

## 47 A Horse-trade Secures the Cultural Revolution

(1965-66; age 71-72)

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went back nearly four decades – to 1929, when the two struck up an alliance to sabotage Zhu De, whom Lin Biao loathed and Mao was bent on dominating. From then on, a special crony relationship evolved between Mao and Lin. Mao tolerated an extraordinary degree of independence on Lin's part. For example, when Lin was in Russia during the Sino-Japanese War, he had spoken his mind to the Russians about Mao's unwillingness to fight the Japanese and how eager Mao was to turn on Chiang Kai-shek – an act Mao would never have swallowed from anyone else. During the Yenan Terror, Lin again did what no one else was allowed to: he simply removed his wife from detention and refused to let her be interrogated. Under Mao, everyone had to do humiliating 'self-criticisms' in public, but not Lin. In return for giving Lin this degree of licence, Mao expected him to come through for him in times of need, which Lin always did.

When Mao was launching the Great Leap Forward in 1958, he promoted Lin to be one of the Party's vice-chairmen, as a counterweight to his other colleagues. When former defence minister Peng De-huai challenged Mao over the famine in 1959, Lin's staunch backing for Mao ensured that few dared to take Peng's side. Mao then moved Lin in to replace Peng as defence minister. Throughout the famine, Lin propped up Mao's image by promoting the cult of Mao's personality, especially in the army. He invented the Little Red Book, a collection of very short quotations by Mao, as a mechanism of indoctrination. At the Conference of the Seven Thousand in 1962, Lin saved Mao's skin by championing the equivalent of papal infallibility for him. Afterwards, when Mao was laying the ground for his Great Purge, Lin continued to build the army into the bastion of the cult of Mao.

Lin lauded Mao to the skies in public, although he felt no true devotion to Mao, and at home would often make disparaging and even disdainful remarks about him, some of which he entered in his diary. It was out of pure ambition that Lin stood by Mao and boosted him – the ambition to be Mao's No. 2 and successor. He told his wife that he wanted to be 'Engels to Marx, Stalin to Lenin, and Chiang Kai-shek to Sun Yat-sen'. With the Great Purge, which had Liu, the president, as its primary target, Lin Biao could expect his advancement.

The man who was about to rise to the top suffered from many phobias and looked like a drug addict. His most extreme phobias were about water and air. His hydrophobia was so acute that he had not taken a bath for years, and would only be wiped with a dry towel. He could not stand the sight of the sea, which kept his contact with the navy to zero. He had a villa by the seaside, but it was located among hills, so that he would not actually see the sea. His residences

had numerous wind-sensitive devices hanging from the ceilings. One visitor was told by Mrs Lin to walk slowly in Lin's presence in case the stir of air when he moved triggered her husband's breeze phobia.

Lin was a man, as his own wife observed in her diary, 'who specialises in hate, in contempt (friendship, children, father and brother – all mean nothing to him), in thinking the worst and basest of people, in selfish calculation . . . and in scheming and doing other people down'.

The man Lin particularly hated as of 1965 was the army chief of staff, Luo Rui-qing, one of Mao's long-time favourites, whom Mao fondly called Luo the Tall. Mao often routed his orders to the army via Luo the Tall, even orders to Lin himself, which was partly the result of Lin often being out of action nursing his phobias. Luo the Tall was super-energetic as well as able – and had incomparable access to Mao. He had been Mao's top security man for years, and Mao had enormous confidence in him. 'As soon as Luo the Tall steps closer, I feel very safe,' Mao said. These were words not spoken lightly. Lin felt overshadowed, and had been plotting to get rid of the chief of staff for some time. When he received Mme Mao's call in November 1965, which signalled that Mao needed him for a major task, Lin Biao seized his chance. Four days later, he dispatched his wife to see Mao in Hangzhou (the Lins were staying nearby in the garden city of Suzhou), with a letter in his own hand, enclosing some extremely flimsy charges against Luo the Tall. Lin was asking Mao to sacrifice a highly valued retainer.

Mao had Lin Biao himself brought to Hangzhou, and on the night of 1 December the two men had an ultra-secret talk. Mao told Lin about his plans for the Great Purge, and promised to make Lin his No. 2 and successor. He told Lin he must make sure the army was fully under control – and be ready to assume a completely new role: to step in and take over the jobs of the huge number of Party officials Mao intended to purge.

Lin insisted that Luo the Tall must be purged as well. The fact that Lin drove such a hard bargain shows that both he and Mao understood his unique value. Without Lin, Mao could not bring off his Purge.

Mao had been trying hard, without success, to have one particular period opera condemned. This was called *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*, and was based on a traditional story of a mandarin who was punished by the emperor for having spoken up for the peasants. Mao accused it of being a veiled attack on what he (the 'emperor') had done to the purged defence minister Peng De-huai, and ordered it to be denounced,

along with Marshal Peng himself. An article to this effect was written with Mao's sponsorship, and published in Shanghai on 10 November 1965.

To Mao's fury, the article was not carried anywhere else in China. Province after province, even the capital, Peking, ignored it. They were able to do this because the culture overlord at the time, Peng Zhen (no relative of Peng De-huai), blocked it from being reprinted. Peng Zhen was a loyal long-time follower, trusted enough to hold the vital strategic job of mayor of the capital, and few men were closer to Mao. But while his allegiance does not seem to have been in question, Mayor Peng, who had been made national overseer of culture in 1964, was strongly averse to Mao's demands to annihilate culture. And being at the heart of things, he realised that this time Mao intended to use the field of culture to start a purge that would engulf the whole Party.

Mayor Peng cared about the Party. He was also gutsy. He even complained to foreigners about Mao, something quite amazing among the tight-lipped CCP leadership. When a Japanese Communist asked him about the *Hai Rui* opera, Mayor Peng replied that: 'It is not a political issue, but a historical play. Chairman Mao says it is a political issue. How troublesome!' This was unbelievably outspoken language for someone in the inner circle to use to an outsider.

With Mayor Peng taking the responsibility for blocking the Mao-sponsored article, even the *People's Daily* refused to reprint it. The editor, one Wu Leng-xi, knew that he was crossing Mao, as an eyewitness at a small meeting with him and Mao saw. Mao asked smokers to hold up cigarettes, and then said: 'It seems on this point too I am in the minority.' At that remark, the witness recalled, 'I saw Wu Leng-xi . . . turn chalky white, stop taking notes and go rigid. Something about what Mao had just said had frightened [him].'

And yet the editor held out for a week more, until Chou En-lai stepped in and ordered him to run the article, citing instructions from Mao. But the editor still managed to half-bury the article way back on page 5, in a section called 'Academic Discussions', which meant that it was not a Party order to start a persecution campaign. The editor ended up in prison. To his successor Mao said menacingly: 'Wu Leng-xi disobeyed me. And I wonder how you would behave.' The successor was so panic-stricken that he could not stammer out what he wanted to say: 'I will definitely obey Chairman Mao.'

The fact that an article so overtly sponsored by Mao was treated in this way showed the degree of resistance he was facing from very powerful forces in the Party. Mao needed a system to carry out his will, and that made Lin Biao's instant help essential. Lin knew it, and he knew what he wanted in return: Chief of Staff Luo must suffer. So

Mao conceded, even though Luo the Tall had been ultra-loyal, and Mao needed such men more than ever at this of all times. But Lin was the man he could not do without: there was no one with comparable clout who would do Mao's bidding. Luo the Tall was able and loyal, but he was not a marshal, and did not have long-established prestige in the army, and so he was sacrificed.

On 8 December, Mrs Lin Biao addressed a Politburo meeting chaired by Mao, and spoke for a full ten hours about the alleged crimes of Luo the Tall, accusing him of having 'bottomless' ambitions, starting with coveting Lin's job as defence minister. For Lin's wife to play such a role at a Politburo meeting was unheard-of, as she was neither a Politburo member nor even a high official, and wives of the top leaders had till now been kept very much in the background.

Luo the Tall was not present at the meeting. When he learned about his downfall, his legs turned to jelly. This powerfully built man was unable to walk upstairs. He was put under house arrest.

For his family, a nightmare began. One day very soon after this, his daughter, who attended a boarding school and had not heard the news about her father, was cycling home across Beihai Bridge opposite Zhongnanhai. The arch was flanked by elegant carved white marble balustrades. Through the dense dust borne by the cold wind from Siberia, she noticed three boys riding after her, close friends whose parents were also friends with hers. As they passed by her, they turned round and fixed her with a look of such coldness and disdain that it nearly knocked her off her bicycle. They knew something which she did not — that her father was now an enemy. That look, chilling, cruel, intended to hurt and break, from people whom only yesterday one had assumed to be friends, was to become a hallmark of the forthcoming years.

But Lin Biao was still not satisfied with the level of pain inflicted on Luo the Tall. He asked Mao to have Luo condemned for the equivalent of high treason: 'wanting to usurp the Party and state'. Mao was reluctant to allow this, as to do so would mean casting his old stalwart away irrevocably. So, for a few months, Luo the Tall was not charged with treason.

Lin therefore held back about helping Mao. When Mme Mao came to see him on 21 January 1966 about writing the planned 'manifesto' against the arts in the name of the army, he made a show of willingness, and assigned a few writers from the army, but behind her back he told them: 'Jiang Qing is sick . . . and paranoid . . . Just listen to what she says and say as little as you can . . . Don't make any criticisms about how the arts are run . . .' As a result, when their draft was submitted to Mme Mao in February, she called it 'totally useless'.

Meanwhile, Mao was getting desperate. That same February, with the backing of Liu Shao-chi, Mayor Peng issued a national 'guideline' forbidding the use of political accusations to trample on culture and the custodians of culture. Moreover, he went further, and actually suppressed Mao's instructions aimed at starting a persecution campaign. The obstruction from the Party was being highly effective.

Nor was this all. As soon as he issued the guideline, Mayor Peng flew to Sichuan, ostensibly to inspect arms industries relocated in this mountainous province. There he did something truly astonishing. He had a secret tête-à-tête with Marshal Peng who had been banished there the previous November when Mao began clearing the decks for the Great Purge. What the two Pengs talked about has never been revealed, but judging from the timing, and the colossal risk Mayor Peng took in visiting a major foe of Mao's, without permission, *in secret*, it is highly likely that they discussed the feasibility of using the army to stop Mao.

Although Marshal Peng was under virtual house arrest and was powerless, he still commanded great respect and loyalty in the army, especially among his old subordinates. While he was under house arrest in Peking, a few of them, including one man high up in Mao's security apparatus, had risked a lot to see him.

News of the clandestine visit by Mayor Peng to the marshal may not have reached Mao's ears, but he certainly suspected Mayor Peng was up to something in Sichuan, and his suspicions deepened when Marshal Ho Lung, the man to whom Soviet defence minister Malinovsky had said 'Get rid of Mao', soon also went to Sichuan, also in the name of inspecting the arms industries. Mao suspected a conspiracy was being cooked up down there, and soon accused his opponents of hatching a plot, dubbed 'the February military coup'.\* Mao's state of mind was shown by the dosage of sleeping pills he was now taking, which rose to ten times his normal, to a level that could kill an average man.

And there was more that was gnawing at Mao's mind. It seems that Mayor Peng was contemplating getting in touch with the Russians, and may have thought of seeking Russian help to avert Mao's Purge. The Kremlin had invited the CCP to attend the next Soviet Party congress (the 23rd) in April 1966. Mao's colleagues knew that ever since Malinovsky's remarks in November 1964, Mao did not want any of them to go to Russia, in case they colluded with the Kremlin against him, and so they had recommended declining the invitation.

\* This suspicion sealed the fate of Sichuan chief Li Jing-quan, who was supposed to be Peng De-huai's minder. Li, who had been one of Mao's favourites, suffered greatly in the years ahead, and his wife committed suicide.

But in early March 1966, after his secret meeting with Marshal Peng in Sichuan, Mayor Peng revised this position, with the agreement of President Liu Shao-chi, and suggested to Mao that the Party should consider accepting the invitation. This was an extraordinary shift, and undoubtedly deepened Mao's suspicions. Mayor Peng was soon accused of trying to 'liaise with a foreign country' and 'attempt a coup'. Mao's anxiety can hardly have been assuaged when the new Soviet ambassador, Sergei Lapin, with whom President Liu had earlier had an unusually frank talk, contrived an unscripted encounter with Liu on the tarmac at Peking airport on 24 February 1966 as they were awaiting the arrival of Ghana's President Kwame Nkrumah (who had been overthrown in a coup that same day). Lapin said he had an invitation for the Chinese to the Soviet congress. 'Give me the document,' Liu replied. Lapin said it was at the embassy; but all subsequent efforts to get it to Liu failed.

Mao was already suspicious that there might be a vast conspiracy between his colleagues and Moscow against him. The previous November, in the opening stage of the Purge, one of his first moves had been to fire the man who handled the leadership's communications with Moscow, the Russian-speaking director of the Central Secretaries' Office, Yang Shang-kun, and exile him to Canton, in the far south. Later, Yang was grilled intensely in prison about contacts with Moscow, as were the leadership's Russian-language interpreters.

There was one thing in Yang's past that especially roused Mao's suspicion. Yang's office had tape-recorded Mao. Mao did not want any record kept of what he said and did, unless it was carefully sanitised. In the old days, he would light a match to telegrams once they were sent. After he came to power, he would constantly ask his listeners not to take notes. But this caused insoluble problems, as Mao's words were commands, and the absence of written records made it hard for subordinates to know what he had really said and thus, at times, to carry out his orders. So he had to allow some of what he said to be noted down or taped. With Mao's approval, Yang's office began installing recording systems in the late 1950s. But a couple of years later, the tape operator unwisely teased a girlfriend of Mao's about overhearing her with Mao on his train. 'I heard everything,' he claimed, though in fact he had not. The girlfriend told Mao, who instantly ordered the systems dismantled and the tapes destroyed.\* All Mao's houses and cars were combed for bugs. Although none was found, Mao was not

\* Although most were kept, and the man in charge told us that he privately saw to it that the ones destroyed were first transcribed. This was accomplished with the approval of his superior, who, it so happened, was Mayor Peng Zhen, who said: 'I'll just tell the Chairman they are all destroyed.'

convinced. He suspected the taping was part of a plot linked with President Liu and the Russians. All those involved would in time be interrogated, quite a few meeting gruesome deaths.

In March 1966, all the strands of Mao's suspicions meshed together. In January Brezhnev had visited Mongolia – the first Soviet leader ever to do so – and had been joined there by none other than defence minister Malinovsky, the man who had put out the feeler about ditching Mao. Brezhnev had never had dealings with Mao, but knew Liu Shao-chi, having been Liu's host when he visited Russia for a summit of the world Communist parties in 1960. Brezhnev, then No. 2 to Khrushchev, had spent more than a week with Liu travelling in Russia and to the Soviet Far East on the Trans-Siberian train, and the two had got on well. Now Brezhnev signed a military treaty with Mongolian chief Yumjaagiyn Tsendenbal. Russian units were moved into Mongolia and stationed only about 500 km from Peking, across open country, accompanied by ground-to-ground missiles, apparently armed with nuclear warheads. Tsendenbal, who had been on the receiving end of Mao's plots to overthrow him earlier in the 1960s, volunteered to carry the fight against 'the Mao clique' into China itself.

This was a real crisis for Mao, and he needed forceful support from Lin Biao – at once. He consented to Lin's demand to have Chief of Staff Luo condemned for 'treason'. On 18 March, Luo threw himself off the roof of his house, in a failed attempt to kill himself. This was regarded, as always, as 'betraying' the Party, and qualified him for the nastiest punishment. Later, he was subjected to mass denunciation meetings, and as he had broken both ankles when he jumped off the roof, he would be dragged up onto the stage in a big basket, his crippled feet dangling over the rim, oozing blood.

The day after Luo's suicide attempt, Mme Mao wrote to Lin Biao asking him to endorse her 'kill culture' manifesto, which Mao himself had meantime revised, writing Lin's name into the heading ('Comrade Lin Biao Has Authorised Comrade Jiang Qing to . . .') so as to highlight Lin's backing. Lin endorsed it at once in writing, and before the end of the month he had presented a formal demand to the Party, in the name of the army, for a comprehensive purge.

This move by Lin propelled another crucial man into affirming his stand. This was Chou En-lai, who had so far managed to maintain an ambivalent position. Chou now told Mayor Peng that he, Chou, was with Mao. It was with Chou on board that the unbeatable trio of Mao, Marshal Lin and Chou was complete, thus dooming any hope of resistance.

On 14 April 1966, Mme Mao's 'kill culture' manifesto was made

public. A month later, the Politburo met to rubber-stamp the first list of victims of the Great Purge, four big names described as an 'anti-Party clique': Mayor Peng, Chief of Staff Luo, Yang Shang-kun, the liaison with Russia and the tape-recording suspect, and old media chief Lu Ding-yi. Mao did not bother to come to the occasion, and just ordered it to pass a document he had had prepared condemning the four. A fatalistic atmosphere dominated the gathering, which included two of the four-man 'clique' and was actually chaired by Liu Shao-chi, who knew he was chairing an event that was ultimately going to bring him to ruin, even though for now he was not named. For once, his steely Communist training failed him. With unwontedly visible anger, he made a protest aimed at Mao: 'we are ordered to discuss this document, but no revision is allowed . . . Is this not dictatorial?' He then asked Mayor Peng, who was condemned by name in the document, whether he had 'any complaints'. The mayor, who had acted so bravely up to now, answered: 'No complaints.' Liu gave him another chance to say something by asking: 'Are you for it or against it?' The mayor hung his head and was silent. Liu then asked all in favour to raise their hands. All did, including Mayor Peng and Liu himself.

The members of the 'clique' were soon hauled off and incarcerated. Mao's cynicism about his case is revealed in a conversation he had the following month with Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh. Mao claimed the four men 'are with the Nationalists'. When Ho queried this absurd assertion, Mao replied, without batting an eyelid: 'We still do not have firm evidence, but just a suspicion of sorts.'

At this May Politburo gathering it was Lin Biao who acted as Mao's intimidator. Raising his clenched fist, he surveyed the audience threateningly, and announced that anyone opposing Mao must be 'put to death . . . the whole country must call for their blood'. His speech was larded with coarse personal abuse, with foes referred to simply as 'sons of bitches'.

Most unusually, in the speech Lin spoke explicitly about the possibility of a coup d'état, a subject which was normally taboo. Mao had him talk in this way in order to knock any lingering dreams of a palace coup on the head. Mao had been making preparations against a coup for years, Lin disclosed, and particularly 'in recent months', when Mao had 'paid special attention to the adoption of many measures toward preventing a . . . coup'. Mao had 'deployed troops and key personnel . . . and made arrangements in critical departments like radio stations, the army and the police. This is what Chairman Mao has been doing in the past few months . . .' He also divulged that Mao had taken the possibility of a coup so seriously that he (Mao) had 'lost sleep for many days'.

Mao had indeed been making arrangements to forestall a coup.

Army units officered by Lin men had been moved into the capital. 'We transferred two more garrison divisions [into Peking],' Mao told Albania's defence minister. 'Now in Peking we have three infantry divisions and one mechanised division, altogether four divisions. It is only because of these that you can go anywhere, and we can go anywhere.' The Praetorian Guard was drastically purged, including three deputy chiefs, one dying a terrible death, two barely surviving. The only person left unscathed was its chief, Mao's trusted chamberlain Wang Dongxing. Likewise, in the only other organisation with access to weapons, the police, chiefs of both the ministry and its Peking bureau were arrested, because they had had ties to President Liu in the past. Another victim of Mao's precautions was the ethnic Mongolian chief of Inner Mongolia, Ulanhu. This province occupied a vital position bordering on Russia's satellite Mongolia. Ulanhu was detained that fateful May.

While shoring up Mao, Lin Biao also attended to some personal business. Apart from Chief of Staff Luo, there was another member of the four-man 'clique' he hated: media chief Lu Ding-yi, and for a rather unusual reason. Lu Ding-yi's wife was a schizophrenic who was fixated on Mrs Lin, and had written the Lins over fifty scabrous anonymous letters claiming that Mrs Lin had had a string of affairs, including one with Wang Shi-wei, the dissident leader of the young volunteers in Yanan, and that Lin might not be the father of their children. Some of the letters were addressed to the Lins' children, with lewd descriptions of their mother's alleged sex life, some signed with the name of Dumas' avenger, 'Monte Cristo'. Instead of receiving mental treatment, which was what she clearly needed, Mrs Lu was arrested on 28 April 1966, and went through hell for the next twelve years.

At one session of the May Politburo gathering, Lin had a document placed in front of the participants. It read:

I solemnly declare:

1. Ye Qun [Mrs Lin] was a pure virgin when she married me. Since then, she has always been proper;
2. Ye Qun had no love relationship whatsoever with Wang Shi-wei;
3. Tiger and Dodo are blood son and daughter of mine with Ye Qun;
4. Everything written in the counter-revolutionary letters by [Mrs Lu] is rubbish.

Lin Biao

14 May 1966.

It was the first time such a colourful text had ever come before the Politburo.

Although this behaviour seems ludicrous, it had a practical aim. Lin was clearing his wife's name, as she was now to be a fixture on the political scene, acting as his representative. He himself disliked attending meetings, or seeing people.

Mrs Lin was a rather batty woman, a bundle of energy who received little love from the marshal and lived in a state of unremitting sexual frustration. She grew to be erratic, and managed to drive her own daughter, Dodo, to attempt suicide more than once, the first time in 1964. Like Mme Mao, who was also hysterical from frustration, Mrs Lin now sought compensation and fulfilment in political scheming and persecution, although she was less awful than Mme Mao. She acted as her husband's assistant, and issued orders on his behalf.

Mao's Great Purge was rolling thanks to a horse-trade with his crony Lin Biao.