A member of the Australian fraternal delegation to the last Congress of the Communist Party of China in 1956, advances some ideas on what is happening to the Chinese Revolution, one of history's most significant events.

October 1, 1956: Tien An Men Square is filled with a million citizens marching or watching in elation at the seventh anniversary of their Revolution. Mao Tse-tung and other leaders of the Chinese Communist Party stand alongside Communist leaders from over fifty countries. There is a spirit of great optimism and enthusiasm. The just concluded 8th Congress has decided on a program of carefully-planned socialist construction. China has scored a brilliant success at the Bandung Conference, which united almost all the Afro-Asian countries, many of whose leaders are also standing on Tien An Men. The unity of the world communist movement has never appeared so strong. Chairman Mao praised the Soviet Union and indicated Chinese willingness to learn from it and other socialist countries.

October 1, 1966 will be celebrated in very different conditions. Almost all the main decisions of the 8th Congress have been jettisoned — and that without convening another Congress or openly stating the reasons for the changes. The rational policy of socialist economic construction was replaced by the grandiose "great leap". Correct policies of gradually raising the quality of education according to possibilities and providing the conditions of tolerance and diversity in science and the arts have been replaced by the so-called "great proletarian cultural revolution." This is not proletarian in ideological inspiration—it could perhaps be regarded as inspired by primitive suspicions of science and culture, a form of petty-bourgeois fanaticism. It is not cultural but obscurantist and anti-cultural, it is not a revolution but a degeneration of the revolution and encouragement of conformism miscalled "rebellion". Chinese foreign policy, changed beyond
recognition from the days of Bandung, has led to an international isolation unbelievable in 1956. The Chinese leaders have placed their Party in isolation in the communist movement, too. The exaggerated language, absurd polemics and subjective policies they advance have gradually alienated the support and even sympathy of Parties hitherto agreeing, in part at least, with their concepts and ideas.

The Chinese leaders have been the most important contribution to this themselves, by their stubborn and contemptuous rejection of all appeals for united action in support of Vietnam. This has shown up the stark fact that Chinese disruption of communist unity has helped only United States imperialism, otherwise in such dire straits in Asia and the world. Chinese attacks on the Soviet Union over Vietnam have been in sharp contrast to statements by Ho Chi Minh. They have attacked Cuba in violent terms, are at loggerheads with the Japanese communists over the peace movement, and have an exactly opposite estimate to the Koreans of the 12th Tokyo Conference against A and H Bombs. An interesting confirmation of this estimate comes from Vanguard (No. 32, September) in an article almost certainly by E. F. Hill. As sometimes before, he goes even further than the Chinese are prepared to go:

"It is said that the Chinese are 'isolated'. Yes, if you want to look at the superficial, count heads of countries even amongst those who have hitherto supported China, that is true. In the ranks of the Communist themselves an immense process of sorting out is going on." (The word Communist is in the singular, by mistake probably, yet symbolic. One is reminded of the old verse: The whole world's queer, 'cept thee and me, And even thee's a little queer.)

Changes in policy are accompanied by no less significant changes in other fields. Some main leaders elected by the 8th Congress have disappeared from the political arena, where and how often remaining a mystery. The Party Constitution is flouted—the Congress five years overdue; the Central Committee meeting less and less frequently—four years between the last two, although it should meet "at least twice a year." An increasingly rigid theory and practice is reflected in jargon and near-hysteria in speech and writing, quite opposite to earlier writings of Mao Tse-tung and to his admonitions against jargon (in Oppose the Party Eight-Legged Essay).

A full-blown "personality cult" has developed in China. If there has been no repetition of the worst excesses of the Stalin
period—as is fervently to be hoped—it is certain that adulation of Mao is already far more extreme—and absurd—even than that lavished upon Stalin. These and other dramatic changes in China call out for explanation and assessment.

**Historic event**

One great fact must be grasped: despite all the mistakes, excesses and policy shifts made by the Communist Party, the Chinese Revolution is one of the great events of our times; it has already achieved much in remaking China and will achieve still more. This revolution is an objective process which will in the long run assert the necessity for reversal and correction of policies. Conditions of its historical development have laid an impress upon the Chinese Revolution and upon the Communist Party which performed such prodigies of self-sacrifice, valor, persistence, won such victories and so creatively developed marxist-leninist theory.

Economic, social and political conditions of China in the 1920's—themselves a consequence of its long history—confronted the Chinese communists with complex problems. A big nation, with enormous latent power, it lay a prostrate and helpless victim of contending European powers and Japan. A people once among the world’s most advanced in industry, technology and science, had dropped far behind. The foreign powers, coming for outright plunder, stopped to exploit through trade and industrialisation. Their oppression of the Chinese, and their savage rivalry, distorted social development beyond all bounds. The Chinese people suffered this intolerable burden, not patiently as in the Western myth, but with an ever growing bitter determination to change the whole society.

Those young intellectuals (inevitably mostly from the upper middle class) who perceived the plight of the nation and wanted to change society, could take only the revolutionary path. The death of Sun Yat-sen, the bloody victory of Chiang Kai-shek with the aid of the foreign powers, set the most determined of these upon the communist path. There was no other way open. Yet how could the communists win in China? Repeated efforts at proletarian uprisings in the cities, despite incredible heroism, were crushed. These uprisings were advised by the Communist International; Stalin played a large part in elaborating this advice. Efforts to impose views upon the Chinese Party, springing from failure to appreciate the specific conditions of China and perhaps from narrow concern for Russian national interests, may have laid the foundation for Maoist suspicion of views of other Communist
Parties.* If so, this was compounded by Stalin's policy on China during and after the Second World War. (This casts serious doubt on the sincerity of the Chinese defence of Stalin.)

Mao Tse-tung seriously tackled the great and complex problems of the Chinese Revolution. The strategic political and military concepts he elaborated in this herculean task are brilliant examples of creative marxism, the antithesis of doctrinairism and rigidity (and examples of vivid writing even in translation). Perhaps the essence of his theory was that the peasantry under proletarian leadership had to be the main force of the Chinese Revolution for a variety of reasons—including the superiority of the weapons of Chiang’s armies and the foreign forces stationed in the cities. From this arose the concept of “encircling the cities from the countryside.”

The Chinese Revolution succeeded in the course of twenty years of civil war and the war against Japan. It was successful in the face of overwhelming odds, implacable opposition from the United States and Britain, at a bitter cost in lives and suffering. It was also successful in face of advice from foreign communists, although by no means without assistance, including the Aid for China movement in Australia and the struggle to stop export of iron to Japan.

US responsibility

The main single external contribution to what has happened has been the US policy of active hostility to China which has continued and developed until today it is the main threat to world peace. This bitter US hostility is a reaction expressing the rage of an expanding US monopoly capitalism, intoxicated with dreams of world supremacy and counting upon the huge stimulus of the exploitation of cheap labor, rich natural resources and massive market for the export of capital supplied by a country larger in area than the USA and a population one-fourth of humanity. The course of events since 1956 has been greatly influenced by the fateful US option for an active anti-China policy of isolation, aggression and attempted humiliation. This policy has already failed, and has rebounded upon the Americans, who have added to their other crimes the grave responsibility for contributing much to recent developments in Chinese policy. It

* Further light on this can be obtained in Resolution on Some Questions in the History of Our Party (Vol. IV. Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, p 171, Lawrence and Wishart.—Ed.). The Wang Ming criticised in this resolution was Chinese representative in the Comintern, who returned to China and influenced what Mao calls the “Third Left Line”.

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is a little late for Johnson to speak in vague generalities about wanting a settlement with China.

The American anti-China policy is followed by Holt, acting for the decisive groups in the Australian ruling class. It is their main justification for “All the Way with LBJ”, for Vietnam and the decline in living standards, whether put in the refined accents of a Hasluck or the crude roar of the recruit instructor: “Get those slant-eyed yellow bastards before they get you.”

Those level-headed Australians who can see the national interest through the haze of racialist anti-communism will oppose this criminal policy, and seek to develop the already-significant trade relations to a national policy of friendship with China. Australian communists will be to the fore in this patriotic task, while making their position clear on those issues on which they differ from the Chinese leadership. This is not always easy, since statements from China sometimes lend superficial coloring to the otherwise absurd black-white caricatures of the hard-line gang now in control of Australian foreign policy.

Despite its own words, however, the Chinese leadership remains cautious in action, calculating and shrewd in analysis of power realities. It so far retains the communist standpoint that imperialism remains the source of war, and that world peace can be maintained only by opposing imperialism. The divergence occurs on estimation of the possibility of preventing world war—which in words at least the Chinese estimate at almost zero—and the methods of struggle for peace. There is no danger of China declaring war on, invading or bombing the United States; neither desire nor possibility are present. On the other hand, American planes have flown over and bombed China; the United States has the military potential to invade China (though no chance of winning the war this would inaugurate). Some important American military and political forces have openly advocated this course. The Chinese leadership, for its part, does not help the cause of world peace, or its friends, by exaggerated talk of “welcoming” an American invasion.

The fight against the threatened US aggression against China, for the reversal of China’s exclusion from the United Nations and the world community, is vital for world peace and especially relevant to the struggle for an independent Australian foreign policy. There is a special significance for all Communist Parties in waging this struggle, since it may well prove one of the paths towards restoration of the unity of the movement. Rightly or
wrongly—I believe wrongly although not completely without some subjective cause—the Chinese feel that their special position has not been always considered by other socialist countries, particularly the USSR.

**Are they communists?**

There is some discussion among Australian communists—and, it may be, elsewhere, too—about whether the Chinese Party leadership can still be regarded as communist, or at what point their departure from marxist-leninist positions and behaviour would call this into question. This writer believes that the answer can only be: Yes, they are communists, even though their political positions are wrong, damaging the cause of communism. They are communists whose communism is influenced strongly by Chinese tradition and national pride, the latter swollen by their great achievements, and not least by the almost mystic belief of Mao Tse-tung in his own “thought.”

Though the experiences of the Stalin era, among other examples, warn of the need to avoid crude over-simplification of the relationship between base and superstructure, China is a socialist country so long as the economic structure of China remains collectively owned, and its movement is towards construction of socialism. It is difficult to detect any evidence of, or probable trend towards, return to capitalist production relations. It is no more valid to wipe aside this fact because of deep ideological differences with the Chinese, than for the Chinese to claim to discern a return to capitalism in the USSR. Perhaps, in the long run, this basic fact provides the foundation for qualified optimism.

The internal and deep-lying social causes for the spasmodic character of Chinese policies, as distinct from their ideological and psychological reflections, are to be found in the complex problems of industrialisation of their huge country, with at least 500 million living in rural areas and depending upon peasant agricultural methods, even with a form of collectivisation. The 1958 “great leap” was an effort to jump over a whole historical stage. It called forth tremendous enthusiasm, setting as the goal a victorious entry into fully-fledged communist society before the Soviet Union, by the power of ideology and without the patient and even tedious work of creating a large-scale modern industry or needing to master science and technology.* Now, there is reason to expect some new variant of the “great leap”.

* This displays only hindsight, since I was convinced and enthused by the Great Leap which I saw in its genesis in 1958, backyard steel furnaces, incredible crop yields and all.
It may seem contradictory to foreshadow a possible new “great leap” following the “proletarian cultural revolution” and yet to speak of (even a long range) optimism for return to scientific marxism. Yet it is possible that, given the present political and ideological line, the only way to return to rationality lies in further experience of the futility of such subjective internal economic policies, particularly when this is added to the reverses in Chinese foreign relations on both state and Party levels.

Reports of widespread opposition within the Communist Party to the “Red Guard” excesses are significant, coming as they do from official Chinese sources. It would, however, be a mistake to swallow whole the press speculation that the “Red Guard” is replacing the Communist Party, or is being built up as an alternative; the Red Guard is firmly controlled by the dominant Party leadership under Lin Pia.

But there is enough hard evidence to show that there has been long-standing opposition to recent Maoist policies on all fronts—economic, military, political, cultural. Its persistence reveals a firm social basis for this opposition, which cannot easily be dismissed or regarded as “remnants of the bourgeoisie.” It is far more likely that this basis is to be found in the important and growing industrial working class, and the scientists, technicians and academics directly or indirectly associated with large-scale production.

It would be a gross over-simplification and determinism, as well as political naivete, to believe these economic conditions will result in smooth rectification of incorrect policies. Undoubtedly, ideological and political changes are decisive in the assertion of these social forces. This is possible only within Chinese society—and within its Communist Party.

Communists of other countries can only do their best to assist this inevitable process by acting to their utmost power upon the external conditions which influence China’s development—that is, the struggle against imperialist hostility and US encirclement, and by continuing patient efforts for unity within the movement, including with the Chinese Party. This latter requires patience, ability to resist provocations and endure insult, while making reasoned criticisms of what they regard as the most important differences with the Chinese stand.

Australian communists will try to make their modest contribution.