

History of Dialectics:

MAO'S LATE DIALECTICS, PART II

Revisionism means pro-capitalist ideas and policies that claim to be Marxist. In the early 1960s, the Communist Party of China (CPC) was engaged in an ideological fight against the revisionism of the Soviet communist party (CPSU) and against the CPC's own internal revisionism. As part of this struggle, the CPC organized a conference in Beijing in October 1963 calling on philosophy and social science workers to fight revisionism.

Mao Zedong worked together with Zhou Yang, who gave the main speech at the conference. It reviewed the history of Marxist dialectics and attacked Soviet philosophers who were trying to water down dialectics. These revisionist philosophers claimed that contradictions could be resolved without one side defeating the other, by opposites merging and becoming unified. This wrong idea about resolving contradictions served the Soviet leaders' line that capitalism could be eliminated without revolution, by a “peaceful transition.”

“All conservatives and opportunists,” Zhou Yang said, “all those who do not desire but fear revolution, dread change and evade or deny contradictions. On the contrary, all revolutionaries who take upon themselves the transformation of the world desire change, courageously face contradictions and resolve them by revolutionary means.”

Mao's contribution to this speech included his version of Lenin's idea that the essence of dialectics was “the division of a unity into mutually exclusive opposites and their reciprocal relation.” Mao's way of putting this was “in a unified thing, one divides into two, it changes because of the mutual struggle of two parts.”

Soon after the anti-revisionist conference, right-winger Yang Xianzhen, head of the CPC's philosophy school, started to teach students that the basic principle of dialectics was not Mao's

“one divides into two” but “two combine into one.” This slogan expressed the idea that resolving a contradiction means that the two sides merge, precisely the Soviet philosophers' idea that Mao and Zhou had attacked at the conference. This began a year-long public debate on whether the sides of a contradiction can unify or not.

Mao on Resolution of Contradictions

At that time, Marxist philosophy called the result of resolving a contradiction “synthesis.” Mao used a number of unofficial channels to give a new formulation of synthesis.

The leftist philosopher Ai Siqi wrote down a very valuable conclusion by Mao from the summer of 1964. Mao said: “Synthesis is just the completed development of one side, the elimination of one side, and the resolution of the contradiction.”

In August 1964 Mao gave a talk on philosophy that was published by Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution. He said: “How can synthesis happen? The [capitalist] Guomindang and the Communist Party are two opposites. On the mainland synthesis was precisely this way—you all saw it. Their armed forces arrived and we ate them up, piece by piece. There was no synthesis of two peacefully coexisting sides. They do not want peaceful coexistence, they want to eat us up... One eats up another, big fish eat little fish, this is what synthesis is. No previous writings have described such errors [about synthesis], and my writing also has not described them.”

In a speech at Hangzhou in December 1965, Mao added a little more: “To synthesize is just to eat the enemy up. How did we synthesize the Guomindang? We captured rank-and-file soldiers but did not kill them. Some were let go but the greater part replenished our army. We seized all weapons, provisions, and all kinds of equipment.

“Synthesizing the Guomindang was just eating it up, absorbing the larger part, and discarding a small part. This is learned from Marx. Marx removed the outer shell of Hegel's philosophy, absorbed the valuable inner core, and transformed it into materialistic dialectics.”

In China today, capitalism is triumphant and the philosophical gains of the 1960s have been reversed. Textbooks now claim that the sides of a contradiction can merge together, or that they can co-exist without destroying each other. One text claims that “although there is significant competition among the economies of different countries, the present economic process of globalization should jointly develop on the basis of equality, in a mutually beneficial way.” In other words, China can create an empire without challenging other empires—a myth that serves the interests of China's new bosses.

Rejecting this nonsense, our communist movement can learn from and spread widely the true dialectics that China's past revolutionaries helped develop and fought for.

