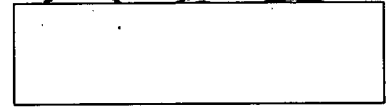


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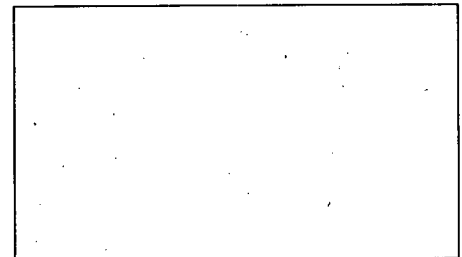


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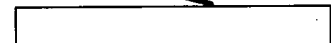
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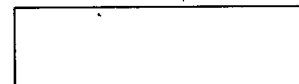
THE ROLE OF THE RED GUARDS AND REVOLUTIONARY
REBELS IN MAO'S CULTURAL REVOLUTION

(Reference Title: POLO XXXIV)

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THE ROLE OF THE RED GUARDS AND
REVOLUTIONARY REBELS IN MAO'S CULTURAL REVOLUTION

MEMORANDUM TO RECIPIENTS:

Mao Tse-tung's "great proletarian cultural revolution" can best be understood as the aging dictator's reaction to real and imagined opposition to his will within the Chinese Communist Party and Chinese society at large. To cleanse the party, and to imbue it and the nation with a new revolutionary fervor, Mao initiated a massive purge which convulsed China for more than two years.

The shock troops of this purge were the Red Guards, publicly surfaced at a Peking mass rally on 18 August 1966, and the Revolutionary Rebels, who swung into action later in the year as reinforcements for the youthful fanatics. These groups, from whose ranks some new party and government cadres were to be selected, were themselves expected to be purified in the course of the artificial revolution.

A revitalized nation of one mind and intuitively responsive to Mao's will has not emerged from the violence and turmoil of the purge. What has emerged is a China bereft of many of the instruments of authoritarian control, with a younger generation motivated in many instances not by Mao's thought and visions of self-sacrifice, but by considerations of political self-advancement and material well-being.

This brief report provides the major findings of a larger study of the origins, activities, and purposes

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of the Red Guards and Revolutionary Rebels, and of how those groups related to the broader phenomenon, the cultural revolution. The more detailed study, bearing the same title but published separately as POLO XXXIII, carried a higher classification. Both reports were produced solely by the Special Research Staff. The research analyst in charge was Dennis J. Doolin.

John Kerry King
Chief, DD/I Special Research Staff

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In August 1966, Mao Tse-tung unleashed his Red Guard blitzkrieg against the Party apparatus throughout China. Egged on by Madame Mao and her Cultural Revolution Group (CRG) lieutenants, the young students were given a carte blanche to purge "anti-Party and anti-socialist bourgeois authorities" and to "drag out" and "struggle" any provincial Party leader who "stands in the way of the great cultural revolution." Assured that all of their actions in defense of Mao and the cultural revolution were correct, the Red Guards vowed to "turn the old world upside down, smash it to pieces, pulverize it, create chaos and make a tremendous mess, the bigger the better!"

They kept their word. During the latter months of 1966, China was convulsed by a frenzy of Red Guard activity. Some nine million provincial youths conducted "liaison" to Peking, caught a glimpse of Mao at one of the mass rallies, and received "instructions" to "make revolution" upon returning home. At the same time, elite Red Guard units from Peking University, Tsinghua, Peking Aviation Institute, and other institutions in the capital fanned out into the provinces to organize local militants for an assault on the Party apparatus.

Serious difficulties beset the Red Guard movement from the start. First, the "instructions" given the young fanatics by Central leaders were purposely vague and all-inclusive (only Mao and his coterie were immune from attack). Indeed, they were nothing less than strident exhortations to "rebel" against anyone or anything that the Red Guards believed to be antithetical to the new Maoist order. As a result, when Mao later desired to stop the indiscriminate Red Guard onslaught, he had great difficulty in doing so.

Second, many Peking Red Guards who visited other cities attempted to exercise control over local cultural revolution activities. In at least two provinces, Party leaders were pre-targeted by the Maoists and, as such, were attacked by the outsiders as soon as the latter

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arrived on the scene. At a minimum, this imperious behavior was resisted, for local Red Guards, even if they agreed concerning the targets, felt quite able to "struggle" them without being told what to do by outsiders. In other areas, local Red Guards did not agree with the outsiders' black lists and came to the defense of those under attack. In still other provinces, officials organized Red Guards for the specific purpose of defending the Party apparatus against the outsiders' onslaughts. Added to this was the innate hostility of some Chinese (such as the Cantonese) toward their fellows from other parts of the country.

Finally, given the effusive praise showered upon them by Central leaders and official media during the period following the first mass rally on 18 August 1966, many Red Guards did not realize--and many more did not accept--the fact that while they were the instrument of the purge, Mao never empowered them to determine which officials were to survive as "revolutionary cadres." Although open to advice, Mao, Lin Piao, and the Central CRG reserved the right to make the final determination.

By early October (1966), it was clear that the cultural revolution was not going according to plan. In many areas, the violent Red Guard assaults on the Party apparatus during the previous month or so had produced only increased resistance on the part of those under attack. If Mao had expected a relatively easy victory--with provincial leaders meekly enduring the young fanatics' outrages, debasing their persons and their careers with "self-criticisms," and then passively awaiting the Chairman's verdict as to whether or not they had "passed the test"--he had been proven wrong. Certain correctives were required, and Mao approached the problem on two levels--proffering "forgiveness" (at the October Work Conference) to those who corrected their "errors," while at the same time sharpening the weapon that would cut down those who continued to oppose his cultural revolution.

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After the conclusion of the Work Conference, the Maoists turned their attention to the establishment of Revolutionary Rebel organizations consisting primarily of workers--rather than students--in industrial, mining, Party, and governmental organs throughout the country in order to bolster the Red Guards and erode the bases of support for local authorities. In one important sense, the newly-formed Revolutionary Rebel organizations succeeded all too well. The "Rebels" proved that they could tear down established structures very effectively, but they were incapable of working together to build a new order. Nowhere was this demonstrated more clearly than in Shanghai, regarded by Mao as second in importance only to Peking itself, for by the end of December, China's largest city was in chaos. The old Party and governmental apparatus was moribund; public security and military forces were powerless to control competing Rebel groups; production and essential services ground to a halt.

By early January 1967, the mess in Shanghai had become so serious as to require a "power-seizure" for which, it soon became clear, the Maoists were poorly prepared. In effect, the "power-seizure" was a rescue operation, and Mao's new team in Shanghai--headed by two members of the Central CRG--faced the formidable task of pacifying a city and re-establishing central authority over a populace whose desires were often in conflict with Mao's objectives in the purge.

Almost immediately, revolutionaries throughout China were told to emulate their Shanghai counterparts, thereby leading to a series of "power-seizures," accompanied by much bloodshed and violence, in almost every province and major city. Although the Maoists had stated repeatedly that there were only a "handful" of "capitalist-roaders" to be dealt with, the Revolutionary Rebels and Red Guards heard only the call to "seize power," and thus subjected to severe attacks nearly all officials, a number of whom were later declared to be "good comrades" and retained by Mao in positions of considerable responsibility. This

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led to a deep-seated and continuing hostility on the part of many Red Guard and Revolutionary Rebel organizations toward those appointed to the Revolutionary Committees-- the new organs of power--established (often with great difficulty) since January of 1967, for those who have survived the purge have, by and large, been assigned to posts in the same province where they had been under attack.

A major reason for the failure of many "power-seizures" was the fact that a given Rebel faction or alliance usually attempted to seize power only for itself. This often led to a second round in which the excluded faction or factions would attempt to wrest control away from those who had carried out the initial seizure.

A second problem centered around just what Mao meant by "power-seizure." It may be that he really believed that the young toughs, armed with his "thought," could seize and exercise power in an effective manner. If so, Mao could not have been more wrong. On the other hand, he may have meant only for the militants to supervise the work of Party and government cadres and keep them at their posts until a determination was made (by Mao or his lieutenants, not by the Red Guards) with regard to their loyalty. If this was what Mao had in mind, and it seems the more likely alternative, he must have been rudely shaken by the self-seeking behavior of his "revolutionary young generals." The Revolutionary Rebels had failed, as had the Red Guards before them.

Accordingly, on 23 January 1967, Peking ordered the PLA to restore order and end the increasingly severe conflicts between rival Rebel organizations. It is not known what criteria were supposed to be employed in determining which mass organizations were to be supported and which were to be suppressed. However, it appears that local PLA commanders were given considerable latitude in this regard, and that their decisions were almost certainly influenced by the attitudes which the Red Guards and Revolutionary Rebels had already displayed toward the military authorities.

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Unfortunately for some military commanders, much of the violence was perpetrated, or at least initiated, by the more militant Red Guard groups. Thus, when a number of organizations that had been suppressed by the PLA were later restored to favor by Mao and the Central CRG, the responsible military commanders had to pay for their earlier "errors," although there is good evidence that at the time even Mao and his inner circle did not know which group or groups to support in some areas.

It soon became apparent that the PLA, from Mao's point of view, had carried out the 23 January directive too well. In other words, too much order had been restored; too many Red Guards had been coerced by the military; too many Party and government officials had been confirmed in their posts (conversely, too few "revolutionaries" had seized and retained power). To correct this situation, the Red Guards and Revolutionary Rebels were again given the go-ahead in mid-March. This time around, the initial target was the so-called "adverse current of counter-revolutionary restoration"--that is, the phenomenon of "false power-seizures" in a number of provinces, whereby the attempt was made to reinstate large numbers of Party officials, even though many if not most of them had not gone through the prerequisites of "rehabilitation" (being "struggled," composing abject self-criticisms, and willingly accepting "supervision" by the "revolutionary masses"). The next step was to order the PLA to construct "three-way alliances" of Revolutionary Rebels, PLA, and revolutionary cadres as a prerequisite for a second, genuine "power-seizure" at all levels.

At the same time, official media intensified the attack on Liu Shao-chi ("China's Khrushchev") in an attempt to provide a specific enemy against which the entire revolutionary Left could unite in opposition. However, the hatreds that had been generated during the "seize-power" period were too deep-seated to be eliminated or assuaged in most cases, and the PLA had been rendered incapable--by the restrictions placed on it--of firmly channeling the Revolutionary Rebels and Red Guards in the correct direction and against the correct targets. Thus, the

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rival revolutionary groups fell almost immediately to fighting among themselves, and several of the recently rehabilitated organizations turned their energies to settling accounts with those military commanders who had outlawed their units and arrested some of their members earlier on.

As a result of the deteriorating situation, a directive was issued on 6 June 1967 which stated that all those who continued to engage in armed struggles would be dealt with severely, but which did not authorize the PLA to open fire on groups that disregarded the order. As a result, the order was largely disregarded, as few groups were willing to stop fighting before they had defeated their rivals, thereby (they hoped) securing for themselves a place in the new order.

The basic problem appears to have been Mao's reluctance to acknowledge that much of the fighting was the result of the deep split within the ranks of the "revolutionary Left" itself. Thus, instead of ordering the PLA to move effectively against the troublemakers, Mao's policy throughout June and most of July 1967 was (a) to summon representatives of hostile factions to Peking where--it was hoped--they would work out their differences, and (b) to dispatch delegations of central leaders to settle disputes and promote "revolutionary great alliances" among competing Revolutionary Rebel and Red Guard organizations, a prerequisite for the establishment of "three-way alliances" of Revolutionary Rebels, PLA, and revolutionary cadres, thus making possible the formation of a new revolutionary organ of power.

One such delegation was sent to Wuhan, and it was there that events transpired which moved the cultural revolution into its most leftist stage to date. With regard to the two competing alliances there, the Central CRG opted for one side and declared that the other (the so-called "Million Heroes") was a "conservative" organization that had been erroneously supported by the Military Region commander and his subordinates. The delegation

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was to see to it that the Central CRG's decision was carried out, and that the Military Region leaders confessed their earlier "mistake." At least one of the PLA commanders refused, and this emboldened the "Million Heroes" to mount a protest against the decision, culminating in an assault on the leaders of the delegation and their detention.

As soon as the news reached Peking, several vessels of the East China Sea Fleet were ordered up river, and Chou En-lai arrived in Wuhan to secure the release of the prisoners. He was successful, and accompanied the battered delegation back to Peking the following day.

The Maoists' reaction to the Wuhan Incident was swift. The Military Region commander was immediately ordered to Peking, struggled, and broken, and the "Million Heroes" was condemned as a "counterrevolutionary" organization. At the same time, the reaction was extreme. On the day the delegation returned, for example, Madame Mao declared that the "revolutionary masses can use weapons in self-defense." Her statement was followed by a series of press attacks on the PLA, culminating in a Red Flag editorial on 1 August which stated that the movement to "overthrow and discredit . . . the handful of top persons in authority taking the capitalist road in the party and the army" now "represents the general orientation of the struggle." Finally, on 9 August, Lin Piao ordered PLA commanders to "seek instructions from and report to . . . Mao, the Central Committee, and the Central CRG" before acting on "any matter, large or small."

The call to overthrow the "handful" in the Party and the PLA, together with the new constraints placed on the army by Lin's directive, reduced China to a state of near-chaos, and the Maoists moved quickly to redress the balance in accordance with what came to be known as the Chairman's "great strategic plan." This major pronouncement, probably delivered in late August, is extremely important to an understanding of the course of the cultural revolution since September 1967, for several of Mao's major concerns in the summer of 1968 were

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identical with the key points set down in this "plan" of a year earlier.

According to Mao, the first order of business in the fall of 1966 had been criticism of the "bourgeois reactionary line," and the Red Guards had been the first to recognize this. In January 1967, however, heeding the call to seize power, the "workers of the whole country rose;" thus, "the principal force (now) lies with the workers and peasants," and the Red Guards must "recede to the subordinate position."

After the "power-seizures" of early 1967, Mao stated, the hope had been for a "prompt great alliance," but this had not been achieved because of the self-seeking activities of "intellectuals and young students" with their "petty-bourgeois and bourgeois ideas." And Mao then warned the Red Guards, "Unless they strive to reform their world outlook, things will run counter to their wishes."

Mao clearly stated that his "plan" did not signal the end of the cultural revolution, but rather that the movement must re-direct the attacks against "correct" targets, organize "revolutionary great alliances" and "three-way alliances," point out "bad persons and devils," and "rehabilitate Party organizations" and "convene Party congresses at all levels." He also made it plain that his call for further attacks against "capitalist-roaders" did not authorize the Rebels to attack the new revolutionary committees that were being established with such difficulty, and he called for careful political and ideological training to eliminate factionalism from the ranks of the "revolutionary Left."

Numerous directives were soon promulgated in an attempt to lower the level of violence and hasten the realization of Mao's "plan." Most important of all, the PLA was authorized to open fire on Rebels attempting to seize additional weapons, and was empowered to compel them to return all ordnance seized previously. In some provinces, public trials were held and criminal elements--including "juvenile delinquents" and "hoodlums using the names of

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revolutionary mass organizations"--were imprisoned or executed. In Peking, Madame Mao informed the Red Guards that "troops will be assigned to your schools to conduct military training"--that is, to shape up the young fanatics.

Finally, representatives of the contending factions, PLA commanders, and revolutionary cadres from various provinces were ordered to attend "Mao-study" classes in Peking. At these classes, Chou En-lai and the Central CRG put the participants through criticism and self-criticism, tried to secure their voluntary compliance with Mao's "plan," and attempted to hammer out compromises and "revolutionary great alliances" among the rival mass organizations.

The study classes, the deployment of additional army units, the reopening of the schools, the crackdown on all unauthorized revolutionary liaison, the directives ordering the dissolution of mass organizations that cut across functional or occupational lines, and the dispatching of urban Red Guards for resettlement in rural areas--these and other measures were instrumental in restoring relative calm by the end of 1967 to a number of areas where large-scale violence had been the rule during July and August.

As a result of the negotiations in Peking, 12 more revolutionary committees were set up at the provincial level during the first four months of 1968, bringing the total to 21 and leaving eight yet to be established. Concurrently, the campaign against the "twin evils" of anarchism and factionalism was greatly intensified, the purpose being to get on with the business of forming "revolutionary great alliances," reaching agreements on which cadres were "revolutionary" and thus eligible for inclusion in "three-way alliances," and defending and consolidating the revolutionary committees at all levels.

However, it must again be emphasized that when the Maoists called for the defense and consolidation of revolutionary committees, they did not mean (nor do they now mean) that the cultural revolution was nearing an end.

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Although anarchism and factionalism were roundly condemned, so were other "evils," including the fact that "bad elements" were still hidden within the ranks of the Party (thus indicating more purges). In sum, the Maoists wanted: (1) to terminate indiscriminate mass attacks on the revolutionary committees; (2) as required, to purge and streamline the committees, either directly from Peking or through continual personnel screenings by the committees themselves; (3) to put an end to factional clashes; (4) to stimulate revolutionary élan by further attacks on those already in disgrace; and (5) by means of the "Mao-study" classes, conducted in some areas by worker-soldier-cadre propaganda teams, to carry out "struggle-criticism-transformation" (criticism, self-criticism, reform) in a "penetrating way" within individual schools, factories, and offices. The cultural revolution was to continue--transformed, not abandoned--in a more manageable, compartmentalized fashion in order to consolidate the revolutionary committees and promote Red Guard and Revolutionary Rebel obedience to both central and provincial authority.

By mid-March, however, it became clear that the Maoists felt that the emphasis on restoring order had led to a loss of revolutionary fervor, thereby (in Mao's eyes) casting doubt on the loyalty and reliability of some revolutionary committee members, and had caused many people to believe that the cultural revolution would "victoriously" conclude with the establishment and consolidation of the committees. Accordingly, another militant phase was initiated, accelerated by the purge of Acting PLA Chief of Staff Yang Cheng-wu and two other high-ranking officers who exceeded their authority and ran afoul of the venomous Madame Mao and the Central CRG.

As the "anti-rightist" campaign began, emphasis was placed upon the important role yet to be played by the mass organizations as watchdogs of the performance of revolutionary committee members. However, this emphasis encouraged the Rebels to renew their factional clashes and undermined the already tenuous stability of the revolutionary committees. The result, in short, was not the controlled revolutionary upsurge that Mao desired.

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The conflagration in Kwangsi--where Vietnam-bound rail service was disrupted, arms shipments raided, trains derailed, and cities gutted--was the most ominous development of the "anti-rightist" campaign, and appears to have been the final outrage that caused Mao to authorize the PLA to move forcefully against the Red Guards throughout the country. Central directives of 13 June and 3 July 1968 ordered an immediate halt to the fighting, but rail outages were noted in Kwangsi as late as 25 July.

On 24 July, another central directive (approved by Mao) was issued concerning the situation in Shensi Province, where "counterrevolutionaries" were accused of bank robberies, arson, auto theft, incessant attacks on PLA units, and refusal to carry out Central Committee and Central CRG orders. Accordingly, the directive ordered: all "bad elements" to be severely punished; armed struggle to stop immediately and "all bands formed specially for armed struggle disbanded;" all stolen monies, weapons and equipment returned and production resumed; and "all mass organizations, collectives, and individuals to thoroughly and earnestly carry out the '3 July Directive' [regarding Kwangsi] approved by . . . Mao, and in no way violate it." In other words, the Kwangsi directive was not meant to apply to that area alone.

Finally, on 28 July, Mao made it absolutely clear that he was fed up with the Red Guard outrages. In a five-hour meeting with Red Guard leaders in Peking, Mao stated that the above-mentioned directives were applicable to the entire nation, and warned his audience that those who continued to resist would be declared to be counter-revolutionaries and destroyed. The Revolutionary Rebels and Red Guards, if allowed to continue as autonomous, self-seeking, and hostile factions, not only imperiled what had already been achieved, but also made it impossible for Mao to proceed with the cultural revolution and the radical restructuring of Chinese society according to his revolutionary obsession.

Events during August provided further confirmation that the working class had replaced the Red Guards as Mao's revolutionary vanguard. Worker-peasant propaganda teams, some with several thousand members and often armed, descended on universities and schools throughout the

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country. In some areas, the teams met with resistance, but the Rebels were overwhelmed by the PLA-backed workers, who were armed with Mao's clear authorization to restore order and reform the young militants. Some Rebel organizations began to announce their "voluntary disbandment," others were outlawed, and it became clear that such Red Guard activity as was permitted would henceforth be under the aegis of Red Guard congresses responsible to the revolutionary committees and not left to autonomous factions. Finally, hundreds of thousands of university and middle-school students were (and continue to be) dispatched forcibly for rectification in rural areas--communes, villages, mines, and PLA farms.

By early September, Red Guard-related violence was at a lower level than at any time since August of 1966. At the same time, with order basically restored, official media and central leaders began to caution that worker propaganda teams were not to engage in the indiscriminate suppression of Red Guards and intellectuals. Events during October provided further indications that Mao continued to envisage an essential--though much diminished--role in the cultural revolution for a streamlined, revolutionary, and responsive Red Guard organization.

Twenty-six years ago, in his address at the Yen-an Conference of Writers and Artists in May of 1942, Mao had declared:

Whenever I compare unreformed intellectuals with workers, peasants, and soldiers, I feel that not only are there many unclean things in the minds of the intellectuals but also that their bodies are unclean. The cleanest people are the workers and peasants, even though their hands may be soiled and their feet smeared with cow dung. Anyway, they are still cleaner than the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie.

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Later events intensified Mao's distrust of China's intellectuals. In 1957, during the short-lived liberalization of the "Hundred Flowers" Movement, some of the most outspoken criticism of Party policy came from students and faculty of the China People's University, a "model university" established in February 1950 for the specific purpose of training "revolutionary" intellectuals of worker-peasant background to become cadres for national construction.

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Mao's long-standing views with regard to the intellectuals' strengths and weaknesses were reinforced by the performance of the Red Guards during the course of the cultural revolution to date. In the initial, destructive phase, Mao exploited the young students' revolutionary zeal and used the Red Guards as a unique extra-Party instrument to subject the elite to an ordeal by fire--a test to determine whether or not high-ranking members of the Party were worthy to be declared revolutionary successors and hence eligible for positions of responsibility in the new revolutionary order.

While it would be too much to say that the cultural revolution has followed a precise master plan--

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there have been too many tactical adjustments and shifts along the way--it is clear that Mao envisaged two distinct phases from the start: destructive and constructive. The Red Guards were Mao's vanguard during the destructive phase, but proved to be a woefully defective instrument during the constructive phase.

Mao's disillusionment with the Red Guards became apparent after their dismal, self-seeking performance during the initial "power-seizures" of early 1967, and was intensified by their indiscriminate internecine warfare during the following summer. Time and again, Mao ordered the young students to rectify themselves voluntarily. They did not do so, thereby confirming in Mao's mind his assessment of the negative qualities of China's intellectuals.

As early as 1939, Mao had written that the sole criterion by which to judge whether or not a youth is revolutionary is if he is "willing to integrate himself with the broad masses of workers and peasants and does so in practice." The Red Guards had not been willing to do so. Thus, Mao replaced them with a new vanguard--the working class--when he decided that the time had come to start building and consolidating his new revolutionary order, and he forcibly dispatched the young intellectuals to rural areas by the hundreds of thousands for further "revolutionary purification." The Red Guards as a terroristic device had outlived their usefulness.

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