Chapter 4

Inevitability of Violence: Underdeveloped Capitalism and the Feudal-Colonial State

We concluded in chapter 3 that Lenin was in agreement with Marx and Engels in so far as he believed, like them, that the nature of political structure was determined by the economic structures, but he deviated from their position when he asserted that a socialist revolution will have to be violent in all cases because, in his view, all pre-socialist political structures, including the capitalist political structures, remained essentially authoritarian. He argued that in the case of autocratic political conditions in particular, which are the product of feudal economic structures and may linger when the capitalist economic structures have already started to emerge, a violent socialist revolution becomes all the more inevitable. Carrying his analysis beyond domestic borders, he pointed out imperialist war as an additional factor that was responsible for making a socialist revolution violent. The imperialist war played this role by giving a further tilt towards authoritarianism/autocratism to feudal or capitalist political structures. But if we leave aside the bourgeois democratic societies and consider only those societies which had authoritarian/autocratic political structures, it is clear that Lenin only followed the argument of Marx and Engels and extended it further.
We have, once again, already seen in chapter 1 that Mao is closer to Lenin than to Marx and Engels in so far as he believed that ultimately a violent socialist revolution was inevitable even in societies with bourgeois-parliamentary structures. When we come to predominantly feudal societies with authoritarian political structures, we find that here too Mao's position was not much different from that of Lenin. As we shall see in the present chapter, Mao believed that a socialist revolution in a predominantly feudal society like China would be inevitably violent because of mainly two reasons: (1) the unremitting oppression under feudal conditions would force the masses to react in a violent manner, and (2) the power of the feudal forces was so deeply entrenched that it could not be overthrown without the use of violence. Mao stayed close to the position of Lenin in one more respect. In a manner not very dissimilar to that of Lenin, he regarded the direct or indirect presence of imperialist forces as one of the important factors that contributed to the necessity of a violent socialist revolution in a predominantly feudal society. In this respect, he differed from Lenin in only one way. Whereas for Lenin it was a full-scale imperialist war that exacerbated the inevitability of a violent revolution, for Mao even the presence of imperialist political and/or military forces was sufficient to create a situation which left no option with the socialists except waging a violent struggle.
In China the presence of the imperialist military forces led to a situation which was specifically instrumental in taking Mao away from Lenin so far as the form of the revolutionary struggle is concerned. As we know, for Lenin the form of the struggle that the authoritarian conditions made inevitable was that of a civil war. While Mao too advocated this form when the struggle was directed against the feudal classes in a purely domestic context, or when it was directed against imperialist powers when they were working indirectly through their domestic class agents, he asserted that the struggle would have to be waged as a regular military war in the event an imperialist power physically occupied a part or whole of China in collaboration with the comprador classes. This idea of regular military war as a method of revolutionary struggle was his original contribution to the Marxist theory of revolution. It was a product of the peculiar economic and political situation in China during the years Mao developed his thought.

We begin our exposition with Mao's characterisation of this situation.

I. A. Like Marx's and Engels' in the case of continental western Europe and Lenin's in the case of Russia, Mao's characterisation of the Chinese economy and state did not
remain uniform throughout his political career. During the period from 1926 to October 1928 he characterised the Chinese economy and state as semi-feudal, semi-colonial and marginally capitalist. Accordingly, the classes that were dominant were the feudal landlords, military warlords and two sections of the bourgeoisie, the big bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie. Among these the two former and the big bourgeoisie were the comprador classes, that is, they were the agents of the indirect imperialist rule, whereas the last one, that is, the national bourgeoisie, was anti-imperialist, but at the same time also anti-working class, a trait which it shared with the big bourgeoisie.

Analysing the character of these classes in March 1926, Mao described the landlord class, the warlords and the big bourgeoisie as "wholly appendages of the international bourgeoisie, depending upon imperialism for their survival and growth". These classes represented the "most backward and most reactionary relations of production in China" and hindered the development of her productive forces. The big landlords and the big bourgeoisie in particular always sided with imperialism and constituted an extremely counter-revolutionary group. Their existence, therefore, was "utterly incompatible with the aims of the Chinese revolution".


2. Ibid., pp. 13-14.
The national bourgeoisie, on the other hand, was "inconsistent" in its attitude towards the Chinese revolution. It felt the need for revolution and favoured the revolutionary movement against imperialism and the warlords, but was, simultaneously, suspicious of the revolution, for it sensed that the revolution threatened its hope "to attain the status of a big bourgeoisie". Nevertheless, its aim remained the establishment of a state under its own rule.\(^3\)

Mao's characterisation of the national bourgeoisie outlined immediately above and his belief, mentioned earlier, that it was one of the dominant classes in the Chinese society could suggest that he favoured the revolutionary movement to treat the national bourgeoisie as an enemy class as a matter of immediate necessity. In reality, Mao's understanding of the stage of the Chinese revolution led him to defer the revolutionary hostility against the national bourgeoisie for the time being. In October 1928 and again in November of the same year, he agreed with the Communist International that China was "still at the stage of the bourgeois-democratic revolution" and that the programme for such a revolution comprised "externally, the overthrow of imperialism so as to achieve complete national liberation, and, internally, the elimination of the power and influence of the comprador class in the cities, the completion of the agrarian revolution in order to abolish feudal relations in the villages, and the overthrow of the government of the warlords".\(^4\) It was

---

4. Mao, "The Struggle in the Chingkang Mountains", Selected Works, ibid., p. 97. Also see his "Why is it that Red Political Power Can Exist in China?", ibid., pp. 63-64.
essential to go through this kind of revolution before "a real foundation for the transition to socialism" could be laid.  

It is not difficult to see that in Mao's immediate strategy the target of the revolutionary movement was to be the big bourgeoisie in the urban areas and the feudal landlords and warlords whose base lay in the countryside. However, in a majority of his writings of the period Mao seems to have narrowed down his attention to the task of elimination only of the latter two classes by changing the agrarian relations in the countryside. The reason possibly was that the Chinese economy was predominantly rural and agrarian and, therefore, the elimination of the feudal classes looked more important for the success of the revolution. As has been pointed out earlier,


6. A brief look at the contemporary rural China will be relevant here. In the 1920s, the majority of the farming population in China consisted of tenants. The average size of a farm was just 3.31 acres. Although the average produce from this farm was sufficient to feed a medium-sized family, 50 per cent of it was usually appropriated by the landlord. This meant that the tenants had to borrow money during the period between sowing and harvesting. And with the interest rate as high as 30 per cent or more, most of the tenants found themselves in perpetual debt. In addition, they had to pay a number of taxes to the warlords, their rulers in most places, usually in advance. All this left the peasants, including the middle and small owners, increasingly impoverished. This can be seen from the fact that whereas in 1918 50 percent of them were owners and 30 per cent tenants, by 1926-27 the percentages were 25 and 55 respectively. But these figures pertain to the whole of China. In certain provinces, especially in the south, the conditions were even worse. In Hunan, for example, the tenants comprised 80 per cent of the total population. See Jerome Ch'en, Mao and the Chinese Revolution, Oxford University Press, London, 1967, p.71.
Mao himself believed that the Chinese economy of the period was only marginally capitalist and that the hold of the big bourgeoisie on the Chinese state was correspondingly small. It could therefore, in comparison, be ignored, even if only for the moment.

This issue assumes some importance when we try to discover the reasons for Mao's belief that only violent revolution was most appropriate and most expected in Chinese conditions.

As we have seen in chapter 1, Mao believed that the bourgeois parliamentary structures could not be the instrument of the communist capture of power; these structures could be used at best only to educate and prepare the workers for the inevitable revolutionary struggle which would take the form of a civil war. In other words, even in a bourgeois state the revolution will have to be ultimately violent. As we noted above, as per Mao's own analysis the Chinese state was primarily feudal. Further, even as a matter of historical fact, bourgeois parliamentary structures had not taken roots in China at the time when Mao carried out his above-mentioned analysis. In the middle of 1920s, in fact, they hardly existed in any respectable form. Clearly, from Mao's point of view not only was a

violent revolution inevitable in China, but even the scope for the peaceful preparation for an ultimately violent revolution did not exist here.

It is not surprising that under such a situation Mao justified the use of violent methods in the agrarian struggle right from the day one. Specifically, this justification rested on a two-fold belief: the Chinese peasantry was deeply resentful about the intense oppression it had had to bear under the existing relations, and the peasants had no option but to resort to violent methods given the deeply entrenched power of the feudal lords. As we shall see below, there was an additional tactical reason. Mao believed that the use of extreme violence in some cases would help the peasantry in psychologically overwhelming the feudal landlords.

As a matter of fact, the use of such methods was already being resorted to in the growing peasant movement in rural China. Specifically, this was happening in certain KMT (Kuomintang) - controlled areas in May 1927. In these areas, the peasants had organised themselves into associations and had started confiscating the land of the landlords under the direction of the Peasant Department of the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) then headed by Mao.

8. See Jerome Ch'en, n. 6, pp. 107-10.
Mao, who had stayed in the region between 1924 and 1926, and had toured it again in January-February 1927, found the peasants arresting, humiliating and murdering those whom he called "local tyrants and evil gentry", looting their houses and killing their animals. "Doing whatever they like and turning everything upside down, they have created a kind of terror in the countryside", Mao noted approvingly. This was what some people called "going too far" or "exceeding the proper limits in righting a wrong" or "really too much". "Such talk may sound plausible", commented Mao, but in fact it was "wrong". Firstly, because "the lawless landlords" had "themselves driven the peasants to this". "For ages" they had "used their power to tyrannize... the peasants and trample them underfoot". That was why the peasants had "reacted so strongly". "The most violent revolts and the most serious disorders" had, according to Mao, "invariably occurred in places" where the landlords had "perpetrated the worst outrages". Secondly, "Without using the greatest force", the peasants could not "possibly overthrow the deeprooted authority of the landlords" which had "lasted for thousands of years".  

These, however, were not the only reasons for the use of violence against the rural gentry. According to Mao, there was a

9. Ibid., pp. 98, 104, and 111.
direct link between the use of violent methods and the strategic and tactical aims of the movement. Viewing the activities of the peasants in the light of these aims, he said: "There is a revolutionary significance in all the actions which were labelled as 'going too far' in this period". "It is necessary", he declared, "to create terror for a while in every rural area, or otherwise it would be impossible to suppress the... counter-revolutionaries in the countryside or overthrow the authority of the gentry". "Proper limits" had "to be exceeded in order to right a wrong", or else the wrong could not be righted.11 Justifying execution in selected cases, Mao added: "The execution of one ... big landlord reverberates through a whole county and is very effective in eradicating the remaining evils of feudalism. Every county has these major tyrants ... and the only effective way of suppressing the reactionaries is to execute at least a few in each county who are guilty of the most heinous crimes". Citing instances of the frequent killings of the innocent people by the landlords, Mao asked: "...now that the peasants have risen and shot a few and created just a little terror in suppressing the counter-revolutionaries, is there any reason for saying they should not do so?"12

11. Ibid., p. 29.
12. Ibid., pp. 38-39. Mao urged for restraint in certain areas, however, such as "smashing idols". He feared that the landlords would take advantage of such acts and would incite the superstitious peasants against the communists. "If too much of an effort is made, arbitrarily and pre-maturely, to abolish these things", he said, "the local tyrants... will seize the pretext to put about such counter-revolutionary propaganda as ... 'the peasant association is blasphemous and is destroying religion'... for the purpose of undermining the peasant movement". Therefore, the correct policy for
I. B. It can be seen from the above account that Mao's justification of use of violence by peasants in the areas referred to above was largely post-facto. Secondly, although the peasants were being directed by the peasant department of the CPC, the confiscations and the killings were being carried out by the peasants themselves in a highly populist manner. Although Mao's reasons for the justification of such violence did not change in the subsequent years, nevertheless certain developments that took place between 1926 and 1928 convinced him that the execution of violent tactics could no longer be left purely to the peasant initiative. On the contrary, the task of the perpetration of violence on the enemy classes must now be taken into the party hands and be performed in a more organised and systematic manner. The logical culmination of this line of thought was finally the insistence on the need of having a standing people's army, trained and used on regular military lines.

We noted at the beginning of this section that Mao was initially in favour of suspending revolutionary hostility towards the national bourgeoisie. This was because of his belief that

12(Cond.) ..the communists in such matters should be; "Draw the bow without shooting, just indicate the motions". It should be left for the peasants themselves "to cast aside the idols, and pull down the temples...". It would be "wrong for anybody else to do it for them". Ibid., p. 46.
the latter had as yet an ambivalent attitude towards the workers' movement. Further, this attitude also stemmed at least partly from his view, which he shared with the Comintern, that the Chinese revolution was still at the bourgeois-democratic stage. This fact might make necessary an alliance with the national bourgeoisie against the other confirmed reactionary classes. It needs to be pointed out here that this alliance had actually materialised already in 1922 and was largely the handiwork of the Comintern. However, by the end of 1927 the KMT, the political representative of the national bourgeoisie, had fallen out with the communists. It had, in fact, turned against them, and by the beginning of 1928 had virtually exterminated them. This behaviour of the KMT was an alarmed response to the rapid growth and entrenchment of communist influence during the preceding years. These years had seen a strong workers' movement in the trail of the KMT advance. In certain areas, the movement had even preceded the March of the KMT army. This happened, for example, in Shanghai where the workers organised themselves into a militia and took control of the city. The leader of both these movements was the communist party.

The sudden turn-about by the KMT evoked a sharp reaction from Mao and resulted in additional, in some ways totally new, theoretical insights about the political situation in China - insights which had far-reaching implications for the revolutionary strategy of the communist party. Mao expounded these insights in his article "Why is it that Red Political Power can Exist in China?" which he wrote in October 1928 while he was at the Chingkangshan plateau on the borders of Hunan and Kiangsi provinces. This was the area where Mao had established the first "Red" base after the first united front between the KMT and the CPC had collapsed.16

Analysing the internal political situation in China, Mao labelled the current KMT regime as "the new warlords of the Kuomintang". It was a regime "of the comprador class in the cities and the landlord class in the countryside". This regime had "capitulated to imperialism in its foreign relations" and had "replaced the old warlords with new ones, subjecting the working class and the peasantry to an even more ruthless economic exploitation and political oppression". The bourgeois-democratic revolution of 1926-27 "had gone only half way when the comprador

and landlord classes usurped the leadership and immediately shifted it on to the road of counter-revolution". As a result, "throughout the country the workers, the peasants, the other sections of the common people, and even the [national] bourgeoisie" remained under counter-revolutionary rule. Mao believed that Chiang Kai-shek's was only one of the four "cliques of the new Kuomintang warlords", all of which were fighting bitterly among themselves. This struggle among the different cliques of warlords reflected "the contradictions and struggles among the imperialist powers".

It can be seen that with the suppression of the communists by the KMT, the latter no longer represented, to Mao, the national bourgeoisie. Rather it had become an instrument of the comprador classes, namely, the big bourgeoisie, the warlords and the feudal landlords. In terms of the nature of the state, this meant that after the capitulation of the KMT, the Chinese state had become all the more imperialist while still retaining its previous partly feudal character. Nevertheless, the economy continued to retain its partly capitalist nature, for, even though the national bourgeoisie no longer existed as a political force, its economic presence did not lose the space it occupied before. In terms of the goals of the revolutionary movement,

17. Mao uses the term 'bourgeoisie' here to denote the national bourgeoisie. See Note 1 to Mao's article "Why is it that Red Political Power can Exist in China?", in Selected Works, Volume I, n. 1, p. 70.

18. Ibid., p. 63.
these developments implied that the efforts to accomplish the
tasks of the national bourgeoisie, namely, the emancipation
of China from imperialism and the elimination of feudal relations
in the countryside, now went neglected. The inevitable conclusion
in terms of revolutionary strategy had to be that the struggle
for the national bourgeois revolution would now have to be led
by the proletariat itself. This is the conclusion Mao in fact
arrived at after his examination of the national political scene
in his above-mentioned article. It is important to note in
this connection that while Mao agreed with the Comintern and
the central committee of the CPC that "the content of China's
democratic revolution" consisted in "overthrowing the rule of
imperialism and its warlord tools in China so as to eliminate
the feudal exploitation of the peasants by the landlord class", he accused the CPC of having "failed to exercise firm leadership
in the revolution of 1926-27, thereby allowing the comprador
and landlord class to seize the leadership and replace the
revolution by counter-revolution".

The facts that emerge from the preceding discussion are
the following: Towards the end of 1928, the Chinese economy and
state were almost totally dominated by the so-called comprador
classes, namely, the warlords, the feudal landlords and the

19. Ibid., p. 64.
20. Ibid.
big bourgeoisie. These classes were not only better organised but also better armed than the proletariat, the class that in the complete absence of the national bourgeoisie as a political force had to lead the revolutionary struggle. Because of the very logic of the situation, this struggle had to be a national, bourgeois-democratic revolution. As we shall see below, it was these facts, along with a combination of certain other factors, that convinced Mao that violent armed struggle carried out on regular military basis was the only revolutionary strategy which would enable the revolutionary movement to defeat the opposing reactionary classes.

One of these factors mentioned above was the feasibility of "long-term survival inside" China "of one or more small areas under Red political power completely encircled by a white regime". This feasibility could not exist, believed Mao, in an imperialist country or in a colony under direct imperialist rule. It could exist only in a country like China which was not only economically backward but also semi-colonial and under indirect imperialist rule. It depended upon the existence of "another unusual phenomenon, namely, war within the White regime". In the opinion of Mao, it was a feature of semi-colonial China that "ever since the first year of the Republic (1912)", the various cliques of the old and new warlords had "waged incessant wars against one another, supported by imperialism from abroad."
and by comprador and landlord classes at home".  

During the revolutionary struggle certain regions of China had already experienced the emergence of independent Red regimes through the use of armed struggle on military lines. This is how the independent regimes of peasants had come into existence "in Haifeng and Lufeng, in eastern and southern Hunan, in the Hunan-Kiangsi border area and in Huangan Hupeh Province".  

This factor was complemented by another, namely, that the current Red army was a split-off from the erstwhile National Revolutionary Army which had been involved in mass democratic struggles along with the workers and the peasantry and therefore did not lack democratic tradition.  

The presence of all these factors along with the conclusions he had reached through politico-economic analysis deepened Mao's conviction that conditions were ripe in China for the creation of a mass armed organisation on military lines. This organisation could be used, first, for the establishment of Red political bases in the countryside, and, then, for their expansion towards the urban centres.  

In fact, Mao began to firmly believe that "the existence

21. Ibid., pp. 64-65.  
22. Ibid., pp. 65-66.  
23. Ibid., p. 66.
of a regular Red army of adequate strength" was "a necessary condition for the existence of Red political power" in China. If there were only local Red guards but no regular Red army, then the movement could not "cope with the regular white forces". Therefore, even when the masses of workers and peasants were active, it would be "definitely impossible" to create an independent regime which was "durable" and grew "daily", unless there were "regular forces of adequate strength". It followed that the idea of establishing independent regimes of the workers and peasants by armed force was "an important one which must be fully grasped by the Communist Party".24

In a report that he submitted to the central committee of the CPC just over a month later, Mao returned to this issue. "An independent regime", he repeated, "must be an armed one. Wherever such an area is located, it will be immediately occupied by the enemy if armed forces are lacking or inadequate ...".25 He recommended that the central committee "should devote great effort to military work".26 One and a half years later, Mao was still hammering away at this theme. In the famous article "A Single Spark can Start a Prairie Fire", written in January 1930, he noted: "...in...China the establishment

---

24. Ibid.
and expansion of the Red Army... and the Red Area is the highest form of ... struggle ... and undoubtedly the most important factor in accelerating the revolutionary high tide throughout the country".27

It needs to be mentioned here that Mao wrote this sentence in the process of justifying his disagreement with the central committee of the CPC which believed that there was no need to establish Red political bases in China, an opinion which in turn implied the infructuousness of a regular and constantly expanding Red Army. As reported by Mao, the committee was in favour of confining the military activity only to roving guerrilla actions till the masses had been readied to launch a countrywide armed insurrection in which the Red Army, inevitably only in its guerrilla form, too would participate.

This opinion of the central committee led Mao to defend his thesis about the feasibility and necessity of Red political bases. According to him, the "theory that we must first win over the masses on a country-wide scale and in all regions and then establish political power does not accord with the actual state of the Chinese revolution". In Mao's view, this theory

derived mainly from the failure to understand that China was a semi-colonial country over which many imperialist powers were contending. If one clearly understood this fact, only then could one understand why "the unusual phenomenon of prolonged and tangled warfare within the ruling classes" was "only to be found" in China, and why this warfare was steadily growing fiercer and spreading. This in turn would make one understand why the policy which merely called for roving guerrilla actions could not accomplish the task of accelerating the nation-wide revolutionary movement. What could accomplish it was the alternative policy "of establishing base areas; of systematically setting up political power; and ... of expanding the people's armed forces by a comprehensive process of building up first the township Red Guards, then the district Red Guards, then the county Red Guards, the local Red army troops, all the way up to the regular Red army troops ... etc." 28

II. A. We have so far seen that Mao's belief that a violent revolution was inevitable in China flowed from his analysis of the Chinese situation. Mao changed the conclusions of this analysis at least once, we saw, during the period from 1926 to 1930, bringing a corresponding change in his strategy of the

revolutionary movement. Accordingly, the form of the violent struggle, too, did not remain similar in the two situations. Whereas in the earlier form it was the ordinary people and the people's militia who were to execute the violent tactics, in the later form this task was to be performed in a more organised and systematic manner by a regular military force.

However, the reader must have noticed that Mao had thus far discussed only the need for a standing military force; he had not clearly suggested the kind of struggle this force would wage; a regular military war, or only some form of civil war, which, needless to say, would be different from regular war?

It is necessary to mention in this context that although Mao never clearly distinguished a civil war from a regular military war, which he also at times called a "national war", the distinction is implicit in his writings. We shall see below that the idea of revolution as a regular war emerged clearly after Mao's analysis of the Chinese situation in 1935 and later, an analysis the conclusions of which constituted, once again, a departure from his previous position.

The circumstances which prompted Mao to review his position was the occupation of Manchuria by Japan in 1931 and the
probability that it would advance even further.\(^{29}\) This brought three concrete and mutually related changes in Mao's position: (1) at the level of the characterisation of the state, after the Japanese move China was no longer semi-colonial but rather a potential colony; (2) at the level of political strategy, the event had given rise to a need to form a united front with all nationalist forces, especially the national bourgeoisie, against Japanese imperialism; and (3) at the level of revolutionary strategy and tactics, it had created a situation in which the revolutionary struggle would have to be waged as a regular military war.

The main characteristic of the current situation in China according to Mao was that "Japanese imperialism" wanted "to turn China into a colony".\(^{30}\) This "basic change in the situation" had "changed the relationship among the various classes in China, strengthening the camp of national revolution and weakening that of counter-revolution".\(^{31}\)

Elaborating this, Mao said that for nearly a hundred years


\(^{31}\) Ibid., p. 159.
China had been a semi-colonial country jointly dominated by several imperialist powers. However, the people of China had always resisted and struggled against this imperialism. It was due to this struggle, and the conflicts among the imperialist powers, that China had been able to retain its semi-independent status. Despite this, Japan could annex exclusive domination over China for a time during the first war. Japan's actions during the 1930s showed that this time its ambitions were greater. Now it wanted to physically occupy the whole of China and convert it from a semi-colony shared by several imperialist powers into a colony of Japan.\(^{32}\)

From amongst the classes in China, the big bourgeoisie, the feudal landlords and the warlords, true to their comprador character, were helping Japan to realise its latest ambition in China. Since the interests of these classes were "inseparably linked with imperialism", they continued to believe that "revolution of whatever kind" was "worse than imperialism". Mao believed that "Japanese imperialism could not become so blatant in its aggression were it not for this pack of traitors". They were "the running dogs of imperialism", and therefore remained the "deadly enemies of the Chinese people" even in the new situation.\(^{33}\)

\(^{32}\) Ibid., pp. 153-54.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., pp. 155.
Among the "people", Mao included the workers, the peasants and the petty-bourgeoisie, all of which according to him were in favour of resisting the Japanese imperialism. The workers and the peasants had been and still were, without any doubt, "the most resolute forces in the Chinese revolution". This was proved by their record in the revolution of 1924-27, the agrarian revolution from 1927 onwards, and the anti-Japanese movement since the occupation of Manchuria. As for the petty-bourgeoisie, the students and the urban sections of this class were already active in the anti-Japanese movement. The urban petty-bourgeoisie had also taken part in the revolution of 1924-27. Being small producers, their interests were irreconcilable with those of imperialism. Imperialism and the Chinese counter-revolutionary classes had caused them great harm, driving many of them into unemployment and bankruptcy. Faced with the immediate danger of becoming slaves to a foreign nation, they had no alternative but to resist the Japanese advance. 34

Thus the position of the counter-revolutionary and the revolutionary classes towards the impending Japanese colonialism were clear and unambiguous. In this respect, the only problematic class was the national bourgeoisie. Mao reiterated his previous view that this class had taken part in the revolution.

34 Ibid., p. 154.
of 1924-27, but had later shown an ambivalent attitude towards the revolution. It had joined the reactionary classes, the leadership of which was then assumed by Chiang Kai-shek. At the same time, Mao asserted that under the new circumstances there was a possibility of certain sections of this class undergoing an attitudinal change. These were those sections which were less feudal and less comprador than the reactionary classes as they had less ties with the Chinese landed interests and with the foreign capital than the right wing of national bourgeoisie. The possibility of attitudinal change was strengthened by the fact that during the years the national bourgeoisie had deserted the revolutionary camp, these sections had gained nothing except bankruptcy or semi-bankruptcy of their industrial enterprises. As to the extent of the change, it remained true that the general trait of the national bourgeoisie was to vacillate, but at a certain stage of the struggle the left wing of it might join progressive forces while the right wing might vacillate towards neutrality.35

Anticipating the likely objection that the Chinese national bourgeoisie could possibly not change its attitude because of its economic and political weakness, Mao contended that weakness could not be the reason for its inability. By that logic it should not have joined the revolution of 1924-27. The only thing

35. Ibid., pp. 155-56.
that could possibly happen was that the comprador classes could try to entice it with the lure of some temporary advantage.³⁶

On the basis of this analysis, Mao asserted that "when the national crisis reaches a crucial point, splits will occur in the Kuomintang camp."³⁷ These splits, which will be "unfavourable to the counter-revolution and favourable to the revolution",³⁸ would facilitate the task of forming "a broad revolutionary national united front", a front that was needed at the moment "to turn China into a free and independent country with full territorial integrity".³⁹

Mao emphasised that it would not be possible for the front to realise this aim without waging a regular military war against Japan and its Chinese collaborators, a course of action that was not imperative earlier. In the earlier period imperialism was not making any direct armed attack on China. As a result, the communist party could fight against counter-revolution through the tactic of civil war alone. As examples Mao cited the party's struggles against the warlords jointly with the bourgeoisie in 1924-27, and the one against the warlords and the comprador bourgeoisie together with the peasants and the petty bourgeoisie after 1927. But now that imperialism had

³⁶ Ibid., p. 157.
³⁷ Ibid.
³⁸ Ibid., p. 158.
³⁹ Ibid., p. 162.
launched a direct armed attack on China, it was necessary for the party to unite all classes and strata in the country opposing Japan and wage a "national war" against it and its lackeys. 40

In sum, then, Mao thought that a civil war against the comprador classes must be extended to become a regular military war when an imperialist power attempted to physically occupy the country with the open or tacit approval and help of these classes. It is clear that war, in its civil or regular military form, was the essential and the most central element in Mao's strategy of revolution in a semi-feudal, semi-colonial society that was in danger of becoming, partly or fully, a full-fledged colony. It would be appropriate to cite here certain views of Mao on war that he expressed in his writings over the years. These views would help us grasp better his understanding of war as an instrument of revolution, especially in China.

Asserting that "All wars everywhere in the world in which people rise up to fight their oppressors are just struggles", 41


Mao thought of war as "the highest form of struggle for resolving contradictions, when they have developed to a certain stage, between classes, nations, states, or political groups...". Such wars, however, have "different laws" directing them. These are "determined by the different circumstances of those wars...", including differences in their time and place. Hence the laws of one such war cannot be "mechanically applied" to another.  

In the capitalist countries practising bourgeois democracy, for example, the form of this war would be primarily civil war which would be preceded by a long legal and political struggle. In China, on the other hand, the situation was different. China was "not independent and democratic" but semi-colonial and semi-feudal, and was experiencing both feudal and imperialist oppression. The people here had "no parliament to make use of and no legal right" to peacefully organise themselves. Therefore, the task of the communist party here was "not to go through a long period of legal struggle before launching insurrection and war", but just the "reverse". Here, war was "the main form of struggle" and army "the main form of organisation". Other forms "such as mass organisation and mass struggle" were "also extremely important and indeed indispensable", and were "in no circumstances to be overlooked", but their purpose was "to serve the war". Mao quoted with approval,

in this connection, Stalin's thesis that in China "the armed revolution" was "fighting the armed counter-revolution", and that this was "one of the specific features... of the Chinese revolution". Without armed struggle, therefore, the communist party "would have no standing at all in China, and it would be impossible to accomplish any revolutionary task". The CPC "did not grasp", according to Mao, "this point fully" during the twenties. "It did not then understand the supreme importance of armed struggle in China, or seriously prepare for war and organize armed forces, or apply itself to the study of military strategy and tactics". This was the reason why "the whole movement collapsed the moment the Kuomintang turned reactionary". 43

II.B. Such insistence by Mao on the use of armed struggle and war for establishing Red political power could give the impression that he over-emphasised the military means and neglected politics. As a matter of fact, however, throughout the period from 1926 to late 1930s covered above, he constantly warned against the dangers of, what he called, "the purely military viewpoint". 44 One reason for the defeat of the movement


in the late 1927, according to him, was the policy of "adventurist advance" that a section of the party had adopted at a time when "the masses...had not yet been aroused". Thus the insurrection had proved to be "pure adventurism". Denouncing such a policy, Mao insisted on the use of "correct tactics", that is, "fighting no battle unless we can win it...". He condemned those elements in the CPC which regarded "military affairs and politics as opposed to each other" and refused "to recognize that military affairs" were "only one means of accomplishing political tasks". These elements believed that "if you are not good militarily, you cannot be any good politically". This was tantamount, according to Mao, to "give military affairs a leading position over politics". In reality, the Red army was only "an armed body for carrying out the political tasks of the revolution". It fought "not merely for the sake of fighting" but in order to help the masses "to establish revolutionary political power". Without this objective, fighting had no "meaning" and the Red army had no "reason for existence".

45. Mao, "Why is it that Red Political Power Can Exist in China?", Selected Works, Volume I, ibid., p. 68.
47. Ibid., p. 101.
Similarly, in the 1930s, while writing his famous sentence that "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun", Mao had added; "Our principle is that the Party commands the gun, and the gun must never be allowed to command the Party". This latter sentence has often been under-emphasised, even overlooked, while quoting the first, thus giving a false impression of Mao's strategy. Therefore, what Mao said immediately thereafter must be viewed in the light of the relationship established between politics and military in these two sentences. "All things grow out of the barrel of a gun", he wrote. "Experience in the class struggle in the era of imperialism teaches us that it is only by the power of the gun that working class and the labouring masses can defeat the armed bourgeoisie and the landlords; in this sense we may say that only with the gun can the whole world be transformed. We are the advocates of the abolition of war, we do not want war; but war can only be abolished through war, and in order to get rid of the gun it is necessary to take up the gun". 49

This was in November 1938. Earlier, in his articles "Problems of Strategy in Guerrilla War Against Japan", and "On Protracted War", written in May–June 1938, Mao had expressed similar views. Regarding the relationship between politics and war particularly,

he had written in the latter: "...war cannot for a single moment be separated from politics. Any tendency among the anti-Japanese armed forces to belittle politics by isolating war from it and advocating the idea of war as an absolute is wrong and should be corrected". 50

Before we close this discussion of Mao's views on the use of the military means as an instrument of revolutionary struggle, we will present a brief exposition of how he thought the captured enemy soldiers, traitors and the ordinary Chinese helping enemy troops, etc. should be dealt with. This exposition will be a good illustration of the care and discrimination with which Mao always treated the question of the use of violence even during such an extremely violent process as a revolutionary war.

When in an interview on October 25, 1937, the British journalist James Bertram, questioned Mao's policy of giving lenient treatment to prisoners of war, Mao answered: "We will persevere in this policy of ours... We shall go on giving lenient treatment to captured Japanese soldiers and to those captured junior officers who have fought us under coercion;

we shall not insult and abuse them, but shall set them free after explaining to them the identity of the interests of the people of the two countries. Those who do not go back may serve in the communist army". 51 Reiterating those views in May–June 1938, Mao underlined the importance of treating prisoners of war leniently. "The chief method of destroying them is to win over the Japanese soldiers politically", he wrote. "We should understand, rather than hurt, their pride and channel it in the proper direction", leading them "to see the anti-popular character of the aggression committed by the Japanese rulers". 52 Earlier, in the case of KMT soldiers too Mao had advocated similar treatment for similar reasons. "The most effective method in propaganda directed at the enemy forces is to release captured soldiers and give the wounded medical treatment", he had written while still at the Chingkangshan mountain base. "Whenever soldiers, platoon leaders, or company, or battalion commanders of the enemy forces are captured... they are divided into those wishing to stay and those wishing to leave, and the latter are given travelling expenses and set free. This immediately knocks down the bottom out of the enemy's slander

that "the communist bandits kill everyone on sight." As for the Chinese who try "to sabotage, engage in disruption, stir up sedition or ferret out military secrets within the boundaries" of the communist-controlled region, they "may be arrested", and if convicted, "will be punished with due severity", but only upon "valid evidence". 

III. We have so far elaborated Mao's views on the reasons for, the nature and the method of application of violence in a revolution under semi-colonial, semi-feudal and partly bourgeois conditions. However, the reader must have noticed that our exposition has remained confined to the discussion of Mao's views on this subject only upto the stage of capture of power; it has not extended to the period when political power is already in the hands of the proletariat. In the present section, we propose to explicate Mao's views on the status of violence at this stage of the revolution.

Before we proceed any further, however, we must draw the reader's attention to the fact that unlike in the case of Marx, Engels and Lenin, in Mao's conception of revolution during


a certain phase of the revolution the stage of the dictatorship of the proletariat occurred simultaneously with the stage of the capture of power. Mao had to evolve this conception due to the peculiar situation in China where after a period certain territories had already fallen in the hands of the revolutionaries and therefore were ready for the administration of the dictatorship of the proletariat whereas the rest of the country was still to be captured. The concrete effect of this situation was that the tactics which were to be used against the formerly dominant classes in the areas under the rule of the proletariat were determined to some degree by the necessity of collaborating in the struggle for the capture of other areas with some of these same classes. In the Chinese revolution this phase continued right up to October 1949 when the national bourgeoisie was finally defeated. It is only after this date that the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat proper could be said to have begun, if at all.

At the end of the previous section we saw Mao insisting on the tactical use of violence. It needs to be noted here that this continued to be a characteristic of his policy throughout the remainder of his career, both before and after the final capture of power in 1949. In effect, this meant subtle shifts towards and away from moderation as the situation demanded, as we shall see below. As for the peculiar reason for
these shifts, we have already noted it in the paragraph above.

III. A. In March 1927, as we have seen, Mao had defended, and even advocated in certain cases, the murder of landlords and rural gentry on historical and moral grounds. But his opinion on this issue in these early years was more impetuous than considered. In later years, when the CPC was already in control of certain areas and was actually carrying out land reforms, Mao moderated his tone to some extent and, so far as the confiscation of land was concerned, even shifted his stand. Whereas earlier he had supported the forcible confiscation of all land, he now came to believe that the expropriation of land belonging to what he categorised "the intermediate class", that is, the class of "small landlords and rich peasants", was a mistake that stemmed from inexperience in the agrarian struggle. In 1929, the relevant provision in the Land Law promulgated in the Hunan-Kiangsi border area was changed from "confiscate all the land" to "confiscate the public land and the land of the landlord class". The aim of this change was to win over the intermediate class to the side of the small and poor peasants.55

During the late 1930s, when the anti-Japanese front was to be formed and it was found necessary to collaborate with the

55. See, "The Struggle in the Chingkang Mountains", Selected Works, n. 1, p. 87; and Notes 17 and 18 to this article at ibid., p. 104.
Kuomintang, the policy of forcible confiscation of land was totally abandoned, and the CPC became willing "to solve the land problem by legislative and other appropriate means in the course of building the new democratic republic". "The first question to be settled", according to Mao, was "whether China's land will be owned by the Japanese or by the Chinese".  

These shifts in the policy of land reforms, thrice within the period of approximately a decade, show Mao's extreme flexibility on the question of the use of violence. They make it clear that in spite of his belief in the necessity of a violent revolution in Chinese conditions, he paid close attention to the constantly changing situation and modified his approach in accordance with each new stage, depending upon whether the use of violence was advantageous or otherwise at a given stage.

During the early forties, Mao made a further shift towards moderation. He now proposed to accommodate the interests of the landlords to a considerable extent. They were now required only to reduce the rent and interest which they charged from the peasants. The peasants, on the other hand, were asked to pay this reduced rent and interest.  

Similarly, in industry the "policy of suitably improving the workers' livelihood and of not hampering the development of the capitalist economy" was

adopted. Mao characterised this as "the dual policy". As he put it: "In the sphere of political rights, it is the dual policy of allowing all the anti-Japanese landlords and capitalists the same rights of person ... and property ... as the workers and peasants and yet of guarding against possible counter-revolutionary activity on their part". This, according to him, was "the most revolutionary policy for China" of the day, and "to oppose or impede its execution" was "undoubtedly a mistake". 58

After the compulsions of the period of the war against Japan had ended, Mao made a reversal in his land policy and did away with the concessions that had been granted to the big landlords. 59 But his attitude towards the intermediate class underwent no perceptible change. "...When solving the land problem", he exhorted the party in 1946, "we should distinguish the ordinary rich peasants and middle and small landlords from the traitors, bad gentry and local tyrants". He asked the party to be "more strict" with the latter and "more lenient" towards the former. 60 As for the middle peasants, it was "absolutely impermissible to encroach on" their interests. If cases were


to occur "where the interests of the middle peasants are encroached upon, there must be compensation and apology". Similarly, "adventurist policies towards middle and small industrialists and merchants" were to be avoided. The "only industrial holdings" that were to be confiscated were those of bureaucrat-capitalists and of real counter-revolutionary local tyrants". Thus, only "the handful of arch-criminals" who were "really guilty of the most heinous crimes" were "to be handed over to the people's courts to be tried and punished". And after the sentences had been "approved by the appropriate government organisations", it was "entirely necessary for the sake of revolutionary order to shoot them and announce their executions". This, however, was only "one side of the matter". The other side was that "we must insist on killing less and must strictly forbid killing without discrimination". To advocate killing more or killing without discrimination was "entirely wrong". It would cause the party "to forfeit sympathy, become alienated from the masses and fall into isolation". Therefore, the main emphasis should be on "saving" the landlords as individuals and on "remoulding" them. For, the task of the party was "to wipe out the landlords as a class, not as individuals".  

In the period that immediately followed, Mao repeatedly warned the party workers against indulging in the "ultra-left policy". In a speech to the cadres in April 1948, for example, he criticised the party organisation of the Shansi-Suiyan liberated area for failing "to adhere unequivocally to the Party's policy of strictly forbidding beating and killing without discrimination". The result of this failure of the party had been that some landlords and rich peasants had been "needlessly put to death", and "the bad elements" in the rural areas had been "able to exploit the situation". To avoid such occurrences, according to Mao, the "system of feudal exploitation must be abolished step by step, that is, in a tactical way". And the tactics must be determined "according to the circumstances and the degree to which the ... masses are awakened and organised".

Mao's repeated stress on "discrimination" illustrates a substantial shift from his position in the late 1920s when he had justified the peasants' action in "going too far" and "exceeding the proper limits" while dealing with the landlords. We may note that Mao's stand in this particular matter was much softer than that of Lenin at the comparable stage of revolution.

64. Ibid., p. 236.
(Marx and Engels had not gone into the matter in such detail). The difference obviously stems from their different conceptions of revolution. In the new democratic revolution which involved a considerable accommodation of the interests of certain upper classes till a particular time, Mao perhaps could not afford to be as harsh as Lenin could in his 'purer' 'socialist' revolution.

III. B. Three months before the proclamation of the republic, in an article written on June 30, 1949, in commemoration of the twenty-eighth anniversary of the CPC, Mao had defined the precise nature of the new state as "the people's democratic dictatorship", which meant in effect "democracy for the people and dictatorship over the reactionaries". But who were the people, and who the reactionaries? In 1949, as per Mao's definition, the people were "the working class, the peasantry, the petty-bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie", and the reactionaries were "the landlord class and the bureaucrat-bourgeoisie". In the new state, the people were to "enjoy the rights of freedom of speech, assembly, association and so on", and the reactionaries were to be "suppressed". In some cases, however, the policy of suppression was to extend to the people

as well. These would be the cases where people broke law. In such cases, they too could be "imprisoned or even sentenced to death". But this would differ "in principle from the dictatorship exercised over the reactionaries as a class". Overall, the method to be employed towards the people would be that of "persuasion", and not of "compulsion". Further, those members of even the reactionary classes who "do not rebel, sabotage or create trouble", and who show a willingness to "remould themselves through labour" would not be unduly punished. 

This policy was put into effect in 1951-52, first, in the campaign against the "counter-revolutionaries", and, later, in the "thought reform" movement and the campaigns against "three evils" and "five evils". These latter two campaigns were directed against the corrupt party officials and against those members of the national bourgeoisie which cheated and/or sabotaged against the state, respectively. 

In the case of counter-revolutionaries, Mao asked the party to "strike surely, accurately and relentlessly". He insisted on a "strict examination of the lists of persons to be arrested or 

---

executed. The number of persons to be killed, he said, "must be kept within certain proportions". Wrong executions should be avoided, but all those who deserved the death penalty must be eliminated. These would be the persons who owed "blood-debts" or "whose death is demanded by the people". Those whose crimes did not warrant death penalty should be "sentenced to ... various prison terms or put under public surveillance". 68 As for party officials and members of the national bourgeoisie, for minor offences the guilty, according to Mao, should only "be criticized and educated", but in major offences they should be "sentenced to prison terms (to be reformed through labour), and the worst among them be shot". 69 The intellectuals, however, were to be let off comparatively lightly. Since they belonged essentially to the people, in the thought reform they were merely to be "educated and convinced" that they had anti-people views. This was to be done through criticism and self-criticism which, according to Mao, was one of the "democratic methods". 70

Inspite of these detailed instructions by Mao, however, at least 800,000 people are said to have been executed, jailed and/or sent to labour camps during this period. 71 According

69. Ibid., p. 65.
70. See Schram, n. 29, p. 268.
71. See Han Suyin, n. 67, p. 45.
to some estimates, the figure was as high as two million executions alone. However, this amounted to only about 0.3 per cent of the total population of the then China.72

In later years, too, Mao continued to emphasise and defend this policy off and on. In an article, in May 1955, for example, he wrote: "...in an era in which classes and class struggle still exist both at home and abroad, the working class and the masses who have seized state power must suppress the resistance to the revolution put up by all counter-revolutionary classes, groups and individuals, thwart their activities aimed at restoration and prohibit them from exploiting freedom of speech for counter-revolutionary purposes".73 Similarly, in a conference in January 1962, he declared: "During the whole socialist stage there still exist classes and class struggle, and this ... struggle is a protracted, complex, sometimes even violent affair. Our instruments of dictatorship should not be weakened; on the contrary they should be strengthened".74 In this speech, Mao also urged the party to adopt a "helpful attitude towards those who have made mistakes". "If people...


sincerely carry out self-criticism and are willing to correct mistakes", then they should be "forgiven". This latter policy was to apply especially to the party and government officials, and it extended well into the period of Cultural revolution. Chiding the central committee of the CPC in April 1969, Mao said: "There are some places where too many people have been arrested. This is bad. Why arrest so many? They haven't committed homicide, arson, or poisoning". He asked the central committee to make precise distinctions among those who had "done bad things". Those who are frank should be treated leniently. Those who resist should be dealt with severely. And those who make a proper self-criticism should be allowed to keep working - but not in the positions of leadership.

As can be seen, in his capacity as the leader of the newly established state, Mao did not add much that was new to his old policy towards the classes and groups mentioned above. If at all, he seemed to have become more careful, discriminating and circumspect than before. Another remark that can be made with a degree of certainty is that our exploration of the pronouncements of Mao as also of his political practice till 1969 do not

75. Ibid., pp. 185-86.

76. Mao, "Talk at the First Plenum of the Ninth Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party", in Schram, ibid., p. 284.

77. Ibid.
throw much evidence of the so-called Maoist terror. There is no evidence in any case that Mao personally was in favour of unleashing indiscriminate mass terror against any section of the populace, including the reactionaries.

III. D. Mao's policy towards minority nationalists also proves the same point. Laying down this policy in June 1950, he declared:

It is of vital importance to unite with the minority nationalities... Social reforms in their areas are a matter of great importance and must be handled cautiously. On no account must we be impetuous, for impatience will lead to trouble. No reform is to be instituted unless the conditions are ripe. Neither should any major reform be introduced where only one of the conditions is ripe... Of course, this is not to say that no reform at all is to be carried out... But the minority nationalities themselves must do the reforming.78

Specifically in the case of Tibet, Mao-emphasised these views two years later. In a directive to the Southwest Bureau and the Working Committee of the CPC in Tibet (April 1952), he said: "We must do our best and take proper steps to win over the Dalai and the majority of his top echelon and to isolate the handful of bad elements in order to achieve a gradual, bloodless transformation of the Tibetan economic and political system over a number of years...". At the same time, he asked

78. Mao, "Don't Hit Out in All Directions", Selected Works, n. 68, p. 35.
the Bureau to "be prepared for the eventuality of the bad elements leading the Tibetan troops in rebellion, and attacking" the communists, "so that in this contingency, the communist army could still carry on and hold out in Tibet". 79

These two inner-party statements show Mao to be adopting a cautious approach so far as the task of carrying out reforms in the areas dominated by minority nationalities was concerned. He obviously preferred a peaceful transition, although he was not averse to using the force of arms when it was made inevitable.

Both these methods were amply used as the example of Tibet demonstrated. The Chinese army moved into Tibet on October 7, 1950 and occupied it, but only after nearly a year of propaganda to the effect that Tibet will be "liberated" and "reintegrated" into China, unilaterally if necessary. Later, on May 27, 1951, the Tibetan government was forced to sign an agreement with the Chinese government, ironically titled Agreement Between the Central People's Government and the Local Government of Tibet on Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet. 80 In accordance with this agreement, Tibet


80. See George Ginsburgs and Michael Mathos, Communist China and Tibet: The First Dozen Years, Martinuss Nijhoff, The Hague, 1964, pp. 7-10. Also see Note 1 to Mao's article mentioned at 79 above.
accepted the suzerainty of China over its territory. However, it was granted "national regional autonomy". Further, the status, power and functions of the Dalai Lama in the domestic context were not disturbed. In addition, it was laid down that the religious beliefs, habits and customs of the Tibetan people would be respected and their language promoted. As for reforms, they were to be carried out by the local government of Tibet "of its own accord", and no compulsion on the part of the central authorities in this regard was to be exercised. 81

In the subsequent years, the Chinese government repeatedly violated the provisions of this agreement in order to quicken the pace of reforms. But when it encountered resistance, it adopted a more conciliatory approach, at least for the time being. 82 The following statement of Mao, which, to our knowledge, is his last known statement on the question of Tibet, reflects this change. In his speech to the Eleventh session of the Supreme State Conference, on February 27, 1957, he said:

Democratic reforms have not yet been carried out in Tibet, because conditions are not ripe. According to the seventeen-article agreement... the reform of the social system must be carried out, but the timing can only be


82. See, Tibet and the Chinese People's Republic: A Report, ibid., pp. 167-76 and 180-81; and Tenzin Phuntsok, Sino-Indian Interaction on Question of Tibet, unpublished M.Phil dissertation, Panjab University, Chandigarh, 1981, Chapter III.
decided when the great majority of the people of Tibet and the local leading public figures consider it opportune, and one should not be impatient.83

This moderation on the part of Mao, however, was not allowed to bear fruit because in March 1959, the Tibetan government and national assembly repudiated the 1951 agreement and proclaimed Tibet as an independent and sovereign nation. The insurrection in and around Lhasa that preceded and continued after this proclamation was militarily suppressed by the Chinese government. A consequence of the uprising and its suppression was that the reforms that were so far being cautiously handled were now rapidly and intensively carried out.84


84. See Tenzin, n. 82, Chapter IV; and Gibsburgs and Mathos, n. 80, Chapters III & IV.