

The Workers Dreadnought

In Memoriam: Jorge Palacios

(November 3, 1926 – May 5, 2014)

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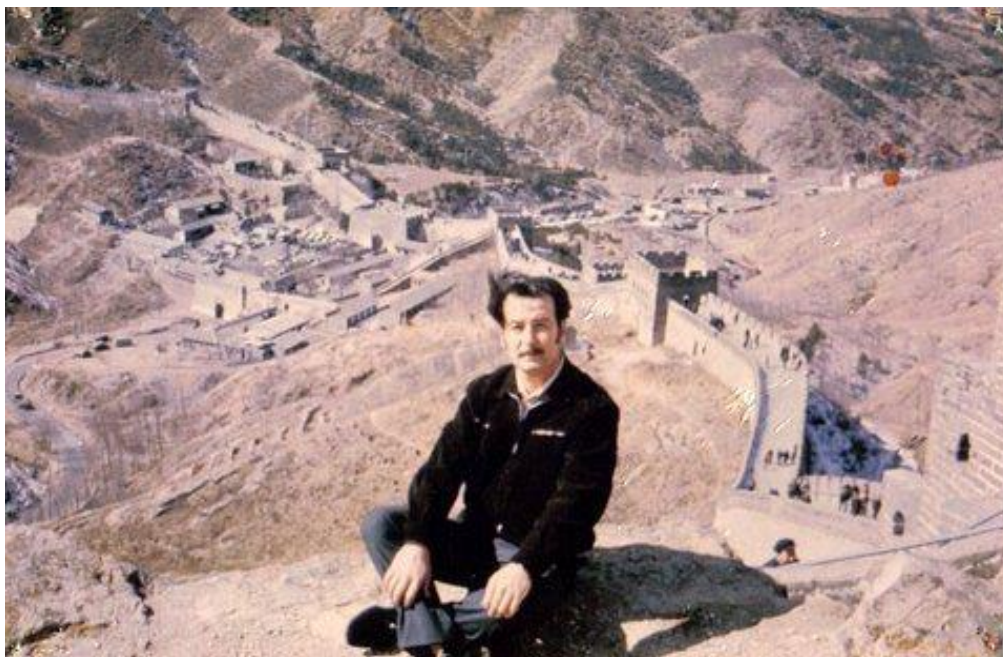


On September 11, I had written a post about the 1973 coup in Chile. At the time I had mentioned that I had not yet read Jorge Palacios' *Chile: An Attempt at a "Historic Compromise."* While writing that article I was struck by how little Palacios was mentioned in any capacity after 1984 in Maoist literature. According to Wikipedia, the Revolutionary Communist Party (Chile) fell apart in 1985. I was able to find one subsequent mention of Palacios, dated 1992, when he added his name to the list of signatories that supported the "[Call to Create an International Emergency Committee to Defend the Life of Dr Abimael Guzmán.](#)" However, there Palacios no longer referred to himself as a founding member of the RCP

(Chile), but as the former Chairman of Philosophy Department, University of

Chile. It was not even clear if Palacios was alive or dead, or whether he had continued to write.

Mike Ely, of the Kasama Project, has vaguely mentioned in an article about the hidden influence of Louis Althusser on the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA (especially in the writing of *America in Decline*, co-written by Raymond Lotta and Frank Shannon) that the influence that Palacios had on Avakian's thought, especially when writing *Conquer the World*, had similarly been obscured. Indeed, it would be fascinating to learn more about Palacios and his ideas, which really have not been discussed in great deal anywhere. His book on Chile is widely cited in literature on Allende and the coup, but his work on Marxist philosophy seems to have been largely neglected.



In China (1976)

As I began to dig I found out that Palacios had died on May 5th, 2014 in Chile. He had returned to Chile after the end of the Pinochet dictatorship. Obituaries that marked his passing were published in *Le Monde Diplomatique* (Chilean edition) (available [here](#)), which he had started, and in the publication, *Francochilenos* (available [here](#)). However, the Maoist movement to which he had contributed so much had not even thought it worthwhile to reflect on his life and contributions (both positive and negative). Furthermore, it became quickly apparent that Palacios had not abandoned writing and thinking about changing the world, rather, he had simply abandoned the dogmatic version of Maoism that once had compelled him. Instead, Palacios had over time drifted more and

more towards anarchism. Palacios himself noted that the collapse of the RCP(Chile) had to do with three main



In China (1976)

factors : 1) the leadership in exile had lost touch with the base membership in Chile. As Palacios aptly put it, “they were a general staff without an army.” In fact, the party had lost a number of comrades involved in the trade unions in 1973 (although according to Palacios this was in fact a minority of the membership). These forces formed the Revolutionary Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist), which was repressed during the Pinochet years. In 1979, the rest of the membership in Chile abandoned the RCP(Chile) and had formed the Chilean Communist Party (Proletarian Action), which today is connected to the International Committee of Marxist-Leninist Parties and Organisations (Unity and Struggle) (the PC(AP) would in turn incur a split and see the formation of [*Organización Comunista Recabarren*](#)); 2) the leadership was unable to

respond concretely to the political conjuncture that was developing in Chile after their exile; and 3) the degeneration of the USSR and China had caused an ideological crisis within the RCP(Chile)'s leadership in exile and they spent the next few years trying to understand what had gone wrong without relying on easy answers.

I found an archive of his writings, written and published after 2000 (www.purochile.rojasdatabank.info/opiniones.htm), including 1) a particularly important letter that he wrote in response to a publication that had published by a new Maoist organisation on the RCP(Chile) in which he explains why he thought the RCP(Chile) had collapsed ([¡A los camaradas que me sobrevivirán!](#)). Indeed, he raises the three points I mentioned above, but also points out that any new MLM formation must necessarily be attuned to ensuring that authoritarianism and dictatorial tendencies did not continue to persist with their respective organisations. It is this authoritarian tendency that Palacios traces through the history of the communist movement in the rest of his letter; 2) a response to this letter by a former comrade from the RCP(Chile) where he partially disagrees with Palacios' characterisation of the reasons for the collapse, especially his emphasis on a revisionist plot within the RCP(Chile), and instead points to the lack of internal democracy within the organisation ([Acotaciones a Una Declaración de Jorge Palacios](#)); 3) a 2007 pamphlet that Palacios wrote entitled, "[Why Did the Revolution Fail? USSR and China](#)". This seems to be an elaboration of the basis premises and perspectives that he articulated in the aforementioned letter. Again Palacios identifies the lack of democracy and democratic decision-making to be a fundamental flaw in the communist project; and 4) a series of philosophical essays, especially on freedom, necessity and dialectics, which look quite interesting.

It is incredibly sad that the modern Maoist movement has so quickly abandoned and forgotten one of its own founders, and that too because he simply dared to differ from the movement's official summations. Indeed, the little I have read of Palacios' work in his latter years suggests that he, like many others in the international communist movement in the 1970's and 80's, had arrived at a similar set of conclusions: the tension between socialism and democracy had been handled incredibly poorly by the communist movement, whether by those parties that had been able to capture State power or by those that aspired to do so. Indeed, it would be incredibly interesting to see Palacios' essays from the late 1980's because I have a hunch that in the debate between K. Venu and Bob

Avakian regarding democracy, Palacios was lurking in the background. Furthermore, Palacios should not be treated as a negative example of someone who because of their “petit-bourgeois intellectualism” abandoned Maoism, but as a positive model for the kind of thinking and self-critical comrade whose primary concern was to improve the lot of workers and peasants.

Comrade Jorge Palacios’ death is definitely heavier than Mount Tai.