

Discussion

Did Mao or Chou attend Russell's lectures in China?

by *Chi-chun Hu*

IN HIS BOOK, *The Life of Bertrand Russell*, Mr. Ronald Clark says, "In Peking he [Russell] gave five 'official' lectures.... It is reputed that both Mao Tse-tung and Chou En-lai attended."¹ And Mr. Christopher Farley, Russell's last secretary, also says, "... he lectured to the young Mao Tse-tung in China."²

Are these statements true?

Before this question can be answered, we must review some historically relevant facts.

- Fact I: After serving as a librarian's aide for a few weeks at Peking University, Mao Tse-tung returned to Changsha, Hunan, via Shanghai, in July 1920. He stayed there until the next summer when he went to Shanghai to attend the Chinese Communist Party's First Congress in early July 1921.
- Fact II: After his release from jail, Chou En-lai joined a group of Chinese students who left for France in October 1920 under the auspices of the work-study program. He stayed in Europe until 1924.
- Fact III: Russell arrived in Shanghai on 13 October 1920 and left Peking for Japan on 11 July 1921. Before starting his "official" lectures in Peking, he had given lectures in Shanghai, Hangchow, Nanking, and Changsha. In Changsha, he did not stay more than twenty-four hours. During those hours he gave a lecture to an educational conference there. That was 25 October 1920.

We do not know the exact date and place Chou left for France. If Chou

¹ Ronald W. Clark, *The Life of Bertrand Russell* (New York: Knopf, 1976), p. 389.

² Christopher Farley, "Bertrand Russell: Reminiscences and Reflections", in *Russell in Review*, ed. J. E. Thomas and K. Blackwell (Toronto: Hakkert, 1976), p. 20.

departed from Shanghai (not from Tientsin) after Russell's arrival, it was not logically impossible, although quite improbable, for him to attend Russell's Shanghai lectures. He could not have attended Russell's lectures in Changsha, let alone in Peking.

According to facts I and III, both Russell and Mao were in the same city, Changsha, on 25 October 1920. In a letter of 1 December 1920, Mao criticized Russell's speech made in Changsha in October.³ He probably attended Russell's lecture there but possibly obtained Russell's opinions from newspapers. He could not have attended Russell's lectures anywhere else in China.

We do not know conclusively if Mao attended Russell's lecture in Changsha or if Chou attended his speeches in Shanghai. In accordance with the said historical facts, neither Mao Tse-tung nor Chou En-lai attended Russell's lectures in Peking. That was impossible.

Taiwan

³ Li Jui, *The Early Revolutionary Activities of Comrade Mao Tse-tung*, trans. Anthony W. Sariti and ed. James C. Hsiung; intro. Stuart R. Schram (White Plains, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1977; 1st published in Peking, 1957), p. 150. For the text of Mao's criticisms of Russell's lecture, see Stuart R. Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung*, rev. ed. (New York: Praeger, 1969), pp. 296-8 (which contain the reference to their original, full publication).