24.3  Mao Tse-Tung: Report of an Investigation into the Peasant Movement in Hunan

If Karl Marx would have been surprised to see communism taking root in Russia he would have been astonished to see it conquer China; for China, even more than Russia, was a land of peasant farmers, with only a minuscule population of industrial proletarians. Clearly, it was no place for a Communist revolution, according to orthodox Marxist theory.

As in Russia, the success of communism in China was in large part the result of the activities of a single individual—in this case Mao Tse-tung, now called Mao Zedong (1893-1976). Mao was instrumental in accomplishing two goals. First, he revised Marxist theory and practice to fit the actual conditions in his country. Lacking a nucleus of industrial workers, but with hundreds of millions of agricultural laborers at hand, most living under conditions of dire poverty, he turned to these peasants for his revolutionary force. (He did suggest that China had undergone an earlier bourgeois revolution in 1911, when Dr. Sun Yat-sen had overthrown the Manchu dynasty and set up a republic.)

Mao's second task was a different, more formidable one that took him over twenty years to accomplish. This was to mount the revolution and to guarantee that it would lead to the establishment of a Communist regime in China. Two obstacles stood in his way; both were military. Scarcely had he begun organizing the peasants and getting the revolution under way than Japan invaded and occupied Manchuria (in 1931) and later much of the rest of China. The Japanese occupation frustrated Mao's revolutionary movement for over a decade until the end of the Second World War in 1945. The other military opposition was internal. During the long struggle against the Japanese a substantial portion of the Chinese army belonged to the Kuomintang, under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek. Chiang, who had originally been a compatriot of Mao, had, over the years, become increasingly reactionary. So, after the expulsion of the Japanese, these two leaders became bitter antagonists, in a struggle for control of China. Mao won, forcing Chiang and his followers to flee to Formosa (Taiwan) in 1949. Finally, he was able to realize his goal of establishing a Communist state in China.

The selection that follows is Mao's account of the beginning phases of the peasant revolt that was to lead to a Communist victory over twenty years later. In 1926 peasants in the interior of China had begun to rise against their landlords, but many of Mao's co-workers belittled their efforts. Mao decided to go to the area himself to see what actually was happening. In the selection he reports on what he found.


THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PEASANT PROBLEM

During my recent visit to Hunan I conducted an investigation on the spot into the conditions in the five counties of Siang-tan, Siangsiang, Hengshan, Liling and Changsha. In the thirty-two days from January 4 to February 5, in villages and in county towns, I called together for fact-finding conferences experienced peasants and comrades working for the peasant movement, listened attentively to their reports and collected a lot of material. Many of the hows and whys of the peasant movement were quite the reverse of what I had heard from the gentry in Hankow and Changsha. And many strange things there were that I had never seen or heard of before. I think these conditions exist in many other places.

All kinds of arguments against the peasant movement must be speedily set right. The erroneous measures taken by the revolutionary authorities concerning the peasant movement must be speedily changed. Only thus can any good be done for the future of the revolution. For the rise of the present peasant movement is a colossal event. In a very short time, in China's central, southern and northern provinces, several hundred million peasants will rise like a tornado or tempest, a force so extraordinarily swift and violent that no power, however great, will be able to suppress it. They will break all trammels that now bind them and rush forward along the road to liberation. They will send all imperialists, warlords, corrupt officials, local bullies and bad gentry to their graves. All revolutionary parties and all revolutionary comrades will stand before them to be tested, and to be accepted or rejected as they decide.

To march at their head and lead them? Or to follow at their rear, gesticulating at them and criticising them? Or to face them as opponents?

Every Chinese is free to choose among the three alternatives, but circumstances demand that a quick choice be made.
GET ORGANISED!

The peasant movement in Hunan, so far as it concerns the counties in the central and southern sections of the province, where the movement is already developed, can be roughly divided into two periods.

The first period was the period of organisation, extending from January to September of last year. In this period, there was the stage from January to June—a stage of underground activities, and the stage from July to September when the revolutionary army expelled Chao Hengti1—a stage of open activities. In this period, the membership of the peasant association totaled only 300,000–400,000, and the masses it could directly lead numbered but little more than a million; as there was hardly any struggle in the rural areas, very little criticism of the association was heard. Since its members served as guides, scouts and carriers, the officers in the Northern Expedition Army even had a good word or two for the peasant association.

The second period was the period of revolutionary action, extending from last October to this January. The membership of the peasant association jumped to two million and the masses over whom it could exercise direct leadership increased to ten million people. As the peasants mostly entered only one name for each family when joining the association, a membership of two million therefore means a mass following of about ten million. Of all the peasants in Hunan, almost half are organised. In counties like Siangtan, Siangsiang, Liuyang, Changsha, Liling, Ningsiang, Pingkiang, Siangyin, Hengshan, Hengyang, Leiyang, Chen and Anhwa, nearly all the peasants have rallied organisationally in the association and followed its leadership. The peasants, with their extensive organisation, went right into action and within four months brought about a great and unprecedented revolution in the countryside.

DOWN WITH THE LOCAL BULLIES AND BAD GENTRY! ALL POWER TO THE PEASANT ASSOCIATION!

The peasants attack as their main targets the local bullies and bad gentry and the lawless landlords, hitting in passing against patriarchal ideologies and institutions, corrupt officials in the cities and evil customs in the rural areas. In force and momentum, the attack is like a tempest or hurricane; those who submit to it survive and those who resist it perish. As a result, the privileges which the feudal landlords have enjoyed for thousands of years are being shattered to pieces. The dignity and prestige of the landlords are dashed to the ground. With the fall of the authority of the landlords, the peasant association becomes the sole organ of authority, and what people call “All power to the peasant association” has come to pass. Even such a trifle as a quarrel between man and wife has to be settled at the peasant association. Nothing can be settled in the absence of people from the association. The association is actually dictating in all matters in the countryside, and it is literally true that “what ever it says, goes.” The public can only praise the association and must not condemn it. The local bullies and bad gentry and the lawless landlords have been totally deprived of the right to have their say, and no one dares mutter the word “No.” To be safe from the power and pressure of the peasant association, the first-rank local bullies and bad gentry fled to Shanghai; the second-rank ones to Hankow; the third-rank ones to Changsha; and the fourth-rank ones to the county towns; the fifth-rank ones and even lesser fry can only remain in the countryside and surrender to the peasant association.

“I’ll donate ten dollars, please admit me to the peasant association,” one of the smaller gentry would say.

“Pshaw! Who wants your filthy money!” the peasants would reply.

Many middle and small landlords, rich peasants and middle peasants, formerly opposed to the peasant association, now seek admission in vain. Visiting various places, I often came across such people, who solicited my help. “I beg,” they would say, “the committeeman from the provincial capital to be my guarantor.”

The census book compiled by the local authorities under the Manchu régime consisted of a regular register and a special register; in the former honest people were entered, and in the latter burglars, bandits and other undesirables. The peasants in some places now use the same method to threaten people formerly opposed to the association: “Enter them in the special register!”

Such people, afraid of being entered in the special register, try various means to seek admission to the association and do not feel at ease until, as they eagerly desire, their names are entered in its register. But they are as a rule sternly turned down, and so spend their days in a constant state of suspense; barred from the doors of the association, they are like homeless people. In short, what was generally sneered at four months ago as the “peasants’ gang” has now become something most honourable. Those who prostrated themselves before the power of the gentry now prostrate themselves before the power of the peasants. Everyone admits that the world has changed since last October.

1 [The ruler of Hunan—Ed.]
“AN AWFUL MESS!” AND “VERY GOOD INDEED!”

The revolt of the peasants in the countryside disturbed the sweet dreams of the gentry. When news about the countryside reached the cities, the gentry there immediately burst into an uproar. When I first arrived in Changsha, I met people from various circles and picked up a good deal of street gossip. From the middle strata upwards to the rightwingers of the Kuomintang, there was not a single person who did not summarise the whole thing in one phrase: “An awful mess!” Even quite revolutionary people, carried away by the opinion of the “awful mess” school which prevailed like a storm over the whole city, became downhearted at the very thought of the conditions in the countryside, and could not deny the word “mess.” Even very progressive people could only remark, “Indeed a mess, but inevitable in the course of the revolution.” In a word, nobody could categorically deny the word “mess.”

But the fact is, as stated above, that the broad peasant masses have risen to fulfill their historic mission, that the democratic forces in the rural areas have risen to overthrow the rural feudal power. The patriarchal-feudal class of local bullies, bad gentry and lawless landlords has formed the basis of autocratic government for thousands of years, the cornerstone of imperialism, warlordism and corrupt officialdom. To overthrow this feudal power is the real objective of the national revolution. What Dr. Sun Yat-sen wanted to do in the forty years he devoted to the national revolution but failed to accomplish, the peasants have accomplished in a few months. This is a marvellous feat which has never been achieved in the last forty or even thousands of years. It is very good indeed. It is not “a mess” at all. It is anything but “an awful mess.”

“An awful mess”—that is obviously a theory which, in line with the interests of the landlords, aims at combating the rise of the peasants, a theory of the landlord class for preserving the old order of feudalism and obstructing the establishment of a new order of democracy, and a counterrevolutionary theory. No revolutionary comrade should blindly repeat it. If you have firmly established your revolutionary viewpoint and have furthermore gone the round of the villages for a look, you will feel overjoyed as never before. There, great throngs of tens of thousands of slaves, i.e., the peasants, are overthrowing their cannibal enemies. Their actions are absolutely correct; their actions are very good indeed! “Very good indeed!” is the theory of the peasants and of all other revolutionaries. Every revolutionary comrade should know that the national revolution requires a profound change in the countryside. The Revolution of 1911 did not bring about this change, hence its failure. Now the change is taking place, which is an important factor necessary for completing the revolution. Every revolutionary comrade must support this change, or he will be taking the counter-revolutionary stand.

THE QUESTION OF “GOING TOO FAR”

There is another section of people who say, “although the peasant association ought to be formed, it has gone rather too far in its present actions.” This is the opinion of the middle-of-the-roaders. But how do matters stand in reality? True, the peasants do in some ways “act unreasonably” in the countryside. The peasant association, supreme in authority, does not allow the landlords to have their say and makes a clean sweep of all their prestige. This is tantamount to trampling the landlords underfoot after knocking them down. The peasants threaten: “Put you in the special register”; they impose fines on the local bullies and bad gentry and demand contributions; they smash their sedan-chairs. Crowds of people swarm into the homes of the local bullies and bad gentry who oppose the peasant association, slaughtering their pigs and consuming their grain. They may even loll for a minute or two on the ivory beds of the young mesdames and mademoiselles in the families of the bullies and gentry. At the slightest provocation they make arrests, crown the arrested with tall paperhats, and parade them through the villages: “You bad gentry, now you know who we are!” Doing whatever they like and turning everything upside down, they have even created a kind of terror in the countryside. This is what some people call “going too far,” or “going beyond the proper limit to right a wrong,” or “really too outrageous.”

The opinion of this group, reasonable on the surface, is erroneous at bottom. First, the things described above have all been the inevitable results of the doings of the local bullies and bad gentry and lawless landlords themselves. For ages these people, with power in their hands, tyrannised over the peasants and trampled them underfoot; that is why the peasants have now risen in such a great revolt. The most formidable revolts and the most serious troubles invariably occur at places where the local bullies and bad gentry and the lawless landlords were the most ruthless in their evil deeds. The peasants’ eyes are perfectly discerning. As to who is bad and who is not, who is the most ruthless and who is less so, and who is to be severely punished and who is to be dealt with lightly, the peasants keep perfectly clear accounts and very seldom has there been any discrepancy between the punishment and the crime.

[The revolution that ended the autocratic rule of the Manchu dynasty. On October 10, 1911, under the influence of the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois revolutionary groups, a section of the imperial “New Army” staged an uprising in Wuchang, provincial capital of Hupeh. Similar uprisings in other provinces followed in rapid succession and the Manchu regime soon crumbled. On New Year’s Day, 1912, the Provisional Government of the Republic of China was inaugurated in Nanking with Sun Yat-sen as President—Ed.]

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Secondly, a revolution is not the same as inviting people to dinner, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing fancy needlework; it cannot be anything so refined, so calm and gentle, or so mild, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous. A revolution is an uprising, an act of violence whereby one class overthrows another. A rural revolution is a revolution by which the peasantry overthrows the authority of the feudal landlord class. If the peasants do not use the maximum of their strength, they can never overthrow the authority of the landlords which has been deeply rooted for thousands of years. In the rural areas, there must be a great, fervent revolutionary upsurge, which alone can arouse hundreds and thousands of the people of form a great force. All the action mentioned above, labelled as “going too far,” are caused by the power of the peasants, generated by a great, fervent, revolutionary upsurge in the countryside. Such actions were quite necessary in the second period of the peasant movement (the period of revolutionary action). In this period, it was necessary to establish the absolute authority of the peasants. It was necessary to stop malicious criticisms against the peasant association. It was necessary to overthrow all the authority of the gentry, to knock them down and even trample them underfoot. All actions labelled as “going too far” had a revolutionary significance in the second period. To put it bluntly, it was necessary to bring about a brief reign of terror in every rural area; otherwise one could never suppress the activities of the counter-revolutionaries in the countryside or overthrow the authority of the gentry. To right a wrong it is necessary to exceed the proper limits, and the wrong cannot be righted without the proper limits being exceeded.

The opinion of this school that the peasants are “going too far” is on the surface different from the opinion of the other school mentioned earlier that the peasant movement is “an awful mess,” but in essence it adheres to the same viewpoint, and is likewise a theory of the landlords which supports the interests of the privileged classes. Since this theory hinders the rise of the peasant movement and consequently disrupts the revolution, we must oppose it resolutely.

**THE SO-CALLED “MOVEMENT OF THE RIFFRAFF”**

The right wing of the Kuomintang says, “The peasant movement is a movement of the riffraff, a movement of the lazy peasants.” This opinion has gained much currency in Changsha. I went to the countryside and heard the gentry say, “It is all right to set up the peasant association, but the people now running it are incompetent; better put others on the job.” This opinion and the dictum of the right wing come to the same thing; both admit that the peasant movement may be carried on (as the peasant movement has already risen, no one dares say that it shouldn’t); but both regard the people leading the movement as incompetent and hate particularly those in charge of the associations at the lower levels, labelling them “riffraff.” In short, all those who were formerly despised or kicked into the gutter by the gentry, who had no social standing, and who were denied the right to have a say, have now, to everyone’s surprise, raised their heads. They have not only raised their heads, but have also taken power into their hands. They are now running the township peasant associations (peasant associations at the lowest level), which have been turned into a formidable force in their hands. They raise their rough, blackened hands and lay them on the gentry. They bind the bad gentry with ropes, put tall paperhats on them and “parading through the fields” in Liling.) Every day the coarse, harsh sound of their denunciation assails the ears of the gentry. They are giving orders and directions in all matters. They rank above everybody else, they who used to rank below everybody else—that is what people mean by “upside down.”

**VANGUARD OF THE REVOLUTION**

When there are two opposite approaches to a thing or a kind of people, there will be two opposite opinions. “An awful mess” and “very good indeed,” “riffraff” and “vanguard of the revolution,” are both suitable examples.

We have seen the peasants’ accomplishment of a revolutionary task for many years left unaccomplished, and their important contributions to the national revolution. But have all the peasants taken part in accomplishing such a great revolutionary task and in making important contributions? No. The peasantry consist of three sections—the rich peasants, the middle peasants and the poor peasants. The circumstances of the three sections differ, and so do their reactions to the revolution. In the first period, what reached the ears of the rich peasants was that the Northern Expedition Army had met with a crushing defeat in Kiangsi, that Chiang Kai-shek had been wounded in the leg and had flown back to Kwangtung, and that Wu P’ei-fu had recaptured Yochow. So they thought that the peasant association certainly could not last long and that the Three People’s Principles could never succeed, because such things were never heard of before. The officials of a town

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1 [The Three People’s Principles-Nationalism, Democracy, and the People’s Welfare—were proposed by Sun Yat-sen as guiding principles for China’s bourgeois-democratic revolution. In the Manifesto of the First National Congress of the Kuomintang, issued in 1924, he reinterpreted these principles, defining his Nationalism as the fight against imperialism and pledging active support for the workers’ and peasants’ movements. The old Three People’s Principles thus gave way to the new, which embody the three cardinal policies of alliance with Russia, cooperation with the Communists, and assistance to the peasants and workers. The new Three People’s Principles of the three cardinal policies served as the political basis of Kuomintang-Communist cooperation during the First Revolutionary Civil War period.—Ed.]
ship peasant association (generally of the so-called “riffraff” type), bringing the membership register and entering the house of a rich peasant, would say to him, “Please join the peasant association.” How would the rich peasant answer? “Peasant association? For years I have lived here and tilled the fields; I have not seen anything like the peasant association but I get along all the same. You had better give it up!”—this from a moderate rich peasant. “What peasant association? Association for having one’s head chopped off—don’t get people into trouble!”—this from a violent rich peasant.

Strangely enough, the peasant association has now been established for several months, and has even dared to oppose the gentry. The gentry in the neighbourhood have been arrested by the association and paraded through the villages because they refused to surrender their opium-smoking kits. In the county towns, moreover, prominent members of the gentry have been put to death, such as Yen Yung-ch’iu of Siangtan and Yang Chih-tse of Ningsiang. At the meeting celebrating the anniversary of the October Revolution, the anti-British rally and the grand celebration of the victory of the Northern Expedition, at least ten thousand peasants in every county, carrying big and small banners, with poles and hoes thrown in, marched in demonstrations in great columns like rolling waves. When all this happened, the rich peasants began to feel perplexed. In the grand celebration of the victory of the Northern Expedition, they learnt that Kiu-kiang had been taken, that Chiang Kai-shek had not been wounded in the leg and that Wu P’ei-fu had been finally defeated. Furthermore, “Long live the Three People’s Principles!” “Long live the peasant association!” and “Long live the peasants!” were clearly written on the “decrees on red and green paper” [posters]. “Long live the peasants! Are these people to be regarded as emperors?” The rich peasants were greatly puzzled.

So the peasant association put on grand airs. People from the association said to the rich peasants, “We’ll enter you in the special register,” or, “In another month, the admission fee will be ten dollars!” It was only in these circumstances that the rich peasants tardily joined the peasant association, some paying fifty cents or a dollar (the regular fee being only one hundred cash), others securing admission only after people had put in a good word for them at their request. There are also quite a number of die-hards who, even up to the present, have not joined the association. When the rich peasants join the association they generally enter the name of some old man of sixty or seventy of their family, for they are always afraid of “the drafting of the adult males.” After joining the association they never work for it enthusiastically. They remain inactive throughout.

How about the middle peasants? Their attitude is vacillating. They think that the revolution will not do them much good. They have rice in their pots and are not afraid of bailiffs knocking at their doors at midnight. They too, judging a thing by whether it ever existed before, knit their brows and think hard: “Can the peasant association really stand on its own feet?” “Can the Three People’s Principles succeed?” Their conclusion is, “Afraid not.” They think that all these things depend entirely on the will of Heaven; “To run a peasant association? Who knows if Heaven wills it or not?” In the first period, people from the peasant association, registers in hand, would enter the house of a middle peasant and say to him, “Please join the peasant association!” “No hurry!” replied the middle peasant. It was not until the second period, when the peasant association enjoyed great power, that the middle peasants joined up. In the association they behave better than the rich peasants, but are as yet not very active, and still want to wait and see. It is certainly necessary for the peasant association to explain a good deal more to the middle peasants in order to get them to join.

The main force in the countryside which has always put up the bitterest fight is the poor peasants. Throughout both the period of underground organisation and that of open organisation, the poor peasants have fought militantly all along. They accept most willingly the leadership of the Communist Party. They are the deadliest enemies of the local bullies and bad gentry and attack their strongholds without the slightest hesitation. They say to the rich peasants: “We joined the peasant association long ago, why do you still hesitate?” The rich peasants answer in a mocking tone, “You people have neither a tile over your head nor a pinpoint of land beneath your feet, what should have kept you from joining!” Indeed, the poor peasants are not afraid of losing anything. Many of them really have “neither a tile over their head nor a pinpoint of land beneath their feet”—what should have kept them from joining the association?

According to a survey of Changsha county, the poor peasants comprise 70 per cent of the rural population; the middle peasants, 20 per cent; and the rich peasants and landlords, 10 per cent. The poor peasants who comprise 70 per cent can be subdivided into two groups, the utterly impoverished and the less impoverished. The completely dispossessed, i.e., those who have neither land nor money, and who, without any means of livelihood, are forced to leave home and become mercenary soldiers, or hired labourers, or tramp about as beggars—all belong to the “utterly impoverished” and comprise 20 per cent. The partly dispossessed, i.e., those who have a little land or a little money, but consume more than they receive and live in the midst of toil and worry all the year round, e.g. the handicraftsmen, tenant-peasants (except the rich tenant-peasants) and semi-tenant peasants—all belong to the “less impoverished” and comprise 50 per cent. The enormous mass of poor peasants, altogether comprising 70 per cent of the rural population, are the backbone of the peasant association, the vanguard in overthrowing the feudal forces, and the foremost heroes who have accomplished the great revolutionary undertaking left unaccomplished for many years. Without the poor peasants (the “riffraff” as the gentry call them) it would never have been possible to bring about in the countryside the present state of revolution, to overthrow the local bullies and bad gentry, or to complete the democratic revolution. Being the most revolutionary, the poor peasants have won the lead-
ership in the peasant association. Almost all the posts of chairmen and committee members in the peasant associations at the lowest level were held by poor peasants in both the first and second periods (of the officials in the township associations in Hangshan the utterly impoverished comprise 50 per cent, the less impoverished comprise 40 per cent, and the impoverished intellectuals comprise 10 per cent). This leadership of the poor peasants is absolutely necessary. Without the poor peasants there can be no revolution. To reject them is to reject the revolution. To attack them is to attack the revolution. Their general direction of the revolution has never been wrong.

They have hurt the dignity of the local bullies and bad gentry. They have beaten the big and small local bullies and bad gentry to the ground and trampled them underfoot. Many of their deeds in the period of revolutionary action, described as “going too far,” were in fact the very needs of the revolution. Some of the county governments, county headquarters of the party and county peasant associations in Hunan have committed a number of mistakes; there are even some which at the request of the landlords sent soldiers to arrest the lower officials of the peasant associations. Many chairmen and committee members of the township associations are imprisoned in the jails in Hengshan and Siangsiang. This is a serious mistake, which greatly encourages the arrogance of the reactionaries. To judge whether or not it is a mistake, one need only see how, as soon as the chairmen and committee members of the peasant associations are arrested, the local lawless landlords are elated and reactionary sentiments grow. We must oppose such counterrevolutionary calumnies as “riffraff movement” and “movement of the lazy peasants” and must be especially careful not to commit the mistake of helping the local bullies and bad gentry to attack the poor peasants.

As a matter of fact, although some of the poor peasant leaders certainly had shortcomings in the past, most of them have reformed themselves by now. They are themselves energetically prohibiting gambling and exterminating banditry. Where the peasant association is powerful, gambling and banditry have vanished. In some places it is literally true that people do not pocket articles dropped on the road and that doors are not bolted at night. According to a survey of Hengshan, 85 per cent of the poor peasant leaders have now turned out to be quite reformed, capable and energetic. Only 15 per cent of them retain some bad habits. They can only be regarded as “the few undesirables,” and we must not echo the local bullies and bad gentry in condemning indiscriminately everybody as “riffraff.” To tackle this problem of “the few undesirables,” we can only, on the basis of the association’s slogan of strengthening discipline, carry on propaganda among the masses and educate the undesirables themselves, so that the discipline of the association may be strengthened; but we must not wantonly send soldiers to make arrests, lest we should undermine the prestige of the poor peasantry and encourage the arrogance of the local bullies and the bad gentry. This is a point we must particularly attend to.

Questions:
1. According to Mao, who were the revolutionary classes? Who were the counterrevolutionary classes?
2. In what ways has Mao changed the Communist ideas of Marx?
24.4 “How to Be a Good Communist” (1939): Li Shaoqi

Just before his death in 1925, Sun Yat-sen had appointed the young military officer, Jiang Jieshi, to succeed him as leader of the Guomindang party and head of the National Revolutionary Army. It became Jiang’s responsibility to organize a Northern Expedition to “crush the warlords and unify the country.” The Guomindang party at that time was composed of a coalition of Nationalists and Communists, united in their opposition to the warlords and Western influence. But the Communist faction also viewed the campaign primarily as an anti-imperialist and anti-feudal struggle whereas the Nationalists were looking to end the interference of the West through negotiation. The Nationalists sought the support of Western powers while the Communists, true to their Marxist roots, wanted a domestic revolution and establishment of a workers’ and peasants’ state. By 1930, the Nationalist campaigns against warlord control had evolved into anti-Communist forays.

Mao’s success in organizing peasants, promoting strikes against landlords, and eventually redistributing land to the needy peasants demonstrated his dangerous organizational genius. Jiang launched four military campaigns against Mao’s new Chinese Soviet Republic from 1930 to 1932; all four proved unsuccessful. The Communist Red Army, though poorly trained and equipped, was incredibly motivated and able to resist these assaults. But by 1934, an effective economic blockade and a fifth Nationalist offensive proved too much for the Communists. Rather than risk total annihilation, Mao broke through Jiang’s encirclement and began a retreat to the hills called the “Long March” on October 16, 1934. Attacked and harried by Nationalist forces during a 6,000 mile trek, the Red Army was decimated and but a skeleton force when the march ended a year later. As Mao recalled in 1971: “The Red Army had had 300,000 men prior to the Long March, but it was reduced to 25,000 men when it arrived in Shensi province.” As Jiang’s forces moved in for the kill, the Communists were rescued, most ironically, by a Japanese invasion of Manchuria in northern China. Encouraged by the Chinese civil war, the Japanese had seized the opportunity to attack, forcing Jiang to deflect his attention.

The Soviet Union’s leader, Joseph Stalin, encouraged both Mao and Jiang to end their civil war, and China entered World War II against Japan in 1937. This reprieve of the Communists was a crucial turning point in the Chinese Revolution. For while Jiang directed the Chinese resistance against Japan, Mao reorganized his political movement. At the end of World War II in 1945, Mao stood ready to meet Jiang once again in a fight to the death.

The following selection is an indoctrination tract by Li Shaoqi (1898–1969), one of Mao’s closest advisors and theoreticians. This was part of the Communist strengthening movement that focused Party discipline and revived Communist fortunes. Such instructive tracts gave inspiration to the peasants movement and Red Army in their duel with the Nationalists.

Comrades! If you only possess great and lofty ideals but . . . do not carry on genuinely practical work, you are not a good Communist Party member. You can only be a dreamer, a prattler, or a pendant. If on the contrary, you only do practical work, but do not possess the great and lofty ideals of Communism, you are not a good Communist, but a common careerist. A good Communist Party member is one who combines the great and lofty ideals of Communism with practical work and the spirit of searching for the truth from concrete facts.

The Communist ideal is beautiful while the existing capitalist world is ugly. It is precisely because of its ugliness that the overwhelming majority of the people want to change it and cannot but change it . . .

At all times and on all questions, a Communist Party member should take into account the interests of the Party as a whole, and place the Party’s interests above his personal problems and interests. It is the highest principle of our Party members that the Party’s interests are supreme. . . .

A Communist Party member should possess all the greatest and noblest virtues of man-kind. . . . Such ethics are not built upon the backward basis of safeguarding the interests of individuals or a small number of exploiters. They are built, on the contrary, upon the progressive basis of the interests of the proletariat, of the ultimate emancipation of mankind as a whole, of saving the world from destruction, and of building a happy and beautiful Communist world.

**Questions:**

1. Li Shaoqi’s 1939 political tract, “How to Be a Good Communist,” sought to inspire unity and focus commitment to the Communist cause. Why was such an effort so important at the time? Note especially the link between idealism and practical necessity argued by Li Shaoqi. How does one become a “good Communist”?

2. Li notes that “Marxism-Leninism offers a scientific explanation that leaves no room for doubt” and that “such a society will inevitably be brought about.” Over sixty years later, why has this “happy and beautiful Communist world” not materialized?
Chapter 24: Authoritarian and Totalitarian Experiments in Asia

24.5 The New Communist State (1940-1950)

Jiang Jieshi's decision, as leader of the Guomindang's Nationalist forces, to resist the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in summer 1937 was hailed by most Chinese as a valiant and proper decision in the face of foreign aggression. The Communist Chinese led by Mao Zedong were perhaps most elated, for they had been on the brink of annihilation by the Guomindang when the threat instantly disappeared. With the Japanese now viewed as the primary threat to China, the Communists entered a rather unnatural collaboration with the Guomindang from 1937 to 1941. They both pledged cooperation, but the distrust and even hatred of these rival factions immediately produced tension that exhausted their energies and made effective resistance to Japan an impossibility. Although the United States sent military advisors and diplomats, the gulf between the Nationalists and the Communists could not be breached.

After the surrender of Japan in 1945, the Nationalist forces of Jiang enjoyed tremendous prestige and even signed a treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union, which promised to recognize and support Jiang's government. As Mao emerged from the Yenan caves where he and his Communist supporters had directed their operations against the Nationalists, it was not clear whether he would concede authority to Jiang or renew the civil war. By 1947, despite the diplomatic efforts of American General George Marshall, it was evident that China was about to embark on a path of destruction even more brutal than had just been experienced in World War II. Millions of Chinese, Communist and Nationalist, were killed in the ensuing civil war. Finally, the Nationalist forces of the Guomindang were defeated and pushed to the coast where they fled to the island of Taiwan.

It is difficult to assess the reasons for the Guomindang's defeat; they are varied and complex. Ultimately, this was a struggle not only for China's sovereignty and national independence, as it had been since the beginning of the century, but for China's soul. The Communists won most importantly because they were committed and outstanding organizers of a new political force in Chinese history: the peasant masses. Mao knew quite early in the history of Chinese Communism that the social and economic welfare of the peasantry was the key to its mobilization as a revolutionary force. The vision of a peasant rarely extended past his village, but he understood exorbitant rents and landlord villains; he advocated land confiscations and redistribution, and he desired dignity as an individual. These had never been priorities in China's modern history and Mao directed his organizational genius to the hearts and minds of an underclass that had never known opportunity. The peasants rewarded the Communists with their loyalty as the backbone of the Red Army, and with their inspiration as the keystone of a new nation independent of foreign control. Under Mao's direction, the Chinese people envisioned a future of possibility.

As the year 1949 opened, the Nationalist forces were in disarray and the Red Army was marching toward Nanjing, the Nationalist capital. Mao demanded unconditional surrender and the punishment of war criminals; foremost among them was Jiang Jieshi, as noted in the first selection. It is followed by an assessment of the situation by U.S. Secretary of State, Dean Acheson.


“JIANG JIESHI IS CHINA’S NUMBER ONE WAR CRIMINAL” (JANUARY 1949)
MAO ZEDONG

Two and a half years have gone by since July, 1946, when the reactionary Nanjing Guomindang government, with the aid of the U.S. imperialists, violated the will of the people, tore up the truce agreement and the resolutions of the Political Consultative Conference, and launched the countrywide counter-revolutionary civil war. In these two and a half years of war, the reactionary Nanjing Guomindang government has, in violation of the will of the people, convened a bogus National Assembly, promulgated a bogus constitution, elected a bogus president, and issued a bogus decree on the so-called “mobilization for putting down the rebellion”; sold out the national interest wholesale to the U.S. government and received loans amounting to thousands of millions of U.S. dollars; invited the U.S. navy and air force to occupy China’s territory and territorial sea and air; signed a large batch of treasonable treaties with the U.S. government and accepted the U.S. Military Advisory Group’s participation in China’s civil war; and obtained from the U.S. government huge quantities of aircraft, tanks, light and heavy artillery, machine-guns, rifles, shells, bullets and other war material for slaughtering the Chinese people.
And it was on the basis of these reactionary and traitorous basic policies, domestic and foreign, that the reactionary Nanjing Guomindang government ordered millions of troops to launch ruthless attacks on the Chinese People’s Liberated Areas and the Chinese People’s Liberation Army. . . . Wherever they went, they massacred and raped, burned and looted, and stopped at nothing.

In the areas under its rule, the reactionary Nanjing Guomindang government sucks the lifeblood of the broad masses of the people—the workers, peasants, soldiers, intellectuals, and businessmen—by exacting grain levies, taxes, and forced labor for “putting down the rebellion and suppressing the bandits.” The reactionary Nanjing Guomindang government deprives the people of all their freedoms denying them their legal status; it suppresses the righteous movement of the students against civil war, hunger, and persecution and against U.S. interference in China’s internal affairs. . . . In short, the reactionary Nanjing Guomindang government has plunged the whole nation into dire suffering by waging a civil war based on its reactionary and traitorous basic policies, domestic and foreign; it absolutely cannot escape full responsibility.

In contrast to the Guomindang, the Communist Party of China did all it could after Japan’s surrender to press the Guomindang government to prevent and stop the civil war and realize domestic peace. Basing itself on this policy, the Communist Party of China struggled steadfastly and, with the support of the people of the whole country. . . . But it is regrettable that the reactionary Guomindang government showed no respect for any of the actions we took in defense of internal peace and the democratic rights of the people. On the contrary, they thought that the people could be bullied. . . . Therefore, the reactionary Guomindang government had the audacity to violate the will of the people of the whole country and to unleash the counter-revolutionary war.

Under the circumstances, the Communist Party of China had no choice but to rise resolutely against the Guomindang government’s reactionary policies and to fight to safeguard the country’s independence and the people’s democratic rights. Since July, 1946, the Communist Party of China has led the heroic People’s Liberation Army to repulse the attacks of . . . the reactionary Guomindang government and then to go over to the counter-offensive, recover all the lost territories of the Liberated Areas and liberate many large cities. . . . The People’s Liberation Army has overcome unparalleled difficulties, grown in strength, and equipped itself with huge quantities of arms given to the Guomindang government by the U.S. government. In two and a half years, it has wiped out the main military forces of the reactionary Guomindang government and all its crack divisions. Today the People’s Liberation Army is superior to the remnant military forces of the reactionary Guomindang government in numbers, morale, and equipment. It is only now that the Chinese people can begin to breathe freely. The Guomindang regime will crumble and perish if the People’s Liberation Army launches a few more powerful attacks against its remnant forces.

Having pursued a policy of civil war, the reactionary Guomindang government is now reaping what it has sown: the masses are in rebellion, its close followers are deserting, and it can no longer maintain itself. . . . Jiang Jieshi, chief-tain of the Guomindang bandit gang and bogus president of the Nanjing government, is China’s number one war criminal.

Comrade Commanders and fighters of the People’s Liberation Army, attention! You should not slacken your fighting efforts in the slightest until the reactionary Nanjing Guomindang government has accepted a genuine democratic peace and carried it out. Any reactionaries who dare to resist must be resolutely, thoroughly, wholly and completely annihilated.

Questions:
1. Why did Mao Zedong regard Jiang Jieshi as “China’s number one war criminal” in 1949?
2. According to Mao, why did the civil war take place, who was to blame, and what was the Communist role?
24.6 “From the Countryside to the City” (May 1949): Mao Zedong

As the Communists rolled toward victory against Nationalist Chinese forces, Mao directed his rhetoric toward the establishment of a “people’s democratic dictatorship” that would extend “from the countryside to the city” and integrate rural peasants and urban workers, as the following speech of May 1949 indicates. On October 1, 1949, Mao, flush with victory, proclaimed the establishment of the People’s Republic of China.


From 1927 to the present, the center of gravity of our work has been in the villages—gathering strength in the villages, using the villages in order to surround the cities, and then taking the cities. The period for this method of work has now ended. The period of “from the city to the village” and of the city leading the village has now begun. The center of gravity of the party’s work has shifted from the village to the city. In the south the People’s Liberation Army will occupy first the cities and then the villages. Attention must be given to both city and village and it is necessary to link closely urban and rural work, workers and peasants, industry and agriculture. Under no circumstances should the village be ignored and only the city given attention; such thinking is entirely wrong. Nevertheless, the center of gravity of the work of the party and the army must be in the cities; we must do our utmost to learn how to administer and build the cities. In the cities we must learn how to wage political, economic, and cultural struggles against the imperialists, the Guomindang, and the bourgeoisie and also how to wage diplomatic struggles against the imperialists.

On whom shall we rely in our struggles in the cities? Some muddle-headed comrades think we should rely not on the working class but on the masses of the poor. Some comrades who are even more muddle-headed think we should rely on the bourgeoisie. As for the direction of industrial development, some muddle-headed comrades maintain that we should chiefly help the development of private enterprise and not state enterprise, whereas others hold the opposite view, that it suffices to pay attention to state enterprise and that private enterprise is of little importance. We must criticize these muddled views. We must wholeheartedly rely on the working class, unite with the rest of the laboring masses, win over the intellectuals and win over to our side as many as possible of the national bourgeois elements and their representatives who can cooperate with us—or neutralize them—so that we can wage a determined struggle against the imperialists, the Guomindang and the bureaucrat-capitalist class and defeat these enemies step by step. Meanwhile we shall set about our task of construction and learn, step by step, how to administer cities and restore and develop their production.

Very soon we shall be victorious throughout the country. This victory will breach the eastern front of imperialism and will have great international significance. To win this victory will not require much more time and effort, but to consolidate it will. The bourgeoisie doubts our ability to construct. The imperialists reckon that eventually we will beg alms from them in order to live. With victory, certain moods may grow within the party—arrogance, the airs of a self-styled hero, inertia and unwillingness to make progress, love of pleasure and distaste for continued hard living. With victory, the people will be grateful to us and the bourgeoisie will come forward to flatter us.

We must guard against such a situation. To win country-wide victory is only the first step in a long march. Even if this step is worthy of pride, it is comparatively tiny; what will be more worthy of pride is yet to come. We are not only good at destroying the old world, we are also good at building the new. Not only can the Chinese people live without begging alms from the imperialists, they will live a better life than that in the imperialist countries.

Questions:
1. Why did the Communists turn their attention to the cities in order to achieve the consolidation of Communism?
2. Who did he identify as “muddle-headed” and why?
24.7 The Failure of the Nationalist Government: The American Assessment (1949)

Jiang Jieshi’s decision, as leader of the Guomindang’s Nationalist forces, to resist the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in summer 1937 was hailed by most Chinese as a valiant and proper decision in the face of foreign aggression. The Communist Chinese led by Mao Zedong were perhaps most elated, for they had been on the brink of annihilation by the Guomindang when the threat instantly disappeared. With the Japanese now viewed as the primary threat to China, the Communists entered a rather unnatural collaboration with the Guomindang from 1937 to 1941. They both pledged cooperation, but the distrust and even hatred of these rival factions immediately produced tension that exhausted their energies and made effective resistance to Japan an impossibility. Although the United States sent military advisors and diplomats, the gulf between the Nationalists and the Communists could not be breached.

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DEAN ACHESON

The reasons for the failure of the Chinese National Government appear in some detail in the attached record. They do not stem from any inadequacy of American aid. Our military observers on the spot have reported that the Nationalist armies did not lose a single battle during the crucial year of 1948 through lack of arms or ammunition. The fact was that the decay which our observers had detected . . . early in the war had fatally sapped the powers of resistance of the Guomindang. Its leaders had proved incapable of meeting the crisis confronting them, its troops had lost the will to fight, and its Government had lost popular support. The Communists, on the other hand, through a ruthless discipline and fanatical zeal, attempted to sell themselves as guardians and liberators of the people. The Nationalist armies did not have to be defeated; they disintegrated. History has proved again and again that a regime without faith in itself and an army without morale cannot survive the test of battle. . . .
It must be admitted frankly that the American policy of assisting the Chinese people in resisting domination by any foreign power or powers is now confronted with the greatest difficulties. The heart of China is in Communist hands. The Communist leaders have forewarned their Chinese heritage and have publicly announced their subservience to a foreign power, Russia. . . . The foreign domination has been masked behind the facade of a vast crusading movement which apparently has seemed to many Chinese to be wholly indigenous and national. Under these circumstances, our aid has been unavailing. . . .

And now it is abundantly clear that we must face the situation as it exists in fact. We will not help the Chinese or ourselves by basing our policy on wishful thinking. We continue to believe that, however tragic may be the immediate future of China and however ruthlessly a major portion of this great people may be exploited by a party in the interest of a foreign imperialism, ultimately the profound civilization and the democratic individualism of China will reassert themselves and she will throw off the foreign yoke.

Question:
1. Ultimately, why did the Communists win the civil war? On this point, compare the account of Mao Zedong on Jiang Jieshi.