



### 把反击右倾翻案风的斗争进行到底

Fig. 9 A propaganda poster from 1976 criticising 'Right Deviationism'. This reflects the last propaganda campaign initiated by the Gang of Four, who were increasingly unpopular in China

leadership and the factional rivalry intensified. The radicals regarded Hua Guofeng as a political upstart and believed that they could outmanoeuvre him just as they had brought down Deng Xiaoping. During the summer of 1976 they worked hard to undermine Hua. This was a serious tactical mistake as it drove Hua to seek alliances elsewhere, particularly with the PLA military commanders. When the Gang of Four placed the 100,000-strong Shanghai militia on the alert in August 1976, this was a clear sign that they were preparing for an armed confrontation. Whatever their personal political preferences, the PLA military commanders perceived their primary responsibility as the maintenance of order and stability and the avoidance of Civil War.

As Mao approached death, the factional struggle over the succession was reaching its peak. The Gang of Four controlled the media and considered their position to be very strong. Their victory over Hua, however, was by no means guaranteed.

#### Summary questions

- 1 By 1976, the Gang of Four gained the upper hand in the power struggle to control the succession.' Explain why you agree or disagree with this view.
- 2 "Mao made a miscalculation in the anti-Confucius campaign." Explain why you agree or disagree with this view.
- 3 How important was the legacy of the Cultural Revolution to political life in China in the early 1970s?

#### Did you know?

##### An omen?

On 27 July 1976, a massive earthquake struck the Chinese coal-mining city of Tangshan, killing over 200,000 people. Many in China regarded this event as an omen that major upheavals were about to occur in the political sphere.

In this chapter you will learn about:

- the positive achievements of Mao's rule over China
- the costs of Mao's regime for the Chinese people.

#### The East is Red

The east is red, the sun is rising  
China has brought forth a Mao Zedong  
He amasses fortune for the people  
Hurrah, he is the people's great saviour.

Chairman Mao loves the people  
He is our guide  
To build a new China  
Hurrah, he leads us forward!

This song, *The East is Red*, became the unofficial anthem of the People's Republic of China during the Cultural Revolution. Schoolchildren started the day by singing this song, as did many adults at their place of work. Loudspeakers broadcast it on the streets of China's cities. It is a stark illustration of the personality cult that surrounded Mao from the mid-1960s until his death in 1976.



Fig. 1 Mao Zedong lies in state, September 1976



Mao died on 9 September 1976. Hua immediately succeeded to all the top positions within the Party, State and military hierarchies and made his preparations for a showdown with the Gang of Four. They then committed another serious tactical error. Obsessed though they were with endlessly quoting Mao Zedong Thought, they ignored one of the basic Maoist principles of guerrilla warfare – when faced with a superior enemy force, withdraw to a secure base area. Their secure base area was in Shanghai, yet they remained in Beijing after Mao's death – at the heart of the government system controlled by Hua Guofeng. On 6 October 1976, with the support of the PLA, Hua arrested the Gang of Four. The factional rivalry that had bedevilled China since the Cultural Revolution was over. There would be no civil war. Deng Xiaoping was rehabilitated (for the second time) in 1978 and would succeed Hua as Chairman and supreme leader in 1980. Despite all his efforts to ensure that his legacy was entrusted to someone who would defend the 'verdict' of the Cultural Revolution, Mao had been unable to prevent the old 'number two capitalist-roader', Deng Xiaoping, from returning to power.

**Activity**

**Source analysis**

Study Sources 1 and 2.

- 1 What can we learn from these sources about the attitude of the CPC leadership towards Mao after his death?
- 2 How far do you agree with Chen Yun's assessment of Mao's life?

Had Mao died in 1956, his achievements would have been immortal. Had he died in 1966, he would still have been a great man. But he died in 1976. Alas, what can one say?

1 *From Chen Yun, 1979*

His merits are primary, his errors secondary, in the proportion of seven to three.

2 *An official Chinese verdict on Mao's life, 1981*

Since Mao's death in 1976 the Communist Party has continued to rule China. However, the China of the early 21st century is very different in many ways from the China that Mao ruled over. Since 1981, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping and his successors, the country has experienced unprecedented economic growth and become one of the world's leading economic powers. Much of this has been achieved by abandoning many of Mao's most distinctive policies, such as rural communes, and by allowing the development of private enterprise. Although many of Mao's policies have been cast aside, the communist leadership in China has not abandoned the myth of Mao because to do so would undermine the foundations on which their rule is based. Mao's achievements have been the subject of debate and re-evaluation since his death, but he is still honoured as the founder of the PRC and his body is preserved in a mausoleum on Tiananmen Square.

**Mao's achievements**

Mao had many talents and qualities that equipped him for his role as leader of China. He possessed great charisma and was highly intelligent. He was a visionary, a philosopher, a poet and a highly gifted political and military strategist. However, there were also limitations to his attributes as a leader. He was no administrator – he had no enthusiasm for the mundane, day-to-day business of government. He had only a limited understanding of economics and little or no grasp of foreign affairs. Mao was first and foremost a revolutionary leader who believed in the necessity for constant class struggle and in the mobilisation of the masses.

Revolution has more to do with tearing down the old than with painstakingly constructing the new. Mao's legacy was to clear the way for less visionary, more practical men to build the shining future that he could never achieve.

3 *From P. Short, Mao: A Life, 1999*

When assessing Mao's achievements, therefore, we must bear in mind that Mao did not concern himself with the details of economic reform or improvements in health and education. These were essentially the work of able administrators and political leaders at all levels in the communist system of government. Mao's contribution was to 'clear the way' and set the course.

Under Mao's leadership, China was transformed in a number of ways:

- After many years of weakness and disunity, China became once again a united country. Warlordism and civil war was ended and a strong central government was established in Beijing.
- China became a great power. For more than a century foreign powers, especially Western powers and Japan, had treated China as virtually a colonial territory. Under communist rule, China regained its independence, pride and self-respect. China acquired nuclear weapons and entered the space race.
- There was progress towards greater equality for women.
- China's population became better educated and more healthy.
- Food production, particularly grain, kept pace with the rapid increase in population; apart from the period of the Great Leap Forward, hunger and starvation were largely eradicated.
- Improved communications enabled food to be moved from regions where there was a surplus to regions where there were shortages.
- China experienced significant industrial development. Steel production tripled between the 1950s and the 1970s. The foundations were laid for China's own oil industry. A machine-tool industry and



Fig. 2 Mao's achievements



## Activity

## Revision exercise

Summarise Mao's achievements under the following headings: Political; Military; Economic development; Social change.

a nuclear industry were created from scratch. Electricity generation, particularly hydroelectric power, was greatly expanded.

- The net output of industry grew at an annual average of 10.2 per cent between 1957 and 1979. This compares favourably with the international average for other low-income countries of 5.4 per cent over the same period.

## The costs of Mao's rule

Mao, who for decades held absolute power over the lives of one quarter of the world's population, was responsible for well over seventy million deaths in peacetime, more than any other 20th century ruler.

4 From Jung Chang and J. Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story*, 2006

Official Chinese reports and estimates by historians give different figures for the numbers of Chinese who died from purges, land reform, famine and events such as the Cultural Revolution. Whatever the true scale of the deaths, it is clear that tens of millions of Chinese suffered violent deaths at the hands of the communist authorities (or at the hands of people incited to use violence as an instrument of State policy) and many millions more died from the famine of the early 1960s. In Mao's defence it might be argued that he rarely gave personal instructions for the executions carried out in his name. It could also be argued that the famine victims were the unintended casualties of his misguided policies. However, Mao showed a callous indifference to the suffering of millions of his fellow countrymen, regarding their deaths as unavoidable and as a necessary cost to bear in the pursuit of his ideals. For him, the end justified the means.

There was also in Mao's China a complete indifference to the concept of human rights and the rule of law. The Chinese state exercised its power in an arbitrary way and the victims of Mao's policies had no right of appeal or protection in law. Those arrested for 'counter-revolutionary crimes' could find themselves subjected to oppressive interrogation, imprisonment without charge or trial and years spent in forced labour camps enduring physical abuse by their guards, back-breaking labour and inadequate food. Many failed to survive this treatment. Freedom of speech, conscience, assembly and protest were irrelevant in a State that showed no respect for such 'bourgeois' abstractions.

As a revolutionary Mao brought fundamental change to China but he failed to follow through on his achievements in many areas. By the 1970s China had reached an economic 'plateau', the foundations for industrial growth and improved food production had been laid, but Mao's policies of mass mobilisation, struggle and self-reliance could not take China any further in its economic development. Economic growth was slowing down. This was the conundrum that lay at the heart of the debate between radicals and pragmatists in the 1970s. The stress on self-reliance and China's increased isolation during the Cultural Revolution had denied China access to the more advanced technologies of the West. Attacks on intellectuals and the disruption to China's education system had discouraged innovation and experiment, leaving the country unable to develop its own advanced technologies. Centralised planning of the economy had led to wasteful duplication of effort. Agriculture had benefited from irrigation schemes and other land improvements but farming was starved of both the investment

## Activity

## Talking point

'The deaths of millions of Chinese were a necessary consequence of the drive to modernise and strengthen China.' Organise a class debate on this issue, and consider whether you feel that the end justified the means.

## Activity

## Thinking point

Who benefited the most from Mao's policies under the communist regime: city dwellers or peasants?

needed for greater mechanisation and the use of fertilisers. The result of all this was that the incomes of ordinary Chinese peasants and workers rose very slowly, but incomes of city dwellers rose faster than the incomes of the peasants. Mao's aim of reducing inequality in Chinese society, particularly the gap between the urban population and the peasants, was as far from realisation in 1976 as it had been in the 1950s. No wonder the peasants continued to complain about 'socialism which we cannot eat'. Whereas in the 1950s Mao had been leading China towards a solution for its chronic economic underdevelopment, by the 1970s he had become part of the problem, an obstacle to further progress.

Throughout his time as an absolute ruler, Mao had been used to getting his own way. When, as in the early 1960s, he felt he was being sidelined, he was ruthless in his determination to overthrow those leaders whom he believed were following the 'capitalist road'. He believed that by carefully selecting his successor and struggling against those who deviated from his line, he could ensure that his ideas would survive his death. Ultimately he failed in this. The vast majority of Chinese, traumatised by the Cultural Revolution, had grown tired of mass campaigns and disorder. He had dominated the years 1949–76 in China but he was unable to dominate after his death.

## Activity

## Thinking point

Draw up a balance sheet of Mao's rule, showing the positive achievements alongside the failures and costs of his policies.



Fig. 3 PLA soldiers read copies of the Little Red Book