

OUTLINE

Title: Mao's Critique

Thesis: Mao Tse-Tung offers a penetrating critique of Soviet Economics.

Opening Sentence: This inquiry seeks to establish that Mao Tse-Tung offers a penetrating critique of Soviet Economics.

Part 1: Transitions through Socialism. Mao looks at the variety of changes that happen when a country transition into and out of socialism.

Part 2: The structure of the State. Mao examines the structure of the state in a country where socialism is the current system and how it needs to change when transitioning to communism.

Part 3: Mao vs. Stalin. We take a really deep look at how Mao and Stalin differ in their views of socialism.

Closing Sentence: This inquiry has sought to establish that Mao Tse-Tung offers a penetrating critique of Soviet Economics.

Mao's Critique

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Mao Tse-Tung and his critical approach towards soviet economics.

Abstract: This inquiry seeks to establish a critique on the soviet economy through the literature of Mao Tse-Tung. After briefly introducing Mao we will begin to divulge Mao's writing. Firstly we will discuss Mao's thoughts on the differences of the "transitional period" in the "stages of history" focusing on the transition into socialism from capitalism. The next part will focus on class struggle, looking at the lack of discussion on the superstructure within the Soviet texts. It will also briefly touch on the delicacy of development within socialism. We will conclude with how Mao's views are a very in-depth and accurate criticism of Stalin's texts, being a nearly perfect dissection of the USSR in the mid 1900's.

JEL Classifications: B14, B19, B31, B40

Keywords: Mao Tse-Tung, People's Republic of China, USSR, Socialism, Maoism

Mao Zedong also translated as Mao Tse-tung and commonly referred to as Chairman Mao(December 26, 1893 – September 9, 1976), was a Chinese Communist revolutionary and the founding father of the People's Republic of China, which he governed as Chairman of the Communist Party of China from its establishment in 1949 until his death in 1976. His Marxist-Leninist theories, military strategies and political policies are collectively known as Marxism-Leninism-Maoism or Mao Zedong Thought.

Transitions Through Socialism

Mao Tse-Tung is the founder of Maoism, creating a deeply thought out view of how a country should be developed and run. Mao gives us the “crisis of socialism”. In its fundamentals, what came to be known first as “Mao Zedong Thought”, and later by many as “Maoism,” was an effort led by forces within the Communist Party of China (CPC), and later in other communist and revolutionary movements and parties, to address the crisis of socialism. Mao (1977,34) states that “socialism must begin with the transformation with the fundamental background of social relations in which they must be transformed”. So what are these social relations that must be transformed? Mao (1977,34) suggests that all social relations includes in its meaning the production relations and the superstructure (economics, politics, ideologies and culture). Such a change is much easier said than done though. The transition between the stages of history is a struggle that takes place in the superstructure and the in the process of production. And while the Soviets and Mao agree on this idea, the Soviets suggest that such a transition can also go over peacefully. Mao (1977,33) is very critical of this idea that the transition from capitalism to socialism can happen peacefully, stating that the components of a socialist economy cannot mature within an economy with private ownership, such as capitalism. With this said the only way for this transition to occur is through the proletariat by organizing all working people to attain the goal of eliminating capitalism.

Another key difference is that Mao was very set in his ways, where his ideas were not only better than others but also more fine tuned. Most these are on par with Marxian fundamentals such as the idea that socialism was not a mode of production but represented a transitional period between capitalism and communism during which

elements of both modes of production would exist causing a struggle because of different ideals. Mao (1977,35) also says that there would continue to be classes, and class struggle would continue during socialism, but this struggle would take different forms than had existed under traditional capitalism. He is very critical of the soviet ideas at this point where he disagrees with the idea that “the middle peasants become the principal figures in the village”. On the other hand Mao (1977, 45) purports that middle peasants are not the principal figures, believing that if this were such the case it could prove costly for a country because whoever holds ownership in an area has tremendous power over development in the area. Another key point on the classes is that classes, including antagonistic classes, could in fact re-emerge during socialism. Socialism, therefore, was not a period in which there could be no reversals. The consolidation of capital under the rubric of state property—to borrow from Engels—was insufficient to guarantee a transition to communism or the emancipation of the oppressed according to Mao (1977, 103) who agreed with Engels.

The Structure of The State

Mao (1977, 101) continues to criticise Stalin’s ideas because Stalin saw class struggle as a military action against foreign aggressors or foreign agents. Basically he was stating that the solution to absolve class struggle was elimination. The notion of class struggle and the possibility of the emergence of a new oppressive class arising from both small commodity production and from within the socialist state and party itself were simply not on the table. For Stalin, as for many of his followers in what came to be known as the NCM (New Communist Movement) in the USA, socialism was a one way street: the only way for there to be capitalist restoration or moving back was through a counter-

revolutionary insurrection or an external invasion. Mao (1977, 41) disagreed, stating that socialism will still have internal contradictions, but that a more reasonable approach would be to maximize labor discipline because of the high level of automation that should already be implemented in the country. This is a much more in depth approach than to just “eliminate” internal contradictions.

Mao (1977, 100) continues to challenge Stalin’s ideas of economic determinism, even during its post-Stalin incarnations. It suggested that while the development of the productive forces was essential, economic development in and of itself would not, ipso facto, lead toward communism, even if a communist party were in command. Mao (1977, 40) also has a very important quote where he suggests that the ideological and political line decides everything. And that if a party's line is correct then people will follow and if there isn’t any followers, followers will come. Mao (1977,103-104) finishes this idea by saying that as long as the rope is pulled the whole net can open up. What he is saying is that socialism can take various forms and that there is no definite path to a socialist state. The party’s political and ideological line, which Mao never reduced to a set of programs and proclamations, but always founded on a concrete analysis, was the battleground in the construction of socialism. Yet we must assume from Mao’s (1977, 101) ideas is that it is possible to move “backwards” in the stages of history or his formulation doesn’t make too much sense. We can look at historical events to prove this idea by looking at when the USSR was socialist and it reverted back to a Western style capitalist system. Why was it that a formal restoration of Western-style capitalism transpired so easily? Why was there no civil war? Why was it that cadres of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) did not rally en masse against private

capitalism? How, in other words, did the great tree become infested with termites? Short of a conspiracy theory that places all the blame on a cabal of a small group of leaders, there are few answers besides getting to the root of actual class struggle as it was playing out in the former USSR.

Mao vs. Stalin

Was Maoism correct that the Soviet Union had become a form of state capitalism? Mao (1977, 135) believed that it had changed back because of a complete disregard to the superstructure in the USSR, with Stalin only considering things and not people. Another serious shortfall of the USSR that Mao (1977, 136) points out is that although they suggest laws they do not propose a method to implement these laws. It is easy to see why the implementation process was not considered because without considering the superstructure and only considering the mode of production there would be no need for laws because there is only production with no regard to who or what is doing the production.

Now we must consider that Mao wrote his Critique in the late 1950s. This was after the Great Leap Forward and all the problems associated therein. Revolutionary fervor in the Communist Party was being replaced by the creeping winds of conservatism. Those conservatives in the Party seemed to be eager to copy the Soviet model with its commandism and bureaucracy. To Mao, those methods smacked of capitalism, not socialism. Mao, ever the student, looked to the USSR and their experience of socialist development to find out what had gone wrong. He looked at works of Stalin and other Soviet writers to diagnosis China's current problems and find a way out of the impasse.

Mao (1977, 98-99) looked at how the USSR had engaged in primitive socialist accumulation, or how the nation built up its industry and collectivized agriculture. To Mao, although Soviet achievements in these fields were undeniable, they were largely conducted at the level of economics and neglected politics, ideology and culture. For instance, the USSR collectivized the countryside at the expense of the peasantry. In fact, the peasants were not the driving force of the collectivization movement, but were simply told that they must be collectivized by the Soviet party. This was in contrast to the Chinese party's dealings with the peasantry, which used the methods of the mass line and fused with them. What the Soviets were doing smacked of bureaucratic behavior more appropriate to a capitalist enterprise.

These bureaucratic and commandist ideas that were so clear in how the Soviets treated the peasantry were certainly bourgeois holdovers. Mao (1977, 33) recognized that even in socialism that there would be a struggle between old and new ideas. Yet the Soviets seemed to believe that as the standard of living improved through economic development that old bourgeois ideas would simply die out. To Mao, this was not so. The communist revolution wasn't just about changing the economy, but about forging new political, ideological, and cultural values appropriate to communism. These new values would spontaneously emerge with economic development like Athena from the head of Zeus. Nor could these new values be commanded or forced upon the people. Rather, to Mao (1977,46), these values could only emerge through the participation of the masses themselves in the process.

For Mao (1977, 100), it wasn't enough to simply change the relations of production in the countryside as the USSR had done (although this was necessary). You

needed to change the ideas of the masses, which with new communist ideas would in turn increase productivity and build communism. This was exactly what Mao sought to do in the Great Leap Forward.

What Mao (1977, 40) is getting at here is that there are contradictions in the process of building socialism. This was something that the Soviets did not recognize. There were bourgeois survivals in the superstructure (commandism, bureaucracy, etc.) that conflicted with new emerging proletariat political, cultural and ideological ideas. It was not enough to just develop the economy, but the masses had to be involved. To Mao (1977, 62) and any self-respecting communist, the masses wanted revolution and communism. Therefore, if they were properly led, they would combat the bourgeois survivals and institute new proletariat modes of politics, ideology and ideology.

When Mao talks about involving the masses in the struggle, he is departing from a great deal of the Stalin-era practice. During Stalin's time, the masses were often distrusted and handed down their instructions by party fiat. Mao (1977,40) certainly believed that the party had a great role to play in the revolutionary process, but he knew that a revolution was a living and breathing thing. The party had to be willing to learn and as well as teach. The party had to recognize that there were no blueprints handed down in advance and allow the masses to experiment. The Soviets thus didn't have the final word on how socialism was to be built.

Flowing naturally from the above is that the communist revolution is an all-around process, affecting both the economic base and the superstructure. Central to the communist revolution was that (communist and mass) politics be in command. The

communist revolution had to recognize that there were contradictions between base and superstructure, town and country, worker and peasant, manual and mental labor, and leader and led during the whole transition period. Building communism means putting into practice the mass line, investigating and concentrating the scattered ideas of the masses and communicating them back until the masses take up as their own. In the process, the revolutionaries fuse with the masses and involve them in building communism. Furthermore, in building communism, Mao (1977,94) discusses this in line with the Soviet experience that developing heavy industry was essential. Mao (1977,80) also purports that the Soviets put too much emphasis on heavy industry, so that light industry and agriculture were neglected and the masses suffered because of this. Mao (1977,82) urged that growth be more balanced with light industry and agriculture not being neglected in favor of heavy industry. It was necessary to develop heavy industry because it was in the long-range interests of the people, but also to combine their immediate needs. Mao like a true dialectician grasped this connection. This was in contrast to Soviet planning which often didn't put the needs of the masses in the forefront and was lopsided.

Mao's critique of Soviet methods of planning also extended to what he saw as their one-sided reliance on material incentives. Material incentives to Mao were a bourgeois survival that did not raise consciousness of the masses. The masses needed to be involved in the planning process (they weren't involved in the USSR). They needed to be building communism, not having it built for them, otherwise how could that be communism? For the Soviets, planning was about things, not people. For Mao, planning

(and communism) meant that there had to be conscious activity by both the party and the masses.

What Mao would come to recognize as the 1960s wore on was that there were those in the Chinese party (and in the Soviet), who rely upon bourgeois survivals and seek a return to capitalism. Yet these ideas were not fully developed when Mao wrote the Critique, yet he was developing in that direction. If it was necessary to involve the masses in the building of a communist society and combating the old ideas of the bourgeois which could survive even in the party, might that lead to a clash? In China, that led to more than a clash, but a great unleashing of communist energy in the Cultural Revolution.

This inquiry has sought to establish that Mao developed a well thought out and in-depth analysis of Stalin's ideas and how the USSR was run. By looking at Stalin's writings Mao was able to view his ideas with an outside view so that he was able to create a critical view of not only the "base", but also the superstructure. Firstly Mao looked at and criticised how the USSR and Stalin viewed the transition through socialism within their country. Mao concludes that classes do not cease to exist in Socialism, they just take on a different format from that of capitalism. He continued to look at the peasants of the country by looking at what their role should be. While the USSR suggests promineny among the peasants, Mao (1977,53) disagrees while provided a strong counter argument that to put the role of development in the hands of peasants would be a dangerous decision and that it would be better to put it in the hands of an individual with loyalty to the state and an understanding of how to efficiently develop an area. Lastly Mao looks at how delicate development can be, with there being

a fine balance between developing too much heavy industry or light industry, with Mao focusing on how the USSR neglected developing light industry and in particular agriculture which lead to serious problems down the road.

Bibliography

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