line tells us that everyone from the exploited masses who are conscious of their exploitation are capable of becoming scientists and that trained scientists can learn from them, distilling their ideas, as the untrained elements of the masses also learn through contact with the advanced elements to become scientists.

Other scientific disciplines, due to the prevalence of bourgeois ideology that drives a wedge between mental and manual labour, obscure the truth that knowledge is made by the masses and not by those who had the privilege of receiving the requisite training. Indeed, historical materialism teaches us that the truths established by every science are the result of multiple and often invisible processes in which the exploited and oppressed masses as a whole are involved. For example, the modern conception of vaccination, though made precise through the implementation of the theory of natural selection, would not have been possible without the intervention of the knowledge of African slaves: Cotton Mather learned of smallpox inoculation from his slave Onesimus.

Hence the claim made during the Cultural Revolution, which is foundational for a Maoist understanding of science, that it is necessary to be both *red* and *expert*. We have nothing to lose by unleashing the creativity of the revolutionary masses; rather our expertise can be expanded by this creativity when it is articulated within the bounds of the science. The balancing of the two terms—red and expert—is important. On the one hand, as the Chinese Revolution that would generate Maoism demonstrated, expertise is not enough: theoreticians of all kinds can become divorced from the masses; Marxist theoreticians who engage in the “book worship” of the expert can become a new bourgeoisie. On the other hand, being red without being expert, and thus allowing the former to transform our understanding of the latter, is to fail to rise to the level of science. While it is indeed the case that a communist promoting something like astrology would be someone who is *red* but not *expert* (and thus not truly “red” since theoretical expertise is necessary), it is also the case that a dogmatist who promotes a kind of red expertise that ignores the rigorous demands of scientific

practice would be another example of this error. Dogmatism is not expertise, and dogmatic articulations of Marxism are about as useful as the spiritual dogma of the astrologist.

### **Falsifiability**

In *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* Karl Popper writes that in order for a theory to be scientific “it must be possible for [its] empirical scientific system to be refuted by experience.”<sup>15</sup> In other words, according to Popper, the most significant test for a theory’s scientific status is whether it can be submitted to an actual test where it can possibly be proved false. The concept of falsifiability clearly applies to simple material facts: if I tell you the door is locked, for example, you have the ability to prove my truth claim incorrect by trying to open said door; what I have claimed is thus submitted to empirical examination because it can be tested and thus judged either true or false. Theories that can never possibly be proven false also can never be proven true, and this is why religious claims such as “God exists” concern faith rather than science since, as those who employ the argument from ignorance fallacy know very well, one cannot prove that God does not exist. But inversely, because the existence of God remains non-falsifiable, one cannot prove empirically that God *does* exist. Hence, theories that systematize claims about the existence of God, miracles, Astrology, haunted houses, etc. are non-scientific.

Of course, as I have discussed elsewhere, Popper was an anti-communist who also claimed that the concept of falsifiability excluded Marxist theory from the realm of science. That is, based on a very simplistic understanding of Marxism’s own claims to scientific status, Popper read Marxism as some kind of cargo-cult conspiracy theory: it could always account for everything and thus never be proven wrong, hence it could not be submitted to the rigorous testing that made science science. But as I wrote in *This Ruthless Criticism of All That Exists*:

Popper unintentionally rendered a small service to Marx-

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<sup>15</sup> Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (London: Routledge, 2002), 19.

ism thanks to his unscientific grasp of social categories: his conceptualization of falsifiability did not exclude historical materialism from the privileged domain of the sciences but, because he was too lazy to grasp Marxism as a historical process, cinched its inclusion. Historical materialism can indeed lay claim to falsifiability (and its inverse, “testability”) as one of its criteria for scientific veracity: revolutions are the crucibles in which the unfolding theoretical terrain is tested and where its hypotheses can possibly be rendered false—and this is how we judge its development as a discrete science.<sup>16</sup>

To give the devil his due, however, Popper’s straw-person version of Marxism was in fact a version that has haunted historical materialism since its emergence and continues to manifest right up to the Maoist sequence. That is, the dogmatic and blasé assertion that Marxism is a science, criticized in the first section of this chapter, has contributed to this misapprehension. When Marxism becomes a weird panacea that can speak for all the sciences, and not just about these sciences’ connections to what Marxism *does* deal with (social and historical relations), does distort historical materialism into a non-falsifiable religious theory. When Marxists declare that the theory of the Big Bang is wrong because of “dialectical materialism” (my favourite example, typified by the Trotskyist International Marxist Tendency), and then attempt to use Marxism as a deep science of the life, the universe, and everything they are demonstrating this distorted form of Marxism that Popper could easily exclude. Maoists who are unclear about what science *is*, but know that historical materialism is a science, make similar religious pronouncements: *x* is scientific because the Marxist tradition said so; everything can be accounted for and explained without the worry of testability.

Modern revisionism, in fact, is quite deft in its defiance of falsifi-

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<sup>16</sup> J. Moufawad-Paul, *This Ruthless Criticism of All That Exists: Marxism as Science* (abstraktdergi.net/this-ruthless-criticism-of-all-that-exists-marxism-as-science/).

ability. China's "market socialism" can always be united with Marxism as a whole because there is nothing that can every falsify its claim to being socialist. The empirical evidence can be tailored according to well-chosen quotes and ad hoc explanations so that is always socialist, regardless of how it has been demonstrated false on this score according to what Marxism actually means, according to an eclectic-dogmatic application of the "science" of historical materialism. Indeed, the fact that Marxism as a scientific totality can provide the tools to falsify these revisionist claims (as the anti-revisionist tradition has historically demonstrated) should clearly prove that Marxism does possess the kind of scientific rigour that Popper crudely denied.

Just as Einstein waited on a total solar eclipse to either prove his theory right or wrong, we wait upon those objective circumstances that can do the same for Marxism. We have thus discovered that so far it is only what Marxism has established in the course of its development that actually succeeds in bringing us closer to communism. We have also discovered the limitations of these revolutions that prevent communism from being consummated and, in the repeatability of parts of each sequence, what more needs to be discovered. The Maoist sequence has currently theorized—from what the Chinese Revolution replicated from the Russian Revolution and the mistakes it did not repeat so as to push the revolution further—concepts distilled from the Cultural Revolution; the wager is that these concepts are necessary for creating the next world historical revolution and transgressing the limits of the previous sequence. Reaching the point where the theory can possibly be falsified (where socialism is established and we enter it fully aware that class struggle persists within socialism) is our solar eclipse.

Investigating alternative approaches to making socialist revolution is also part of falsifiability. Each time we examine movements that break from the sequence of revolutionary science we examine them to see if they can falsify what we claim has been established by world historical revolutions. We should not investigate these movements dogmatically, attacking them as heretical simply because they are not-Marxist or not-Maoist, but take them seriously. Mao claimed that rebellion is

justified and thus we should recognize the multiple rebellions against capitalism even when they're dressed in costumes different from ours. If we believe that it is better to make (communist) revolution then we should care about these other approaches, examining them to see if they falsify our theoretical claims. If they could do so then our claim to science would be wrong, but this would not be a bad thing because what we want, more than anything else, is communism. But nothing so far has falsified revolutionary science currently codified as Marxism-Leninism-Maoism.

First of all, we must recognize those who also claim the post-Leninist mantle of revolutionary science: Trotskyists and Hoxhaists. Trotskyists do not have a revolution to call their own (despite their weird attempts to claim that the Bolshevik Revolution was led by Trotsky) and the theory of permanent revolution has produced nothing but multiple "Fourth International" sects. Hoxhaists rely on a revolution that was part of the Leninist sequence, an echo of the Stalin period of the Russian Revolution, and in their attempt to preserve the purity of the anti-revisionist Marxist-Leninist sequence—decrying the cultural revolution—have produced nothing since.

Secondly, there are the *spontaneous* and *parliamentary* theories of making socialism that, if correct, would falsify all iterations of Marxism that proceed down the Leninist route. Conversely, these theories have failed the test of falsifiability because all such attempts to make revolution have not been able to replicate, let alone go further, the successes of Marxism-Leninism. Spontaneous theories—whether they are traditional workerist theories of self-organization or post-modernist variants—have resulted only in limited rebellions that have done very little to crack the edifice of the bourgeois state. The Spanish Civil War was the furthest the traditional anarchist method of making revolution has gone and it is notable that, though this heroic attempt should be celebrated, because of its inability to conceptualize state power in a Leninist sense—even Durruti realized, too late, the necessity of establishing state power. The experience of the EZLN in the 1990s was another high point of an alternative to the Leninist route of seizing power and yet, though



the legacy and significance of the Zapatistas should be celebrated, this armed popular movement refused to develop into a people's war aimed at wresting power away from the Mexican ruling class because of its suspicion at that time of "power". To the Zapatistas we can add the fetishization of the PKK in Rojava that has more recently manifested. Meanwhile even those revolutions within the Leninist sequence of the science (Cuba, Korea, Vietnam, Zimbabwe, China, etc.) that did not produce another world historical revolution—many of which would fall along with the Soviet Union or persist as revisionist siege states—*could* replicate the basic successes of the Bolshevik Revolution. The fact that they either fell with the Soviet Union or continued as relics of Marxism-Leninism simply demonstrates that they did not go further by following what the most radical aspects of the Chinese Revolution unlocked, i.e. the sequence we call Maoism. Contemporary China is testament to this failure since, following the failure to carry the revolutionary line forward, it went backwards.

Parliamentary approaches to making socialism are likewise falsified. Our conception of revisionism in fact begins with the SPD, under the guidance of Bernstein and Kautsky, taking the parliamentary road and capitulating to fascism. This approach was falsified whereas the road taken by the Bolsheviks in the same period passed the test of falsifiability. But the greatest exemplar of the parliamentary road was its only real heroic iteration that, in contradistinction to the SPD's cowardly capitulation, is worth studying: the democratic election of Salvador Allende's Unidad Popular in Chile in 1970. Allende's political party faithfully followed the road of making revolution through parliamentary means, what at that time could be characterized as the "peaceful road to socialism." There was no insurrection or people's war but a popular election where a socialist government was overwhelmingly and enthusiastically voted into power. On the one hand, we should recognize this popular election as a victory for socialist rebellion because it proved that socialism was indeed popular and that, regardless of what bourgeois advocates of "democracy" claim, the masses will cast their vote for socialism if they are permitted to do so. On the other hand, Allende's election

proves decisively that the parliamentary road to socialism is impossible. Without a revolution that built its own institutions to smash the old state and replace it with a dictatorship of the proletariat, within three years there was a coup: the old army remained untouched, as did all the other ruling class institutions; these were the apparatuses that, because they were not defeated in a revolution, were allowed to persist and plot the demise of a victory gained only from the ballot box. Allende was the most faithful and radical subject of the peaceful road to socialism and, regardless of his heroism which should be celebrated, the reason that he failed was because he could not follow the path that would allow him to repeat the successes of the Bolshevik Revolution.<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, it has been demonstrated historically that every time attempts to make revolution have not followed the path established by Marxism to date—by either repeating the lines of failed attempts that have been consistently proven to fail or by trying something new (which is usually just a rehashing of these old attempts)—they have proven false, none succeeding in replicating the successes that the Marxist sequence to date has achieved let alone overcoming the failures these sequences met. Indeed, through falsifiability we recognize the limits of even these successful attempts and what has caused them to fail, leading us to hypotheses that now need to be subordinated to the same rigorous appreciation.

As Maoists, though, we must of course extend the same rigour to our current claims. So far we know only this about our thesis: that we can get as far as the last world historical revolution in China if, like the Chinese Revolution did with the Russian, we replicate its sequence and also learn from its errors. We have received a series of hypotheses from this sequence that can guide us in making the next revolutionary sequence but only if we do not fall into dogmatism, eclecticism, or a mixture of these two errors. The danger is to take what has been established and treat it unscientifically, even when we speak the name of “sci-

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<sup>17</sup> There is an old Indian Maoist document about these events entitled “Chile: the Casablanca of Revisionism”. Sadly, although I read a print version of it years ago, I can no longer find a version of it. My analysis of Allende’s coup was inspired by the analysis in that old document.

ence”, and fail to think Maoist reason according to a concrete analysis of concrete situations.

### **Scientific Development**

By claiming that revolutionary science develops according to stages—and stages that are justified according to world historical revolutions—we are repeating another important qualification that makes a theory scientific: that scientific demystification, that which explains natural phenomena according to natural causes, is also open to the future. Science does not establish static truth claims that are closed but are necessarily incomplete or procedural. In every science new discoveries open to the potential of newer ones, and the broad scientific fields are never closed. Scientists stand on the proverbial shoulders of other scientists, using the experience of the past to attempt to establish insights for the future. Science develops and, if Marxism is a science, it also develops. This is why those who seek to locate a pure Marxism prior to Mao and Lenin are no longer engaged in the scientific thinking of historical materialism but, instead, are engaged in a form of religious thinking.

In order to understand what it means to think of historical materialism as a revolutionary science that has developed over time and will develop further, we need to engage in second order thinking that is not necessarily found in Marx and Engels, who were labouring primarily to establish the foundation of the science of history and society: the science of revolution. I write “not necessarily” because, while they did not write out a full conception of the future development of their science (how could they when they were laying the groundwork and such a conception of scientific development would require a crystal ball?), they still understood the general notion. As such, they constantly noted the limitations of history, and what contemporary history presented them with, and how they could solve only those questions given to them by the past and the present.

Thus the problematic of scientific development becomes a second order question because it is best appreciated if we look at how the

development of all fields that can properly be called *science* are understood. Hence, if Marxism is a science and not a theology, or ontology in the old philosophical sense, then it should evince the same patterns of development demonstrated by every other proper science. Thinking such patterns of development is a philosophical exercise and, being second-order, does not affect the deployment of revolutionary science anymore than it affects the deployment of physics or biology. All it does is bring clarity to our understanding of Marxism as a science, just as it brings clarity to other fields of science. Most importantly it helps prove that Marxism *is* scientific, a qualification that cannot be proved by simply citing multiple quotes that merely assert this fact as a truism; something is not a science just because it is claimed. Such an understanding of the proof of Marxist scientific development, as well as the development of other sciences, proceeds through the clearest philosophical logic we possess to date—and the logic that Marx and Engels revealed and championed: the logic of dialectical materialism. In *Continuity and Rupture*, therefore, I attempted to explain the scientific development of revolutionary science that resulted in Maoism through the dialectic from which the book took its name: “continuity-rupture”.

To clear up some confusion as to why I utilized this dialectic to explain the unfolding of revolutionary science, aside from borrowing terms that were at that time in operation within the International Communist Movement (most notably in the Afghans’ response to the RCP-USA and the Indians’ discussion of the Maoist Party), was because it was a dialectical way of looking at what important works in the philosophy of science (the work of Bachelard and the work of Kuhn) had written about scientific development. They had both demonstrated how scientific fields develop according to different stages of thought, and admittedly Kuhn, who was a physicist as well as a philosopher, had had done so in a much clearer manner than Bachelard.

Hence, far from being an addition to the theory of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, and thus some kind of “doctrine”, the conception of continuity-rupture was a way in which to prove—against multiple claims to the contrary—that historical materialism *was* a science

because it also developed in the way Kuhn had described, that Maoism was the name given to its most contemporary development, and that its development was extremely vital. Philosophically and dialectically speaking, I feel the relation of continuity-rupture is more accurate than Kuhn's use of "paradigm shift" because it explains not only the fact of successive and higher stages of development (a higher stage is by definition a rupture since if there was no breaking from a previous stage it would just be the same stage) and that these successive stages were part of a whole (if there was no underlying continuity there would be no unified field we could call revolutionary science, just disconnected insights). Even still, this is philosophical and not theoretical language designed to clarify the development of a theoretical terrain.

In any case, the point here is that if we think Marxism as a science, and we understand a scientific terrain as a terrain in development and open to the future, then we must understand what it means to be in development and how precisely it is open to the future if we are to think Maoism as part of this scientific totality.

### **Uphold Scientific Reason**

The claim that historical materialism is a science, and that Maoism is the name for the current conjuncture of this science, is important to maintain and understand because this is what makes the Marxist theoretical trajectory more meaningful than other theoretical trajectories.<sup>18</sup> The problem, however, is that, since Marx and Engels, there has been very little examination of what this scientific claim means, what makes historical materialism a science in the first place, and why its pursuit results in Maoism. I tried to think the meaning of this science and its development in *Continuity and Rupture*, and here I have further examined its meaning, but this exercise in thought still encounters the limit of the theological application of Marxism that masquerades as science while refusing to think the meaning of science.

The fact that Marx and Engels declared their theory as the initiation

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<sup>18</sup> I discussed this theoretical significance in *This Ruthless Criticism Of All That Exists* so will not repeat the arguments here.

of the science of history/society requires that Marxists who care about what Marx and Engels were claiming to establish assert their fidelity to revolutionary science. But this does not mean that such an assertion is meaningful simply because it was proclaimed. That is, the strength of Marx and Engels' claim that historical materialism is a scientific field is located in the content of this claim and not the claim itself. After all, I could declare any form of thought "scientific" merely to stamp it with a name that possesses a particular level of knowledge-authority in this day and age but this would not guarantee that such thought was indeed scientific. Occultists and hucksters have indeed declared a variety of magical thinking scientific (i.e. "astrology is an *older* science") but we know that such declarations are meaningless because the kind of occult thinking associated with science does not accord to the definition of the latter.

Unfortunately, though, there is a history of self-proclaimed Marxists treating historical materialism as a new form of magical thought and then stamping this magical thought with the label of science because historical materialism was indeed proclaimed a science by its principle theorists. Concepts that have been developed through various scientific sequences have been reduced to spells and mantras that, torn from their conceptual context, serve as talismans to banish what the "Marxist" sorcerer refuses to think: revisionism, rightism, liquidationism, opportunism.

But if Marxism is a science, and Maoism is its most contemporary conjunctural nominalization, then we cannot undermine its meaning as a science. We need to think its content as scientific, with the rigour its historical categories deserve, and refuse all attempts to reduce it to lazy magical thinking. In order to do so we not only have to examine what it means for the historical development of Marxism to be counted as a science—as I have indicated in this chapter—but understand the emergence of its current articulation, Maoism, and what this emergence tells us about how, like any science, it is open to the future.

## Chapter 3

### The Maoist Point of Origin

I want to argue that we ought to be unequivocal in asserting that the point of origin for Marxism-Leninism-Maoism is found in the sequence begun by the PCP and consummated by the RIM. Anything else did not generate Maoism as *Maoism* (what I have called “Maoism-qua-Maoism”) and was only a prefiguration to or adjacent of revolutionary science. The prefigurative aspect encompasses a variety of theories and theorists: i) anti-revisionist Marxism-Leninisms that occasionally used the name of “Maoism” (often meaning “Mao Zedong Thought”); ii) early attempts to claim “Marxism-Leninism-Maoism” that were still indistinguishable from Marxism-Leninism and were oft-times eclectic; iii) theories and theorists who did not necessarily use the term “Maoism” but that provided insights that predicted significant aspects of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. The adjacent aspect refers to those theories and theorists that were claiming Maoism simultaneous to the PCP-RIM sequence, and thus influenced this sequence during and after its existence, only to be also influenced by it later on: i) the theory that emerged over the fragmented people’s wars in India, leading up to the foundation of the Communist Party of India (Maoist); ii) the theory that resulted from the long people’s war led by the Communist Party Philippines. We will examine these prefigurations and adjacents, followed by the argument as to why the PCP-RIM sequence is the generator of Maoism-qua-Maoism, in the successive sections of this chapter, but for now let us discuss the importance of origins.

Why does the grounding of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism in a univocal origin matter? Most importantly, because origins matter to any theory that speaks in the name of science as those who oppose the totalizing aspect of revolutionary science have made patently clear. Indeed, Foucault’s opposition to scientific discourses—particularly Marxist discourse—has proceeded according to an appreciation of a genealogical

method that, unlike science, “opposes itself to the search for ‘origins’.”<sup>19</sup> Scientific investigation seeks to ground itself in an archimedean point, establish originary foundations, and trace out meaning according to this point and its foundations—this is precisely the problem according to Foucault:

[B]ecause it is an attempt to capture the exact essence of things, their purest possibilities, and their carefully protected identities; because this search assumes the existence of immobile forms that precede the external world of accident and succession. This search is directed to “that which was already there,” the image of a primordial truth fully adequate to its nature, and it necessitates the removal of every mask to ultimately disclose an original identity. However, if the genealogist refuses to extend his faith in metaphysics, if he listens to history, he finds that there is “something altogether different” behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms. Examining the history of reason, he learns that it was born in an altogether “reasonable” fashion—from chance; devotion to truth and the precision of scientific methods arose from the passion of scholars, their reciprocal hatred, their fanatical and unending discussions, and their spirit of competition—the personal conflicts that slowly forged the weapons of reason.<sup>20</sup>

In the above assessment, scientific theory is no more or less significant than any other kind of theory, though its claims to veracity and reason make it more murderous. Sciences establish points of origin to provide themselves with meaning; reason is not aimless nor ahistorical. For Foucault and those who follow in his footsteps such claims are no

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<sup>19</sup> Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 77.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.



more meaningful than religion. But we are not Foucault and we reject this anti-scientific assessment of reality. There is no point, here, in outlining why Foucault's position is erroneous, aside from pointing out that science *does* establish truths and to think otherwise is akin to being a Six Day Creationist. Rather, I have quoted him at length to indicate why, in opposition to his anti-scientific mysticism, understanding the point of origin is necessary for precisely what Foucauldian theories reject. Moreover, it is important to point out that while Maoism prides itself on rejecting post-modernism, rejecting a point of scientific origin runs dangerously close to saying something similar to what post-modern thinkers such as Foucault uphold.

A scientific theoretical terrain necessarily possesses points of origin that determine it as scientific; it would be strange to pretend otherwise. I have already established *why* Marxism-Leninism-Maoism is scientific, Foucault be damned, just as I have previously established why it is important to understand revolutionary science *as* science. Let's not waste our time any further with this post-modern nonsense beyond what it establishes contrapuntally: a theoretical terrain that calls itself "scientific" *must* care about origins.

After the world historical revolution in China that first gives us the name of *Maoism* it was necessary to figure out the point where the name became more than a notion, that is became a concept, and thus like "Marxism" and "Leninism" referred to universal aspects that thus fell under the category of science. The name thus first emerged as a notion that, linked to the Chinese Revolution and especially in the Sino-Soviet split, marked fidelity to anti-revisionist Marxism-Leninism (Mao Zedong Thought) before, after the Chinese Revolution itself fell to revisionism, later being developed into a scientific conceptualization (Marxism-Leninism-Maoism). In *Continuity and Rupture* I discussed the process by which a notion becomes a concept: i) "[a] world historical revolution provides the origin point of any significant and ruptural theoretical development"; ii) "[t]he assessment of the theoretical practice behind a world revolution begins the process of developing a theoretical terrain, based on what theoretical insights, in light of the

revolution, are universally applicable”; and iii) “[t]he new theoretical terrain emerges when this struggle passes beyond the limits of the previous terrain and begins to produce a new stage of struggles according to this assessment, synthesis, and its decision of universality.”<sup>21</sup> I will not repeat the arguments I made in that book for this sequence, though the reader is encouraged to peruse them at their leisure. The point is that amongst the broad Maoist camp there is general agreement that what we now call “Maoism” was not what was given that name during the Chinese Revolution but that something else happened in the period between the death of Mao and the contemporary conjuncture that generated Maoism.

If we agree that origins are important (and we must for we also do not pretend that the origin of Marxism is anterior to Marx and Engels regardless of the multiple utopian socialisms and dialectical philosophical traditions that would have influenced them), and that origins do indeed provide foundational meaning, then we must be able to provide a decisive answer regarding the origins of Maoism-qua-Maoism. When and where precisely did Maoism emerge as Maoism? If we cannot answer this question then we cannot adequately say what Maoism is; after all, locating its origin in different places will provide it with a different meaning.

Nor can we accept a mythology of multiple lines of descent. Although we can accept, as aforementioned, that there are prefigurations and adjacent traditions, this is not to say that their are multiple lines of origin that all possess the same status. Rather, these prefigurations/adjacents only make sense as such *in retrospect* once we ground Maoism in a specific origin and then look back and around at other attempts/traditions. For example, it was only after the Darwinian paradigm shift in biology established itself that later biologists could look at the work of scientists such as Lamarck and see prefigurations to natural selection, and use aspects of his work to think Darwinism... But, and here is the key, no one would suggest that the origin of the Darwinian sequence in biological science was located in Lamarck.

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<sup>21</sup> Moufawad-Paul, *Continuity and Rupture*, 29-30.

This analogy of biology science is in fact more apt when we think the problematic of origins and theoretical lines of descent. That is, while it is correct to recognize that there is a complexity of lines of descent that inform a given phenomenon, it is also erroneous to use this complexity to reject the scientific search for origins. We cannot accept the mythology of multiple lines of descent that are all equal because that would be analogical to our biologist declaring that there were multiple lines of evolutionary emergence, numerous points around the globe where the human species evolved independently. Such a position is scientifically incoherent because it would suggest that humans are not a single species but a variety of distinctly evolved species. As should be obvious, this way of thinking humanity's emergence not only assumes the accident of natural selection that generated the human species was repeated (which makes sense only if a God or Gods was running an experiment that worked and, like any good scientist, was able to repeat the results), but divides humans into a set of sub-species—the cornerstone of racist pseudo-science. None of this is to say that we have precisely grasped the univocal nature of human evolutionary emergence, because it still seems to be under debate, which is why we must part ways with this analogy: in the case of the emergence of a theoretical terrain, which is far easier to trace than human prehistory and not a problem of biology, we can figure out the point of origin.

In the case of Maoism-qua-Maoism this origin can only be the sequence formed between the PCP and the RIM, and definitely not the former without the latter (as one group claiming the name “Maoism” wants to assert), but in order to grasp this in its totality we must discuss the prefigurations and adjacents. These prefigurations and adjacent are not separate lines of descent but only make sense as prefigurations and adjacents in reference to the singular line of descent, as we shall examine.

### **Prefigurations**

As noted above, theoretical and philosophical work that prefigured aspects of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism can only be understood as

prefigurations in retrospect. That is, the establishment of a science, and in particular a scientific development, sheds light on a variety of pre-existing concepts that would not have been as meaningful otherwise. If Maoism had never come about then the theoretical/philosophical work that we see now as prefiguring it—i.e. pointing to it—would have pointed nowhere and be judged as sign-posts directing us towards a useless theoretical terrain. In the terrain of literature Borges once claimed that Kafka defined his precursors: the literary significance of Kafka was so singular that “if Kafka had never written a line, we would not perceive this quality [the so-called “Kafka-esque”]; in other words, it would not exist.”<sup>22</sup> Similarly, if Mao and Maoism did not exist in the singular theoretical way that they exist then we would not be able to locate meaningful prefigurations. And for those who do not appreciate this literary analogy I reiterate the point I made about Lamarck and Darwinism in the previous section. The history of scientific theoretical terrains is also filled with examples of precursors that are given new meaning after a paradigm shift or epistemic rupture within a given terrain.

Those who have been skeptical about my claim that the PCP-RIM sequence is the prime generator of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism have pointed out that my reference to a constellation of prefiguring theories/philosophies seems to undermine this claim.<sup>23</sup> But the main claim is only undermined if we treat a constellation of prefigurations as meaningful outside of how they are given meaning *after* the advent of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. If this advent had not taken place, if the theoretical sequence of Maoism was not founded as Maoism, then we would not have a complex history of precursors to examine because they would prefigure nothing but a dead-end.

We can thus treat the whole of the New Communist Movement

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<sup>22</sup> Jose-Luise Borges, “Kafka and his Precursors” ([sites.google.com/site/jimeikner/home/borges/kafka-and-his-precursors](http://sites.google.com/site/jimeikner/home/borges/kafka-and-his-precursors)).

<sup>23</sup> Specifically I’m addressing those who seek a variety of origin points rather than a single one, and who have questioned why I would point to Fanon and not, say, to the UCFml. To be clear, I also pointed to the UCFml as a “glimmer” in a constellation of prefigurations and adjacents (referencing its main theorist, Alain Badiou) and never claimed that any part of this constellation was more significant than another. (Moufawad-Paul, *Continuity and Rupture*, 32-33)

as producing, to greater or lesser degrees, prefigurative moments of Maoism. Whether we are speaking of insights developed by the Revolutionary Union, the Revolutionary Communist League of Britain, En Lutte, Gauche Prolétarienne, the Workers' Communist Party, the Maoist International Movement, and many others... we find a wealth of theoretical labour that, now understood as pointing towards MLM, can be mined in retrospect but only through the lens of MLM.

Moreover, there were some attempts within the New Communist Movement to assert the veracity of Maoism as a third stage of revolutionary science. For example, the UCFml, which counted Alain Badiou and Sylvain Lazarus as its members, was a paradigm example of an early attempt at founding Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. The problem with treating such attempts as anything more than interesting prefigurations, however, is that they resulted in eclectic rather than programmatic definitions of Maoism, were barely indistinguishable from Marxism-Leninism, and lacked the basis of class struggle, that is the scientific practice, to be anything more than errant theorizations. Indeed, the UCFml was a minor trend within the French anti-revisionist movement, far less important to contemporary Maoism in that country than the Gauche Prolétarienne, and in any case, beyond ascribing momentousness to the term “Marxism-Leninism-Maoism”, did not outline the universality of Maoism beyond the universality of Marxism-Leninism.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, elements of the earlier New Left can be similarly examined for prefigurative notions, as can the wealth of anti-colonial theory of Fanon, Nkrumah, Babu, and others. We know that all of these movements and thinkers were engaging with concepts warged by Mao and the Chinese Revolution; since Maoism treats this revolution as the most advanced world historical revolution to date then it must also engage with all attempts to grasp its sequence, as premature as some of them might have been. There is an entire constellation of theories and theorists who did not use the term “Maoism” but still provided insights that would prefigure significant aspects of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism.

<sup>24</sup> I discussed this in *Continuity and Rupture* in regards to the UCFml's prime theorist, Alain Badiou, and his claims about the universality of Marxism-Leninism in *Theory of the Subject*. (Moufawad-Paul, *Continuity and Rupture*, 33-34)

It may be the case that some of these prefigurative elements are more important than others. And it seems to be the case that we should treat the insights of the largest and most revolutionary organizations of the New Communist Movement with more weight than those more distant from the name “Maoism”. I have not pursued the task of investigating these prefigurative elements with the intention of ranking their importance in relation to Maoism-qua-Maoism; to date, I have simply named them when I was speaking of glimmers, prefigurations, signposts we now know points to the advent of Maoism. To be clear I have never argued for an ecumenical attitude towards this large constellation of prefigurations, though it may have seemed so because of the off-handed way in which I have mentioned them. If we were to pursue a task of itemizing and ranking the glimmers within this constellation—so as to see what theories and theorists possess the most prefigurative importance—then the only way to do so would be to accept a singular origin point where Maoism was generated as Maoism and use that as the measure for the salience of any and every prefigurative glimmer. Without such a measure, which I have argued is the PCP-RIM sequence, we cannot even begin to think through this vast array of pre-Maoist theory. To grasp this sequence, moreover, is to also understand the past through the present conjuncture—to be able to make a concrete analysis of the concrete situation of our theoretical history. This task, which is the task of historical materialism, requires archimedean points of origin, one for every moment of continuity-rupture in the unfolding of the science.

## **Adjacents**

Far more important to the foundation of contemporary Maoism than the prefigurative theories and theorists are those that I have called *adjacents*. These are revolutionary movements that resulted in people’s wars that are still being waged today and, though using the term Maoism, were not necessarily generated by the PCP-RIM sequence. What makes them far more important than the prefigurations is that, at present, they inform the two greatest ongoing revolutionary Maoist movements of the contemporary conjuncture: the people’s war in India

and the Philippines, respectively, both of which identify themselves as Maoist revolutions. But the fact that they are adjacent, and not merely prefigurative, demonstrates the significance of the PCP-RIM sequence as I shall argue below.

The people's war in India, led by the CPI(Maoist), is probably the easiest to grasp as an adjacent process that confirms the significance of the PCP-RIM sequence. Although the Charu Majumdar led Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) [CPI(ML)] pre-existed the PCP and the RIM, and was veiling itself as Maoist as it associated itself with the original Naxal Rebellion, like the majority of the New Communist Movement it never really theorized Maoism as a third stage and was instead an anti-revisionist variant of Marxism-Leninism declaring "China's chairman is our chairman." When it fragmented into multiple proto-Maoist groups, however, two of these groups ended up joining the RIM: the Maoist Communist Centre [MCC] and the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Naxalbari [CPI(ML) Naxalbari]. At the high-point of the RIM the MCC ended up uniting with another post-Majumdar Indian revolutionary organization, the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) People's War Group [CPI(ML) PWG], and their unity would be on the basis of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism and *not* Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought.<sup>25</sup> The CPI(ML) Naxalbari would join the CPI(Maoist) years later, after the dissolution of the RIM, thus signifying the importance of the theoretical conjuncture that the PCP-RIM sequence had sealed: Ajith, one of RIM's primary theorists of Maoism-qua-Maoism, was now a theorist of the CPI(Maoist). The overall point, here, is that although aspects of the Maoism developing in the people's war in India were adjacent to the PCP-RIM process, it was also intimately connected to this process and its current understanding of MLM cannot be treated as separate any more than the Communist Party of Turkey Marxist-Leninist [TKP/ML] or the Maoist Communist Party of Turkey [MKP] are separate from this process.

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<sup>25</sup> The emphasis of MLM over MLMZT was made in the documentary of the CPI (Maoist), *Blazing Trail: A Journey of the Indian Revolution*.

The people's war in the Philippines, however, is different from the Indian case because the Communist Party of the Philippines [CPP] never joined the RIM and yet was pursuing a people's war under the name of Maoism before the PCP initiated its own people's war and declared Maoism as the third stage of revolutionary science. Since the CPP initially embraced an ideology of anti-revisionist Marxism-Leninism, eventually adopting the terminology "Mao Zedong Thought" it might seem that the CPP is not properly Maoist, as some have claimed. Indeed, in *Stand For Socialism Against Modern Revisionism*, a classic CPP anti-revisionist text from 1992, "Marxism-Leninism" is the terminology used for revolutionary science. In this sense it may appear as if the CPP is closer to the CPI(ML), or at least similar to the NCM Marxist-Leninist "Maoist" groupings, in its understanding of Marxism.

At the same time, however, the CPP participated as observers in the first RIM meeting and those Maoist organizations that came out of RIM largely recognize the CPP's people's war as an advanced Maoist revolution. Most importantly, however, is the fact that the 2016 *Constitution of the Communist Party of the Philippines* begins by asserting the universality of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism.<sup>26</sup> Although it is also the case that the same document later uses the term "Mao Zedong Thought" it does so as a synonym of Maoism as the highest stage of revolutionary theory by again asserting its "universality."<sup>27</sup> Due to the fact that the anti-revisionist Marxism that used the terminology "Mao Zedong Thought" in the NCM did not assert that Mao Zedong Thought was universal but, instead, asserted only the universality of Marxism-Leninism, we should understand that this term's usage here is conceptually different in the way that "Maoism" has become conceptually different after the PCP-RIM process. The odd use of it is perhaps due to Jose Maria Sison's back-peddling where, in the years before the drafting of this constitution, he asserted that there was no real difference between Maoism and Mao Zedong Thought. Whatever the case, the shift from Marxism-Leninism to Marxism-Leninism-Maoism was significant

<sup>26</sup> *Constitution of the Communist Party of the Philippines* (bannedthought.net/Philippines/CPP/2016/CPP-ConstitutionAndProgram-2016-English.pdf), 10.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.



enough that the party would note in 2017 that “[t]he Second Congress [in 2016] amended the CPP Constitution to reflect the Party’s experience in applying Marxism-Leninism-Maoism as the ideological guide in its concrete revolutionary practice.”<sup>28</sup> Thus, by the time it celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2018, the CPP was calling its ideology Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, proclaiming that MLM was universally applicable, and defining the universal aspects of this theory in terms that echoed the foundational RIM conception of MLM.<sup>29</sup>

None of this is to say that these adjacent emergences of MLM are homogenous with the PCP-RIM process, or with each other, but only that they are adjacent to the latter’s conception of MLM and eventually participated, echoed, and reasserted that conception of MLM. Although some aspects of the PCP-RIM conception of MLM are not accepted in these adjacent versions that exist as a constellation around the point of origin—for example, the universality of Protracted People’s War—it is notable that they otherwise are largely in agreement with the way in which the RIM statement conceptualized Maoism. In fact, we can argue that they were pulled along by this statement and the way it influenced the international Maoist milieu considering that the claim of Maoism’s universality—that is, the notion that it was the third and highest stage of revolutionary science—became normative. Moreover, as I argued in *Continuity and Rupture*, the fact that revolutionary parties such as the CPP still deny the universality of Protracted People’s War is somewhat meaningless since they are engaged in People’s Wars themselves, and thus proving its significance in practice, and are not based in the imperialist metropolises and thus cannot really speak to the strategy of particular contexts outside of their revolutionary practice.

The larger point is that the PCP-RIM process is the locus of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism and, regardless of the defeat of the people’s war in Peru and the collapse of the RIM, it was monumental enough to

<sup>28</sup> *Communiqué: Second Congress of the Communist Party of the Philippines* (bannedthought.net/Philippines/CPP/2017/SecondCongress-Communique-170329.pdf), 1.

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, *Celebrate the Party’s 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and Lead the Philippine Revolution to Greater Victories* (bannedthought.net/Philippines/CPP/2018/CelebrateTheParty’s50thAnniversary-181226.pdf).

pull in these adjacent anti-revisionist movements grouped around the experience of the Chinese Revolution and influence their ideological perspective. So let us conclude this chapter with some thoughts on the significance of the PCP-RIM process.

### **Why PCP to RIM**

The fact that the PCP declared Maoism as the third stage of revolutionary science, and not as a name simply designating the most faithful iteration of Marxism-Leninism in the face of revisionism, right at the moment when capitalism declared itself victorious is significant. Most prefigurations of the Maoist stage were gravely affected by this event: some vanished (with their adherents becoming liberals, reactionaries, or cynics), many others tried to adapt their leftism to the “truth” of the death of “really existing socialism”, but a minority would pass through this catastrophe upon the path opened by the PCP.

The traumatic nature of this event, combined with China’s journey into revisionism, cannot be dismissed. By the mid-1980s there was a worldwide collapse of innumerable revolutionary movements as defeatism became immanent, encouraged by the ascendant Cold War ideology about communist terror, gulags, show-trials, Cultural Revolution trauma, etc. No longer possessing centres of knowledge production that could challenge these bourgeois and imperialist discourses the worldwide movement imploded, saturated in the malaise of failure—like the nihilism that came from Nietzsche’s death of God, and more than one disaffected former militant drew this comparison.<sup>30</sup> For example, in his 1985 treatise *Can Politics Be Thought* the formerly “Maoist” philosopher Alain Badiou wrote:

Marxism began once, between 1840 and 1850. After that, in the history inaugurated by this beginning, it has known various stages, for example, the victory of October 1917

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<sup>30</sup> Decades earlier, at the end of the Soviet sequence and the beginning of the Chinese sequence, there was a prefiguration of this malaise in a book called *The God That Failed*. The discourse was replicated in the 1980s and, without a strong worldwide anti-revisionist movement to challenge this discourse, was far more devastating.

and the theoretic-political form of Leninism. Today it is much more than a stage that is at issue. To speak of a stage would mean that the first beginning is still valid. But we introduce precisely the radical hypothesis that this beginning has ceased to be valid and that it is an entire cycle of existence of Marxism that has come to an end in the phenomenon of expatriation.<sup>31</sup>

First of all, this statement indicates yet again that the UCFml never truly held that Maoism was a third stage: just as he did with *Theory of the Subject*, one of its prime ideologues treats only two stages as universal. More importantly, though, we witness the sacrifice of scientific thought upon the altar of the capitalist “end of history”. The irony is that this transitional treatise is about thinking politics: he cannot think the essential political meaning of Marxism—the unfolding of a scientific terrain—because the trauma of the event of worldwide capitalist victory occludes this insight. Without scientific continuity there can only be political rupture, and thus Badiou poses a doctrine of absolute rupture: “Marxism has completed its first existence.”<sup>32</sup>

And yet, at the same time of Badiou’s pronouncement, another ruptural moment takes place, but one that ruptures only from revisionism and defeatism to declare a universal continuity with the science of revolution: the people’s war in Peru where Maoism is declared as a third stage. The fact that this sequence is beginning when Badiou writes his political organization out of Marxist continuity demonstrates that even the most prescient prefigurations were nothing more than prefigurations. They did not grasp what was at stake, nor were they willing to pay attention to what was happening in the global peripheries.<sup>33</sup>

The fact that we find a people’s war declaring a third stage right at the collapse of “really existing socialism” is thus significant. Revolution

<sup>31</sup> Alain Badiou, *Can Politics Be Thought* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 64.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>33</sup> Badiou would later think back on the PCP in *Logics of Worlds* but only to weirdly compare them to the Khmer Rouge—thus proving he had no conception of what was happening in the mid- to late-80s under the name of Maoism.

is happening just when we are told that it should not happen, that everything should accord to the capitalist “new world order”. More importantly, the declaration of the PCP resonates with a new international communist movement: various worldwide revolutionary organizations come together under the auspice of the Revolutionary International Movement, with the PCP, to eventually think the PCP’s claims. In 1993 the RIM, which includes the PCP and many remaining anti-revisionist communist organizations worldwide, collectively agrees that Maoism is the third stage of revolutionary science. The PCP’s wager is endorsed by numerous groups worldwide, the basis of Maoism is decided upon collectively, and hence this third stage is consummated. While there are adjacent developments that inform contemporary Maoism, as I noted in the previous section the parallel influence of the PCP-RIM experience is singular in its ability to generate the framework of a coherent theoretical terrain.

Here it is necessary to assert that there can be no Maoism without the RIM despite the fact that the “principally Maoist” trend maintains that there is no legitimate sequence between the PCP and the RIM, asserting the former as the only legitimate origin point. In the course of upholding the importance of the people’s war in Peru this tendency has either downplayed the significance of the RIM or, even worse, maintained that the RIM articulation of Maoism (as codified in the 1993 statement) was a rightist deviation of Maoism. Upholding the PCP as the sole generator of Maoism, with its connection to the RIM downplayed, permits a curious doctrine of Maoism to emerge: all of the applications of revolutionary science to the particular circumstances of Peru (the militarization of the party, jefatura, concentric construction) which did not find their way into the 1993 RIM statement are elevated to the level of universality. We thus observe the curious practice of Maoists in the US and Europe declaring that revolution must be built precisely according to the practices of the PCP in Peru, and that Gonzalo is “the Fourth Sword” of Marxism, even though the people’s war in Peru—despite its contributions to world revolution—ultimately failed and fell short of the Chinese Revolution.

Most importantly, though, the PCP was part of the RIM and a signatory of the 1993 statement. Other revolutionary organizations around the world, some of which were quite important and made their own contributions to Maoism, participated in a process, transforming the PCP's claim that Maoism was a new stage of revolutionary science into a claim that was no longer regional but global. Although there were participants in this process who lost their way (those who fell to Avakianite post-Maoism or Prachanda's capitulation in Nepal), there were also those who stayed the course to develop Maoism further in the course of their own struggles (i.e. the Afghan and Indian Maoists). Moreover, as aforementioned, the PCP also having splintered when its original Central Committee was captured and, unlike the Indians or Filipinos whose people's wars have survived the arrest and exile of leadership, collapsed. Indeed, the assessment of the RIM's failures on the part of the Afghans and Indians has placed the errors of the PCP alongside those of the Avakianites and Prachandites.<sup>34</sup>

Those who seek to uphold the people's war in Peru over and above the RIM experience, isolating an ur-Maoism prior to the 1993 statement, must retreat into magical thinking. First of all, they are forced to ignore the fact that the PCP itself signed the 1993 statement that globally codified Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. Secondly, in their bid to elevate this pre-RIM Maoism of the PCP they have to account for why this regionalist interpretation of Maoism resulted in a failure that could not even approach the successes of the October Revolution and the Chinese Revolution, let alone the revolutionary high tide of the latter's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Their answer seems to be an appeal to circumstances beyond the control of the PCP: the movement

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<sup>34</sup> Those who disagree with this assessment both ignore the CmPA's criticisms and downplay those made by the CPI(Maoist), blaming the latter solely on Ajith. Although it is true that Ajith is the only ideologue of the CPI(Maoist) who has made such claims and did so before his organization merged with the CPI(Maoist), it is important to note that these claims were not denounced by the CPI(Maoist) as erroneous and that Ajith maintained them as a CC member after the merger. Furthermore, those who would seek to isolate Ajith from the rest of the Indian people's war as representing a rightist political line seem to be unaware that Ajith was far more conciliatory with the PCP's legacy than the former members of the MCC and the rest of the Indian Maoist movement.

failed to protect its great leadership. Such failure is thus treated as the movement's only failure even though it is based on external circumstances (the Central Committee's capture) rather than internal circumstances, though Mao teaches us that it is the latter that is decisive. As mentioned, the people's wars in the Philippines and India have survived the capture and assassination of Central Committees; to blame the failure of a people's war on its inability to protect its original Central Committee is not only tantamount to blaming the masses for events that necessarily happen in the course of a revolution, but to fall prey to a magical interpretation of history. If only the right leaders had remained in command, if only they weren't captured or killed, everything would have proceeded according to plan.

The other justification for asserting the primacy of the PCP interpretation of Maoism over that of the RIM is that the former came first, but this is logically inadmissible. That which comes first is not necessarily superior or purer; conservatives use arguments from tradition all the time and we rightly dismiss such nonsense. Within the overall terrain of Marxism upholding the first-in-line is quite silly: the Trotskyists, for example, were the first to declare a "Fourth International" but we know that when a new International is actually built (something that the former RIM hoped to promote) we will not pretend that the Trotskyist "Fourth International", since it was declared first, was more meaningful than an actual Fourth International. Within the sub-terrain of Maoism we already know that what is declared first is in-itself meaningless: the UCFml declared Maoism before the PCP but, as discussed above, we have good reason to reject this declaration even though it was declared first. Although it is indeed important to recognize that there was something ruptural in the PCP's initial declaration of Maoism as a third stage of revolutionary science, it is not until this declaration was consummated in the RIM experienced—refined and globalized—that we can speak of Maoism... Even if in speaking this Maoism we must also be critical of the short-comings of the beginning of its sequence.

Hence, those who seek to sever the PCP-RIM sequence by endorsing only its former half are demonstrably incapable of thinking

Maoist reason. That is, they cannot think what makes historical materialism scientific and how this science develops through class struggle. The struggle against this particular dogmatism thus becomes a struggle that is supremely important for the survival of Maoism. And if Maoism, which is the most advanced articulation of revolutionary science, cannot survive then the barbarism promised by capitalism will reign supreme.





## Chapter 4

### Against Communist Theology

When we look back at the high points of the revolutionary history through which the names Marx, Lenin, and Mao became signposts for the terrain of revolutionary science we are struck with the audacity, creativity, and rigour of theoretical practice. The love of learning and engaging with knowledge, connected of course to revolutionary practice, saturates the terrain.

Marx and Engels were extremely well read in the history of philosophy and engaged with the philosophical debates of their time; on top of that they voraciously studied economics, mathematics, the natural sciences, anthropology, world history, and literature. We can see the expansiveness of their education, which became more focused and honed through their political practice, in everything they wrote.

Lenin was also a lifelong student who enthusiastically engaged in reading and writing, consuming innumerable texts on a plethora of topics. It is hard to imagine how he could have had time to become the political and theoretical leader of the Bolsheviks between the amount of texts he was reading and producing. At a crucial point in his development he even went back to Hegel's *Logic*, studying it thoroughly to discipline his mind.

Similarly, Mao was an avid and enthusiastic consumer of philosophy, theory, science, and literature. In fact, he warned against lapsing into doctrinaire understandings of Marxist theory just as he warned against scholastic withdrawal. Study and re-study everything in the midst of practice, understanding that all knowledge is connected in some way to social practice. Like Lenin he also returned to studying difficult bourgeois philosophical texts such as the *Logic*, encouraging multiple study groups at the height of the Cultural Revolution to critically study, but not fall under the spell of, Hegel.

Stalin and Luxemburg were similarly extremely well read, and by all accounts rejoiced in the practice of intellectual investigation, though

it is commonplace (because of Cold War ideology) to claim that the former was a boor. An entire host of Marxist philosophers, sociologists, scientists, legal theorists, artists, etc. were unleashed upon the world from the writing of the *Manifesto* to the Cultural Revolution.

And yet, at those points when and where the science lapsed into doctrinal repetition and/or where revisionism began to creep in, we are faced with the inverse phenomena: the emergence of dogmatic thinking; the emergence of lazy thinking. Suddenly the joy of learning, of rigorously engaging with texts from the basis of developing revolutionary science, began to recede in the wake of dry formalism, a hatred of “intellectuals” (including the incorrect identification of “academic” with “bourgeois”), a dismissal of complex thought that did not appear identical to doctrine, a paranoid suspicion of challenging counter-positions. During the course of the New Communist Movement in the imperialist metropolises, for example, there is a point where all of the polemics devolve into quote mongering protectionism of little ML kingdoms—of whose hermeneutics is the most faithful to a pure Marxism-Leninism.

In *Continuity and Rupture* I discussed the possible reasons why this doctrinaire thinking emerged within anti-revisionism (most notably, the necessity to declare fidelity to Marxism-Leninism in the face of the revisionist onslaught) so I will not discuss it in detail here. The point is that we find these moments in a theoretical terrain’s development where all of the creative thinking—all of the love for intellectual investigation—is suddenly and tragically eclipsed by a refusal to think anything but what is accepted as canon. That is, scientific theoretical struggle is subordinated to hermeneutical struggle with the latter sometimes being called “scientific” or “philosophical” when it is in fact more akin to a guiding theology.

We have again reached such a point, now over 50 years after the Cultural Revolution and over 25 years after the consummation of the PCP-RIM sequence, within the realm of Maoist reason. It has become commonplace for young Maoists, who in their laudable desire to stand against contemporary revisionism and anti-communism (which also

takes pseudo-radical forms such as post-modernism), adopt the same kind of anti-intellectualism as previous generations that is in direct contradiction to the expansiveness of intellectual rigour and investigation that the great theorists and philosophers of Marxism demonstrated. They even treat the theoretical achievements of these thinkers as theological artifacts, though they employ the name of “science” to hide their hermeneutics, forgetting that these great theorists came to their conceptual insights partly because of their expansive intellectual rigour.

Although it is worth noting that such dogmatism is a response to the eclecticism that has produced variants of post-Maoism (that are not, as noted earlier, free from their own dogmatism), this does not excuse its fear of intellectual investigation and rigour. Whereas the great theorists from Marx to Gonzalo did not shy away from intellectual investigation, and in fact held such investigation to be supremely worthwhile, there is now a troubling anti-intellectual current that fears engagement with any text that is not canonical. All Marxist theorists and philosophers outside of this core canon are treated as immediately suspicious. At best they are vaguely interesting curiosities; at worst they are seen as impure academics who exist to seduce the masses. An overarching fear of post-modernism results in theory and philosophy that is not Marxist being instantaneously relegated to the proverbial historical dustbin. Whereas a rejection of post-modernism is necessary and correct, when such a rejection is driven by a fear that results in a failure to read and think these texts—to understand them according to historical and materialist factors—we do not do our movement any favours.

The love of knowledge and intellectual engagement that has defined all of the great moments of Marxist development is abandoned at the altar of theological preservation. We forget that the strength of *Capital* was due in part to Marx’s willingness to critically read and think through, without immediate pithy dismissals, multiple bourgeois economists. Indeed we would not have been gifted with the materialist theorization of the labour theory of value, the concept of surplus value and exploitation, and a whole host of our core concepts without Smith, Ricardo, Malthus, and many others that Marx treated seriously in order

to demystify and elaborate the basis of historical materialism.

Today, against this theological eclipse of thought, it is necessary for Maoist militants to follow the example of the great theorists of our tradition and critically engage with those theories and philosophies that, while sometimes opposed to our science, may have aspects worth appropriating—just as Marx, Lenin, Mao, and others appropriated aspects of alternative (and sometimes hostile) theoretical formations. Ajith understood the importance of such theoretical practice, which is he why he wrote in *Against Avakianism*:

We have noted that Marx and Engels were not totally free of Enlightenmentist influences. [...] Today, compared to even Mao's time, we are enriched with a new awareness of the contradictory essence of Enlightenment and its scientific consciousness. Post-modernist trends have made significant contributions in this matter. Though their relativism led them to an ahistorical rejection of the Enlightenment and modernisation, the critical insights they offer must be synthesised by Marxism.<sup>35</sup>

But it is passages like this, which only exhort us to think thought in the way it was thought by Marx and Lenin and Mao, that caused Ajith to be maligned by the theological currents in Maoist reason. The strongest of these currents coheres in the fourth tendency of contemporary Maoism—Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, principally Maoism—built on the fetishization of the ruins of the PCP's people's war.

### **Failures in Thought**

To be clear, the PCP during its apex could not be accused of the theological thinking we are examining in this chapter. Upon declaring Maoism as the third stage this revolutionary movement worked to develop new and creative theories generated by its concrete circumstances. Gonzalo came from the ranks of academia, a philosophy pro-

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<sup>35</sup> Ajith, *Against Avakianism* (Utrecht: Foreign Languages Press, 2017), 159-160.

fessor who was invested in studying and learning. Moreover the RIM possessed many currents that would further embark on creative intellectual investigation, though some of them (such as the Nepalese and USAmericans) would lapse into their own dusty theology.

And yet here we have the phenomenon of Maoist militants who should be aware of the failures of the previous anti-revisionist sequence, who should be conscious of the fact that the thinking produced by the PCP-RIM experience was critical and creative, who fall into the worst patterns of hermeneutical exegesis. Such failure in thought is endemic to the “principally Maoist” trend, with several outliers, and the aforementioned USAmerican platform *Struggle Sessions* is paradigmatic of this poverty in thought. Nearly every article on this site reads like a hermeneutic of classical texts, demonstrating a fear of critically engaging with thought itself, resulting in a tragic repetition of the worst examples of the previous generation of anti-revisionism: “This is wrong because Gonzalo/Mao/Lenin once wrote *x*.”

(The foundation of this “principally Maoist” trend can be located in the tiny French grouplet that runs the website *lesmaterialistes.com* and has produced a dogmatic counter-ICM that includes organizations in places such as Afghanistan that have emerged in opposition to the dominant Maoist movement. Although the now dominant “principally Maoist” trend in Europe, the US, Brazil and other Latin American countries sees itself as separate from this French grouplet and its wrecker allies, its understanding of Maoism and analysis is generally identical.)

Such theological thinking results in a doctrinaire application of categories, as it always has, that eclipses scientific rigour. For example, the “principally Maoist” trend is wont to claim that all forms of Maoism that do not fully agree with the way in which the PCP conceptualized MLM prior to the RIM sequence are either examples of “rightism” or “centrism”. Such a claim, though, rests on the a priori assumption that the “principally Maoist” trend is the correct “left” position—no argument beyond appeals to the PCP’s greatness and an assumption of correctness is given for this claim—which enables the categories of “rightism” and “centrism” to be deployed according to a theological axiom.

The claim is non-falsifiable; it is a profession of faith. And just as all deviations from the core beliefs of a religious sect can be designated as “heresy” due to their distance from these central but presumed axioms, everything that deviates from “principally Maoism” is, by definition, a rightist or centrist deviation due to this doctrine’s unquestionable status as “left”. Hence, when utilized in this manner, these categories lose their initial meaning. They are scientific costuming draped over the corpse of dogma where what is really meant by the word “left” is a confession of faith and what is meant by the words “rightism” and “centrism” are heresy and apostasy.

But why can we not, inversely, categorize this “principally Maoist” trend as rightist due to its backwards presumption of theoretical tradition? After all, it asserts that it is properly “left” only because the claim that Maoism was the third stage of the science was first declared by the PCP but then, despite the PCP’s failure, refuses to accept the later instantiation located in the RIM sequence. Moreover, it refuses to account for the PCP’s failure in a historical materialist sense, choosing to explain this failure according to external contradictions (the PCP did not protect its Central Committee, the repression was insurmountable) rather than internal contradictions (the PCP’s conception of *jefatura* internally conditioned the collapse of its People’s War, it failed to fully develop its People’s War according to the mass-line). All of this smacks of rightist traditionalism, no matter how much a contemporary aesthetics of representation dress up this reality. Moreover, the fact that the three most significant Maoist formations—in the Philippines, India, and Afghanistan—do not accept the “principally Maoist” interpretation, and that two of these formations are engaged in the most advanced people’s wars, should falsify the claims made by the “principally Maoist” tendency who now decidedly lag behind the worldwide Maoist movement. (The exception to this is Brazil, which by most accounts has a relatively developed mass movement on several fronts.) By designating the current guiding lights of Maoist rebellion as “rightist” or “centrist” this PCP fetishist tendency parallels the criticisms of revisionist parties and thus, despite the theological use of left/right terminology seems to be in

a rightist camp. Of course, things are not so simple; it would be erroneous to dismiss this “principally Maoist” trend as a rightist deviation. But that is the point: we cannot simplistically employ these categories according to a theological analysis of the global state of affairs.

### **The Doctrine of the Synthesizers**

There are three theoretical moments in Marxism-Leninism-Maoism symbolically represented by the figures of Marx, Lenin, and Mao. What do we do, then, with individuals such as Engels, Stalin, and now Gonzalo whose heads have been attached to alternate pictorial sequences of MLM so that we have five or six floating heads instead of these three political singularities?

Those who speak of “Gonzalo Thought” or “principally Maoism” (and who even imitate imperialist propaganda about how the PCP called Gonzalo “the fourth sword of Marxism” though there is no evidence in PCP documents of this) sometimes provide the story of “great synthesizers” in order to explain this longer sequence of representation. That is, Gonzalo synthesized Marxism-Leninism-Maoism just as Stalin synthesized Marxism-Leninism and Engels synthesized Marxism. At first glance, such an interpretation appears to make sense but, at the level of substance, it begins to fall apart. The comparison of Gonzalo to Stalin and both to Engels is a faulty analogy. First of all, whereas Gonzalo was temporally and spatially removed from the sequence of the Chinese Revolution, Stalin was intimately involved with Lenin in the Russian Revolution; he was a fellow cadre whose practice was bound up with the Bolshevik Party and thus his work on Marxism-Leninism (the work that first gave us the *name* Marxism-Leninism) is the work of someone practically involved and invested in what would come to be known as the Leninist sequence. Secondly, Engels was not only practically bound up with Marx but in many ways was theoretically inseparable: a large portion of what is known as “classical Marxist theory” is the theory written by Marx *and* Engels—core works that produced as collaborators, works by Marx that Engels edited, and works by Engels that Marx edited—and it is only Marxian dogmatists who, ignoring

the historical evidence *and Marx's own words*, propagate the myth of an epistemological separation between the two.

Let us be clear: the three sequences of revolutionary theory are facialized as Marx, Lenin, and Mao because these three figures were the principle theorists representative of each moment in the science's unfolding to date. That is, they are the faces of social processes. And social processes are synthesized by way of their being as social processes rather than by recourse to "great men of history"; to explain their synthesis according to other and lesser faces is to reify what the faces were meant to represent and subject them to a history of one great thinker after another.<sup>36</sup> How do we actually understand the ways in which these sequences were synthesized, then? As I argued in *Continuity and Rupture* in passages completely neglected by those who choose this more dogmatic explanation of theoretical emergence: the procession of sequences themselves are the synthesis. Marxism receives its full synthesis as Marxism through the Russian Revolution and the theoretical work of Lenin. There are other thinkers invested in thinking Marxism leading up to this event who contribute to this theoretical synthesis—Kautsky, Luxemburg, Liebknecht, Stalin, etc.—some as polemical foils, some as fellow travellers, some as both. But the theoretical coherence of Lenin, as the preeminent theorist of this world historical revolution, is decisive: his work, though representative of a revolutionary social process, is the principal aspect of this contradiction. Next, Marxism-Leninism receives its full synthesis not from Stalin's *Foundations of Leninism* and other similar work (though this work founds the "name" of Marxism-Leninism and thus opens up the road to thinking theoretical development beyond the classical sequence) but from Mao and the Chinese Revolution, paradigmatically represented by *Long Live Marxism-Leninism*—written against Soviet revisionism—as the polemical concept of what Leninism, as grasped in the sequence of the Chinese Revolution, actually was. Finally, Maoism was not synthesized by Gonzalo: as discussed in the previous chapter it must be understood as

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<sup>36</sup> Convenient for theories such as "jefatura" but otherwise lacking in scientific depth.



the product of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement of which the PCP, though significant for putting the question of Maoism on the map, was a member. That is, Gonzalo's early theorization of Maoism was bound to his particular context and it is only through the social process of the RIM, in a statement that his PCP endorsed, where we find a universal conception of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism that spills beyond the regional context of Peru.

But it is precisely this procession of five or six facializations of Maoism that obscures the scientific meaning of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, reducing it to a theology. A procession of great thinkers and great synthesizers is the way in which a non-scientific—that is to say a *theological*—conception of Maoism is conceived. Such an understanding dove-tails with the rejection of “rupture” and the desire to see everything as a singular “continuity”. Indeed the US MLMpM movement have designated my *Continuity and Rupture*, which was only ever a sum-up and thinking through of what the main currents of the Maoist international movement was asserting at the time, as putting forward a revisionist “theory of rupture” and then claiming that it was tantamount to a rupture with Leninism.<sup>37</sup> Reducing the dialectic of continuity-rupture to a “theory of rupture”, while a misrepresentation of what I actually argued, is perhaps the only way that those who understand revolutionary science as an unbroken/continuous destiny promised by Marx and Engels can conceive of a position that undermines such a political theology.

To be clear, I never argued that Maoism was a total rupture from Leninism. Nor was my position on the development of revolutionary science a theory premised solely on rupture. Rather, I argued that positions treating theoretical development as only ruptural were by-and-large eclectic and that, conversely, positions that argued for only an unbroken continuity were largely dogmatic. The rupture from the *lim-*

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<sup>37</sup> See, for example, *Navigating The Canadian Split* ([struggle-sessions.com/2019/05/24/navigating-the-canadian-split/](http://struggle-sessions.com/2019/05/24/navigating-the-canadian-split/)) where, among other egregious misrepresentations of Maoism in Canada, it is also and erroneously claimed that the pan-Canadian PCR-RCP are “Moufawadites” and thus beholden to the supposed “theory of rupture”.

*its* of Leninism was thus not a rupture from the universal aspects established by the Leninist sequence (the vanguard party, the conception of the state, etc.) but from the limits themselves (i.e. the vanguard needed to be rethought according to the mass-line, the dictatorship of the proletariat needed to be rethought according to the Cultural Revolution), thus establishing in the break a line of continuity. In this sense we are more faithful with what Leninism promised by rupturing from the limits it had reached prior to the Maoist sequence. Hence this so-called “theory of rupture” was in fact a “theory of continuity” in that it established the way in which scientific continuity ought to be understood: not as a prophecy established the moment a scientific field is declared, but as a series of world-making moments that preserve scientific continuity through what Thomas Kuhn called “paradigm shifts”. To claim that such shifts did not and cannot take place, that there is no experimentation and struggle upon the theoretical terrains of science, is to in fact rupture from the very concept of science and thus assert a doctrine of theological continuity.

Hence, rather than seeing MLM as a series of sequences won through revolution and the result of discrete social processes, the theological view imagines that Maoism was already existent in germ form when Marx was writing. According to this view, the emergence of Maoism is nothing more than a sequence that could not have been otherwise, like Hegel’s *Geist*, from the very beginning. The great thinkers, like Napoleon, are programmed moments from the potential seed in the work of Marx and Engels that will unavoidable actualize themselves at unavoidable historical moments. In this sense, Maoism is reached according to a quantitative arithmetic that is prophetic: Marx + Engels + Lenin + Stalin + Mao + Gonzalo. Although those who abide by this narrative of continuity claim that there are moments where “the quantitative becomes qualitative” they only do so because they must—because Marx, Lenin, and Mao used this language—not because they actually uphold this claim. For to assert only continuity is to assert only quantitative development. That is, it is the concept of rupture in dialectical unity with continuity that allows us to conceive of the qualitative trans-

formation of the science. Otherwise we are left with the simple quantification of successive revolutionary figures.

In any case, to claim that Maoism is the third and highest stage of revolutionary theory is to in fact claim some notion of rupture along with a foundational notion of continuity gleaned from the unity of related stages. Asserting that one theoretical stage is higher than another is to say that is not the same as the previous stage, is in some form of discontinuity, because to be logically continuous is to be logically identical, which means that there can be no higher stages just as there can be no lower stages. Something *new* is not in perfect continuity with the old even if this newness highlights and unlocks truths and germinal insights in older moments—which would be the continuity preserved in such a theoretical development. If there are stages in revolutionary theory, then there are ruptures, as one stage supersedes another, just as there are continuities, as we cannot reach successive stages without standing upon previous theoretical truths.

### **Against Destiny**

Marxist theologians always go back to the classics so as to assert theoretical destiny. The anti-Maoists and anti-Leninists have a long history of engaging in such a practice: they assert that there is no evidence of Leninism in Marx, let alone evidence of Maoism, and promote either a completely pre-Leninist Marxism or some Trotskyist variant based on the passages they decide are the most significant. We know that such readings are wrong, that they deceitfully pick and choose in the way that they assemble the foundational work of Marx and Engels—*but this is the point*. Our forebears of revolutionary science are not prophets, going back to them does not solve questions but, rather and in reference to their own claims, should make us recognize that we can only answer those questions presented to us in our historical moment. There are indeed multiple ways to read previous moments of the science, possibilities based on what they were thinking in their time and place, due to their historical and social limitations. The reading of precedence always happens in retrospect; the only aspect that makes any reading theoret-

ically important—that allows us to develop the language of universality—is the basis of the theory that is class struggle. That is, those aspects of the previous sequences of theory that are proved by its revolutionary development, that are seized and mobilized in moments of revolution (specifically world historical revolution) are far more significant than those interpretations that have nothing to do with theory's core claims regarding class struggle. Trotskyists, for example, assert a particular destiny without any experience of class struggle: this is why their reading of Marxist origins is simultaneously doctrinally correct but scientifically wrong. They can find precedence for their theory, as can those opposed to their theory, but they have so far failed to falsify this interpretation. Trotskyists are theologians par excellence; let's not follow their example into the void of pseudo-praxis.

We cannot emphasize this anti-theology enough; it should be central to Maoist reason and yet is obliterated by an anti-scientific mindset that seeks an unbroken theoretical destiny from Marx and Engels to the present. As noted in the previous chapter qualitatively new theoretical moments define their precursors; they were not predicted all along. To claim pure continuity, an unbroken and promised theoretical growth with historically mandated synthesizers and great theorists helping it along the way, is to claim prophecy. Moreover it is to delete two significant aspects of historical materialism: i) its methodological perspective of history; ii) its foundational understanding of the motion of history.

The methodological perspective of history presented to us by historical materialism is that we can only understand historical development in its totality by reading the past through the present. This is an unfinished totality because, unlike Hegelian idealism, it remains incomplete. To paraphrase Marx: we can only answer those questions that history presents us with. In *The 18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire* he speaks of history as a nightmare on the brain of the living and that, although humans collectively make history (that is, move history forward), we are made by this same historical process. We can understand how we are made by grasping our present circumstances in light of the historical relations that have brought them into being. Such an insight will teach us

something about thinking and engaging with the present—it will reveal our options, teach us something about the limits of our contemporary period and the possibilities of future transformation—but it does not *predict* the future. Hence the truth of successive theoretical developments did not always exist in the work of Marx and Engels anymore than the exact present we have always existed in the contradictions of the historical past. We can see that present in these contradictions now, because this is the only present that exists, but history could have happened differently. (The materialist point, though, is that history *didn't* happen differently.) Similarly, we can see the prefigurations of the theoretical terrain's later developments in its antecedents because these developments now exist.<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, historical materialism teaches us that class struggle is the motion of history, the law of motion of this science. If we accept that class struggle is the basis of historical development then we must also accept that history does not proceed in a smooth, straight line but is rather a culmination of zig-zags and moments of torsion generated by the historical tension between social classes and their reflection in

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<sup>38</sup> If I seem to be over-emphasizing this point, both in this chapter and the previous one, it is because it is a point that seems to be missed by many who claim the name *Maoist* but insist on this dogmatic rejection of the ruptural aspect of the continuity-rupture unity of opposites. As Maoists we should already be aware that those Marxist-Leninist variants that reject Maoism as a third stage use this same logic of continuity to do so. That is, when we assert that Maoism presents new theoretical innovations the doctrinaire Marxist-Leninist goes back to the works of Lenin and Stalin, as well as the historical period of the Russian Revolution, to locate esoteric evidence that will prove that Maoism has generated nothing new. Evidence of cultural revolution and the mass-line, for example, is located in throwaway remarks and tiny historical examples so as to prove that Maoism is not a meaningful qualitative development. The fact, however, is that there is no exoteric evidence and such claims are based on occult readings that treat theory as doctrine. Hence, it is disappointing when Maoist formations such as the late Red Guards Austin write essays such as *Do Not Reverse The Verdict* ([redguardsaustin.wordpress.com/2016/12/19/do-not-reverse-the-verdict-a-tribute-to-comrade-joseph-stalin/](http://redguardsaustin.wordpress.com/2016/12/19/do-not-reverse-the-verdict-a-tribute-to-comrade-joseph-stalin/)) which, by celebrating Stalin as the theoretical “bridge” between Lenin and Mao, confirm precisely what the anti-Maoist Marxist-Leninists have been saying for years: that Mao’s theoretical interventions are an after-thought because everything he wrote was already thought by Stalin and Stalin’s relation to Lenin. Due to this perspective on history, then, these supposed “Gonzaloists” do not grant the same theoretical autonomy to Mao that Gonzalo and the PCP did—they sound more like repetitions of the anti-revisionist Marxism-Leninism that went by the name of “Mao Zedong Thought”.

every area of social existence. Revolutions are, by definition, *ruptural* in that they break from the continuity of business as usual. The idea that there can be an uninterrupted working out of historical contradictions is the logic of reformism and accommodation, what the capitalist roaders during the Cultural Revolution justified under the principle of “two unites into one”. Those associated with the revolutionary line in the Cultural Revolution argued instead for the principle that “one divides into two” so as to emphasize the importance of splitting and breakage that defines historical momentum where antagonistic class positions are involved. When it comes to the larger and more generalized historical stage, where we can grasp the great theoretical developments of this science, world historical revolutions become significant *and these are by definition ruptures from the previous states of affairs*. They are not predestined, they are not generated by peaceful reform, but are violent breaks from the past so as to establish qualitatively different theoretical continuities. To be clear: when “rupture” is the principal aspect of the continuity-rupture contradiction, we mean the rupture from revisionism and opportunism.

### **Contradictions**

One final point needs to be made about the theological distortion of Marxism, particularly Marxism-Leninism-Maoism: theological approaches to revolutionary theory are largely incapable of grasping the distinction between antagonistic and non-antagonistic contradictions. Specifically, there is a tendency to treat all contradictions as antagonistic. Everything that differs from the authoritative reading of the theory is judged hostile just as priests judge all deviations from revealed scripture as heretical.

We know that a failure to recognize antagonistic contradictions, or when non-antagonistic contradictions are becoming antagonistic, has historically resulted in revisionism. Such an error is in fact key to understanding the significant historical moments of revisionism. The belief that the antagonistic contradiction between the proletariat and bourgeoisie could be made non-antagonistic through parliamentary

struggle and progressive reforms, or that there could be a “peaceful co-existence” with capitalism is the logic behind the revisionism of both Bernstein and Kautsky’s SPD and Khrushchev’s Soviet Union. Often this conciliatory approach to contradictions is accompanied by “new” and eclectic doctrines such as Kautsky’s *Guidelines for a Socialist Action Programme*. Hence it is commonplace to imagine that revisionism only manifests according to an eclectic mode of thought, double-down on doctrinal purity, fear all creative applications of the science, and become absorbed in dogmatic devotion to the classics. History also tells us, however, that such an attitude breeds its own kind of revisionism: the dogmato-revisionism that, by treating the classics as scripture (and we need to recognize that what is deemed “classic” is historical since the work of Lenin was not deemed “classic” by a swathe of Marxists at the time it was warged, nor was the work of Mao at the time this notion of dogmato-revisionism was coined), undermines the scientific outlook of historical materialism. Theological devotion to the letter of the law always undercuts the spirit of the law.

Therefore, while it is correct to recognize that some non-antagonistic contradictions can and will become antagonistic at certain junctures, it is also the case that non-antagonistic contradictions can be forced into antagonism due to the hostility of dogmatic cadre. We are seeing this now in the Maoist milieu—primarily with the rise of the “principally Maoist” tendency but, like all erroneous attitudes, it is endemic and manifests in varying degrees. What is interesting, however, is the ways in which this inability to grasp non-antagonistic contradictions, though openly justified by a theological attitude towards Marxist doctrine, also undercuts the classical theology. The promotion of antagonistic contradictions at the expense of non-antagonistic contradictions is dialectically unified with promotion of non-antagonistic contradictions at the expense of antagonistic contradictions. The dogmatic and eclectic modes of thought are a unity of opposites—just as ultra-leftism is a disguised rightism, and adventurism and tailism are identical in their betrayal of the masses—and that unity is revisionism.

Contemporary history has presented us with a paradigmatic

example of this unity of opposites. When the RCP-USA decided that its so-called “New Synthesis” was the red line of the international Maoist movement it forced the emerging contradiction between itself and the majority of its former international comrades to become antagonistic. In this specific case the forcing of antagonism on the part of the Avakianites was a good thing for the rest of the Maoist movement because it revealed the RCP-USA’s revisionism quite quickly and resulted in a useful series of demarcations. However, it is notable that the group that pushed this contradiction into antagonism was the locus of revisionism. Those who persist in treating all contradictions as antagonistic will most likely be those through whom revisionism will manifest.

We must recognize, though, that the antagonistic contradiction forced by the Avakianites was not simply the result of dogmatism; eclecticism also played a role. That is, the New Synthesis is an eclectic combination of classical Marxism and supposedly “new” insights that fancied itself a revelatory assemblage of historical materialism. Hence its use to us for thinking the emergence and development of Maoist reason: the two primary modes of thinking through which revisionism manifests, dogmatism and eclecticism, were united in this instance. Dogmatism was the principle aspect of the contradiction; eclecticism was subordinate as a secondary role in the contradiction. That is, theological antagonism was principle but it relied on a non-antagonistic unity with post-Maoist ideology: the New Synthesis was primarily dogmatic in the way it was pushed into theoretical practice; much of its content, though pushed upon the International Communist Movement with theological fervour, was quite eclectic. Our experience with the Avakianites, then, should teach us about the ways in which the dogmatic and eclectic modes of thought are united in their revisionism.

(To be clear, Lenin also understood the ways in which dogmatism and eclecticism were united in revisionism. *What Is To Be Done?* demonstrates this understanding. Those associated with Rabocheye Dyelo attacked their opponents for being sectarian dogmatists, proclaiming the freedom of criticism, but Lenin responded by indicating that the eclectic perspective celebrated by Rabocheye Dyelo was in fact



its own dogmatism that demanded an absolute freedom *from* criticism. Lenin's theoretical wager intended to cut this Gordian Knot was premised on a rejection of both dogmatism and eclecticism and, because it was confirmed by a practice that led to the October Revolution, is justified as part of the unfolding of revolutionary science.)

The MLMpM tendency of Maoism, along with tendencies of Maoist reason that function in a similar manner, is not as different from the Avakianite revisionism as it would like to pretend. On the one hand, this tendency is antagonistic to all theoretical expressions that seem to betray the Marxist classics, locking itself into the standpoint of theological purity. On the other hand, it promotes the militarization of the party and jefatura—which are not directly found in the classics and can indeed be treated as eclectic developments—as doctrinaire. Even worse: some of the most faithful adherents to this tendency openly proclaim their devotion to eclecticism by claiming that we should only read the works of Gonzalo and the PCP because everything else to date, and everything produced by ongoing people's wars, is infected with revisionism. Even worse, they define all critiques of their political line as “rightism” merely because they have made the a priori assumption that their line is properly “left”.<sup>39</sup>

In *Demarcation and Demystification* I discussed the ways in which reasoning gets absorbed by a theoretical terrain's provincialism to the point of being unable to think a region within this terrain according to the latter's overall logic. I called this tendency “assimilation” where those guilty of this philosophical error, refusing to take on the kind of perspective that in the past was useful for understanding revisionist developments, “could no longer ask the larger questions regarding

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<sup>39</sup> The Avakianites made the very same claims regarding the New Synthesis and its hypostatization in the figure of Bob Avakian. Similar sub-arguments were made as well: when the RCP-USA was accused of propagating a cult of personality around Avakian they responded with the false dilemma that, since anti-communists complained about the so-called “cult of Stalin”, any criticism of a cult of personality was therefore anti-communist. The very same guilt by association statements are made by the defenders of jefatura who, like the Avakianites, refuse to accept that all such criticisms of the elevation of Gonzalo to a great man of history are criticisms of a *conservatism*—and hence an actual rightism—within Maoism.

meaning and clarity.”<sup>40</sup> Assimilated thought is always dogmatic since it cannot think beyond the boundaries drawn by historically received formulae. The principally Maoist trend is one such species of assimilated reasoning since it begins and ends with the province of the opening stages of MLM, its initiation and particularization in Peru, treating the boundaries as universal. The US online principally Maoist journal *Struggle Sessions* is evidence of such assimilated thought: nearly every article is an ad hoc exercise in maintaining the boundaries, refusing to think through any critiques of its particular variant of Maoism, and demonstrating the theological practice of repeating slogans and terms, defining these terms in the relation to the unquestioned truth of the tendency, and generally failing to think its own thought. The similarity between this kind of reasoning, the reasoning of the Avakianites, and even the reasoning of some of the more fanatical species of Third Worldism is undeniable.

Unlike Avakianism and Third Worldism (the latter of which we will examine in the next chapter), the principally Maoist tendency is not a post-Maoism or an alter-Maoism; it is a theoretical development that imagines itself at the root of actual Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, purer than even the RIM articulation—which means purer than Gonzalo and the PCP itself since, as noted, the RIM declaration was endorsed and signed by the PCP. But it is not surprising that a more doctrinaire and dogmatic form of the PCP’s initial and important formulation of MLM has emerged in the decades following the collapse of the people’s war in Peru. Such is the pattern of theological thought. After all, a much more dogmatic and puritanical protestantism emerged after the passing of Luther and Muntzer and, in the course of the emergence, adopted Luther as its prophet while simultaneously declaring itself in unbroken continuity with an authentic Christianity. So now we have a species of Maoist reason evincing something similar to the dogmatic obsession of Anabaptists that was premised on an eclectic break from Catholicism.

Maoism deserves better than this because it is the inheritor of

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<sup>40</sup> J. Moufawad-Paul, *Demarcation and Demystification* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2019), 133-134.

revolutionary science.

Nor does Maoism deserve a reversal where the principle aspect of the contradiction is eclecticism but a secondary dogmatism is retained. Such was the case with the now defunct Kasama Project that, while pursuing a wild creative rupture in the history of theory and rejecting Avakian style democracy, fell back on an older dogmatism—the dogmatism of a movementism that could not accept revolutionary theory as a science. Another kind of theology is produced by this whole-hearted embrace of eclecticism: a negative theology, a fear of accepting truth processes that proclaim a continuity beyond historical rupture.

Marxism-Leninism-Maoism needs to supersede theology and its inversion. Because it is not theology nor abstract political theory. Maoism marks the current moment of revolutionary science and those who call themselves Maoists must act like militants devoted to science rather than dogmatists, eclecticians, or a combination of these two deviations.



## Chapter 5

### The Dogmato-eclecticism of “Maoist Third Worldism”

So far we have been dealing primarily with the first, third, fourth, and fifth expressions of Maoism: post-Maoism that is characterized by groups defined primarily by dogmatism (RCP-USA) or eclecticism (the defunct Kasama Project), though eclecticism and dogmatism are respectively secondary in both cases; the RIM articulation of MLM that shares a parallel development with the CPP and CPI(Maoist); the “principally Maoist” articulation that adheres only to the regional Maoism of the PCP; the vague “in development” Maoism that, though accepting that Maoism is a third stage of the science, desires to find a line of descent that predates the PCP/RIM moment of theoretical generation. We have examined these together, rather than treating them separately, because they have often coincided and intersected with each other. That is, they share a lot of the same terrain; they have separated themselves from each other over time thus appearing as distinct categories of Maoist reason despite having once shared a commonality.

But the second species of Maoist reason—the so-called “Third Worldist” tendency—has been an undercurrent of the Maoist movement since it emerged from the New Communist Movement. It is a parallel tendency that, contributing some insights that have adjacently informed the other species of Maoist reason (i.e. the significance of the labour aristocracy), has functioned as something of an alternative or shadow Maoism. As such, due to its isometric relationship to Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, it deserves a separate chapter: this is because it has conceived of itself as separate, existing as a critique of other Maoisms, since its emergence with the Maoist International Movement (MIM).

In this chapter I will examine Maoist Third Worldism (MTW) as a species of “dogmato-eclecticism”. That is, while it often falls back on seemingly doctrinaire assertions of the proletariat, exploitation,

anti-imperialism, and the importance of the struggles at the global peripheries, it does so in a way that is ultimately eclectic. Due to this error in reasoning, and the practice that results from this reasoning, as a discrete Maoist tendency it cannot fulfill the promise of revolutionary science—of which Maoism is supposed to be the most recent articulation—which is class revolution. We should recognize, however, that there are insights that MTW has generated from which we can learn. As with all the tendencies of Maoist reason this particular tendency shares the history of the same theoretical terrain and, due to this fact, there are aspects of its theoretical constellation that are not wholly wrong. But as a fundamental approach to Maoist reason it is erroneous.

Furthermore, as with my approach to other tendencies, my aim in this chapter is not to provide a rigorous point-by-point rejection of MTW intended to disprove all of its core tenets. Rather, this intervention is guided by the notion that if we want to think a revolutionary theory capable of bringing us closer to communism MTW lacks the qualifications to do so. Having already argued, both here and in previous work, that Maoism is the inheritor of the mantle of revolutionary science, this chapter is concerned with indicating how MTW does not live up to the theoretical developments of Maoism.

### **The General Problematic**

A significant problem resulting from any attempt to clarify Maoist Third Worldism is the fact that MTW is somewhat heterogeneous. Although Denmark's Communist Working Circle (KAK) and USAmerica's Maoist International Movement (MIM) are arguably the origin points of this tendency, in the decades since the MIM's heyday various groups and individuals generated by these origin points have struck out according to their own interpretations of third worldist ideology. For instance, there is the Leading Light Communist Organization (LLCO) which is arguably the most dogmatic and sectarian third worldist group—and thus the most clearly dogmatic-eclecticist—with its claims that it is “the highest stage of revolutionary science to date.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> LLCO, “Study Guide for New Comrades” ([llcodotorg.wordpress.com/study-](http://llcodotorg.wordpress.com/study-)

Then there is the Maoist International Ministry of Prisons (MIM-Prisons) that, though concerned primarily with agitation amongst US prisoners, sees itself more in line with the ideology developed by the MIM. There is also the Revolutionary Anti-Imperialist Movement (RAIM), that split from the LLCO, which at one point seemed to have the most coherent third worldist theory since MIM and has attempted to develop some creative concepts of praxis within a first world context. Although RAIM recently dissolved, its synthesis of aspects of MTW is important for the conceptual outlook of those who are drawn to this line of thought. Finally, there are numerous individuals, collapsed organizations, groups that either merged with or are associated with the aforementioned groups. Thus, although I will be referencing various third worldist organizations, I will try to focus this polemic on the core principals that all branches of this tendency accept with a particular focus on MIM and RAIM which I take, rightly or wrongly, to have the most coherent expression of contemporary MTW.<sup>42</sup>

### **Labour Aristocracy and Net Exploitation**

If there is one theoretical concern that makes MTW unique, and unifies all variants of this tendency, it is its particular conception of class structure. Since every communist ideology begins by classifying friends and enemies according to the universal class contradiction of *proletariat* and *bourgeois*, the one concept that unites every articulation of MTW is where it locates and how it defines these classes. Specifically, all species of MTW generally hold, basing themselves on an interest-

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guide). Indeed, the LLCO consistently refers to its “leading light communist ideology” as something new, properly scientific, and superior to even other articulations of MTWism. Thus, the LLCO is something of a ludicrous caricature of MTWism and is often used, unfairly perhaps, to dismiss other MTW organizations that do not openly claim their ideology must be adopted by third world organizations so as to prevent armed revisionism. Dismissing MTWism became even easier when the founder of the LLCO, who went by the name of “Augusta Luz”, was arrested for drug trafficking.

<sup>42</sup> Although MIM-Prisons is also coherent, since its core theory often tends to be a word-for-word reprisal of MIM, I feel it is better to return to MIM by way of RAIM for a contemporary articulation of the ideology. Furthermore, since the LLCO is to third worldism what the Spartacists are to Trotskyism, I will treat them as the orthodox threshold of this tendency.

ing interpretation of Lenin's theory of the labour aristocracy, that the proletariat cannot be found at the centres of global capitalism and is thus primarily a third world phenomenon. This is the axiom of MTW identity. Moreover, as with every variant of Marxism's location and definition of the proletariat and bourgeois, MTWism's conception of the universal class contradiction of capitalism produces a general category of revolutionary praxis—that is, how the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism can be accomplished—that is often referred to, following an essay by Lin Biao, as “global people's war”. While it may be the case that different articulations of third worldism produce differing interpretations of global people's war, the majoritarian MTW organizations are quite clear that this is the general framework within which their particular theorizations of revolutionary practice operate. Therefore, in this section, I will discuss the general MTW theory of class structure and class revolution.

In 1963 Gotfred Appel of Denmark's KAK conceptualized the notion of “parasite state theory” where he claimed that, due the preponderance of the labour aristocracy in the imperialist metropolises, there was no longer a “first world” proletariat:

In short, the theory claimed that the working class of the imperialist countries had become an ally of the ruling class due to its privileges in the context of the global capitalist system. Its objective interests were closer to those of Western capitalists than to those of the exploited and oppressed masses of the Third World. Therefore, the Western working class could no longer be considered a revolutionary subject. Only the masses of the Third World posed a threat to global capitalism by rebelling against the exploitation and oppression they were suffering.<sup>43</sup>

Although it might be inaccurate to classify the KAK as “Maoist Third Worldist”—since it upheld Liu and would later uphold Deng—it

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<sup>43</sup> Gabriel Kuhn, *Turning Money Into Rebellion* (Kersplebedeb/PM Press: Montreal/Oakland, 2014), 4-5.



was definitely the first “Third Worldist” articulation of Marxism, associated somewhere in the constellation surrounding the Chinese Revolution, and as such prefigured the core theory of MTW. Moreover, as we shall examine later, the group that split from the KAK would demonstrate the limits of MTW revolutionary practice.

In any case, decades later in 1995, MIM’s tenth theoretical journal would reiterate the significance of the above conception of the labour aristocracy (though there is no actual evidence that this reiteration was based on reading KAK documents), defining it as the “international line of demarcation” and thus “[t]he recognition of super profits extracted from the oppressed nations as a central fact of economic life in the imperialist countries.” Such a recognition meant that MIM would “not adhere to any international organization of communists or joint declaration or communique involving imperialist country parties that does not recognize that the imperialist country or ‘white’ proletariat is either non-existent or a tiny minority as indicated in the conditions of white-collar work and the pay of those workers.”<sup>44</sup>

In both cases the conceptualization of the proletariat was clear: there could be no proletariat in the imperialist metropolises since the working classes at the centres of imperialism were dependent on the exploitation of third world labour. MIM went a bit further than the KAK by noting the racist coding of the labour aristocracy since, at that time, the imperialist bloc was defined by the nations that had emerged from modern colonialism. This insight demonstrated that MIM was partially influenced by documents such as J. Sakai’s *Settlers* but was perhaps ultimately regionalistic—invested as it was in understanding US settler-capitalism—and thus did not predict the rise of Chinese imperialism. In any case the basic foundation of MTW was clear: due to the labour aristocracy the proletariat at the centres of capitalism was either non-existent or marginal. The revolutionary subject could only exist as a historic bloc in the global peripheries.

Although basing itself on the general conception of the first world

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<sup>44</sup> MIM, “Editor’s Introduction.” In *MIM Theory #10* ([prisoncensorship.info/archive/etext/met/mt10intro.html](http://prisoncensorship.info/archive/etext/met/mt10intro.html)).

labour aristocracy established by MIM (and later, after the publication of *Turning Money Into Rebellion*, the prior insights of the KAK and the groups that came out of the KAK), RAIM adopted a further development of this concept with terminology gleaned, in part, from Zak Cope's *Divided World Divided Class*. That is, aware that the concept of "labour aristocracy" is accepted in various ways by some other non-MTW Marxists, RAIM attempts to clarify the third worldist use of the concept by utilizing the term *net-exploitation*. Net-exploitation is a concept intended to demonstrate the fact that first world workers are not exploited but, in fact, are involved in the exploitation of third world workers—the upshot being that, since the proletariat is the proletariat insofar as it is *exploited* (by itself not an uncontroversial Marxist claim), the proletariat does not exist at the global centres of capitalism.

In a small article entitled "Net Exploitation by the Numbers (Hypothetically)", RAIM defines exploitation in the following, and again uncontroversial, manner: "exploitation can be roughly defined as earning through work less than the full product of that work... a person might work for a day, make 10 widgets; yet only earn in wages enough to purchase six widgets."<sup>45</sup> (Since any Marxist that rejects this definition of exploitation is most probably a revisionist—and since the point of this polemic is not to defend the theory of exploitation, labour theory of value, or the concept of surplus-value—I won't elaborate.) RAIM then goes on to establish a common third worldist concern so as to connect the root theory of exploitation to the rarified theory of net-exploitation:

The modern economy is arranged globally. A minority of First World countries exploit at gunpoint the Third World. Subsets of workers with vastly different functions, wage-levels and standards of living exist. Only in such a situation could a worker be a net-exploiter.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> N. Brown, "Net Exploitation by the Numbers (Hypothetically)" ([anti-imperialism.org/2010/01/11/net-exploitation-by-the-numbers-hypothetically/](http://anti-imperialism.org/2010/01/11/net-exploitation-by-the-numbers-hypothetically/)).

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

Here I would argue that the substance of this point, though controversial for *some* Marxist individuals and organizations, should be accepted as a fact. There *is* such a thing as imperialism and it exists for a reason determined by capitalism’s logic—that is, imperialism is not just some historical fluke that emerged in a vacuum. The imperialist nations exploit the nations in the periphery, often at gunpoint, and this results in a variation of workers and differential wage-levels. The problem, however, is how the concept of net-exploitation is smuggled into the end of this fact, thus loading a premise and forcing a possibly false conclusion:

Hypothetically speaking, in today’s capitalist-imperialist economy, we might see a situation where two different workers each create 10 widgets, or 20 total. The first worker, from the First World, might earn enough wages to purchase 11 widgets whereas the latter worker, from the Third World, only one. Through the extreme exploitation of the Third World worker, the First World worker receives wages over and above what they actually created. In this situation, the First World worker gets a small “cut,” the equivalent of one widget, from the 9 widgets produced by the Third World worker yet not included in the latter’s wages. In other words, the First World worker is a net-exploiter.<sup>47</sup>

How does it follow from the fact of imperialism and super-exploitation that net-exploitation, and thus the claim that the first world worker somehow receives wages “over and above what they actually created” is correct? Obviously, RAIM would argue that more thorough examinations of net-exploitation, such as the one found in Cope’s *Divided World Divided Class*, prove the logical coherence of this statement, but this does not mean that the argument is correct. At the most, it means that there is a positivist empirical way to prove net-exploitation just as there is a positivist empirical way to prove, as others have unfortunately produced, that there is no such thing as super-exploita-

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

tion. Any substantial materialist investigation of reality that provides explanatory depth, however, contradicts this general syllogism.

We do not have to (and we should not) deny the super-exploitation that develops under imperialism allowing first world workers to benefit from imperialism, to reject this concept of net-exploitation. While the export of capital allows for the first world worker to be less exploited, and thus live a better life than their third world contemporary, to claim that the first world worker is not exploited—even in a limited sense—is to make the absurd claim that there is no reason for first world capitalists to maintain a first world work force in any sense and that the only reason they are doing so is because they are fully collaborating with their counterparts in global exploitation. If first world workers are not exploited, then we need to ask why there is a continuous drive of wage-lowering, a consistent cap on the wages of first world workers, and the tendency to casualize labour—not to mention union busting, the use of undocumented labour, assaults on benefits, etc.

Obviously first world capitalists are getting something from their first world workers, just as it is obvious that the majority of these first world workers, though greatly privileged in comparison to their third world counterparts, are making less than what they would make if they controlled the means of production. The historic compromise between labour and capital in the first world—though made possible by imperialism and achieved through workers' struggles within the possibility produced by the imperialist context—only makes sense if we accept the theory of the labour aristocracy and super-exploitation, but this does not necessarily mean the completion of first world worker and capitalist collaboration and thus the absence of exploitation in the first world. The contradiction between first world workers and capitalists, though often assuaged by the labour aristocracy and the ideology it produces, still persists: in moments of crisis it consistently explodes and capitalists, who certainly do not see their privileged workers as belonging to their class, fight for the right to exploit first world labour.

Ultimately, the theory of net-exploitation is the result of equivocation where the concept of *exploitation* is taken to be axiomatically

synonymous with *super-exploitation*. Therefore, if we agree with the MTW theorist that exploitation is only exploitation insofar as it is super-exploitation, then we have to agree that there is no exploitation in the first world. From this it follows that there can be no first world proletariat in any sense. But such an agreement is only possible if we conflate the categories of exploitation and super-exploitation.

“Without investigation,” the Maoist maxim goes, “there should be no right to speak.” But third worldist explanations of net-exploitation and the labour aristocracy are precisely the kind of explanations that emerge from a lack of social investigation. Most often they come from the work of academic theorization and abstract empiricism (and thus can be traced back to the works of H.W. Edwards, Arghiri Emmanuel, Immanuel Wallerstein, and others—all of whose investigations were purely academic) rather than emerging from a context of social investigation where one goes out to the masses and positions oneself in a social movement. So what if these abstract exercises supposedly “prove”, with statistics and positivist equations, that there is no proletariat at the centres of capitalism? Bourgeois economists can also “prove” that the third world is not being underdeveloped, or that capitalism is working, by making recourse to the same analytic toolkit—a toolkit that every major Marxist revolutionary has recognized as unscientific since the time of Lenin.

The general point, here, is that when one does immerse oneself in even the first world masses, however minimally, one immediately discovers a conscious awareness of exploitation, a conscious awareness of poverty, a conscious awareness of being unable to live as a full human due to the necessity of survival. If social being determines social consciousness, then where does this consciousness come from? It cannot be derived from bourgeois ideology which has always maintained, even in the first world, that workers are not exploited and that poverty is only a problem if workers are lazy; nor can it emerge in a vacuum, an a priori idea that just pops spontaneously into the average workers’ head. But if this consciousness exists we have to find a way to explain it, to make sense of how the mental emerges from the material, and the theory of

net-exploitation, by itself, can only deny that it is a fact.

None of this is to say, again, that these workers and their reserve army, if their awareness of exploitation resonates with a material fact, are even close to experiencing the same level of exploitation and misery as their third world counterparts. The argument, here, is simply that the fact of super-exploitation does not mean that exploitation does not exist in spaces where the working class also benefits from super-exploitation: there are different levels of exploitation. It is clearly the case that proletarianization is more of a concrete fact at the peripheries than it is at the centres, which is why we should agree with third worldism in arguing, along with Lenin and Mao, that revolutions will most likely first happen at the weakest links of global capitalism. But such a recognition does not mean that there is no exploited proletariat at the centres of capitalism—these are two different claims that should not be conflated, as MTWism does.

### “First Worldism”

Due to its division of the world into a global proletariat and bourgeoisie, third worldism claims that the primary enemy of a revolutionary movement is “first worldism”. In its *Open Letter Against First Worldism in the ICM*, which was written to the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist formations involved in rebooting the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement, RAIM argues:

First Worldism is a fatal flaw. It is both a hegemonic narrative within the “left” and a trademark of reformism, revisionism, and chauvinism. [...] The consistent struggle against First Worldism is an extension of the communist struggle against both social chauvinism and the theory of the productive forces. As such, it is the duty of all genuine Communists to struggle against First Worldism.<sup>48</sup>

Elsewhere, in a critique and reappropriation of Saul Alinsky’s

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<sup>48</sup> RAIM, *Open Letter Against First Worldism in the ICM* (anti-imperialism.org/2013/04/15/raim-a-letter-to-maoist-and-revolutionary-organizations/).

*Rules for Radicals*, RAIM consistently emphasizes “first worldists” and “first worldism”, rather than capitalism and imperialism, as the primary enemies that the third worldist must be prepared to defeat.<sup>49</sup> Although the reasons for choosing “first worldism” as the primary enemy are clearly based on the third worldist analysis of reality that is built around the concepts of the labour aristocracy and net-exploitation, there is a dangerous lack of theoretical precision to an analysis that appears to elevate the possible contradiction between “first worldism” and “third worldism” to the level of an antagonistic contradiction, if not the *principle* antagonistic contradiction.

Once again we are faced with a tendency that cannot parse the differences between antagonistic and non-antagonistic contradictions—which was the problem, as aforementioned and for different reasons, with the “principally Maoist” tendency. There is something to be said about how the comprehension of antagonistic/non-antagonistic contradictions are central to pursuing a revolutionary project, which was why Mao focused on this distinction throughout his work, most importantly in *On Contradiction*. While it is indeed the case that revisionism is an immanent danger that a revolutionary movement must overcome and stamp out, it is also the case that we can easily mistake non-antagonistic contradictions as revisionism and rightism because it is easier to fall back on sectarian dogmatism when differences of line are encountered. In the case of third worldism, however, this dogmatism takes on an eclectic dimension since the locus of revisionism, reformism, and rightism are understood as “first worldist”.

What counts as “first worldist”, here, is any revolutionary movement that does not adopt the third worldist line. Thus, the outright first world chauvinism of eurocentric communism is only different in form from those organizations that believe there is a proletariat in the first world that can be organized. To believe that there is a proletariat in the first world that can be organized, and that it is the duty of any communist organization to locate and organize this proletariat, is possibly first

<sup>49</sup> RAIM, *Applying Alinsky's 'Rules for Radicals' Against First Worldism and Reformism* ([anti-imperialism.org/2013/02/06/applying-alinskys-rules-for-radicals-against-first-worldism-and-reformism/](http://anti-imperialism.org/2013/02/06/applying-alinskys-rules-for-radicals-against-first-worldism-and-reformism/)).

worldism insofar as it denies the fact that the proletariat is located solely in the global peripheries.

Although linking these very different tendencies together makes sense if one buys the theory of net-exploitation, it seems quite odd when it comes to actual practice: is it implicitly “first worldist” to argue that there is a proletariat at the centres of capitalism and go out to organize, for example, miners around a communist ideology that is also anti-imperialist? The third worldist will argue, however, that to embark on such an organizational strategy is to deny the fact that first worldism will necessarily get in the way of one’s praxis and quite possibly result in counter-revolution. There is a “damned if you do” fatalism that lurks at the heart of third worldism and produces an a priori justification for revolutionary refusal. After all, if the revolution can only happen elsewhere, and agitating for revolution in the first world must always fail due to an intrinsic counter-revolutionary tendency that overdetermines praxis at the centres of capitalism, then the third worldist living within the “belly of the beast” (where, to be clear, third worldism generally finds its home) is justified in failing to mobilize the masses around a revolutionary strategy—the masses are in the third world and it is thus impossible to practice the mass-line in the first world.

Here it is worth emphasizing, though, that some of the concerns motivating MTW are valid and should not be dismissed out of hand: we need to recognize that unquestioned racism and over-fetishization of a working-class automatically classified as white (who looks a certain way, works in a certain kind of factory, listens to the Boss, etc.) has been a significant problem for some organizations and that the inability to deal with this problem is often due to the fact that these organizations are overwhelmingly filled with white folks who want to separate race from class and ignore the role imperialist exploitation plays in class struggle. We also need to recognize that the conservatism and embourgeoisification of the working classes at the centres of capitalism is indeed due, as third worldists have rightfully argued, to a labour aristocracy that was made possible by imperialist super-exploitation. As I noted at the outset of this chapter, there are aspects to MTW that are laudable and that,



shorn from their ahistorical and often quite metaphysical theoretical constellation, are extremely useful for any revolutionary project worth its salt.

Other variants of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, then, are in agreement with MTW when it comes to the problem that “first worldism” plays in the movement. Where these tendencies differ from MTW, though, is on the focus of “first worldism” as the primary enemy since it serves as a substitution for thinking about capitalism as an enemy—such a substitution, as we shall examine in the conclusion of this chapter, prevents concrete organizing against capitalism. For such a substitution is not a problem for third worldism because the praxis logically generated by its theory prevents it from even trying to organize amongst the first world masses—if these masses are all part of some global bourgeois, then there is no real reason to organize amongst them. In any case, by arguing that “first worldism” is the primary enemy of a revolutionary movement, third worldists can spend their organizational time attacking other Marxist organizations that do not agree with their line rather than focusing primarily on organizing amongst the masses and waging theoretical line struggle on the side.

While it is correct to grasp the power of ruling class ideology, and thus be prepared to expend part of one’s revolutionary praxis in combating those superstructural elements that partially determine the base, the focus on the problem of “first worldism” is primarily a focus on the realm of ideas in that it locates struggle on the ideological terrain by arguing that the most significant problem facing the international communist movement is not the problem of capitalism, let alone the problem of organizing a viable and sustainable movement at this conjuncture of history, but a problem of ideas. One is reminded, here, of Trotskyism’s obsession with the spectre of “Stalinism” that supposedly haunts every non-Trotskyist movement: third worldists are similarly obsessed with the spectre of “first worldism”.

And yet the belief that “first worldism” is the primary enemy of the revolutionary camp has been a dogmatic conceit from the very beginning of third worldism. The MTW rejection of the RIM is a per-

fect example of this conceit: following MIM's conspiracy theory analysis of the RCP-USA's control of that would-be international, third worldists are able to ground their suspicions of "first worldism" in what they take to be an historical fact: the RIM, which they misunderstand as the property of the RCP-USA, ended up becoming a bastion of first world chauvinism and a weapon that undermined the PCP's people's war. Hence the suspicion and hatred third worldists bear for any Marxist-Leninist-Maoist formation that cites the RIM experience as significant: for third worldists, the RIM was nothing more than a first worldist project that, because it was first worldist, destroyed a revolution.<sup>50</sup>

Although I would argue that it is worth taking some of MIM's critique of the RCP-USA's behaviour in RIM into account, I would also argue that this position regarding the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement, which is supposed to prove the perniciousness of some unquestioned "first worldism", is more of a conspiracy theory than a scientific assessment. While it is true that the RIM was initiated by the RCP-USA—while it is true that the RCP-USA's chauvinist behaviour led to its collapse, while it is true that the RCP-USA might have even founded the RIM for chauvinist reasons—to assume it was simply a "first worldist" organization aimed at undermining the revolution in Peru is extremely problematic. For one thing, it imagines that the RCP-USA was always in complete control of the RIM; for another it presupposes that every third world organization involved in the RIM was either a puppet of or duped by the RCP-USA and thus guilty of "first worldism"; finally, it assumes that a people's war could be undermined by an organization external to the country in which this revolution was happening—as if external contradictions matter more than internal contradictions, as if an organization that was always conflicted possessed the power to crush an organic revolutionary movement.

Of course, this conspiracy theory seems to unwittingly endorse another conceit of third worldism, a core contradiction that is often sublimated and that I will discuss in more detail in the next section:

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<sup>50</sup> Interestingly, the MLMpM trend echoes the complaint that MIM made about the RIM when the RIM published criticisms against Gonzalo during the peace process.

that organizations in the first world, perhaps due to first world political and economic hegemony, are more powerful than organizations elsewhere and that any movement in which problematic first world organizations are involved must be movements that they command. All of the organizations that involved themselves in the RIM, then, are supposed to be understood as “first worldist” dupes of the RCP-USA who were incapable of expressing the kind of autonomy that would make the RIM experience, despite its problems, worthy of critical revival. Even if the RCP-USA did plan to use the RIM to place every party involved in this organization under its authority—and there is at least evidence that it did try to maintain control of the leading body of this organization, a gambit that hastened the collapse of the RIM—to imagine that a loose affiliation of third world revolutionary organizations was homogeneous and simply a mouthpiece of the RCP-USA is a logical stretch. Especially now, when it is becoming clear that the RCP-USA rejects some of the key RIM documents (i.e. the RCP-USA’s “new synthesis” rejects the formulation of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism in *Long Live Marxism-Leninism-Maoism*), thus placing itself in conflict with its former RIM comrades, should lead us to realize that the RIM was an extremely heterogeneous body and not simply a bastion of “first worldist” hegemony.

### **The First Worldist Contradiction**

The core contradiction of Maoist Third Worldism is the fact that it is primarily a first world phenomenon that attempts to speak for third world revolutions. That is, third worldism is intrinsically first worldist. This contradiction is not a dialectical contradiction (it does not produce motion/change or even exhibit the relational unity of opposites) but is a formal contradiction and thus, when excavated, reveals an unsettling logical incoherence. The fact that there may be some MTW organizations at the global peripheries, their activities and influence only appear on third worldist websites and thus seem to be as significant and organically “third world” as the third world branches of the average Trotskyist organization. Generally speaking, the theoretical development of third

worldism remains a first world phenomenon.

The reason the first worldist origin and hegemony of third worldism is a troubling contradiction is because it undermines the theoretical basis of MTW. If the first world is primarily a counter-revolutionary context where the proletariat, due to net-exploitation, does not exist, then how can anyone develop a proletarian revolutionary theory? Such a theory can only emerge in a proletarian context; it cannot be imposed by would-be revolutionaries who remain within a petty-bourgeois context—and yet first world third worldists, who are responsible for developing this theory, live within a social context that according to their own theory is bourgeoisified. So did they glean their theory from third world revolutions? Well, aside from the way in which they understand the Chinese Revolution (specifically through a Lin Biao hermeneutic), it appears as if third worldists are opposed to the theoretical line espoused by those third world Maoist organizations who have attempted to launch revolutions. MTW groups even go so far as to deride, as noted in the previous section, third world revolutionaries for not understanding the problem of “first worldism”—as if a revolutionary organization engaged in an oppressed third world nation cannot understand first world chauvinism as well as the first world third worldist whose entire ability to conceptualize the problem of “first worldism” is premised on their privileged existence at the centres of capitalism.

None of this is to say that theories that originate from first world contexts cannot be useful for third world revolutionaries, or that a revolutionary movement must only draw upon the ideology it spontaneously develops in the course of its particular struggle. To make such an argument, after all, would be to reject Marxism due to its European origins. The theory of third worldism, however, since it is precisely concerned with autonomy of the third world and the problem of first world chauvinism cannot help but experience its exportation as a contradiction because it is an ideology that is precisely about the revolutionary status of third world revolution in the face of first world chauvinism, the latter being the “primary contradiction” of world revolution.

Another possible way to escape the contradiction of first worldist

third worldism is to argue that Marx and Engels, in their historical context, were able to develop a proletarian ideology despite originating from petty-bourgeois and bourgeois social positions. But such an argument fails to appreciate the emergence of Marxism and, in this failure, treats class as an unchangeable essence. There is a significant difference between the philosophy of the young petty-bourgeois Marx and the Marx who embedded himself in proletarian struggles: the former only produced, at best, a radical liberalism typified by the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*; the latter, though on a continuum with the former, is the Marx who would eventually produce *Capital* and who wrote, along with Engels, the *Manifesto* in the context of a proletarian organization. We know that Marx not only went to the masses in order to eke out the broad brushstrokes of proletarian science, but that he also sank to the level of the proletariat by the time he wrote *Capital*—so much so that he had to continually pawn his winter coat and rely on monies received from Engels’ bourgeois family. So where is the moment that the first world third worldists have embedded themselves in those proletarian masses that, according to their theory, exist only at the global peripheries? It is clear that the third worldist academic intellectuals of yesterday and today (the Emmanuels and the Wallersteins) have not embarked on such proletarianization; I think it is also safe to assume that MIM, LLCO, and RAIM have also not pursued this process of declassing—they cannot, without leaving the comfort of the first world, and it is clear that the most significant third world Marxist revolutions are disinterested in their insights.

The upshot of MTW’s core formal contradiction is terribly chauvinist: first world third worldists will perform the mental labour of theory, third world revolutionaries will perform the manual labour of actually making revolution according to this theory. The former group, after all, cannot *make* revolution since they are not in the third world, they can only provide the guidelines and prepare for world-building revolutionary activities of the global proletariat. The latter group, being the authentic proletariat, is historically destined to kick-off the global revolution but only if they accept the perspective of the first world

third worldists—after all, if they reject the theory that “first worldism” (as conceptualized by MTWs) is the primary contradiction, they are doomed to revisionism.

To be fair, there are third worldist organizations that have attempted to theorize creative ways in which to approach revolutionary praxis despite the fact that they operate within a first world context where there cannot be, according to the theory of net exploitation, a viable proletarian class. The Revolutionary Anti-Imperialist Network, for example, uses the metaphor of a *21<sup>st</sup> Century John Brown*<sup>51</sup> so as to argue that “behind enemy lines... [we] consider our circumstances and focus on areas where we can effectively contribute to revolutionary struggle.”<sup>52</sup> Elsewhere, RAIM speaks of preparing certain elements of the petty-bourgeois first world masses for their future dissolution into the ranks of the proletarian by organizing them around “wedge issues”, such as patriarchy and national oppression, with the aim of “a revolutionary class alliance for proletarian revolution.”<sup>53</sup> Here the praxis is one of “class suicide”, an attempt to sabotage imperialism from behind enemy lines, but with the goal of some united front between these 21<sup>st</sup> Century John Browns and the international proletariat of the third world. Such a strategic line is rather vague, however, and relies heavily on the revolutionary heavy lifting being done by other.

In fact, the only viable revolutionary practice for third worldism is the practice embarked on by Denmark’s Manifest-Kommunistisk Arbejdsgruppe (M-KA) that split from the aforementioned KAK in 1978. Eventually known as “the Blekingegade Group”, cadre of the M-KA went underground to carry out armed expropriations so as to provide material support for third world revolutionary movements.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> John Brown was a white settler abolitionist in the US who, during the height of slavery, betrayed the slaveocracy and, in coordination with Harriet Tubman, sought to bring about a revolutionary overthrow of slavery. He was executed for treason in 1859.

<sup>52</sup> *Program of the Revolutionary Anti-Imperialist Network* (anti-imperialism.org/2009/11/26/program-of-the-revolutionary-anti-imperialist-movement/).

<sup>53</sup> *How Would Marx Organize First Worlders for Revolution?* (anti-imperialism.org/2013/04/02/how-would-marx-organize-first-worlders-for-revolution/).

<sup>54</sup> Earlier, when this faction was still with the KAK, they embarked on some soft

Reasoning that there was no proletariat in the first world and the only authentic proletarian movements were in the third world, the M-KA followed their ideological line to its most rigorous revolutionary conclusion. Functioning as a clandestine commando movement, the M-KA robbed banks and armoured trucks to provide direct material support for revolutionary movements in the third world. They did not leave any manifestos about their expropriations, they did nothing to build a party in the first world, because they felt there was no proletariat in their country to mobilize. Rather than proclaim the virtues of third world revolutions and spend their time attacking the “first worldism” of their Marxist counterparts in Denmark (as the KAK had done), they decided that the only useful activity their ideological line permitted was to steal money from the imperialist state and give it to armed movements in the global peripheries. It was not until these members of the M-KA were caught at the end of the 1980s that the Danish state realized it was dealing with revolutionaries rather than professional thieves.<sup>55</sup> Thus, if MTW is to follow its theoretical commitments to their logical conclusion then the revolutionary practice of its adherents can only resemble that of the M-KA.<sup>56</sup>

What ultimately disqualifies MTW from correctly representing Maoist reason is that it has no logical basis upon which to develop its theoretical insights. If there is no proletariat in the imperialist metropolises, and thus no proletarian movement, the first world third worldist cannot make a correct assessment of anything since it cannot practice the mass line. With no revolutionary masses in which to embed a revolutionary movement (because these revolutionary masses are elsewhere) how can it test its ideas, struggle with the masses, and thus

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material support for the global peripheries through fronts like “Clothes For Africa” but, by 1978, they felt this was not enough. See Kuhn’s *Turning Money Into Rebellion* for further details of this period of revolutionary history.

<sup>55</sup> The story of the M-KA and the “Blekingegade Group” can be found in *Turning Money Into Rebellion*.

<sup>56</sup> In fact, an interesting review of *Turning of Money Into Rebellion* by the LLCO ([lco.org/turning-money-into-rebellion-edited-by-gabriel-kuhn-reviewed-part-1/](http://lco.org/turning-money-into-rebellion-edited-by-gabriel-kuhn-reviewed-part-1/)) demonstrates that MTW is well aware that this is the extent of its practice but, despite lionizing this history, finds absurd ways to deny that this is the logical conclusion of MTW theory.

## Critique of Maoist Reason

develop theory through practice? Considering that MTW disagrees with the assessments of the most significant third world Maoist movements regarding the first world proletariat, it is not as if it is learning from the revolutionary masses it claims to valorize, either. Thus, even if MTW is correct it has no way of knowing it is correct, or developing a theory regarding its correctness, since it has no means of testing these ideas in practice. That is, MTW is not falsifiable and thus not scientific. And if it is not scientific then it is disqualified from Maoist reason.



## Chapter 6

### Left and Right Opportunist Practice

Beyond the various trends in Maoism, and beyond the registers of dogmatism and eclecticism, there are also errors in practice that Maoism did not originate but nevertheless inherited. These erroneous practices are traditionally categorized as right and left opportunism. More specifically: economism/workerism as the right opportunist characteristic and adventurism or hyper-activism as the left opportunist characteristic. Although it is the case that some Maoist trends might lean more towards one of these characteristics rather than another (i.e. to date it seems as if the “principally Maoist” trend is often drawn to left opportunism) they exist autonomously as intersecting vectors of practice. There are reasons why these errors in practice manifest.

The right opportunist pattern of practice emerges out of the laudable desire, driven by a particular appreciation of the mass-line, to embed the organization in the working-class. A “back to the factory” sensibility, often provoked as a reaction to an activist style of work that is divorced from the working class, leads to organizations giving up a clear communist program in the interest of immersing themselves in workers struggles, on the terms of these struggles, which often leads to economism or a fetishization of the working class in-itself. That is, such a fetishization is driven by the assumption (which is often unconscious) that, since the proletariat is the agent of revolution, then every worker will have an inborn proletarian consciousness that only needs to be unlocked and valorized in the course of struggle.

Although Maoists should be aware that, as Lenin pointed out, revolutionary consciousness comes from “the outside” (the *outside*, here, being an organized party project), a particular interpretation of the mass-line will get caught up in the exhortation that revolutionary truth comes “from the masses”, forgetting that the other part of the dialectical definition (“to the masses”) is equally important. It is indeed necessary to imbed ourselves in the masses—and it is indeed the case

that figuring out how to do this is often quite difficult—but doing so without a party programme, or by suspending a party programme, will do very little to build a viable project. We have already witnessed the result of such attempts, the way in which the best organizers are pulled into economic struggle and their politics liquidated, and yet some Maoists continue to persist in this erroneous practice.

On the other hand, the left opportunist style of work leaves much to be desired and, in some cases, encourages Maoists to reject it in favour of right opportunism. Left opportunism can manifest as adventurism, where an organization without roots in the masses embarks on military or quasi-military experiments in the hope of using such experiments to draw the masses into its orbit. Another manifestation is the activist posturing of waving the red flag to see who falls under it, focusing mainly on “correct” ideological posturing. Both manifestations apply a “to the masses” line without very much consideration of what it means to think “from the masses”, often believing that this left opportunist can be tested amongst the masses as a substitute for onerous mass work.

Here we must remember that *left opportunism* is not actually *left* but only masquerades as such; it is another rightism with “left” characteristics. And like right opportunism this deviation is generated by a correct assessment of its opposite deviation: in the face of abject economism and liquidationism, the need for programmatic purity manifests as an over-correction.

Hence, we should examine and critique these erroneous styles of practice so as to understand how a Maoist Party of the New Type must strike the correct position between such deviations. While it must be admitted that locating the correct position between right and left opportunism is always difficult—for the right opportunist everything left of it is right opportunism, and for the left opportunist vice versa—by understanding the general meaning of right and left opportunism we can get closer to what a correct line on Maoist organizational practice can and should be.

## Right Opportunism

As noted, right opportunism tends to manifest when an organization embraces a “back to the factories” ethos and focuses on seeding its cadre into what it has identified as key working-class organizations: industries at the point of production, labour unions, and labour leadership. During the New Communist Movement a variety of Marxist-Leninist grouplets sent their memberships into working class spaces that were identified as important spaces in the hope of embedding themselves in the working class and growing the organization from this embedment.

As aforementioned, the impulse behind this practice is laudable for we should be trying to embed Maoist organizations in the deepest strata of the exploited and oppressed masses. The danger, however, is that the over-valorization of “authentic” working class spaces results in a kind of workerism where we lose sight of how a revolutionary party must exist as an autonomous entity that sends its cadre *to the masses* without being absorbed and liquidated in a workerist style of practice.

As I write these words members from the Maoist organization I have supported for nearly a decade have chosen to break from this organization and start from square one by focusing purely on work place organizing without a party programme. Their hope is to build a new revolutionary party, with a new programme, by getting involved in the day-to-day struggles of the working class without a political plan beyond a vague Maoism. The party no longer comes from outside, according to this approach, but is built through economic struggle.

But we should know by now that the working class by itself, without a revolutionary proletarian project, is absorbed in economic struggle—that is, how to survive and win “bread-and-butter” demands. The insight that the working class is better improved through political struggle according to a vanguard project is lost when cadre liquidate themselves within purely economic struggles, i.e. getting absorbed in the short-term economic struggles (better wages, better unions, labour rights, etc.) at the expense of the political struggle for communism.

An immediate problem confronting working class organizing in

the imperialist metropolises, though, is the fact that the working class is diffused throughout a wide range of industries and job sites. Hence, a revolutionary organization could possess a large number of working class cadre who, due to this reality of diffusion, are separated from each other in multiple job sites—as well as being separated from other workers in these sites due to a casualization resulting from temporary work contracts. It is normal for workers to bounce between a variety of unskilled or semi-skilled jobs and the reserve army of labour. Organizing their work places as communists thus becomes more difficult since they are isolated from their fellow communists.

It is only in the large factories where the possibility of a red union conglomeration seems quantitatively possible due to the concentration rather than diffusion of workers. Qualitatively, in some of the imperialist metropolises, this possibility is partially foreclosed by the existence of the traditional trade unions that, when they are not anti-communist are still organized by capital, and will, at this stage, out-organize whatever small conglomeration of cadre find themselves in these spaces because they have the resources and structures to do so. Why would workers join a red union, proposed by organizers without an outside party machine (or with a nascent party machine that has very little resources) when they can instead join one that can deliver at least some of their economic needs? There is a reason that the IWW, despite the limits it places on its political line, is no longer the force it once was.

In other sites of production where unions are non-existent, the quantity of the workforce is defined by a casualized workforce defined by workers on temporary contracts or precarious migrant labour. In these spaces organizing a red union will have to be clandestine due to the precarity of the workforce or take on the identity of a traditional union drive—the latter of which will thus integrate workers into the ranks of the labour aristocracy and fail to produce communist cadre. The former option, clandestinity, will be meaningless without an overarching party project to guide this clandestinity according to a general strategic line.

In order to be effective communists in work place organizing

requires an exterior organization with a clear political line and a proletarian programme. Such an organization begins by gathering in the most politically advanced elements of the working class (i.e. those who understand themselves as proletariat in relation to a party project, the latter of which defines the category *proletariat*), which are at first drawn from disparate industries and job sites. The fact that these initial cadre are drawn from disparate job sites means that they will initially find political unity in the party rather than in their place(s) of work. But as more are drawn in, and if the project remains consistent, quantity will transform into quality: coordinated intervention in multiple job sites, including large-scale industry, will become possible. Trying to build such an organization, or even buttress a tiny cadre organization, by solely focusing on traditional workplace organizing will result in tailing the masses.<sup>57</sup>

### **“Left” Opportunism**

So-called “left” opportunism often emerges as a response to the right opportunism discussed above, though variants of the latter are also sometimes responses to practices of left opportunism. The relationship of these two types of opportunism is a dialectical spiral where one is generated by the other, and vice versa, forming a totality of opportunistic deviation. Hence left opportunism emerges to over-correct the errors of right opportunism, and another version of right opportunism emerges to over-correct the errors of left opportunism, and so on and so forth... But at the end of the day they are both part of the same opportunism in that they abandon the revolutionary line and thus the masses. Right opportunism abandons the revolutionary line by liquidationism and tailism and thus abandons the masses to capitalism by refusing to organize them according to a vanguard party project. Left opportunism abandons the masses through hyper-activism and adventurism, thus abandoning a revolutionary line since such a line does not matter if it is separated from the day-to-day struggles of the masses.

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<sup>57</sup> I could say much more on this issue but since this requires a book of its own—and one that I have been trying to write over the past few years—I will leave this intervention here, at the level of summary observations.

One version of left opportunism is the singular focus on an ideological activism of “waving the red flag to see who falls under it.” Although it is necessary for vanguard project to engage in such ideological activity to locate potential recruits, the reduction of political activity to this kind of hyper-activism is identical to street missionaries who stand on the corner and preach the Book of Revelations to the unsaved, hoping to win people over by the Word of God. Agitation is necessary—and those who get caught in the right opportunist deviation also understand this (“let’s justify our red union with a newspaper”), though their agitation will necessarily disguise their political line—but agitating for communism without organizing in ways that are not purely agitational is to simply dictate *to the masses*. The masses do not necessarily care about the correct understanding of communism; they need to be won over. And the only way they can be won over is not by pure agitation, though such agitation might win some recruits, but by mass work.

Another version of left opportunism, which often emerges in relation to the first, is adventurism. Focoism, where a small organization engages in military operations in the hope of rallying the masses to its line by prematurely attacking the state, is a well-known form of such adventurism. But some formulations of Maoism, though rejecting focoism in theory, erroneously conceive of people’s war in a similar manner by initiating militant sequences and calling such militancy “mass work”. By reducing the vanguard party to a purely military function without a larger apparatus of mass work, and by hoping to build it through a purely military approach, one runs the risk of alienating the very masses that need to be won over and conflating armed propaganda with a new stage of struggle despite the fact that such a stage has not been reached.

Left opportunism is thus a deviation in practice that separates an organization from the masses, encourages commandism and elitism, and operates by dictating the correct political line to those it has failed to win over. Like right opportunism, left opportunism fails to grow a revolutionary organization. Left opportunism isolates itself from the masses, while constantly speaking for them, in the interests of political immediacy. To be fair, the problem of political immediacy is meaning-

ful: we need to establish and grow revolutionary movements as soon as possible since the stakes of “socialism or barbarism” are larger than they have ever been. Deviations of the correct position, it must be said, are often generated by good intentions. (Even Mao and his allies understood that some opportunists were motivated by good intentions; the problem was that these intentions meant very little if they were unscientific.<sup>58</sup>) So whereas right opportunism ignores political immediacy in the interest of economic immediacy, left opportunism is guilty of the opposite judgment: in the hope of building socialism as soon as possible, sustained work amongst the masses is abandoned in the interest of agitation and abstract militancy.

### **Abandonment of Struggle**

Whereas right opportunism focuses on immediate economic demands, left opportunism focuses on immediate political demands:

Right opportunism openly abandons the struggle for the final aim of socialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat and seeks to reduce the proletariat’s struggle to... mere reforms and small changes, e.g. reformist leaders in the trade union movement, the revisionist party. “Left” opportunism abandons the struggle for immediate [political] demands, and thus abandons the struggle to mobilize forces necessary to make revolution, which it claims are worthless or impossible to achieve, e.g. the former terrorist organizations in Québec [the FLQ].<sup>59</sup>

Opportunism is ultimately an abandonment of struggle, even if its right and “left” expressions pretend otherwise. As aforementioned, Maoism can be sucked into these deviations through a misunderstanding-

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<sup>58</sup> See, for example, the Cultural Revolution film *Breaking With Old Ideas* where the political enemy, the revisionists, are depicted as individuals who honestly believe themselves to be communist but are just wrong.

<sup>59</sup> *The Struggle Against Right Opportunism is Essential For Party Building* (marxists.org/history/erol/ca.secondwave/ccl-right-opp.htm). So said the Workers Communist Party in 1976, but it’s worth emphasizing that they ended up erring on the side of right opportunism despite their express intentions to avoid it.

ing of the mass-line: when *from the masses* is over-emphasized we end up with right opportunism; when *to the masses* is over-emphasized we end up with left opportunism. In order to avoid both deviations we need to think what it means to proclaim “from the masses and to the masses.” To think both aspects of the theory of mass-line simultaneously is to avoid both right and left forms of deviation but, as I have maintained, such dialectical thinking evades both dogmatist and eclectic perspectives—both of which can generate either right or “left” opportunist styles of practice.

There is a dogmatic right opportunism just as there is an eclectic right opportunism. The former resembles the style of classical communist “insurrectionist” work where cadre seed themselves into unions so as take control of the “most organized” elements of the working class (the “most organized” meaning the unions) and generate a communist break. The latter resembles approaches to economism where “red union” projects seek to replicate IWW styles of work, piggy-back on existing union movements, chase down existing struggles, and seek to build party projects through a variety of creative but overly imaginative workerist schemes.

Simultaneously, there is a dogmatic left opportunism and an eclectic left opportunism. The former resembles focoist styles of militancy—where the guerrilla manifests before the masses so as to ignore the masses—or pseudo-PPW initiatives where mass work is liquidated within a small party transformed into a solely military project. The latter resembles various hyper-activist styles of work, guerrilla theatre, “creative” versions of waving the red flag as a beacon for possible recruits, wild new approaches to political immediacy.

And in both right and “left” instances of opportunism there are combinations of the dogmatic and eclectic registers. As aforementioned, the dogmatic and eclectic are not discrete categories; they intermingle just as much as they proclaim opposition to each other. In order to understand these deviations and why they are deviations, however, we need to ask the most important question of Maoist reason: how do we make revolution?



## Chapter 7

### Making Revolution

From its very inception Marxism's prime concern has been making proletarian revolution. Although its scientific strength is indeed about demystifying social and historical phenomenon, and thus generating the conceptual tools with which to permit the concrete analysis of the concrete situation, it is not merely descriptive. As Badiou pointed out back in his Marxist-Leninist stage, all of Marxism's core statements are also prescriptive. "Marxism comprises many principles," wrote Mao, "but in the final analysis they can all be brought back to a single sentence: it is right [meaning *justified*] to rebel against the reactionaries." And Badiou, before departing down the lost road of post-Maoism, recognized this statement as an essential philosophical thesis for Marxism where we are exhorted by Mao to recognize that the descriptive principles of Marxism are, in the final analysis, simultaneously prescriptive. That is, Marx and Engels did not intend historical materialism to simply be the discipline of describing the precise nature of history and society; such insights were only gleaned from a theory that treated class revolution as its primary law of motion and thus intended to serve and develop this law of motion.

Of course, it is the case that various academic iterations of Marxism have sequestered themselves from its prescriptive demands. At best such interpretations make these prescriptive elements into abstract principles functioning beyond a distant horizon. At worst some Marxist intellectuals search for evidence that, despite the analysis of historical materialism, Marx's political commitments were not much different from liberalism—this was indeed the line of descent demarcated by Bernstein, Kautsky, and every classical revisionist. But we must remember that in 1847, when the League of the Just was forced to become the Communist League, it was because Marx and Engels drew a line of demarcation between the revolutionary theory of historical materialism that they were beginning to construct and the utopian liberal-

ism of Wilhelm Weitling and the Proudhon sympathizers. Marx and Engels had embarked on constructing historical materialism, then, to provide a scientific foundation for “the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things.” And they sought the “conditions of this movement... from the premises now in existence.”<sup>60</sup> That is, they developed historical materialism according to the very principle that Lenin would later articulate: “without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.”

Marxism is essentially revolutionary theory. And, since this theory founded itself as a *science*, it is also the science of revolution. Descriptive claims that Marxism is the science of history or the science of social formations must necessarily intersect with prescriptive claims. For if the law of motion of this science of history is class revolution then its pursuit must be revolutionary since the concept of revolution is its scientific basis.

Hence, being the current stage of development in revolutionary science, Maoism is ultimately concerned with making communist revolution and carrying this revolution forward further than the previous world historical moments. I have already argued why Maoism as a whole is the inheritor of Marxism, particularly in *Continuity and Rupture*, so I will not repeat these arguments here. When it comes to the problematic of Maoist reason, however, we must think this basis of Marxism as a whole. The point, here, is that we should be able to judge what variant of Maoism is the correct variant according to the principle of making revolution. For reasons of simplicity we will call this principle the *primary principle* and assess what variants of Maoist reason are best equipped to satisfy its demands. Although we have already critiqued the different Maoist tendencies in previous chapters it is worth reviewing them, one more time, according to this primary principle.

## Articulation 1

The post-Maoist articulations of Maoist reason cannot satisfy

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<sup>60</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1998), 57.

the primary principle. None of the academic and/or activist versions of post-Maoism have generated anything that counts as revolutionary experience. While it is indeed the case that the more dogmatic expression of post-Maoism represented by the current phase of the RCP-USA possesses a history of revolutionary agitation, this history was during its existence in the New Communist Movement leading up to when, as a founder of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement, it pursued Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. Upon breaking from both the RIM and MLM, reorienting itself according to the so-called “New Synthesis” (or “the New Communism”), its departure down the post-Maoist path has cemented its divorce from the masses and cult-like development. More eclectic post-Maoist expressions such as the defunct Kasama Project and the Badiou/Lazarus L’Organisation Politique have fared even less effective.

Theoretically, post-Maoism is confused because its attempts to transgress the limits of Maoism are the result—for different reasons given by different post-Maoist expressions—of a failure to properly conceptualize the development of historical materialism, particularly the Maoism from which this articulation hopes to depart. That is, a flawed version of Maoist reason is used to justify the departure from Maoism without solving the problems presented by Maoism in the only way they can be solved: through another world historical revolution. As Tomas M. writes in the 2017 issue of *Arsenal*:

The fact that most post-Maoists rely on the theory of the mass-line to demand post-Maoism might demonstrate that Maoism has *not* been superseded, particularly since the mass-line, and its relation to the party, still needs to be fully explored and creatively articulated by Maoists. [...] In some ways the whole post-Maoism problematic is a result of the lack of clarity around the meaning of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism.<sup>61</sup>

The author goes on to argue that much of what is expressed as

<sup>61</sup> Tomas M., “A Theory in Search of a Theory.” In *Arsenal* 9 (2017), 41.

post-Maoist is in fact pre-Maoist in that it comes from groups and individuals whose theoretical training was in anti-revisionist Marxist-Leninist circles and so, despite the fact that some of them may have been familiar with the RIM, were always thinking according to a “Mao Zedong Thought” way of seeing the world. According to rumour, the RCP-USA never really accepted that Maoism was a third stage of revolutionary science and were outvoted by the rest of the RIM into accepting the “Long Live Marxism-Leninism-Maoism” statement.<sup>62</sup> Hence the Kasama Project, despite rejecting Avakianite dogmatism, began with this same refusal of Maoism as a third stage due to its training within RCP-USA ranks during the time its founding members still agreed with the pre-New Synthesis Avakianite project.<sup>63</sup> The Badiou/Lazarus expression of post-Maoism fares even worse because, without any RIM or RIM-adjacent experience, its ideologues really did jump from Mao Zedong Thought to post-Maoism without any experience of Maoism-qua-Maoism.

Tomas M.’s article on post-Maoism is called *A Theory in Search of a Theory*. We can add that the articulation of post-Maoism is Maoist reason in search of Maoist reason. And being lost on the level of theory and reason it becomes even more lost on the level of practice. What is the theory of making revolution that it has managed to generate in all this time since it has attempted to push against the boundaries declared by Maoism that it has often refused to properly articulate? Absolutely nothing.

## Articulation 2

The third worldist articulation of Maoist reason also fails to sat-

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<sup>62</sup> The rumour is more than idle gossip. Years ago Mike Ely, when I met him at a conference, told me that this was the case based on his own experience within the RCP-USA. He agreed with this perspective about Maoism despite rejecting the RCP-USA’s “New Synthesis”.

<sup>63</sup> A suspicion of continuity between *isms* defined the Kasama Project. Moreover, it was telling that Ely continued to uphold the RCP-USA’s *Conquer The World* document which, aside from being what the MIM (despite its obvious problems) correctly called “crypto-Trotskyism”, represented a very non-Maoist perspective of the RIM.

isfy the primary principle for reasons that were made clear in the fifth chapter. But let us sum up these ideas according to the primary principle. Although it is indeed the case that MTW upholds third world revolutionary movements, pointing to these as proof that in comparison there can be nothing similar in the imperialist metropolises, not a single one of these movements has upheld the third worldist ideological-political line. Not only has there not been a meaningful revolutionary movement waged under the doctrine of third worldism, the fact that third worldism is a theory created by individuals and groups in the so-called “first world” and thus primarily *about* this first world has annexed it from the revolutionary movements it tends to cite.

If revolutionary theory emerges from and is developed through revolutionary movements then MTW cannot, as previously discussed, even participate in such theory. To reiterate, if there is no real proletariat in the imperialist metropolises (or at least not a proletariat significant enough upon which to build a revolution), no revolutionary masses in a context where the labour aristocracy has embourgeoisified the vast majority of the working class, then third worldism has disqualified itself from being able to make a rigorous contribution to the science. Since the laboratory is class struggle and the scientists are the cadre engaged with the exploited and oppressed masses, to assert that there are no such masses (at least not in a meaningful sense) in the context where one organizes is to also assert that you have no basis upon which to develop your theoretical claims. A lack of proletarian practice means, and this is essential to what Marxism *is*, the lack of a concrete space upon which to abstract the kind of theoretical claims that fulfill the demands of this science. The primary principle can never be approached by the third worldist who lives in a space they have designated as non-proletarian. Unless they admit that they are wrong and recognize that there are revolutionary masses that can provide the practice to generate theoretical insights. To make such an admission, however, would also mean admitting that the core axiom of MTW is wrong.

While it is indeed the case that the MIM did contribute some important insights to Maoist reason (i.e. aspects of its work on the

labour aristocracy, some conceptualizations of the national question, its critique of “crypto-Trotskyism”), these contributions were exceptions to the rule of its theory and only meaningful insofar as it partially participated in Maoist reason. With the collapse of the MIM, and the lack of praxis that is symptomatic of all successive and current expressions of MTW, this articulation of a would-be Maoism is theoretically sterile.

### **Remaining Articulations**

The final three articulations of Maoist reason (MLM, MLMpM, and the agnostic Maoism) need to be examined together because, despite their differences, they are united by the need to conceptualize Maoism according to the primary principle of making revolution and thus share an appreciation of the formulation of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. Moreover, there a number of important intersections. The third and fourth articulations—the PCP-RIM variant and the PCP “principally Maoist” variant—agree on the theoretical significance of the People’s War in Peru, although they eventually depart on the lessons we need to draw from this experience. The fifth trend, which remains agnostic about theoretical generation, tends to intersect with the third in its refusal to grant that the “principally Maoist” articulation is the most meaningful foundation of Maoism and thus shares with the third trend an appreciation of world historical revolutions. By dealing with these trends together I hope to force, by placing them in relation, the recognition that it is only the third articulation of Maoist reason that satisfies the critique of this reason. But I have been open about this from the beginning and, to be clear, this critique has been overdetermined by this assumption that I have chosen to place at the end of our intervention: it was conceptually prior—the guiding thought that demanded this treatise—but it must be logically later because it is the consummation of the critique.

In all three cases Maoism is recognized as third and highest stage of revolutionary science because of the primary principle. We can momentarily subtract the fifth trend, for the moment, due to the fact that it apparently sees Maoism as generated by the Cultural Revolu-

tion without any meaningful moment of theoretical synthesis after this moment, though it often searches for precursors in other trends within the worldwide New Communist Movement. Hence, it often appears to be searching for a synthesis of MLM outside of, or adjacent to, the PCP-RIM sequence as well as working to provide its own new version of this synthesis. The third and fourth trends, however, both take the People's War in Peru as a significant starting point for Maoism-qua-Maoism. That is, they both uphold the experience of the PCP as foundational to the theoretical synthesis of Maoism as an *ism*. The difference of course is that, whereas the third articulation of Maoist reason sees the PCP-RIM sequence as a whole as the generator of Maoism, with the joint RIM declaration being the highest and most concise synthesis of Maoism, the fourth articulation treats the perspective of the PCP as foundational and the perspective of the RIM as an afterthought if not an outright deviation.

The question we need to ask, however, is on what basis can we argue that Maoist reason ought to be understood only through the formulation Maoism was given by the PCP, what our contemporary acolytes of this tendency call “principally Maoism”? If it is indeed the case that the PCP's particular formulation of Maoism, pre-RIM, was the most correct formulation—and if, like today's “principally Maoist” groups and individuals seem to claim, we should ignore the PCP's endorsement of the RIM formulation of Maoism—then our understanding of Maoism is “revisionist” the farther we depart from this particular formulation. Such assumptions, though, are only admissible if they are proven by the primary principle of making revolution. The PCP's revolutionary movement was defeated: it did not prove itself capable of being the inheritor of the Chinese Revolution despite making great strides and initiating the sequence that would found contemporary Maoism. Moreover, other groups within or adjacent to the RIM went further in their People's Wars according to the formulation(s) adopted in the RIM rather than the pre-RIM formulations of “principally Maoism”.

For example, the People's War in Nepal, a protracted revolution that began in the 1990s only to defeat itself in the early 2000s, went

further than the PCP-led revolution in Peru. Rather than being defeated directly by the forces of reaction, it forced the enemy into a detente and made the mistake of shifting this detente into the realm of parliamentary politics so as to gain legal international recognition. On the whole, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)'s theory and practice did not reflect the categories of Maoism laid out by the PCP; rather, it reflected the formulation of Maoism proclaimed by the RIM. With one exception: its notion of "Prachanda Path" was similar to "Gonzalo Thought", its own version of *jefatura* (but not given that name or importance), and it was this notion that hastened its descent into revisionism, capitulation, and the self-defeat of its revolution. For a while Prachanda, upheld as the principle theorist of Nepalese Maoism, was depicted as representing the legitimate left position navigating between the right opportunism of Bhattarai's Dengism and the supposed "left" opportunism ascribed to Kiran's faction. In the end it turned out that Prachanda had also become a right opportunist, and that Kiran's faction was the actual left line and not "left" opportunist, but the aura surrounding "Prachanda Path" prevented this error from being fully recognized until it was too late.

Although it is indeed the case that Gonzalo did not, like Prachanda, lead the party directly into revisionism (unless we accept that he was indeed the author of the letter demanding that the people's war capitulate, but even if this was true we could also claim it was coerced since nothing written in the state of capture and duress should be trusted as authoritative), it is also the case that this choice was never presented to Gonzalo since he was captured before his movement could reach the level reached by the Maoists in Nepal, the latter of whom were able to force a peace process that they ended up bungling. Hence the people's war in Peru is allowed to stay pure since it was defeated before it reached the position of detente reached by the Maoists in Nepal. We would thus be purists and dogmatists if we did not seriously think through the consequences of elevating *jefatura* to a political principle. As Michel T. writes:

In this regard, the conception of the PCP on *jefatura*...



seems to have played a more important role in the dispersion of the organization's activists and the erosion of its influence. It must be said that this conception, which postulated the infallibility of the single leader who embodies the revolution, is widely shared among Latin American leftists. In the ranks of the PCP, it took the form of this commitment solemnly reiterated by Party members: "We who follow Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, Gonzalo Thought, subject ourselves to President Gonzalo and embody Gonzalo Thought." Therefore when it became clear that Guzmán was most probably the author of the peace letters, many aligned themselves to the letters' point of view while those wishing to continue on the path of People's War have not been able to find by themselves the way to renew the political perspectives of the Party and provide it with a new leadership capable of retaking the initiative.<sup>64</sup>

Hence, if we are to assess revolutionary movements as scientists and not dogmatists we should be able to recognize that this fetishization of great leadership is not merely the recognition that some people, because of circumstances, become principle theorists and thus should be honoured as being such beyond their individual existence. We should also learn to examine the circumstances that propel some people towards positions of theoretical authority, combat the fetishization of the name, and recognize that accusations of the cult of personality are not merely lies made up by the capitalist camp to attack socialism (as the RCP-USA likes to constantly complain so as to defend its cult of Avakian) but that we are handing them this complaint. It is a hypocritical complaint, yes, because the bourgeois order has its own personality cults, but why should we elevate great persons beyond the level of ciphers of theoretical development?

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<sup>64</sup> Michel T., "People's War and Militarization of the Class Struggle." In *Arsenal 9* (2017), 102-103. As an aside, this is an analysis written by one of the so-called "Continuators" in the split that happened within the Canadian Maoist party, the PCR-RCP, at the end of 2017.

Outside of the defeated people's war in Nepal there are the ongoing people's wars in India and the Philippines that, despite coding themselves as Maoist, have little to do with the purely PCP formulation of Maoism. The Indian revolution is still connected to the memory of the RIM insofar as the Communist Party of India (Maoist) contains organizations that were once part of the RIM and partly exists because the RIM aided with the peace talks between Maoist forces that led to its foundation. There is nothing in this sequence of revolution that supports the particular claims made by the PCP; in fact, the CPI(Maoist) is largely opposed to the PCP's particular definition of Maoism aside from recognizing its importance in the generation of Maoism over and above Mao Zedong Thought. And the People's War in the Philippines, which predates that of the Peru, has progressed without any influence of Peruvian Maoism though it has, years after the collapse of the RIM, recognized the singularity of Maoism as opposed to Mao Zedong Thought. These revolutionary movements in India and the Philippines are in fact more advanced than the People's War in Peru because they have succeeded in prolonging their existence without being defeated or capitulating, and have made qualitative advancements, nor has their promulgation and proliferation had anything to do with the categories of "principally Maoism."

Hence, with the possible exception of the Brazilian revolutionary movement, the fourth articulation of Maoist reason has nothing currently meaningful upon which to base its conception of revolution beyond what was already defeated. It must admit the third articulation, what was opened by the PCP-RIM sequence, if it is to recognize Maoism as more than a regional phenomenon and yet it is continually sucked back into this regional phenomenon by asserting the primacy of the past—that is, of the fallen PCP sequence. And yet this articulation persists in asserting this primacy and categorizes every criticism of this persistence as "revisionism". In this way, such a perspective resembles the Hoxhaist dogmato-revisionism that accused the Chinese Revolution under Mao as being a "revisionist" version of Marxism-Leninism due to its unfaithfulness to Stalin's conception of Leninism. According

to today's dogmata-revisionism, then, the PCP did not fail because it alone synthesized Maoism; its defeat was due to external factors since its synthesis and practice was otherwise perfect. Although it is correct to treat the PCP's inability to complete its People's War as a *defeat* rather than a *failure* (we must recall, here, Pao-yu Ching's reframing of the question of "socialist failure" as "socialist defeat") it was indeed defeated and there were internal contradictions that led to this defeat. Again, as Mao argued in *On Contradiction* (and this is an important theoretical contribution of Maoism that cannot be denied if one is to be Maoist), it is internal contradictions that are decisive.

Maoist reason—if it is the current accomplishment of Marxist reason and thus a *scientific* reason—cannot waste time with claims about theoretical purity and a point of origin that refuses to develop through the insights from successive and/or ongoing people's wars. While we must indeed recognize the insights the PCP have contributed to the development of the science and its primary principle, particularly regarding the universality of PPW, these insights are recognized and furthered by the PCP-RIM sequence and it is in this sequence where we will discover the ongoing vitality of Maoist reason.



## Conclusion

In 1914 Lenin described dialectical transformation as a “development that repeats, as it were, stages that have already been passed, but repeats them in a different way, on a higher basis... a development, so to speak, that proceeds in spirals, not in a straight line; a development by leaps, catastrophes, and revolutions; ‘breaks in continuity’; the transformation of quantity into quality.”<sup>65</sup> Thus, to assert that the emergence of Maoism as a third and higher stage of Marxism is to also assert such a transformation where the “breaks in continuity” are also a repetition “on a higher basis.” If we are to seriously think Maoism as a new stage of science, and not simply a non-dialectical repetition of pre-Maoist Marxism-Leninism, then we have to also begin thinking what such a transformation means according to this basic understanding of dialectical development. If we do not then we are simply stuck with an understanding of a quantitative straight line of development where it is simply about adding up the insights as if they are an evolutionary trend. Such a view admits no stages or periodizations of the science, no moments where old and limited ideas reach a limit and thus require revolutionary struggle to overcome the revisionism they may come to represent. Such a view treats Marxism not as a science but a complete doctrine that generates an eternal continuity; it would make no sense to even speak of Leninism or Maoism since, if there are no “breaks in continuity”, as mere prophetic additives they would not be higher stages that require those leaps that break from one stage so as to establish another.

As Ajith concludes *On The Maoist Party*:

One of the great leaps achieved by Maoism is its rupture from bad traditions of the Comintern period, without in the least minimising its positive role. This must be further deepened. Today’s Maoist parties are, without doubt, continuators of yesteryear communist parties. But their foundations must be the heights attained by Maoism in

<sup>65</sup> Lenin, *Karl Marx*, ([marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1914/granat/ch02.htm](http://marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1914/granat/ch02.htm)).

the vanguard concept, not the outlook or methods of their past.<sup>66</sup>

Such heights attained “by Maoism in the vanguard concept” are, according to Ajith and the living Maoist movements of which he was familiar, a rejection of the mechanical monolithic approach to organization and one that binds the party of the avant garde to the mass-line and Cultural Revolution. It is only here, as we have seen through the development of Maoism from the 1980s onwards, where a truly Maoist reason can flourish and thus generate the next, and hopefully final, world historical revolution.

I am well aware that Ajith is now being called a “rightist” by those elements of the Maoist milieu who would lock us into an emaciated version of Maoism that has not developed since the possibility of such a new stage was first conceived. This charge of “rightism”, though, is merely rhetorical since it is only an insult thrown out by those who see themselves as properly left and thus cannot conceive of any deviation from their line as anything but rightist. Hoxhaites also classified Mao’s political line as “rightist” and “revisionist” because of its supposed deviation from Stalin’s orthodoxy. The irony, however, is that such a rejection of Ajith’s insights is by definition rightist; traditionalist conservatism—even if and when it manifests “left” styles of political practice—is the textbook definition of right deviationism.

In any case, if we are to understand the meaning of Maoist reason and a critique of its boundaries, we must also learn how to think Maoism in its totality: which means to also think its distance from pre-Maoist Leninism and pre-Leninist Marxism, and which further means to think what makes Maoism the highest stage of revolutionary science—by what rationale we can call it a stage, what makes the process of which it is a part scientific, and what scientific thinking means for Maoists interested in developing revolutionary theory.

The overall problematic that has guided this extended essay is the necessity of thinking Maoist thought. Those who cannot think Maoism

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<sup>66</sup> Ajith, *On The Maoist Party* ([thenaxalbari.blogspot.com/2013/05/on-maoist-party.html](http://thenaxalbari.blogspot.com/2013/05/on-maoist-party.html)).

will be those who are unable to answer the questions implied by the above paragraph—the questions that have structured this critique—because of their dogmatism, their eclecticism, their combination of these two registers, or their general agnosticism that would result in an incapability of making any meaningful statement (dogmatic, eclectic, or otherwise) about what Maoism *is*. Formulaic, confused, or agnostic dismissals to this critique simply demonstrate that there remain regions of Maoist reason that have not yet grasped—and might even refuse to grasp—what Maoism implies and demands. For it implies and demands no less than what was demanded by Marx and Engels: a ruthless criticism of all that exists but according to a substantial reason that does not merely demystify the world but, in this demystification, generates the tools for the overthrow of existent reality.

To be clear, I do not think that the various tendencies vying for the determination of Maoist reason are wholly antagonistic to each other even if some of them tend to interpret multiple non-antagonistic contradictions as antagonistic. I hold that there is still a lot of room for comradely line struggle amongst these Maoisms so as to contribute to a more robust conception of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. Even still, I think it is clear that there is only one tendency—the one forged through the PCP-RIM process and its parallels—that has been proven to represent Maoist reason whereas other approaches are ultimately variations of dogmatism and eclecticism. Although such differences between tendencies might become antagonistic contradictions in the future (that is, when the differences get in the way of making revolution) at the moment they remain at the level of non-antagonism, though the more dogmatic approaches to Maoism like to pretend otherwise. In this context, then, it becomes increasingly important to think Maoism and pursue a critique of its reason so as to sharpen the weapon of criticism.

To sharpen the Maoist sword for the overthrow of existent reality through the critique of its general reason is to also plane away that which would make it jagged or dull. And though the dull and jagged aspects of the sword might hate the whet-stone that critiques their reason for existence, at the end of the day the critique of the stone reveals

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that they were nothing more than flaws—temporary deviations in the sword's cutting edge. Maoist reason will be revealed as the sharp weapon that it is once the stone of its critique has rendered it to itself.



## Acknowledgments

The acknowledgments of this extended essay could go on for pages since there are many individuals and organizations who have contributed, both directly and indirectly, over the many years that I have tried to think and practice Maoism. Some of these influences are no longer close comrades, some have passed away, and many I will fail to remember if I'm trying to do a full accounting of those responsible for my ideological and theoretical development. Moreover, since the acknowledgments in my last book went on for seven pages I'm going to err on the side of brevity.

Most importantly, I want to thank Foreign Languages Press not only for their interest in publishing *Critique of Maoist Reason* but for their thoughtful editorial work that made the book stronger than it otherwise would have been. This is probably the first time I've had editors who were intimately familiar with what I was writing about; their content edits and their copy-edits were invaluable. The project of Foreign Languages Press has developed greatly since it was first conceived and I am happy to contribute an original publication at this stage of its growth—especially since this project would probably never be considered publishable anywhere else due to the specific nature of its intended audience. I look forward to the Press' further development just as I look forward to reading the work these comrades will continue to produce.

Next, I want to again thank Hamayon, my oldest and closest Maoist comrade, who is largely responsible for pushing me towards MLM. He has remained a stolid encourager and sounding-board, and it is most likely that much of the reasoning in this book originated at some point or other in the various discussions and debates we have had for more than a decade. May our children live to see communism.

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Finally, thanks to all the dogmatists, eclecticists, chauvinists, and revisionists and opportunists of all kinds within the movement without whom this book would not have been written. Thought advances through contradiction; a political line becomes clearer—revolutionary theory becomes sharper—in the midst of struggle.







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