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8

Extra-Party neo-anarchist critiques of the state in the PRC

Introduction

This chapter and the succeeding one examine various “neo-anarchist” critiques of the Leninist state in the PRC, from the early years of the Cultural Revolution to the beginning of the Tiananmen protests. The label of neo-anarchist in this book refers not to self-proclaimed “post-modern” anarchist critiques but to anyone in China who criticizes the Leninist state using the simple, basic, but powerful view shared by all kinds of anarchists (contradictory as they might be on their own positive agendas), namely, that the state rules for itself when it can, not for classes, interest groups, a mass of individuals, or the whole community. The term “neo-anarchist” is adapted from analysts who apply the label “neo-Marxism” to those thinkers who find the Marxist class paradigm useful without necessarily being Communists. The references to neo-anarchism, then, in these chapters refer to a kind of negative elite theory similar to the “iron law of oligarchy” of Roberto Michels, whose classic book *Political Parties* is perhaps still the greatest work employing a neo-anarchist paradigm.¹

In that work, Michels gave full credit to anarchist thinkers as “the first to insist upon the hierarchical and oligarchical consequences of party organization,”² while at the same time at key points in his book pointing out that anarchists themselves often departed from this basic critique, as when some anarchists supported hierarchy in economic and in revolutionary organization.³ Michels himself, though a member of the German Social Democratic Party, was heavily involved in a syndicalist group within that

party and was also deeply influenced by earlier anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist thinkers.⁴ In his positive program he supported the necessity of forms of representative democracy, while maintaining his belief in the need for direct democratic institutions and new mass democratic “waves” as would-be checks on the tendency of democracies to constantly develop new “aristocratic forms.” Michels’ critique of bureaucratic organizations starting to work for their own interests instead of those of their constituents is mostly focused on political party organization, especially that of democratic socialist parties, rather than the state as a whole. Nevertheless, what makes Michels’ argument such an outstanding example of the neo-anarchist critique is that he focuses not on their economic and “bourgeois” class privileges as the main factors in causing party leaders to develop interests divorced from their followers, but on their interests in maintaining their own power and in perpetuating their organizations. As we will see below, the focus on institutional as opposed to economic interests as leading to a “new class” of elites helped to differentiate genuine neo-anarchist critiques in China from official Maoist discourse. In any case, if organizations without full monopoly on the legitimate use of violence can become autonomous from their constituents and lose sight of their original mission (the most prominent example in recent years being the Roman Catholic Church’s failure to protect its followers from predatory sexual abuse from priests), how much more likely and virulent is it for states to become autonomous from their subjects and develop into oligarchies?

Michels himself in his later career became suspicious of even direct democracy as a sufficient check on oligarchic tendencies and thus came to value individual heroic leaders as the best way to prevent oligarchy. That ironically Michels later in life became an apologist for Italian fascism should not denigrate his basic critique in *Political Parties*, but only help to demonstrate that even great neo-anarchist thinkers may have their own flaws and limitations based on their own particular situations in time and space that may contradict their basic anarchist critique of the state. In examining these dissident Chinese thinkers in these last two chapters, we will also note the flaws in their ideas about how to overcome oligarchy that contradict a full anarchist critique.

The main limitation of Chinese neo-anarchist thinkers was that they had to protect themselves from the revenge of the Leninist Party-state, thus their critiques were necessarily based on secondary Marxist concepts of the state. As opposed to Marx’s primary class paradigm of the state, these Marxist concepts all contained what Bob Jessop calls a “parasitic” view of the state, or what Robert Alford terms the “pathological” version of elite theory.⁵ These ideas were often very similar to those of East European Marxist dissidents who presented explicit “new class” arguments about the Leninist state, most famously Milovan Djilas, Georgy Konrad, and Ivan Szelenyi, and members of the Yugoslav “Praxis” group such as Svetozar Stojanovic.⁶

While having the advantage of being able to claim Marxist credentials, using these secondary Marxist concepts that they themselves would never label “neo-anarchist” still leaves such intellectuals open to the standard Marxist attack on them as being influenced by the “ultra-leftist” and “petite-bourgeois” ideas, including those of anarchism, charges which such Marxist democrats must take pains to deny. Again, this chapter and the one that follows do not claim that Chinese thinkers who criticize the Leninist state are indeed full anarchists themselves or even much influenced by various positive anarchist visions for future society, but that they come on their own to a neo-anarchist critique based on the oppressive weight of the existing Leninist state that they see and feel every day.

This chapter first examines the dissident Red Guard group Shengwulian, which during the Cultural Revolution took advantage of Mao’s seeming new class argument and early praise of the Paris Commune to condemn the rule of the “Red Capitalist class.” Next we examine the debate between Chen Erjin and Wang Xizhe, who at the end of the Cultural Revolution and beginning of the reform era in different ways came to see the Party-state as becoming a new bureaucratic class. In the next chapter, we will examine Wang Ruoshui and other Communist Party intellectuals during the early reform years of the 1980s who, based on the inhumanity of the Cultural Revolution, resurrected the early Marxist ideas of alienation and humanism to argue that the proletariat could become alienated from the socialist state. The final type of neo-anarchist thought examined in the final chapter is that contained in the Chinese Asiatic mode of production debate of the early to mid-1980s, a time when some Chinese historians argued implicitly that the Leninist state was becoming a despotic entity ruling for itself rather than for the proletariat.

While presenting the neo-anarchist aspects of these Chinese thinkers, these two chapters try not to lose sight of their actual life situations, in which they struggled to find openings for dissent while keeping their jobs and ability to publish, and how they strained to keep the emoluments and minor privileges offered to cooperative intellectuals by the Leninist Party-state from blunting their neo-anarchist critiques.

Shengwulian, Yang Xiguang, and Dissident Maoism

The first major neo-anarchist critique of the state in the PRC occurred during the Cultural Revolution, which the current PRC regime officially says lasted from 1966 to 1976. Taking advantage of openings within official ideology that Party Chairman Mao Zedong himself at first seemed to initiate, as we saw in Chapter 6, groups of young Red Guards, junior high to college age

youth whom Mao had called upon in 1966 to “bombard the headquarters” of the Party and State to oppose the “new bourgeoisie in the Party,” began to take his call a step further to raise a genuine neo-anarchist critique of the state as a ruling class in and for itself.

As we noted in Chapter 6, during the early days of the Cultural Revolution, Mao himself had seemed to support Paris Commune style mass democracy as a way to oppose a growing “new class” within the Party-state elite. As we also saw in that chapter, many observers have long noted that in fact Mao stopped well short of a genuine new class critique similar to that of Milovan Djilas but instead only criticized a “small handful” of people within the Party who were taking China back on the capitalist road. Mao almost always argued that they did so not because of their special privileges or interests as state power holders, but because of remaining economic inequalities in society. In other words, he only opposed those arguing for modest market reforms and stopped short of calling for a struggle against a new power elite. But even before the Cultural Revolution, Mao had made clear to other Party leaders the limits of his anti-bureaucratic critique:

... The Communist Party is a prestigious one. Don't bring up any idea of a stratum ... this will frighten and offend too many people ... It's enough to call them just [isolated] elements or cliques ...⁷

In 1968, after factionalism between competing Red Guard organizations broke out across the country, we saw in Chapter 6 that Mao quickly reemphasized this anti-new class view, denouncing Paris Commune style forms as “extreme anarchy” and calling upon Red Guard units to accept in their place the so-called three-in-one revolutionary committees made up of members of mass organizations, returned bureaucrats who had been “remolded,” and members of the army, who were to take up leadership within the committees. In response, some members of Red Guard groups felt betrayed and tried to maintain the Paris Commune model.

The leading example of such a “dissident radical” group, to use Andrew Walder's term,⁸ was the organization known as “Shengwulian,” an abbreviation of the Chinese title for “Hunan Provincial Proletarian Revolutionaries Great Alliance Committee.”⁹ This group of “more than twenty loosely affiliated Red Guard organizations”¹⁰ managed to publish at least three documents before they were attacked and suppressed by the regime. Under the pretense that it was not “Comrade Mao” (by not referring to him as Chairman Mao, perhaps demonstrating their ultra-egalitarian, anti-bureaucratic ideology) but other reactionary forces in the Party who had tried to abolish the Paris Commune-style models and replace them with the Revolutionary Committees, the group ignored the real limits to Mao's new class argument that we examined in Chapter 6. The group argued in its program that Mao's real goal in the Cultural Revolution was for “proletarian

revolutionaries to overthrow the newborn and yet decadent privileged stratum of the bourgeoisie . . . and smash the old state machinery which serves the [new] privileged class of the bourgeoisie.”¹¹ In its program, Shengwulian followed the official regime line that only a “very few” cadres took the capitalist road. Nevertheless, the group severely condemned the idea that the Cultural Revolution was only about criticizing the crimes of individual leaders and dismissing them from their offices instead of “overthrowing the privileged stratum and smashing the old state machinery.” The group bitterly criticized as well the failure of the Cultural Revolution to even barely touch “the class root which gave birth to the reactionary line, and to the bureaucratic structure which served the revolutionary line.”¹² Shengwulian’s program pointed to the forming of Revolutionary Committees as merely a “reprint of the old political power” that was a reactionary departure from Mao’s revolutionary theory. In effect, the group realized that the formation of Revolutionary Committees was the beginning of the end of the Cultural Revolution and the start of the reformation of the state machinery.

It was in its manifesto, “Whither China?,” originally written in January 1968, that Shengwulian, under the leadership of a young Red Guard member who called himself Yang Xiguang, made its most radical and influential argument. Yang first detailed the history of the Cultural Revolution and what he saw as the betrayal of the “January Storm” 1967 upsurge of Red Guards by the representatives of China’s “new bureaucratic bourgeoisie” in the “February Adverse Current” in that same year. Yang on the surface tried to stay loyal to Mao by focusing on Premier Zhou Enlai, who, as the “chief representative of China’s ‘Red’ capitalist class,” was the person responsible for setting up the revolutionary committees, which to Yang amounted to the reinstatement of the bureaucrats and a usurpation of power.¹³ Rather than the “small handful” of people in power taking the capitalist road, Yang argued that “90 per cent of the senior cadres had already formed a privileged class.”¹⁴ The masses of the January Storm represented the truly revolutionary class of the Cultural Revolution, and by their own revolutionary experiences came to see that,

. . . this class of “Red” capitalists had entirely become a decaying class that hindered the progress of history. The relations between them and the people in general had changed from relations between the leaders and the led, to those between rulers and the ruled, and between exploiters and the exploited. From the relations between revolutionaries of equal standing, it had become a relationship between oppressors and the oppressed. The special privileges and high salaries of “Red” capitalists were built upon the foundation of oppression and exploitation of the broad masses of the people.¹⁵

Though Yang recognized that “Comrade Mao” had decided to delay the dream of establishing people’s communes, thus at least tacitly acknowledging

that Mao had acquiesced in the formation of revolutionary committees, Yang claimed that Mao's intent in his injunction to the People's Liberation Army to "support the left" was to carry out cultural revolution in the armed forces. Thus, in perhaps his most radical statement, and the one that would ultimately get his group in trouble, Yang claimed that the "Red capitalist class" included not just civilian bureaucrats, but also members of the army:

It is now seen that the present army is different from the people's army of before Liberation [i.e., before 1949]. Before Liberation, the army and the people fought together to overthrow imperialism, bureaucratic capitalism, and feudalism. The relationship between the army and the people was like that of fish and water [following Mao's famous phrase]. After liberation . . . some of the armed forces in the revolution have not only changed their blood-and-flesh relationship with the people that existed before Liberation but have even become tools for suppressing the revolution.¹⁶

Yang came to the conclusion that "any revolution must naturally involve the army," members of whom inevitably became part of the "Red capitalist class,"¹⁷ and thus that "it was necessary to carry through to the end the Cultural Revolution in the field armies" as well as in the civilian bureaucracy.¹⁸

Going beyond a neo-anarchist critique of the existing state, Yang in 1968 called for a violent smashing of the new bureaucratic class in the Party, a revolution that would set up Paris Commune-style or early Russian soviet-type organizations of direct, mass democracy in the place of the corrupt bureaucratic state. People would have to be taught that the true purpose of the Cultural Revolution was not just the dismissal of officials and the "purging of individual capitalist roaders" but that the capitalist roaders were a class implacably opposed to the cultural revolution and thus that a violent social revolution would be necessary. In order to carry out such a violent revolution, the masses would have to reject the official militia organizations as well as the army and to seize arms themselves.¹⁹

Perhaps in the foreknowledge that anyone calling for such radical action in a Leninist Party-state would be denounced as favoring anarchism, Yang in "Whither China?" tried to distance himself from what he termed the "infantile leftist" doctrine of "one revolution" and from those who wanted to establish a full communist society immediately. He claimed that though a regime of the Paris Commune type was their goal, his group did not favor elimination of all class differences right away, but instead continued to see the need for stages in the revolution.²⁰

Despite their weak attempts to distance themselves from "infantile leftists," the calls of Shengwulian and other dissident radicals for direct revolution and for extending class struggle into the army frightened the rest

of the state elite, if not Mao himself, and led Mao to allow Zhou Enlai and other Party-state leaders to launch a campaign against “ultra-leftism” and anarchism, as we saw in the previous chapter. In this campaign, Mao and other Party leaders put pressure on the “establishment Maoists” to denounce the “extreme anarchism” of “ultra-leftists” in the country, as exemplified by Shengwulian, who claimed to be followers of the official Maoists. The establishment Maoists included Mao’s wife Jiang Qing, Chen Boda, Mao’s former secretary and first leader of the Cultural Revolution Group in the Party, and Kang Sheng, the secret police chief, all of whom would later fall after Mao’s death in 1976 in the campaign against the “Gang of Four.” In the earlier 1968 campaign against “ultra-leftism,” Shengwulian’s documents were published and widely distributed in order to have everyone denounce and repudiate them.²¹ In effect, we saw that the establishment Maoists tried to use the campaign against “ultra-leftists” to legitimate their position and protect themselves from attack, but in retrospect one can see that this was a futile attempt since the campaign ultimately led to a wider purge of even official Maoists such as Chen Boda in 1970, just as Jiang Qing, Kang Sheng, and other establishment Maoists were later purged and themselves denounced as anarchists in 1976. The 1968 campaign then, as we saw in the previous chapter, was but one of many in the history of the PRC led by people who denounced as anarchist anyone who questioned whether the Party really ruled for the people, yet who themselves were later denounced as anarchists.

Though Yang Xiguang and other Shengwulian members were arrested and imprisoned, they had a profound influence on those members of the betrayed Red Guard generation who would later lead the Democracy Wall movement. Wang Xizhe, a leader of that latter movement whom we will examine below, claimed that Shengwulian was the forerunner of what he called the “thinking generation” that began to question the official line that the Party represented the masses, even as Wang made clear that he disagreed with the group’s critique of Zhou Enlai and by extension other reformist leaders such as Zhao Ziyang. In effect, Wang was arguing that whatever their great foresight and courage, groups like Shengwulian were too entrapped in Cultural Revolution language of violent class struggle and failed to see the need for rule of law and institutional checks and balances, reforms that Wang and others in the Democracy Movement called for in the 1980s.²² Without such a realization of the need for tolerance and treating people with humanity, Wang and others argued in the 1980s, and by calling for further class struggle and “smashing” of people in power, China’s Red Guard generation was trapped in an endless cycle of denunciation and violence that at best would only continually recreate and reinforce a despotic ruling body standing over the people.

Yang Xiguang himself later came to agree with this point of view based on his observations of ordinary people during his 10 years in prison,²³

and under his original name “Yang Xiaokai” in fact became an advocate of market-based economic modernization and political reform, first after his release from prison in China and then as a noted classical economist teaching in Australia up till his death in 2004.²⁴ Even as he changed his political beliefs about how best to go about challenging state autonomy, in effect Yang never gave up his neo-anarchist critique of China’s Leninist Party-state. Whether as a violent Red Guard faction leader or as a neo-classical economist, one could argue that he departed in different ways from a full positive anarchist vision; nevertheless, in both periods Yang viewed institutions as strongly tending to rule for themselves, not the people they were originally designed to serve, and the Communist Party of China was no exception.

Competing Dissident Visions of the New Class: Wang Xizhe and Chen Erjin

As noted above, many members of the self-proclaimed “thinking generation,” which arose among educated and ex-Red Guards in the late stages of the Cultural Revolution and which reached its height in the Democracy Wall Movement of 1978–81, openly paid homage to Shengwulian and the dissident radicals of the early Cultural Revolution. Nowhere was this link clearer than in their ideas of the PRC as being dominated by a “bureaucratic class.”

The first salvo of this generation came in November 1974, during the later stages of the Cultural Revolution, when a group of young former Red Guards writing under the collective pseudonym of “Li Yizhe” (based on a combination of the names of three of its four members) put up a small character wall poster manifesto in downtown Guangzhou denouncing the “feudal fascist” nature of the “Lin Biao system” and the lack of true “socialist democracy” in China.²⁵ Taking advantage of the state-sanctioned campaign then raging that denounced as counterrevolutionaries both the ancient philosopher Confucius and Lin Biao, the Vice-Chair of the Party, Vice-Premier, and Mao’s designated successor, who had been killed in 1971 in a plane crash after supposedly leading a failed coup against Mao, Li Yizhe presented a more radical critique of the whole “Lin Biao system.” Their critique was really aimed at the abuses of other establishment Maoists in the regime, later to be denounced as the “Gang of Four.” In their wall poster essay, “On Socialist Democracy and the Legal System,” the group extended Mao’s critique of the “new bourgeoisie in the Party” to argue that the “privileged stratum” of the Party led by Lin Biao attempted to “implement a feudalistic socialist-fascist despotism.”²⁶ While starting from the argument that it was vestiges of economic inequality and special privileges that created

this new class, Li Yizhe argued that this force of new gentry (*wenren*)²⁷ had vested *political* as well as economic interests and privileges²⁸ and existed objectively based on the “traditions formed by several thousands of years of feudal despotism” that “stubbornly maintain their stronghold over thought, culture, education, law, and virtually every other sphere of the superstructure.”²⁹ In other words, while claiming to support the ideals of the Cultural Revolution in fighting counterrevolutionaries within the Party, Li Yizhe began a line that was to become official during the early reform era, that vestiges of feudalism, not a return to capitalism, were the main threat to China’s socialist revolution.

In a preface to a later edition of their manifesto, the group claimed that members of this new “bourgeois class” maintained and expanded its power by “turning public into private [property]” and turning their power into “special economic and political privileges” that they “extended without limitation to their family, friends, and relatives.” Furthermore,

... they buttress and sustain a clique of “new nobility,” a force which stands separate from the people and whose interests come into opposition with the people’s.³⁰

For Li Yizhe, the “preconditions for the Lin Biao system” were rooted in the “vicious practices of the dictatorial arbitrariness of the feudal era” that were “fixed firmly in the minds of the people as well as in those of the average members of the Communist Party.”³¹ The members of Li Yizhe at first took pains to claim loyalty to Chairman Mao and followed the line that Mao had long known and suspected Lin Biao’s treacherous nature. Despite their claim to be upholding Maoist traditions of the Cultural Revolution, the group called for political reform and the rule of law, not mass violent upheaval, as the way to overcome feudal fascism.

Though initially supported by members of the Guangdong provincial leadership such as Zhao Ziyang, the later reformist national leader of the PRC who in the earlier era hoped to resist and overcome the establishment Maoists, the members of Li Yizhe were eventually arrested, tried, and imprisoned as the Maoists temporarily regained the upper hand. After the second return of Deng Xiaoping to the Party leadership in 1977–8, members of the Li Yizhe group were eventually released from prison and rehabilitated. Most of the group’s members tried to affect the new regime from within, but one of its members, Wang Xizhe, almost immediately joined the new Democracy Wall movement that formed around the young workers and members of the Red Guard generation in Beijing and other major cities.³²

In interviews around this time Wang Xizhe claimed to be the primary author of Li Yizhe’s main essays,³³ a claim Li Zhengtian, another member of the group, partially contested.³⁴ In 1979, as Deng gained ascendancy within

the post-Mao coalition at the top of the CCP and as remaining Maoists within the Party were about to be purged, Wang penned another essay under his name alone, which he termed the sequel to the group's original wall poster.

In this essay "Strive for the Class Dictatorship of the Proletariat"³⁵ Wang attempts to place the "feudal vestiges" argument about the bureaucratic class within a Marxist, class-based explanation. Wang claims that the rise of "the dictatorship of the advanced stratum of the proletariat"³⁶ is inevitable in a socialist nation striving to survive within a world capitalist economy. In such a nation, where, given the low level of development of the productive forces and thus the low "cultural level and capacity for management of the entire proletariat," Wang argues that ". . . it becomes necessary for the advanced stratum of the proletariat (the Communist Party) to carry out exclusively the management for their class." The danger in this division of labor, Wang claims, citing Lenin, is that "it depreciates the political power of the soviet and causes the revival of bureaucratism"³⁷ (here conveniently ignoring that Lenin only decried "bureaucratism" and never claimed that the Soviet political elite constituted a new class). Though claiming to support the idea of rule by the dictatorship of the proletariat, Wang wants to ensure the rule of law and democratic accountability in order to gradually transform the "dictatorship of the Party . . . into the realization of the dictatorship of the proletariat by an organization of the entire proletarian class," by which he means workers' democratic control over management along the lines of what he claimed occurred in Yugoslavia. Without such practices, Wang warns,

. . . this dictatorship of the Communist Party step by step sets itself free from the control of society and becomes a force above the society; the original advanced stratum of the proletariat (especially its leadership group) metamorphoses into the antithesis of the proletariat, and the original dictatorship of the advanced stratum of the proletariat becomes the dictatorship of "the Communist bureaucrats' holding up the sign post of the Communist Party."³⁸

While publishing his manifesto in unofficial journals outside the control of the Communist Party, Wang remained firmly within what Kjeld Erik Brodsgaard termed the "socialist democratic" wing of the Democracy Wall Movement that,

. . . favored democratic reform and progress within the framework of the present political and economic framework of China . . . [and thus] never really questioned the "socialist" foundation of China, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the leadership of the Party based on Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought.³⁹

Though based outside the Party, from 1978 to 1980 Wang in effect hoped to form a pressure group that would help the reformers inside the Party overcome their bureaucratic opponents, and thus Wang took pains to demonstrate his Marxist credentials. Nevertheless, the critique of the “new bureaucratic ruling class” that Wang continued from the first Li Yizhe manifesto, which was in turn influenced by Shengwulian, became an accepted part of the discourse of all wings of the Democracy Wall movement. This would include what Brosgaard terms the “abolitionists,” the wing of the movement (exemplified most famously by Wei Jingsheng) which rejected Marxist-Leninism and concluded that, far from trying to prove their loyalty to the Communist revolution, “the revolution should be reversed in order to destroy the systemic foundation of a new class, ruling in the name of socialism.”⁴⁰

In a long essay he wrote during the later years of the Cultural Revolution and published in one of the Democracy Wall journals in 1979, originally entitled “On Proletarian Democratic Revolution,” another member of the “socialist democrat” wing of the Democracy Wall activists writing under the name of Chen Erjin tried consciously to continue the new class argument from the Cultural Revolution period.⁴¹

Unlike Wang, Chen did not reject Maoism and the Cultural Revolution but claimed to take over what he saw as its democratic spirit and goals while overcoming its inherent limitations. In the midst of his unique and idiosyncratic blend of Paris Commune-style mass democracy and Western influenced institutional checks and balances, in which Chen seemed to favor some kind of violent “second revolution” leading to the founding of a second communist party to compete with the original CCP, Chen launched his own critique of the “bureaucrat-monopoly privileged class.”⁴² In Chen’s view, although the transformation to public ownership of the means of production was a crucial step forward in the socialist revolution, the change to public ownership also began a new, irreconcilable contradiction that would eventually necessitate a new revolution. This contradiction was between “the highly organized and politico-economically unincorporate social production under public ownership” (*gaodu zuzhidi zheng-jing yitihua gongyouzhi shenghui shengchan*) and the coercive monopolization of power by the minority,⁴³ which Chen’s translator explains as “a form of socialized production which proceeds under a form of public ownership, and is characterized by a fusion, into a single and highly-organized whole, of the formerly distinct spheres of the political and the economic.”⁴⁴ In other words, similar here to Wang’s argument, the “new bureaucratic class” arises as a side effect of socialism in a backward country, though Chen thinks this is a necessary step while Wang came to believe it was a tragic development, as we will see below.

While claiming to support the socialist revolution, Chen recognizes the irony that in the “workers state” the workers lost the right to change jobs

or move where they want, and thus under this system “are no longer free but only ‘workers within organization’” who thus “forfeit their free and independent nature.”⁴⁵ Instead of a transition to a classless society, there has been a “coercive monopolization of power by a minority” that has but “established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old.”⁴⁶ Although he incorporates the Cultural Revolution critique of a necessary, even violent struggle against this new class, Chen changes the terms from “capitalist roaders” within the Party to a struggle against privilege and revisionism within the Party and also changes the nature of the system that would replace Party dictatorship.

In a strange and idiosyncratic twist, Chen contrasts his idea of a necessary revolution against the new class with the ideas of those “reformists” within the Party who accepted public ownership and control by the “unicorporate elite” but would fight revisionism through such measures as mass campaigns to restrict “bourgeois right.” As Munro makes clear in his introduction to Chen’s manifesto, this means that in effect Chen identifies the establishment Maoists of the Cultural Revolution as the reformists, not their rivals favoring modest market reforms who were purged during that movement and later returned under Deng Xiaoping.⁴⁷ The “reformists,” Chen argues—here prefiguring later denunciations of the Gang of Four—had a “petite bourgeois mentality” and may possess “revolutionary fanaticism” but “also may turn to the right ideologically.” As members of the political elite, they “either remain subject to the restriction by the interests of the bureaucrat class, or else drool at the prospect of acquiring those vested interests themselves.” As a result,

... they are placed in extremely perilous situation, being not only divorced from the mass of the people but at the same time hated by the bureaucrat class as a whole. At the decisive juncture, the bureaucrat class will surely drown them in their own blood.⁴⁸

By praising the workers’ sense of mastery but not pushing for a thoroughgoing revolution against the new bureaucratic class, the “reformists” on the one hand serve in effect to negate “the rule of privilege; but on the other to reinforce ‘unified leadership’ by the bureaucrat class—thereby in effect reinforcing workers’ slavish position of unconditional subordination.”⁴⁹

In effect, one could argue, Chen was still taking the standpoint of the dissident Maoists who felt betrayed and sold out by Mao and his coterie for turning against the Paris Commune model of mass democracy late in the Cultural Revolution and for sending the dissident radicals to the countryside or to jail. On the other hand, Chen and the dissident Maoists remained suspicious of the rising coalition of Stalinist bureaucrats and market reformers of the Deng era. Chen’s loyalty to a thorough neo-anarchist theory of the state perhaps helps explain his idiosyncratic positive

program that combined calls for violent revolution against all wings of the bureaucratic class with a proposed new system of two communist parties alternating in power within a system of rule by law and checks and balances of three or more branches of government. Whatever one thinks of the lack of anarchism in his positive program, Chen clearly recognized, it seems to this observer, that even a (to him necessary) violent revolution against the bureaucratic class would only eventually result in the formation of a new oligarchy as bad or worse than the old, and thus some kind of institutional checks on that potential oligarchy were needed.

Wang Xizhe reacted strongly against Chen's view that the class struggle and anti-bureaucratic language of the Cultural Revolution should be maintained. In his long essay written in 1980, "Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution," against "Comrade Jin Jun" (whom Robin Munro and others identify as Chen Erjin⁵⁰), Wang argued that Mao and his establishment Maoist followers were neither reformists nor genuine socialist revolutionaries but only "agrarian socialists" intent on "placing the national economy under militaristic command" that would call for "a supreme militaristic authority."⁵¹ From his attacks on Marshall Peng Dehuai, who had dared to criticize the disastrous and harmful failures of Mao's Great Leap Forward, to the brutal and violent purges of anyone who dared to criticize his policies in the Cultural Revolution, Mao was in effect a super-Stalinist autocrat:

Mao Zedong's reactionary trait was precisely that he was not satisfied with the degree of autocracy and of centralization of power that had already been attained by the Stalinist-modeled Party and state. He demanded more autocracy and more centralization, but the democratic reform faction within the Party blocked his attempts. This obstruction developed to a degree so serious that it even threatened his continued ride on the neck of this Party as Chairman. Thereupon he decided to attack this Party, smash this Party, and establish a Mao Zedong Fascist Party.⁵²

In other words, Wang argued that opponents of Mao within the Party who favored more rule of law and market reforms were indeed the genuine reformers, whatever their limits and however much resistance they faced from remaining Stalinist bureaucrats who favored ending the violent upheaval in society but not opening up the Leninist state. Mao, despite his few words against bureaucratism, in fact only used Paris Commune rhetoric to get rid of the reformers in the state who would check his power. The Cultural Revolution was not about mass democracy in the end, but about "worship of Mao Zedong as an individual"⁵³ and "revering Mao Zedong as an emperor."⁵⁴ Though at first tolerating Paris Commune style rhetoric, in the end Mao turned against Paris Commune models, ridiculed the idea of masses electing officials, and only desired to build up his own autocratic power against officialdom, akin to the efforts of Zhu Yuanzhang the late

fourteenth-century peasant rebel who founded the Ming dynasty, or Hong Xiuquan the leader of the Taiping peasant rebellion of the nineteenth century,⁵⁵ both of whom became autocratic tyrants and launched violent purges of their officials.

Though perhaps his argument was not completely fair to Chen himself, since as we saw above Chen also criticized Maoists within the Party, Wang was trying to tell members of his own “thinking generation” that they had to make a complete break with the Manichean ideas of the Cultural Revolution of a violent struggle between good and bad class forces, and instead had to stress the rule of law, the art of compromise, and the gradual evolution of peaceful, democratic checks on authority. In effect, one could argue, despite his own lack of an anarchist positive program, Wang was calling for the neo-anarchist critique to be extended to Mao himself and the whole Maoist system of putting faith in top authority figures. Wang’s weakness, from a full anarchist perspective, was his faith in a reformed single Party system, in which pressure from extra-Party movements such as the Democracy Wall would support reformist leaders in the Party against “opportunistic bureaucrats.” At one point in “Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution” Wang even seemed to downplay Deng’s arrest of Wei Jingsheng, though Wang argued that Deng would come to regret turning against the “thinking generation.”⁵⁶ Ironically, as the crackdown on Democracy Wall intensified and Wang himself came under pressure (ultimately he too was arrested and imprisoned for many years before being exiled to the West), in a late 1980 interview Wang seemed to accept the need for some kind of multiparty checks on the Communist Party.⁵⁷ Even during a gradual transitional stage to fuller democracy, Wang argued, “there may arise a privileged stratum or clique which benefits from seeking to prolong this stage. Such a stratum or clique will never trust the popular masses to stand on their own two feet and to exert their democratic rights on their own behalf,”⁵⁸ and thus he continued to see a need for pressure for democracy from the popular masses, perhaps similar to Michels’ hope for continued democratic “waves” to check the tendency toward oligarchy.

In 1981 the crackdown on Democracy Wall activists extended beyond the “abolitionists” and started to include the socialist democrats, such as Wang and Chen, who were both eventually arrested and imprisoned. Perhaps recognizing that the end was near, in the late interview noted above, Wang now expressed agreement with Wei Jingsheng that “the fifth modernization,” democracy, was needed in order to overcome “a new form of ‘alienation’” under Stalinism, where “the people work more and more but have fewer and fewer democratic rights.”⁵⁹ While reflecting his even bolder attitude and expressions of support for the rights of the abolitionists such as Wei, this statement also reflects Wang’s links with Marxist intellectuals within the reform camp of the CCP who had also been returning to earlier concepts of Marx in order to call for political as well as economic reform.

As in this interview, in his late article “The Direction of Democracy,” Wang Xizhe also called for a “renaissance” of Marxism similar to that in Hungary and Yugoslavia by resurrecting long-ignored Marxist concepts such as alienation to build a “proletarian humanism” that would overcome the “obsolete” practices of Stalinism,⁶⁰ which included an unchecked Party-state. As the Democracy Wall activists were rounded up, it fell to the inner Party democrats to take up this neo-anarchist critique.

Notes

- 1 Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*.
- 2 Ibid., 325.
- 3 Ibid., 326–7.
- 4 Wolfgang Mommsen, “Roberto Michels and Max Weber: Moral Conviction Versus the Politics of Responsibility,” Chapter 6 of Mommsen, *The Political and Social Theory of Max Weber*, 87.
- 5 Jessop specifically states that the anarchists had a “parasitic view of the state” while Alford fits nineteenth-century anarchist thought within the “utopian” version of what he calls the “class” paradigm of the state. See Bob Jessop, “Recent Theories of the Capitalist State,” 353–73; Robert Alford, “Paradigms of Relations between State and Society,” reprinted in Hall, 67. In this and the following chapter we revise Alford’s analysis by separating anarchism’s critique of the state from some anarchists’ revolutionary program, and thus instead locate the critique within Alford’s “pathological” version of the “elitist” paradigm.
- 6 Milovan Djilas, *The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System*; Gyorgy Konrad and Ivan Szelenyi, *Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*; Svetozar Stojanovic, “Marxism and Democracy: The Ruling Class or the Dominant Class?” For summaries of new class arguments of Eastern European dissidents as well as West European and American intellectuals, see Gil Eyal, “The Idea of the New Class,” Chapter 1 of Eyal, *The Origins of Post-Communist Elites: From Prague Spring to the Breakup of Czechoslovakia*, 1–34; and Bill Martin and Ivan Szelenyi, “The Three Waves of New Class Theory.”
- 7 Mao, *Mao Zedong sixiang wansui!* (1969), 582–3, n. 22, translated in Anita Chan, “Images of China’s Social Structure: The Changing Perspectives of Canton Students,” 316, n. 25.
- 8 Walder, “Cultural Revolution Radicalism,” 58–61.
- 9 For studies of the Shengwulian group and its suppression, see Klaus Mehnert, *Peking and the New Left: At Home and Abroad*; Peter Moody, Jr., *Opposition and Dissent in Contemporary China*, 202–9; and Jonathan Unger, “Whither China?: Yang Xiguang, Red Capitalists, and the Social Turmoil of the Cultural Revolution.” The writings of Shengwulian are translated in these volumes, often based on the original translation of their writings by US government intelligence agencies. See especially the group’s main manifesto, “Whither

- China?" *Guangyin Hongqi*, 5 (March 1968), translated in SCMP 4190 (June 4, 1968), 1–18, reprinted in revised form in Mehnert, 82–100. We will cite other writings of this group as well in this chapter.
- 10 Unger, 22.
 - 11 Shengwulian, "Whither China?" translated in Mehnert; also see Shengwulian, "Shengwulian's Resolutions on Several Problems in the Current Hunan Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution," *Dongfeng Chanbao* (East Wind Combat News) (Guangdong), 19 (February 29, 1968), based on resolutions passed by the preparatory group for Shengwulian on December 21, 1967, translated in Mehnert, 80.
 - 12 Shengwulian, "Our Program," *Guangyin Hongqi* (Guangdong Printing System Red Flag), 5 (March 1968), 3, translated in SCMP 4174 (May 9, 1968), 10–13; also translated in Mehnert, 75–6.
 - 13 Shengwulian, "Whither China," translated in Mehnert, 87–8.
 - 14 Ibid., 85.
 - 15 Ibid.
 - 16 Ibid., 89.
 - 17 Ibid., 86.
 - 18 Ibid., 91.
 - 19 Ibid., 91–2.
 - 20 Ibid., 86, 98.
 - 21 For accounts of this campaign, see Unger, 29–32; Mehnert, 20–5; MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, 221–38; and Barry Burton, "The Cultural Revolution's Ultraleft Conspiracy: The 'May 16' Group."
 - 22 Wang, "Mao Zedong yu wenhua dageming" (Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution), in *Qishi niandai* (The Seventies), 133 (February 1981), translated in Anita Chan, Stanley Rosen, and Jonathan Unger (eds), *On Socialist Democracy and the Legal System: The Li Yizhe Debates*, 252 and cited in Unger, 4, 36, n. 20.
 - 23 See Yang Xiaokai and Susan McFadden, *Captive Spirits: Prisoners of the Cultural Revolution*.
 - 24 See Carol Lee Hamrin, "Yang Xiaokai," *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity*, online at www.bdcconline.net/en/stories/y/yang-xiaokai.php/.
 - 25 Li Yizhe, "Guanyu shehuizhuyide minzhu yu fazhi" (On Socialist Democracy and the Legal System), in Qi Hao (ed.), *Guanyu shehuizhuyide minzhu yu fazhi* (On Socialist Democracy and Development), translated in Chan, Rosen, and Unger, *On Socialist Democracy and the Legal System*: 31–86.
 - 26 Ibid., 61.
 - 27 Ibid., 68.
 - 28 Ibid., 78.
 - 29 Ibid., 75.
 - 30 Ibid., 36.
 - 31 Ibid., 42.
 - 32 Besides the Chan et al. and Rosen works cited above, major studies of the Democracy Wall Movement that often contain translations of key texts include Kjeld Erik Brodsgaard, "The Democracy Movement in China, 1978–1979: Opposition Movements, Wall Poster Campaigns, and Underground Journals"; Chen Ruoxi, *Democracy Wall and the Unofficial Journals*; Gregor

- Benton, *Wild Lily, Prairie Fire: China's Movement for Democracy, Yan'an to Tian'anmen, 1942–1989*, 157–263; Stanley Rosen, “Guangzhou’s Democracy Movement in Cultural Revolution Perspective”; James Seymour, *The Fifth Modernization: China’s Human Rights Movement, 1978–1979*, and James Tong (ed.), “Underground Journals in China, Parts I and II.”
- 33 Stanley Rosen (guest ed.), “The Rehabilitation and Dissolution of ‘Li Yizhe’.”
 - 34 Ibid., 111–13.
 - 35 Wang Xizhe, “Wei wuchan jieji zhuanzheng er nuli” (Strive for the Class Dictatorship of the Proletariat), translated in Chan, Rosen, and Unger, *On Socialist Democracy and the Legal System*.
 - 36 Ibid., 141.
 - 37 Ibid., 140.
 - 38 Ibid., 141–2.
 - 39 Brodsgaard, 768.
 - 40 Ibid., 769.
 - 41 Chen Erjin, *Lun wuchan jieji minzhu geming* (On Proletarian Democratic Revolution), *Siwu luntan* (April fifth Forum), 10 (June 1979), translated in Chen, *China: Crossroads Socialism: An Unofficial Manifesto for Proletarian Democracy*, *passim*.
 - 42 Ibid., especially Chapter 6, 110–19.
 - 43 Ibid., 87.
 - 44 Ibid., 87, translator’s note.
 - 45 Ibid., 115.
 - 46 Ibid., 119.
 - 47 Ibid., 26–7.
 - 48 Ibid., 123.
 - 49 Ibid., 124.
 - 50 Ibid., 48, n. 32.
 - 51 Wang, “Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution,” in Chan et al., 195.
 - 52 Ibid., 206.
 - 53 Ibid., 226.
 - 54 Ibid., 218.
 - 55 Ibid., 236. Andrew and Rapp, *passim* make the same argument, acknowledging their debt to Wang Xizhe on page 9.
 - 56 Wang, 248.
 - 57 See Wang, “An Interview with Wang Xizhe on the Democratic Movement,” translated in abridged form as “Democracy and Chinese Communism,” 65.
 - 58 Ibid., 66.
 - 59 Ibid., 38.
 - 60 Wang, “Minzhude fanxiang” (The Direction of Democracy), translated in *The Undercurrent*, 11.