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Criticism of Selected Passages From "Analects" — A Confucian "Classic"

by the workers' theoretical study group of the No. 2 workshop of the Shanghai No. 5 Steel Plant

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The Shanghai No. 5 Steel Plant was built in 1958, the year of China's big leap forward in socialist construction, and the No. 2 workshop was completed the following year. Since the beginning of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in 1966, the plant's cadres and workers have vastly raised their political consciousness and further understood the importance of grasping theory by the working people. Since the Second Plenary Session of the Ninth Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party in August 1970, they have been, more consciously than ever, studying works by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin and by Chairman Mao, studying the Party's basic line in the historical period of socialism, and criticizing the bourgeoisie and revisionism. In the movement to criticize Lin Piao and Confucius, they have set up workers' theoretical study groups.

While criticizing Lin Piao in 1972, workers in the No. 2 workshop looked through the four "classics" of the Confucian school—"Analects," "The Doctrine of the Mean," "Great Learning" and "Mencius"—and selected 258 sayings of Confucius and Mencius and, by comparing them with similar sayings by Lin Piao, they found that Lin Piao was a faithful disciple of Confucius. After the Tenth Party Congress in 1973, they selected and edited "One Hundred Fallacious Sayings by Confucius and Mencius" and criticized them. Since 1974 they not only have repeatedly criticized the "Analects," a record of the reactionary sayings and activities of Confucius, but selected and annotated works written in the classical language by such Legatists as Wang An-shih and Liu Tsung-yuan. Thus they have played the working class' role of being the main force in broadening, deepening and persevering in the movement to criticize Lin Piao and Confucius.

We publish here 17 items from the criticism of selected passages from the "Analects" edited and written by them. —Ed.

I

Original text. Confucius said: "Benevolence means to restrain oneself and return to the rites. Once self-restraint and return to the rites are achieved, all under heaven will submit to the benevolent ruler."

Criticism. Here the "rites" refer to the hierarchy and its related rites and ceremonies under

the slave system of the Western Chou Dynasty (11th century-770 B.C.). "Restraining oneself and returning to the rites" was the reactionary programme of Confucius for restoring the Western Chou slave system.

Towards the end of the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 B.C.), the revolutionary flames of peasant uprisings were spreading everywhere and the newly rising landlord class was struggling to take over power from the slave-owning aristocracy. Faced with the situation of "the rites being lost and music ruined" and big turmoil under heaven, Confucius, a reactionary who stubbornly upheld the interests of the slave-owning aristocrats, waved the sinister banner of "restraining oneself and returning to the rites." What he wanted was to "revive states that were extinct, restore families that had lost their positions, and call to office those who had fallen into obscurity." He aimed at reviving the extinct states of the slave system, resuming the hereditary privileges of the slave-owning aristocrats and letting the overthrown slave-owning aristocrats return to power so as to restore the dictatorship of the slave-owning class.

The bourgeois careerist and conspirator Lin Piao more than once wrote reactionary scrolls bearing these words: "Of all things, this is the most important: to restrain oneself and return to the rites," and he regarded "to restrain oneself and return to the rites" as the most important thing of all. "Restraining oneself" was his way of having his gang cover up its counter-revolutionary ambition and engage in intrigues and conspiracies, and he also wanted the masses to put themselves at his and his son's "command" and "disposal." "Returning to the rites" was his goal, which is to change fundamentally the Party's basic line and policies in the historical period of socialism, subvert the dictatorship of the proletariat, restore capitalism and turn China into a colony of Soviet revisionist social-imperialism. Facts have proved that both Lin Piao and Confucius were diehards trying to turn back the clock.

As for "returning to the rites," it reminds us Shanghai workers of Chiang Kai-shek's big slaughter on April 12, 1927. In collusion with imperialism, that national traitor staged a counter-revolutionary coup d'état and sent troops to carry out large-scale murder of unarmed demonstrating workers. In a few moments corpses piled up and blood drenched Shanghai's Paoshan Road. We will never forget this historical lesson paid in blood! Now, under the dictatorship of the proletariat, Lin Piao dished up the reactionary programme of "restraining oneself and returning to the rites" in an attempt to restore capitalism, dispose of millions of revolutionaries and plunge the working people once again into the abyss of suffering. But this is only a daydream! Chairman Mao has pointed out: "**Retrogression eventually produces the reverse of what its promoters intend.**" Like all other reactionaries, Lin Piao went against the historical tide and finally met his ignominious end and total ruin.

II

Original text. Confucius said: "What must be done is to rectify titles.... If the titles are not correct, words will not carry weight; if words do not carry weight, affairs will not succeed."

Criticism. Towards the end of the Spring and Autumn Period, insubordinations and rebellions were frequent and thus destroyed the rank and titles of "king, minister, father and son" stipulated in the rites of the Western Chou Dynasty. Under these circumstances Confucius sprang to the fore clamouring for "rectifying titles." His aim was to drag back

the changed objective reality and make it suit the old rank and titles and uphold and restore the ruling order of slave society. His idea of "rectifying titles" completely served the reactionary programme "restrain oneself and return to the rites."

Lin Piao picked up the garbage of "rectifying titles" from Confucius and dished up his anti-Party political programme in open opposition to Chairman Mao's repeated instructions that the state would not have a chairman. Lin Piao babbled that when "the state has no head," the result would be: "If the titles are not correct, words will not carry weight." In "rectifying titles" Lin Piao wanted to usurp supreme Party and state power so that he could restore capitalism with "a correct title and weighty words." But the wheel of history cannot be turned back. In spite of his big efforts to advocate "title-rectifying," Confucius could not save the slave system from collapsing. Neither could Lin Piao's "rectifying titles" stem the triumphant advance of our socialist cause.

III

Original text. Confucius said: "When the common people are ruled by administrative order and restricted by punishment, they might not commit crimes even though they do not know crimes are shameful. When ruled by virtue and restricted by rites, the common people know what shame is and behave well."

Criticism. When the slave system was collapsing and the feudal system was rising in the last years of the Spring and Autumn Period, the Legalists put forward the line of rule of "law"—to rule the country by law—and advocated development of feudal ownership of land, the use of revolutionary violence to strike at the slave-owning aristocrats and the establishment of political power of the rising landlord class. Confucius did his utmost to prettify "virtue" and "rites" and used the reactionary idea of rule of "rites"* to oppose the Legalist thinking of rule of "law." This reflected the sharp opposition between the Confucian and Legalist lines at that time.

In eulogizing the rule of "rites," Confucius was simply using the hypocritical preachings of benevolence, righteousness and Virtue to covet up the barbaric and cruel dictatorship of the slave-owners. When the rulers of Chi and Lu (two ducal states in the Spring and Autumn Period, Lu being in the southern part of present-day Shantung Province and Chi in the northern part) attended a meeting of friendship in Chiaku, the slaves were ordered to entertain them with music and dancing. Confucius said that their music and dancing violated the rites of the Western Chou Dynasty and befuddled the rulers, and therefore the slaves should be put to death. So the slaves were executed there and then. Less than three months after he became acting prime minister of the State of Lu, Confucius killed the reformer Shaocheng Mou in 498 B.C. In murdering the representatives of the Legalists, the restorationist forces of the slave-owners killed Wu Chi with a volley of arrows in 381 B.C., killed Shang Yang (c. 390-338 B.C.) by tying his limbs to chariots driven in different directions, and killed Li Ssu by cutting him in half at the waist in 208 B.C. Countless numbers of working people also were killed. These sanguinary facts fully revealed the reactionary essence of Confucius' rule of "rites."

Harping on the same string used by the Confucianists to attack the Legalists, Lin Piao slandered the latter as "punishers" and clamoured that "he who relies on virtue will thrive and he who relies on force will perish." In doing this, his aim was opposing revolutionary violence, social change and the dictatorship of the proletariat. Both Lin-Piao and Confucius

were insidious reactionaries. While saying "he who relies on virtue will thrive," he was plotting to kill the revolutionary people. But the working class, armed with Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought, could neither be deceived by Lin Piao's hypocritical preachings about the rule of "virtue" and "benevolence and righteousness" nor frightened by his counter-revolutionary ferocious features. Since the struggle to smash the Lin Piao anti-Party clique, we have heightened, our ability to distinguish between genuine and false Marxism and understood still better the importance of strengthening the dictatorship of the proletariat.

IV

Original text: Confucius said: "I pass on what is ancient and do not create anything new. I have firm confidence in and love the ancient things."

Criticism. As Confucius saw it, all the old things were perfect and even the slightest changes should be prohibited. He advocated that people should follow the calendar of the Hsia Dynasty (c. 21st century-17th century B.C.), ride in carts built in the style of the Yin Dynasty (17th century-11th century B.C.), wear hats in the fashion of Chou Dynasty times and play music dating back to the times of Yu Shun (legendary leader of a tribal alliance in Chinese primitive times more than 4,000 years ago). What a vivid self-portrait of a "back to the ancients" maniac!

The diehard Confucius was the deadly enemy of all new-born things. He ardently trumpeted the reactionary idea of "having firm confidence in and loving the ancient things," attacked a series of social changes such as casting tripods bearing articles of punishment** and collecting the land tax***, and was dissatisfied even with the changed form of a wine cup. What he had "confidence" in was the declining system and what he "loved" were rotten things.

Tit for tat, the Legalists in the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period advocated that "when the situation changes things will change too"; they maintained that the old rules and old systems should not be followed and criticized the moribund "way of former kings" and the "rites of Duke Chou."**** The Legalist line of reform and corresponding measures conformed to the historical development of society at that time and thus played a progressive role.

Following in the footsteps of Confucius, Lin Piao energetically spread the fallacy that "the present is worse than the past," slandered the excellent situation since the start of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, venomously attacked and vilified socialist new things and frantically opposed the continued revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat. But historical dialectics is irresistible. **"With the support of the proletarian state power, the young shoots of Communism will not wither; they will grow and blossom into complete Communism."** (Lenin: *A Great Beginning*.)

The growth of any new-born thing has to go through difficulties and twists and turns. In trying for a restoration, the class enemy will naturally attack and sabotage socialist new things by every means. Influenced by the force of habit, some people in our revolutionary ranks often follow the conventional way and get into a rut. To consolidate and develop the successful results of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, we must deeply criticize the reactionary saying of "having firm confidence in and loving the ancient things," wipe out

its influence, give tremendous support to socialist new things and be promoters of revolution.

V

Original text. Tzu-hsia (a disciple of Confucius) said: "I heard from my teacher that life and death are preordained; wealth and honour come from heaven."

Criticism. Confucius spared no efforts to blare the idealist theory of the "will of heaven." According to this theory, people should believe that the ruling position of the slave-owning class was decided by "heaven" and could not be changed, and that the bloody rule of the slave-owners over the slaves was "preordained" and irresistible. By preaching the theory of the "will of heaven," he attempted to stamp out the conflagration of slave uprisings and prevent any revolutionary change by the emerging landlord class.

The reactionary ruling classes of the past in China all used Confucius' theory of the "will of heaven" as their magic weapon for ruling the people. They fabricated many proverbs propagating this theory such as "everything is preordained, nothing is disposed by man," and "what is preordained will be given you, what is not preordained will be out of your reach." They cursed the working people, calling them born "cheap bones" and "ill-fated devils." Sayings like these are extremely absurd and reactionary!

An old worker in our workshop who was an apprentice in the old society in Shanghai at 12 led a life worse than that of a beast of burden. He has been emancipated politically and economically since liberation and his family now lives a happy life. With profound understanding, he said: "We working people suffered much in the past. It was entirely the result of ruthless oppression and exploitation by the landlords and capitalists and had nothing to do with any so-called bitter fate. Our living is getting better and better. Is this because our fate has changed? Certainly not. It is because of the good leadership of Chairman Mao and the Communist Party and the good socialist system under the dictatorship of the proletariat. We do not rely on and believe in the will of heaven, but we rely on and believe in revolution."

The bourgeois careerist Lin Piao also desperately peddled the "will of heaven" theory. Styling himself a "heavenly horse" and a "genius," he wanted others to believe he was "endowed by heaven" and to accept his rule willingly. But his dream of restoration could never be realized. He finally died in a plane crash at Undur Khan in the People's Republic of Mongolia and met his shameless end.

VI

Original text. Confucius said: "The superior man stands in awe of three things: the will of heaven, great men and the words of the sages. As the inferior man does not know the will of heaven, he does not stand in awe of it. He shows no respect for the great men and looks down on the words of the sages."

Criticism. The "will of heaven," "great men" and "words of the sages" mentioned by Confucius are in fact the religious authority, political authority and reactionary ruling ideology of slave society. He tried to scare people with these three monstrous things and compel them to submit to the rule of the slave-owners for ever. He attacked the "inferior man" for not fearing these three things. He was correct on this point. The slaves and

Legalists had no fear of the so-called will of heaven, the political power of the slave-owning class was precisely what they wanted to overthrow, and the words of the sages were exactly what they wanted to criticize. What they did was to rise in revolution and rebellion.

“Standing in awe of the three things” or not was an important content in the class struggle and the two-line struggle for more than 2,000 years. Liuhsia Chih, outstanding leader of a slave uprising, refuted Confucius to his face and exposed that Confucius’ so-called “great men” and “sages” were merely “turmoil creators” and “the strong bullying the weak.” Speechless before this criticism, Confucius fled helter-skelter. Chen Sheng, the leader of the first great peasant uprising in Chinese history which took place in 209 B.C., said: “Are the kings, dukes, generals and prime ministers destined to be so?” He led the peasants in an uprising, negating the Confucian theory of the “will of heaven” by his revolutionary action. The Legalist Hsun Kuang (see “Contention Between Hsun Kuang and Mencius Is a Two-Line Struggle,” *Peking Review*, No. 44, 1974) put forward the concept of “making use of heaven by mastering its law of change,” a concept which affirmed that man would surely triumph over nature. The Legalist Wang An-shih in the Northern Sung Dynasty (960-1127) set forth the concept that “natural changes need not be feared, ancestral ways need not be followed and other people’s slanders need not be heeded.” Directly opposed to Confucius’ idea of “standing in awe of the three things,” this concept strongly refuted the attacks of the diehards and spread the idea of reform and change.

An agent of the landlord and capitalist classes, Lin Piao copied Confucius’ “standing in awe of the three things” and used this as his counter-revolutionary ideological weapon. He wanted people to believe the “will of heaven,” obey his counter-revolutionary statements and activities, and regard the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius he propagated as “truths.” In this way he energetically endeavoured to create public opinion for founding a fascist Lin dynasty. But, like Confucius who failed to save the slave system from destruction by trumpeting “standing in awe of the three things,” Lin Piao also could not avert failure by peddling this stuff.

VII

Original text. Confucius said: “Those born with knowledge rank highest. Those who acquire knowledge through learning rank lower. Those who have difficulty but learn rank still lower. Those who have difficulty and refuse to learn are the lowest—the common people.”

Criticism. Here Confucius shamelessly praised the slave-owners and viciously attacked the working people. This is out-and-out idealist apriorism.

Confucius talked about different ranks, actually he put people into only two ranks. One was the slave-owning aristocrats together with the so-called “sages” who were the natural rulers; the other embraced those born “stupid,” or slaves, who could only be ruled. In disseminating the idea that there were people “born with knowledge,” he was simply trying to defend and restore the slave system. In fact there is no such thing in the world—a “sage” “born with knowledge.” **“The lowly are most intelligent; the elite are most ignorant.”** The masses are the real motive force in creating history. Confucius, the “sage,” was an outright fool without learning and knowledge and a homeless dog chased everywhere. Liuhsia Chih derided him: “Haven’t you boasted that you are a genius

and sage born with knowledge? But you were twice chased out of the State of Lu, you could not remain in the State of Wei (a ducal state in the northern part of present-day Honan Province), you failed to find a way out in the State of Chi, and were besieged and hungry for days in Chen and Tsai (two ducal states in what is now the eastern part of Honan Province and a part of Anhwei Province). There is no place for you to stay in this vast world.... After all, what is your preaching worth?" These words stripped Confucius of his mask of "sage."

Taking over from Confucius, Lin Piao used the idealist theory of "genius" as his theoretical programme for usurping Party and state power and restoring capitalism. He boasted about the "particularly brilliant" head he was given by his "parents," and dressed himself up as a "genius" "born with knowledge." But the fact was he was a big Party tyrant and big warlord without any learning.

According to Marxist epistemology, correct ideas **"come from social practice, and from it alone; they come from three kinds of social practice, the struggle for production, the class struggle and scientific experiment."** (Mao Tsetung: *Where Do Correct Ideas Come From?*) We workers have a deep understanding of this point. When our No. 2 workshop was first built in 1959, most of its workers and staff members came from other trades and did not know how to make steel. Learning while doing, we gradually learnt the art of it and are now turning out several hundred kinds of steel as against a dozen at the beginning. Many experienced veteran workers can judge the temperature of the molten steel by its colour and the carbon content by its sparks. It has been proved by facts that true knowledge comes from practice and ability grows out of struggle. Great numbers of creations and inventions by us, the working people, constitute a powerful rebuttal to the theory of "genius" that some are "born with knowledge" as peddled by Confucius and Lin Piao.

VIII

Original text. Tseng Shen (a disciple of Confucius) said: "Every day I repeatedly examine myself from my innermost part and cultivate myself."

Criticism. This is the idealist method of self-cultivation.

Since Confucius and his later generations of disciples politically turned their faces backward and wanted to put back the clock, philosophically they had to stand the relation between knowledge and practice upside down. According to the Confucianists, the benevolence, righteousness, loyalty and sincerity they touted were all inherent in people's minds, and only by examining one's words and acts by such moral standards and digging out one's mistakes behind a closed door could one cultivate oneself to be a defender of the old system.

Lin Piao also made big efforts to peddle this Confucian "self-examination" method of cultivation and advocated that "if you want to solve problems, you should let revolution break out in the innermost part of your soul." According to this absurd remark, one's knowledge can be acquired and world outlook remoulded without taking part in the practice of the three great revolutionary movements and without studying Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought, and these can be achieved simply by "outbreaks in the innermost part of the soul." Here Lin Piao sang the same refrain as Liu Shao-chi did in his sinister book *Self-Cultivation*. By spreading this reactionary philosophy, Lin Piao tried to lead the masses

astray on to the road of "self-cultivation behind a closed door" so they would forget the Party's basic line and become docile tools of the bourgeoisie.

"The standpoint of life, of practice, should be first and fundamental in the theory of knowledge." (Lenin: *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*.) It is impossible to have correct knowledge or a scientific world outlook if one departs from social practice and does not study revolutionary theory. Take for example the old workers in our workshop who lived in the old society. Does their consciousness of class struggle and the two-line struggle come out of "outbreaks in the innermost part of the soul" touched off by "repeated examination and self-cultivation"? Certainly not. Enslaved and persecuted at every turn in the old society by the landlords and capitalists, they know that the reactionary ruling classes will never change their nature, just like "tigers in the eastern or western mountains all devour people." Through repeated struggle, failure and renewed struggle, they have come to understand that they can liberate themselves and become masters of the country only by following the Communist Party to make revolution and overthrow the reactionaries. Led by the Party after liberation, they have studied Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought. Through many political movements which defeated successive attacks by monsters and ghosts, they have seen through the class enemies, who are just like "onions under the eaves whose hearts are still alive despite the scorched outer skin," and deepened their understanding of the Party's basic line. We members of the working class deeply understand that in order to continuously raise our consciousness of class struggle and the two-line struggle, we must diligently study works by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin and by Chairman Mao, actively take part in the practice of the three great revolutionary movements of class struggle, the struggle for production and scientific experiment, and persevere in the continued revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat.

(To be continued.)

* The rule of "rites" was a political idea of the Confucian school. It stressed absolute observance of the hierarchy, rituals and ceremonies under the slave system of the Western Chou Dynasty, strict distinction between the social position of the slave-owner and the slave and absolute obedience by the slave to the slave-owner. The slave-owning aristocrats at all levels had to be content with their rank and title and not overstep the limits set by them. ** This refers to casting iron tripods bearing articles of punishment. There was punishment in slave society but no proclaimed articles. The will of slave-owners was law and they were immune from punishment. Some representatives of the emerging landlord class in the Spring and Autumn Period wanted to work out some articles of punishment and proclaim them by casting them on tripods, so as to restrict and strike at the privileged status of the slave-owning aristocrats. *** This means collecting a military tax according to the area of land held by each household. At the time of slavery in China, all land belonged to the supreme ruler and was called "public domain." The supreme ruler distributed the "public domain" to the slave owners for their use according to their rank. With the development of the productive forces in the Spring and Autumn Period, a section of the slave-owners used the labour of their slaves to open up more land which became the "private land" of the slaveowners. At first, the rulers of the ducal states refused to recognize the legality of "private land." In 594 B.C. the ducal State of Lu in what is now Shantung Province began collecting tax according to the land area, irrespective of "public domain" and "private land." This measure objectively recognized the legality of feudal land ownership. **** Duke Chou worked out for the Western Chou Dynasty the institutions and systems which upheld the dictatorship of the slave-owning aristocrats. They were later known as the "rites of Duke Chou."