

TORONTO SUN MONDAY MARCH 4, 1985

China's disastrous Leap

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution that convulsed China from 1966 to 1971 is surely one of the most bizarre events in modern history. Its full story and terrible effects are only becoming fully known today.

China's party leader, Hu Yaobang, just admitted that the nation had "wasted 20 years," because of "radical leftist nonsense."

In 1958, Mao Tse-tung, China's "Great Helmsman," launched the Great Leap Forward, a series of harebrained economic programs that included, among other oddities, people making pig iron in their backyards. The Great Leap turned into a disaster, bringing China to the sharp edge of economic collapse and starvation.

China's political leaders, led by Liu Shao-Chi and Deng Xiaoping and the huge bureaucracies of party and government, turned against Mao. While Mao, the god-emperor idol of the masses, was publicly defied, the party bowed to him, said "yes, Your Enlightenedness," and then went and did precisely the opposite.

By 1966, Mao had been isolated and held little political power, though he still commanded fervent adoration from the masses. In that year, Mao, ever the brilliant strategist, secretly organized a group of radical, leftist supporters — later known as the "Gang of Four." This group then ignited the Cultural Revolution.

Unlike most revolutions that start with coups or bullets, China's great upheaval began in Shanghai with abstruse political polemics in party newspapers. Radical newspaper articles soon led to the coalition of pro-Mao, anti-party forces. Then Mao made his fateful call to the youth of China to become Red Guards and overthrow the existing order.

Mao was determined to shatter the Communist party which, he believed, had grown bourgeois, anti-revolutionary and elitist, abandoning the principles of his revolution. China's youth responded with exuberance, idealism and plain "let's raise hell."

For almost five years, millions of Red Guards rampaged across China. Party bureaucrats, government officials, teachers, professors, factory managers, intellectuals, artists — all were attacked, denounced, beaten and often driven to suicide. Some of China's top leaders and thinkers were paraded through the streets in dunce caps, splattered with dung.

Liu Shao-Chi, the party leader, was hounded to death, and his brilliant wife, Wang Kuang-mei, publicly humiliated. A reign of terror settled over China. Anyone could be accused of being anti-Mao. In some ways, the Cultural Revolution resembled Stalin's purges of the Communist party in the 1930s. But, in China's case, tens of thousands died rather than 27 million as in Russia. For the Chinese, denunciation and public confession were as effective as the Soviet execution cellars.

While the Red Guards were rampaging across China, industrial production fell by more than 50%, schools closed, all research stopped and contacts with the West — and the modern world — ceased. Red Guards, in a frenzy of demented barbarism,

**ERIC
MARGOLIS**



destroyed books, statues, paintings, art treasures, temples — in short, anything linked to the "bourgeois" past. Not since the Mongols had China experienced such destruction of its art treasures.

By 1969, China was in chaos as rival armies of Red Guards fought pitched battles with one another and the army. To give one brief impression of the surreal situation: In Kwangsi the Revolutionary Rebel Grand Army battled the Kwangsi Proletarian Revolutionary Alliance Command. Both claiming to be fighting for Mao and against "bourgeois revisionism." Confusion was complete.

In Wuchow, an important industrial city, weeks of fighting between factions left 2,000 buildings demolished and 40,000 homeless. All industrial production ceased as Red Guards took over China's vital railroads. Even Peking was under siege by assorted Red Guard factions.

Finally, as China again faced economic collapse, the wily premier, Chou En-Lai, apparently convinced Mao to restore order. The army, under Marshal Lin Piao, moved to crush the Red Guards. After much fighting and casualties, the Red Guards were finally put down and disbanded by 1971. Even Mao had to admit the whole operation had been a catastrophe.

As a direct result, Lin Piao attempted a military coup — what the communists call "Bonapartism" — against Mao. He failed and was likely executed. Mao soon after died and control of China reverted back to the rightists, led by Deng Xiaoping who has, as we are seeing, launched a great rightist counter-revolution.

The legacy of the Cultural Revolution has been terrible. An entire generation of Chinese received almost no education and are functionally illiterate. A decade of agricultural and industrial production was lost. And some of China's greatest art and literary treasures were destroyed. Today, Chinese openly describe the Cultural Revolution as a "nightmare."

Millions of ex-Red Guards are almost unemployable — no one wants these former revolutionaries. In fact, they may still constitute a dangerous leftist opposition to Deng's "Four Modernizations." What Chinese regime can feel comfortable with so many people who only 15 years ago burned the works of Confucius and slaughtered cats as "bourgeois animals"?

We should also recall that while this awesome tragedy was going on, Western adores of Mao were reporting that all was happy and well in China, just as their fellows had done 30 years earlier during Stalin's purges. The Chinese knew the truth and are telling it to the world today. It is shaking to see how easily idealism turns into dementia.