

## Chapter Seven

# The Sino-Soviet Dispute and Expulsion

The dispute between the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) erupted into the open in April 1960 with the publication of a small book entitled *Long Live Leninism*, published in Peking (now Beijing). It consisted of three articles written by the Editorial Department of Red Flag, official organ of the CCP; the Editorial Department of People's Daily, an official daily paper; and Lu Ting-yi, a member of the Politburo of the CCP. These articles embodied the main points of the polemic which was to come out into the open and split the Communist world apart.

The leaderships of different national Communist parties proceeded to take sides, with those of the advanced capitalist countries by and large siding with the CPSU and those of the so-called Third World siding with the CCP. The Korean Workers' Party was ambiguous in its stance.

Most Communist Parties were split, and the result was the effective fragmentation of the International Communist Movement. New parties were formed all over the place, mainly by those party members whose leaderships had sided with the CPSU but who were, themselves, on the side of the CCP in India, France, Britain, Australia, and elsewhere. These parties normally called themselves something like 'Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist),' suggesting that, unlike the old party, they faithfully followed the doctrine known as Marxism-Leninism. The old parties following the Soviet line were known to the "new" parties as "revisionist," implying that those "old" parties had revised Marxism-Leninism in such a way that they had lost their revolutionary bearings and had become merely reformist. The Chinese Party accused the Soviet Party of collaboration with imperialism and of not supporting revolutionary movements all over the world. This was hotly denied by the Russians, of course, and tempers ran extremely high, to say the least.

This clash had a long history, reaching as far back as the foundation of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921. After the setting up of the Republic in China in 1911 by the nationalists (Kuomintang) led by Sun Yat-sen, China was in turmoil and the situation got worse after the death of Sun when the leadership of the Kuomintang (KMT) passed to Chiang Kai-shek. Under Chiang, the KMT became decadent, corrupt, and cruel.

The newly-born, tiny CCP turned to Stalin and the CPSU for help and support, and they sent advisers throughout the twenties. Stalin wrote a great deal about the situation in China and the Chinese revolution; all these writings are to be found in his published works. Much of this advice related to cooperation between the CCP and the KMT, and there was considerable cooperation in the early years of the twenties, even to the extent that some members of the Communist Party were members of the Kuomintang (e.g. Chou En-lai). Much, much later, in the early stages of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 and 1967, some Party members were criticised for having worked with the KMT and for advocating cooperation with it as if it had been a counter-revolutionary crime whereas it had been the Party line!

Details are not available in English about this period, and the only reliable source, the *Journal of the Communist International*, only deals in generalities. However, what actually occurred in 1927 was the virtual wiping-out of the Communist organisation in the cities in Eastern China as a result of a massacre perpetrated by the KMT. Later it became clear that Mao never forgave Stalin for what he considered to have been Stalin's bad advice during those years. The Chinese expressed this in their own way in public during the Cultural Revolution, saying that Stalin had advised them badly. They did not blame Stalin for the outcome but only themselves for taking his advice.

Large numbers of leading survivors escaped to the countryside, including Mao Tse-tung and Chu Te (a well-known Chinese Communist general of that time and also later years). What were called 'liberated areas' were set up in various parts of China, the liberation referring to the land reform which was instituted. Mao was so militarily successful in southeast China that a Chinese Soviet Republic of about 11 million people was set up and lasted until 1933. (Very interesting material exists in the *Comintern Journal* about this Soviet Republic and is available in the London School of Economics Library and in the British Library.) The CPSU still sent advisers to the CCP in the Soviet, and the Kuomintang relied on German advisers.

One of the latter was a certain von Braun who advised Chiang Kai-shek to surround the Chinese forces and starve them out. It is possible it was a shortage of salt which was a decisive factor in making it necessary for the CCP and its supporters to break out of the blockade and embark upon the legendary Long March. This event was of immense practical and mythological importance in the spread of influence of the CCP and the later consolidation of its rule. (See *Red Star Over China* by Edgar Snow, for example.)

It was on the Long March at a place called Tsunyi in 1935 that Mao became the leader of the Chinese Communist Party. A 'rump' leadership re-

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mained in Shanghai, which then became the centre for political work in the cities only. Mao's *Selected Works* contains a history of the CCP according to the Maoists, and the Tsunyi Conference is presented as the occasion on which Mao's line for the future work of the CCP was accepted. All previous leaders of the CCP are torn to shreds in this history, and it is virtually impossible to get at the truth of the matter. What I would have said years ago is that we have to face the fact that the line of Chen Tu-hsiu and others certainly led to massacre and defeat whereas Mao's line led to the victory of the Chinese Revolution in 1949. So perhaps they were right to tear the earlier leaders of the Party to shreds. Today, in 2009, our perspective is rather different!

There were two main aspects to Mao's line. First, instead of being based in the cities and aimed mainly at the proletariat, the Party would base itself in the countryside among the peasants. Second, the Party would call for a United Front against Japanese imperialism to be supported by all possible classes.

The official Party history presents Mao as having been original in proposing a United Front but, in fact, this followed (in December 1935) upon Georgei Dimitrov's call in September 1935 at the Seventh Congress of the Communist International (of which he was General Secretary) for a worldwide United Front against Fascism. The leading figure in the CCP in Shanghai, Wang Ming, had already called for such a United Front as well. (Wang Ming's writing is to be found in the British Library). In the CCP official Party history, Wang Ming gets very bad press indeed, being labelled as a 'leftist.'

The epic Long March ended in Yen-an in 1934-5 where a 'revolutionary base-area' was set up and consolidated. Here, there was much-needed land reform, and people went there not only from other parts of China but from all over the world. The U.S. Government sent representatives to find out what was happening there. Much myth used to prevail about the base-area in Yen-an, and this may still be the case. What is relevant here is that contact with the Comintern and Stalin persisted. Interestingly, we find in the *Comintern Journal* a telegram from Stalin to Mao, when the CCP and Mao were holding two warlords captive and demanding a ransom for their release, threatening to denounce Mao himself to the entire International Communist Movement as a bandit if they were not immediately released. Such a telegram could not have endeared Stalin to Mao.

The Party history is not forthcoming on detail but problems must have persisted (perhaps between the city Party and that of the countryside?) because when the Seventh Congress of the CCP was opened by Liu Shao-chi in 1945, it was called by him 'a congress of unity.' The history of the period from 1945 is well known. Although the CCP called upon the KMT to join them in a coalition government, such calls were fruitless, and the resulting civil war led to the CCP sweeping the countryside. It used to be said in China that the U.S. supplied Mao's army with arms via the KMT whose peasant rank-and-file soldiers surrendered in droves to the Red Army, taking their arms with them. Eventually the U.S. withdrew support from Chiang Kai-shek on the advice of those advisers who had seen for themselves that there was massive,

countrywide support for the Communist Party, not only on account of the land reform that was instituted in the liberated villages but because of the corruption of the KMT. Communist soldiers, on the other hand, were enjoined not to take a pin or a piece of thread from the peasants and not to harass the women. No conquering army in Chinese history had behaved as well as this to the local populations.

In 1949 the People's Republic of China (PRC) was established with Mao as Chairman and Liu Shao-chi as President. It was about this time that the adulation of Stalin reached a high point and the CPSU was the unchallenged leader of the International Communist Movement. Help went from the Soviet Union to China, and all seemed sweetness and light until 1956 when Khrushchev totally destroyed Stalin's image at the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the CPSU.

It was only about a year later that the CCP raised a number of issues with the CPSU (at a joint meeting in Budapest in 1957). Peter and I did not see things this way at the time, but later, when we had gained a little common sense and were more cynical, we saw this as a battle for the leadership of the International Communist Movement—a struggle for power.

Previous to this, the Soviet Party had put forward the thesis that, with two superpowers both in possession of nuclear arms, it was necessary for both to pursue policies of Peaceful Coexistence and Peaceful Competition in order to avoid possible destruction of the entire planet by nuclear war. The Peaceful Competition concerned trade and the efficacy of the respective systems.

The essence of the case made by the Chinese against the Soviet Party was that, in formulating and carrying through their policy of Peaceful Coexistence, the CPSU was caving in to the U.S. and, instead of seeing the struggle between them as a form of international class struggle, was colluding with the U.S. imperialists. It was not explicitly stated at first, but by the mid-sixties the accusation was that the US and USSR had a joint system of world hegemony and had divided the world into two spheres of influence, both intent on world domination.

The second major bone of contention was closely related to this insofar as the CCP alleged that, in putting forward the idea of Peaceful Coexistence, the CPSU was lulling people all over the world into a false sense of security about the possibility of avoiding war. Imperialism always leads to war, wrote the CCP, since war is always a last resort of imperialism when it cannot achieve its ends by peaceful means. The Chinese cited many wars all over the globe that had occurred in recent years, including at the top of the list colonial wars in Indo-China, Korea, and so forth. "It is not we who stand in the way of Peaceful Coexistence but the imperialists themselves whose system invariably leads to war."

Third, and closely connected again, was the issue of giving way to 'nuclear blackmail' by the imperialist countries and encouraging terror in people by exaggerating the effects of nuclear war. One article officially put out by the CCP suggested that if there should be a nuclear war, a better world could be built on 'the radioactive ruins.' In *Long Live Leninism*, we read,

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But should the imperialists impose such sacrifices on the peoples of various countries, we believe that, just as the experience of the Russian Revolution and the Chinese revolution shows, those sacrifices would be rewarded. On the debris of imperialism, the victorious people would create very swiftly a civilization thousands of times higher than the capitalist system and a truly beautiful future for themselves.

I was very uncomfortable with this at the time, though not so uncomfortable as to express myself outright.

Then there was the Test Ban Treaty, still operative today and still a matter of concern and controversy. India now has its own nuclear weaponry, but in 1998 they refused to sign this treaty on the same grounds used by the Chinese all those years ago—namely that a small group of nuclear powers were dictating to others that they should not have nuclear weapons. That is the argument that Iran is using to this very day (2008).

Another argument that will seem very strange today is the ‘class’ argument. This is the argument (made by the CCP) that it is not the weapons themselves that are the threat but the hands which they are in. Nuclear weapons are a threat in the hands of the imperialists but not in the hands of a state governed by a working class Party.

A brief outline such as this is not enough to give a full account of the arguments but does give a flavour of what went on. In reply to the criticisms of the CCP, the Soviet Party accused the Chinese of reckless “adventurism.” At the time of which I am writing, the Chinese had no nuclear weapons. They were to acquire them in 1966.

I must refer to another aspect of the dispute to make it clearer why we espoused the Chinese cause. This was to do with the pursuit of the revolutionary struggle in countries which were still capitalist. The main issue was the possibility or not of a peaceful transition to Socialism. Just as in the case of imperialism and war, the CCP urged that the working people of the world should be vigilant. Communist Parties throughout the world (wrote the Chinese) should remember that no ruling class has ever given up power without a struggle. Of course, working people and Communist Parties would dearly love to achieve a peaceful, parliamentary transition to Socialism, but just as imperialism is the obstacle to a peaceful world, so ruling classes in particular countries are the armed obstacles to such a transition. The working class must, therefore, pursue two tactics in the national as well as the international sphere: hope for peace but prepare for war.

Lenin’s writings on the State as an instrument of violence (sometimes masked but always present) were quoted, and the CPSU was bitterly harangued for effectively dampening down class struggle in capitalist countries in the interests of pursuing their ambition of joining the U.S. in world domination. By underplaying the revolutionary struggle in favour of peaceful, parliamentary means, the Soviet Union was colluding with capitalism and, thus, currying favour with them.

After years of opposition to the Party leadership on theoretical and related practical issues, in however modest a way, feeling weak and impotent, the arrival on the scene of a ‘big brother’ in the shape of the Chinese Communist Party came as a bolt from the blue. We felt euphoric. Far from being outsiders ‘crying in the wilderness,’ we were on the same road as the largest and, in some ways, most experienced Communist Party in the world.

The Sino-Soviet dispute (or the Polemic, as we came to call it) was an extraordinary phenomenon and difficult for outsiders to understand. One reason for this was that the Chinese had a tradition of a rather devious approach to attacking enemies. Instead of directly attacking an object of criticism, a minor target would first be singled out and the case presented in a roundabout way. Thus before criticising the CPSU, they focussed on Yugoslavia, whose leader Tito had had a virtual break with Stalin in 1948.

Such an approach corresponded to the way in which criticism and ‘purging’ was carried out in China itself. They would not start with the real object of criticism but would initially focus on a subordinate. Presumably it was done in this way so associates of the real object of criticism would realise what was coming and be able to dissociate themselves from the main object of attack, who would be left isolated and exposed as a result. Perhaps I am wrong about this, but I cannot think of any other rationale for this round-about procedure.

The Chinese ‘line’ appeared to us as a godsend. No longer were we alone in fighting the opportunism and watered-down Marxism-Leninism of the leadership of the CPGB. The largest Communist Party in the world was on the same side as we were. So, instead of concentrating on the immediate practical and theoretical differences between ourselves and the Party leadership, we eagerly read the pamphlets brought out by the CCP in the course of the dispute and tried to apply their points to the particular situation in which we found ourselves.

The Chinese accused the Soviet Party of the crime of “revisionism,” i.e., altering the content of Marxism-Leninism in an unwarrantable fashion, and soon we called ourselves “anti-revisionists.” It is difficult to disentangle the genuine, principled aspects of the polemic from what was a naked international power struggle over the leadership of the International Communist Movement, which then had a real and sizeable existence on the world stage. At that time, at the height of our fanaticism with respect to Marxism-Leninism, the power struggle was not apparent to us. Furthermore, we had not yet studied the history of the relations between the CCP and the CPSU (and Mao and Stalin in particular) to have any inkling of the real state of affairs. Still less, we hadn’t any idea of the power struggle going on inside the CCP itself—that was to come later, when we were in China. We took everything at its face value. It just felt very good to be waging a battle on the side of powerful forces and on behalf of a cause which would, without doubt, increase the sum of human happiness and banish injustice, poverty, ignorance, and social suffering once and for all.

We used every legal means inside the Party to fight for our case. We did not leave the Party because, as we saw it, the Party belonged to us, the membership, and not to the leadership which had, effectively, hijacked it in pursuit of private ambition. We distinguished between the Party as such and the individual members. The former was still, objectively, the “vanguard of the proletariat” despite everything: the corruption, the reduction of policy to that of the left-wing of the Labour Party, and the watering-down of the fight against imperialism.

There are some ex-Party members even today who left earlier (perhaps in the ‘50s over the suspicion of anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union or over Hungary) who take a rather condemnatory attitude to others who left later, as if some sort of “chronological virtue” were involved. We decided to stay on until they expelled us; until that happened, we would not break the rules but act according to Party principles and would be able to use our membership to expose the leadership and its revisionist policies to other members in Party meetings.

We were not at all clear what we hoped to accomplish in the end. Ideas of rising in the Party hierarchy were definitely not on our agenda. We never envisaged any sort of political power. I think what would have pleased me most would have been intellectual recognition. I know that I took immense pleasure in the sheer interplay of ideas involved in comparing texts and demonstrating the divergence of the Party statements from orthodox Marxism-Leninism. (I did not know it then, but I was really thinking in a rather Talmudic way!)

Every day the international news seemed to come up with more and more evidence to substantiate what we were saying. We received the New China News Agency news bulletin every day, which emphasised struggles and victories of liberation movements in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. With hindsight, I realise that these accounts were gross exaggerations of the true state of affairs.

Remember that the CCP and the CPSU were competing for leadership of the International Communist Movement and patronage from one or other of these Parties was being sought by movements all over the world. Each tiny movement might well exaggerate its own achievements in order to gain patronage from one or other ‘Big Brother.’ These victories were never mentioned by the establishment press or by the *Daily Worker* (which consistently supported the Soviet Party). I wonder what was really going on?

In the meantime, our group continued to meet, but discussion of Peter’s document gave way to discussion of the politics of the international dispute. Matters did not proceed smoothly, however. There was a sort of mini-power struggle in our little group. Originally consisting of comrades well known for their long-standing opposition to the leadership’s policies, it was expanded around 1961 by the addition of one or two others, in particular Michael McCreery, an ex-Etonian and son of a general in the British army. He had confided to us early in the relationship that he had worked for MI5 after doing his National Service, although it had been only in a minor capacity.

Perhaps naively, we took this ‘confession’ as a sign of honesty, and he was integrated into the group. All went well for some time. After a while, he suggested bringing others into the group of whom no one had heard before, who had no anti-revisionist credentials, and whose only claim to joining with all of us was that Michael McCreery said they were anti-revisionist. It would have been difficult to prevent them from coming to our gatherings since it really had no official standing of any sort, so they joined in. However, it more and more seemed that a sort of take-over was going on.

The basic problem was that McCreery had considerable leadership qualities, unlike the rest of us, but on the other hand, some of his attitudes caused us to be suspicious of his motives. I remember sitting next to him at a social gathering and he turned to me and said, “After we have established the dictatorship of the proletariat, we shall have to have a terror, shan’t we?” My reply, despite all my fanaticism, was a resounding negative.

There were many things like this which caused us to be very wary of him. There was, at one point, a meeting at the Lucas Arms, a pub near Kings Cross, which was chaired by a friend of his, Ron Jones. Lots of people were there, and a motion McCreery wanted to be passed was put before the meeting. There was considerable confusion, and McCreery was very angry and leant down to Ron Jones and said (rather loudly), “Take the vote, you fool.” I am afraid I cannot recall any of the many other incidents which worried us. These were all jarring and, in contrast to the genuinely good Communists we knew, something was definitely wrong at the human level. (Which is certainly not to say that we were free of serious shortcomings.)

The break came one evening at a meeting at our house when he came along and announced the time was ripe for starting a new Communist Party and we would sit there all night if necessary in order to make this happen. Peter and I and some others opposed this, both on the grounds of unpreparedness and, more importantly, no one in the group possessed the qualities required to become a Party leader or set up a Communist Party. In the end, the group split up, half going off with Michael McCreery (largely his friends) to set up *Vanguard*, a new anti-revisionist newspaper (where did the money come from?). The rest of us were left in a rather anti-climactic state, not knowing how we were going to proceed.

Some months later, a member of *Vanguard*, H. S., came to see us at home in a very worried state, saying that he had to talk to us because he could trust us. It appeared McCreery was regularly going into the office of *Vanguard* and going through the names and addresses of *Vanguard* subscribers, particularly from the Third World, and making a note of them! This clinched matters for us. We were convinced that he was an agent planted to form a ‘flypaper’ organisation, called a new Communist Party, in order to get these names and addresses.

How very melodramatic that now sounds, but Cold War paranoia was intense and, although we were definitely small fry and rather ineffectual, it may not have seemed like that to the powers that be, who would want to get their



hands on any potential subversives, particularly in the Third World. The only thing we could think of doing as a result of H. S.'s disclosure was to send warnings to every one of our friends in other countries not to send in their names and addresses to *Vanguard*.

When we had recovered from the breakup, we re-formed with a small number of comrades and set up a little journal called *Forum*, designed to be a genuine forum for discussion. Articles (on the way ahead) would be unsigned and, therefore, we argued, would not be clouded by personality issues and so could lead to objective discussion. This was set up in 1964 and continued after Peter and I left for China for a good few years, but eventually the journal folded.

In the meantime, we had been active in the CPGB and engaged in activities which eventually led to our expulsion. We were expelled because we distributed a copy of an article produced by the Chinese Party to Party members at a London District Meeting of the Communist Party. In this way, we violated Branch boundaries—you were not allowed to take any action except through your Branch. We did this because the London District Secretary, John Mahon, had made a speech criticising the Chinese for “racism” on account of their special references to “Asia, Africa and Latin America.” We decided to “defend” the reputation of the CCP and distributed the alleged offending speech which had been given by the Chinese delegate at the World Congress of Women to show the Party members that the speech was not racist.

We knew perfectly well what we were doing, although we asserted we had not really broken Party rules as we had not gone outside the Party, and in any case, the material we distributed was written by a “fraternal” Party. After various letters between the London District Committee and Peter and me, we were expelled in 1963.

This was an immense relief, actually, as we were now free to express ourselves. We had been in the Party for eleven years, and this was thoroughly liberating. We would certainly have been greatly disappointed had they not expelled us.