

this solution, asking that those put in their place to run the army be shown confidence, and the Centre's Cultural Revolution Group agreed.<sup>44</sup> There was no purge in the army.

Once again, Hsiao Hua's policy prevailed. But the military regime that had established itself at Wuhan was preparing for the day when the army would use its weapons.

<sup>44</sup> Speech by the leaders, evening May 7, 1967, announcing the decision of the Central Committee for Szechuan—wall posters. Reported in *Peking Kono Ichinen*, Tokyo, 1968, pp. 155–56, op. cit.

## 8. The Peasants: A Moderate Cultural Revolution

The Maoist policy towards the peasants was to put into practice the principles that the Party had been putting forward since 1963,<sup>1</sup> not to condemn them. There was no change of policy. This meant that the social climate could be kept under control, as long as the revolutionaries did not go among the peasantry seeking support, and as long as the propagandists remained uncertain about the extent of the sacrifices which policy imposed on the peasants. Once these two conditions ceased to apply, agitation increased in the countryside. The villages on the fringes of the big cities were gradually infected by the spirit of partisan quarrels.

When it became clear that the revolutionary committees, established in the people's communes some time after those in the cities, would have a programme that envisaged the eventual abolition of individual advantages, some of the peasants turned their discontent on the poor peasants, on whom the programme relied for the implementation of the policies of the future.

The revolutionary committees themselves, however, continued to advocate moderation. The Centre made it plain that the rural collective system would be maintained. No retreat was possible now, and the concessions that had permitted certain capitalist practices to revive were condemned.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 2.

The only additions that the Cultural Revolution made to the principles that the Party had hitherto been somewhat remiss in supporting were decentralization, and a new stress on the political role of the poor and lower-middle peasants as the people entitled to wield the proletarian dictatorship.

One of the problems on which most ink had been spilt was the equalizing of incomes, whether it should be between different groups working in collective production, or between the individual members of these groups. In the people's communes the groups in question were the production brigades and production teams. The team, consisting of about a score of families, was the lowest-level decision-making unit, and the system was not to be changed for thirty years.<sup>2</sup>

The Communist Party had gone to great trouble to reduce inevitable differences in income, trying especially to balance the land and equipment that was entrusted to production brigades. It also tried to compensate for the inequalities in property between different brigades by encouraging the worse off to engage in subsidiary production, for which the collective provided investment. Regional differences could evidently not be put right, particularly as nothing could modify the natural conditions that made some territories poor or arid, but inequalities between neighbours could be rectified to a certain extent.

The champions of the Cultural Revolution attacked, not these attempts at equalization, but the unprogressive solutions to the problem of individual incomes: quotas for production and rations allocated to each family together with a parcel of land; the right of rural handicraft workers to engage in private enterprise; the private ownership of privately cleared land; and the organization of free rural markets.

In speaking of the 'struggle between the two lines'<sup>3</sup> in

<sup>2</sup> Second revised draft set of working rules for rural people's communes, September 1962.

<sup>3</sup> The ideological campaign to spread the idea of collectivism among the peasants, generally referred to as the 'struggle between the two lines in the countryside,' was the outcome of the Cultural Revolution in the countryside.

the Ch'it'ien production brigade, the peasant Ma Cheng said that after the difficult years around 1961 the Party cadres who were acting on Liu Shao-ch'i's instructions had encouraged the peasants to clear new land that would be their private property. His brigade had ten teams, of which eight had raised their output from collective land, while in the other two output from collective fields had fallen considerably after much private land clearance. In the spring of 1962 a Work Team sent in by the Party committee of their special administrative region had urged the brigade to adopt a system of allocating rations by families and by 'work points.' Ma Cheng had opposed this, saying:

If we adopt this method, those families which have more labour power . . . will get more grain than they can consume. But those with less labour power will receive fewer work points and therefore will get insufficient grain. So therefore surely differences will once again reappear.<sup>4</sup>

It was true that from most of the policies advocated—land clearance, small-scale private enterprise, and family allowances—the rich peasants stood to gain the most. The plans of the group at the top of the Party had been a 'vain attempt to drag the people's communes back to the stage of the small peasant economy,' a group of proletarian revolutionaries wrote later in a theoretical article.<sup>5</sup> The ensuing state of affairs permitted some to play a privileged political role. T'ao Chu himself said that the control of community life by the better-off peasants involved an element of conflict: 'The principal contradiction in the villages at present is the one between the poor and lower-

<sup>4</sup> Ma Cheng, 'Struggle Between the Two Lines in an Agricultural Production Brigade,' *Peking Review*, no. 52, December 27, 1968, pp. 8-10.

<sup>5</sup> Article by proletarian revolutionaries in the National Defence Scientific and Technical Commission in the *People's Daily*, from the New China News Agency, February 10, 1968 (no. 021206 in the French Series).

middle peasants on the one hand and the privileged stratum on the other.<sup>6</sup>

The course the Cultural Revolution was meant to follow in the Units (government offices, factories, people's communes) was summarized in three words: struggle—criticism—transformation. There was hardly any significant transformation in the countryside, except that the poor and lower-middle peasants were given more power within the rural assemblies to prevent the return to power of a privileged class.

This was not the great leap forward towards communism that was sometimes prematurely proclaimed outside China. The Cultural Revolution had a hard job to do among the peasants when it tried to struggle against the non-socialist concessions that it accused Liu Shao-ch'i of having made. The lesser Party cadres had made propaganda for the Liu Shao-ch'i line in the countryside. Some precautions had to be taken before he could be attacked. This explains why the number of people actually censured was so small.

The Cultural Revolution in the countryside was aimed, not at the cadres, but at a few 'landlords, rich peasants, counter-revolutionaries, and rightists.' And the cadres themselves were required to correct their faults of bureaucracy and authoritarian attitudes. But the cadres concerned were mainly minor officials who carried little weight in making the Party's policies; their job was only to carry the policies out by uniting, leading and instructing the people. When the Party collapsed many of them were so confused that they wanted no further involvement. Later on, when the recovery of the Party led to preparations for a congress—an occasion at which the countryside was normally strongly represented—the cadres had to meet to choose their representatives. Militiamen, peasants educated by the army, were generally selected as substitutes for those cadres who had given up and were no longer suitable.

The Cultural Revolution was extended to the countryside in December 1966 by a directive of the Centre. It

<sup>6</sup> Speech by T'ao Chu at the Kwangtung Provincial Committee in February 1965, quoted in *Ajia Keizai Jumbo*, no. 692, August 1967, p. 3.

condemned old customs and put the accent on production, but it steered clear of fundamental problems. Such problems were only put on the agenda later on by peasant revolutionaries in Shansi, the province of the model production brigade of Tachai. The December directive said nothing about seizing power in the spheres of production and finance. The directive outlined a Cultural Revolution in a stricter sense—in ideology—and called upon the poor and lower-middle peasants to direct it. It allowed for those responsible for production to be replaced by substitutes chosen or approved by the masses, but it did not entrust the Cultural Revolution Committees of poor and lower-middle peasants with managing production.

This directive might have been rapidly made obsolete by more radical documents, but this was not to be the case. Another directive on the same subject a year later made no substantial changes on the earlier one. There had, however, been agitation among the peasants in the meantime. Activist organizations had sought recruits among them and tried to draw them into the urban conflicts. In some sensitive areas the army was sent in to 'aid agriculture.' The situation appeared so troubled in places that some soldiers went so far as to arm the militia and use them in local conflicts. When this policy was condemned by the Centre this led to a clash inside the army. But such military interventions in the Cultural Revolution in the countryside seem to have been few in number.

With the roles of the cadres and the army in the countryside reduced, there was a relaxation in centralized control over production, in the planning of collective work, in the control of markets, and even in morals. The revolutionary committees that were eventually set up in the countryside had to deal with all of this. The militia helped the army to educate the peasants in 'Thought of Mao Tse-tung' study classes. The soldiers sent to remote areas to do this found to their astonishment that their audiences had scarcely heard of the Cultural Revolution. Their task was not an easy one: this was the first time for years that the peasants had been asked to make sacrifices.

The movement ended by putting cadres on their guard

against acting arbitrarily and confirmed the position of the poor and lower-middle peasants' associations, institutions outside the Party intended to bring about progress in political life but not affecting collectivization. Yao Wen-yuan wrote an article in the summer of 1968 in which he said that the Cultural Revolution would succeed in the countryside when it had consolidated the position of socialism.<sup>7</sup> This was a confirmation that its programme remained a moderate one even when its success was beginning to come into view. It put a check on the privileges and powers of the formerly wealthier peasants, and although it did not give the poor peasants' associations decision-making powers, it confirmed their role in the running of retail co-operatives and rural schools.

The later documents of the Cultural Revolution only refer to agriculture in relation to production, and say nothing about new political victories for socialism in the countryside.

#### *A moderated Cultural Revolution in the countryside*

At the beginning of 1967 some Red Guard papers were reporting, in the style of the Rebels, what had happened in the countryside around Peking during the first months of the revolution. The Red Guards, eager to spread their revolt throughout society, had come closest to doing so among the peasants who lived around the big cities. They had, however, soon been forbidden to cause agitation among them.<sup>8</sup>

This did not stop them from expressing their views. Allowing for their sense of urgency and a tendency to exaggerate struggles when describing them, their papers are useful sources of information. Of course, this example would not have been typical of the whole of China. The peasants who lived far from the big cities would not have

<sup>7</sup> *Red Flag*, no. 2, 1968, in *Peking News*, no. 35, 1968.

<sup>8</sup> See above, Chapter 4, Mao Tse-tung's instructions of September 7, 1966, and *People's Daily*, September 11, 1966, editorial.

seen Red Guards coming and going. All the same, the story of the people's communes that were used as testing grounds where radicals and conservatives took it in turns to put their theories into practice deserves some attention.

One of these papers<sup>9</sup> said that when the news of the reorganization of the Peking municipal Party committee reached them, the Work Teams responsible for the 'four clean-ups' movement withdrew in disorder. The revolutionaries grew bolder, and were disappointed when Li Hsiieh-feng<sup>10</sup> ruled, on June 25, 1966, that any opposition to the Work Teams would be taken as opposition to Party control. After the final communiqué of the Eleventh Plenum on August 12th, the houses of rich peasants and reactionaries were searched; arms and money were discovered. Women's hair was cut short. But the reactionaries did not lose their self-confidence, for they said, 'Do not make the struggle worse but work hard, otherwise it will be impossible to have our 400 *chin* (200 kilograms) of food grain per head.'<sup>11</sup>

After September 11th and the Centre's decision that the communes should be allowed to make their revolutions for themselves there was a lull. The Rebels in the countryside used this interlude to establish revolutionary contacts. Some of them 'left the country bumpkins to go back to the cities.'

The December directive on the Cultural Revolution in the villages caused new upheavals. At the time the paper came out, February 18th, the peasant movement was still meeting with much resistance in the Peking region, and the amount of progress made differed in the various *hsien*. Where the old authorities were still in control, they were saying to the peasants, 'If you want work points, go to work and don't make revolution. If you don't work we won't pay you.'

<sup>9</sup> *Nungts'un Chanpao*, February 18, 1967.

<sup>10</sup> The new head of the municipal Party committee after the dismissal of P'eng Chen.

<sup>11</sup> Party secretaries and brigade heads were telling them either to fulfil their norms or else accept less rations than had previously been allowed for.

It is clear from this document that even in the Peking region the rural cadres were encouraged by the Centre's moderate decisions and managed to keep the situation under control. This impression is confirmed by the fact that the peasants who wanted to make revolution had to leave their villages. Their arrival in Shanghai has already been mentioned (see Chapter 6 above). In January the *Wenhui Pao*<sup>12</sup> protested against peasants who left their production posts and poured into the cities to present unreasonable demands.

The Centre was well aware that all kinds of personal grudges could add venom to the criticisms of the cadres which the peasants were making. It apparently decided not to allow revolutionary carnivals in the villages, stating that even when accused of criminal offences, Party cadres of below the *hsien* level could not be tried on the spot. If commune officials were charged, their files were to be handed to the *hsien* Party committee, which could dismiss them; and the accused might continue to hold office until found guilty.<sup>13</sup> This resolution must have been intended to prevent the Red Guards who were moving into the countryside from teaching the peasants to hold criticism meetings and public trials.

When the decision was made to involve the workers in the Cultural Revolution it became necessary to specify how the peasants might take part. The Central Committee brought out a ten-point directive to be displayed in the communes. It was similar, even to the extent of being provisional, to the one that applied to factories.<sup>14</sup> Unlike the industrial directive, however, it was not just an experimental one to be tried out in a few trial units, but was of general application; and it was applied unchanged through-

<sup>12</sup> January 20, 1967.

<sup>13</sup> Central Committee resolution of September 14, 1966, quoted in Chapter 4 above.

<sup>14</sup> Published in the *Asahi Shimbun*, December 29, 1966, as 'the Directive of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and the State Council on the Proletarian Cultural Revolution in the Countryside,' December 15, 1966.

out the Cultural Revolution. In the movement among the peasantry the bids were hardly raised at all.

According to this directive, the Cultural Revolution was to be run by the poor and lower-middle peasants acting through their committees.<sup>15</sup> This same policy could be seen in other clauses: the children of the property-owning classes were not entitled to become Red Guards; their path lay in a return back to the land.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, the directive made no connection between the Cultural Revolution and the social organization of the countryside. The subject was not even touched on.

Economic considerations were apparently to be taken into account, for peasants were advised to use periods of inactivity in order to 'exchange experiences.'<sup>17</sup> Lastly, in order to keep the communes isolated while the poor peasants were learning to speak for themselves and the administrators stayed in their jobs, student access to the villages was strictly controlled.<sup>18</sup>

All the other measures introduced after this confirmed the Centre's concern with stability and order in the agricultural collectives which had to feed China during the Cultural Revolution, and which, during that year, were working outside the framework of an overall economic plan. According to the Japanese Kyodo News Agency, there was even a Central Committee notice urging the peasants to show restraint in criticizing the Work Teams that had been sent in to lead the 'Four Clean-ups' movement in order to defend the movement's achievements.<sup>19</sup> This defence of the hated Work Teams must have caused discontent among Red Guards. But by then the peasants were preoccupied with the spring ploughing and fertilizing.

From now on there was a strong motive to bring back the peasants who had gone to the cities and were becoming involved in the power seizures. The Kweichow revolution-

<sup>15</sup> Point 5.

<sup>16</sup> Point 6.

<sup>17</sup> Point 7.

<sup>18</sup> Point 7.

<sup>19</sup> Kyodo News Agency, January 31, 1967, reporting posters in Peking.

any committee and provincial military command ordered all the peasants in the province to go back to their villages.<sup>20</sup> As the contagion of the 'rebellion' had already spread throughout some districts, the Central Committee issued instructions that there should be no seizures of power in the production brigades during the spring agricultural work.<sup>21</sup> The *People's Daily* ran an editorial on the subject on March 13th.

The Centre wanted to use the renewed enthusiasm of the masses for discussions and meetings. The Central Committee sent the peasants an open letter<sup>22</sup> inviting them to hold conferences immediately to discuss the work of spring cultivation. It also recommended that the army should help in this. Three days later the army was ordered to move to 'the help of agriculture.'<sup>23</sup> One may assume that it had a dual role, as in the euphoria of the Cultural Revolution peasants were taking advantage of the relaxation of Party control to share out the agricultural surplus for the Spring Festival (as the New Year by the old calendar has been renamed). There was an appeal from the Ministry of Agriculture to communes not to distribute the seed grain to individuals and to keep the communes' capital (savings and production funds) intact.<sup>24</sup>

The army had to look after the heritage and the reserves of the collective economy, and prevent class struggles from interfering with farm work. On March 16th all mass demonstrations that had no connection with agricultural production were forbidden in the countryside.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Asahi Shimbun Chōsa Kenkyūshitsu, *Mōtakutō no chōsen*, p. 60.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60. Central Committee notice of March 7, 1967.

<sup>22</sup> Letter to the villages, February 20, 1967, published in all the papers.

<sup>23</sup> On February 23rd some army units were ordered to move without delay to help the peasants. (*Mōtakutō no chōsen*, p. 60.)

<sup>24</sup> 'Appeal for spring work from the Ministry of Agriculture and the Revolutionary Rebels of the Peking suburbs.' (The Kweichow notice mentioned above recommended that the militia should guard the granaries.)

<sup>25</sup> *Mōtakutō no chōsen*, p. 60.

### Ferment

The lack of discipline of the revolutionaries in the cities, who were eager to draw the peasants into their ranks, ended the isolation of the communes nearest the big cities. Thus it was that a coalition of revolutionary organizations conceived the idea of preventing the peasants from celebrating the Chinese New Year. As a struggle against ancient practices and customs this came well within the duties of the Red Guards, but it infringed the principle of the segregation of different sectors. Each branch of the government wanted to play a part: the Rebels in the public security services in guarding the entrances to fairs; those of the rationing departments in confiscating food bought at the peasant market; and those of the purchase co-operatives in 'counter-attacking speculation movements' by 'abolishing the black market and peasant private trading.'

The Spring Festival was a traditional occasion for fairs, where many private pedlars sold food or handicrafts. The 'United committee of Revolutionary Rebels in the financial and commercial departments of the entire country and the Revolutionary Rebel Organization' urged its affiliated organs to try to penetrate deeper: 'Every revolutionary organization without exception must send out a propaganda team and develop a movement that goes deep and has a mass nature.'<sup>26</sup>

Although there was no lack of enthusiastic efforts, as steps had been taken to ensure that everything the peasants were not allowed to put on sale themselves was at least available in state shops, such measures threatened to unleash pointless conflicts.

The most fanatical Rebels did not abandon the idea of seeking reinforcements among the rural proletariat. 'Some mass organizations,' wrote the *Wenhui Pao*, . . . 'have

<sup>26</sup> 'Urgent notice on the strengthening of management of Spring markets in 1967,' reprinted from New China News Agency release, Peking, February 5, 1967, in *Fanghsiu Wen-pao*, February 7, 1967.

adopted the anarchistic method of expanding their numbers in the countryside by inciting poor and lower-middle peasants belonging to other organizations to join forces with them.<sup>27</sup> The people's communes to which peasants battle-hardened in urban power seizures returned, and which were the points of contact between these mass organizations and the countryside, became focal points of agitation.

When, at the beginning of the summer of 1967, both the ultra-leftist movement for the strengthening of the proletarian dictatorship and the reaction of the conservatives to the new wave of power seizures alternately stirred up local conflicts, the peasants were urged by both sides to join in the struggle. In Szechuan the 'Industrial Army' recruited peasants in the countryside to crush the Rebels in the towns. In Wuhan the 'Million Heroes' offered them three yuan<sup>28</sup> a day to demonstrate in town on the side of the conservative organizations. That the Rebels used the same methods was shown in a resolution passed by the Peking Municipal Revolutionary Committee on September 1st, which stated:

Red Guards, badly led by their leaders, have caused work stoppages in the factories and the countryside by persuading workers and peasants that it was more important to intervene elsewhere than to work and make revolution where they were.<sup>29</sup>

The peasants were a reserve of manpower that all parties coveted. Those who wanted to enlist them were undoubtedly also inspired by the strategic use that Mao Tse-tung had made of peasant forces during the revolutionary wars to encircle the towns from the countryside. On July 20th the *Peking Daily* denounced those who were misapplying Chairman Mao's ideas on the encirclement of the

<sup>27</sup> Quoted by Harald Munthe-Kaas, 'Mao's Pinkish Peasants,' *Far Eastern Economic Review*, December 14, 1967, p. 481.

<sup>28</sup> UK 50p.; US \$1.20.

<sup>29</sup> Resolution of the Enlarged Session of the Peking Revolutionary Committee, September 1, 1967.

towns. Something was happening at that moment which might well have been very serious. 'To mobilize the peasants to pour into the cities is a crime; a crime against the proletariat, against the people, and from the point of view of the peasants, a crime against themselves,'<sup>30</sup> cried Ch'en Po-ta in a speech on the Wuhan events.

But the peasants who had been drawn into the urban struggles made up only a tiny proportion of the whole. There was no serious crisis, no chain of misfortunes, and the conjunction of circumstances necessary for a peasant revolt did not occur. What the Cultural Revolution did in fact do was to relax control over the cadres after several years of moderate policies. Some peasants were saying that ideological changes were making life progressively easier.

The organizers of the movement to encircle the cities from the countryside probably failed to muster significant forces. But the most serious consequence of their operation was that it set peasants fighting against peasants, for the two sides used the same method. This was made even more serious when both sides tried to use the armed peasants of the militia. The militia had very few arms to distribute. These were kept by the people's armed forces departments of the *hsien*, and they had been instructed that the Cultural Revolution should on no account be used as an excuse for the weapons to be taken from the armouries. Sometimes, however, reactionary organizations looted arsenals, so that the local military chiefs, who had been ordered to help the left and may also have been short of men, decided to arm the militia under their command.

'In general,' said Ch'en Po-ta, 'the mobilization of the peasants towards the cities always started from the military districts and were organized by the people's armed forces departments.'

The army, badly shaken by the Wuhan affair,<sup>31</sup> hesitated during August over what tactics to adopt, and its

<sup>30</sup> Extract from speech by Comrade Ch'en Po-ta on July 21, 1967, in the Peking *Ching kangshan*, June 26, 1967.

<sup>31</sup> See next chapter.



doubts were reflected in the army press. The August 1st (Army Day) issue of the *PLA Daily* had an editorial for the militia that pleaded with the army and Party chiefs 'who were opposed to democratic spirit or political education among the militia.'<sup>32</sup> This article apparently regretted that the militia could not always be relied upon, but it did not condemn their use in the revolution. It was rather a warning against their misuse. The peasant militia was a delicate instrument susceptible to counter-revolutionary propaganda.

On August 18th a similar editorial suddenly sanctioned the use of the militia.<sup>33</sup> It stated that the command of town and *hsien* armed forces should support the left just as the PLA did, adding that the militia was to obey without question. This was perhaps intended to offset the political immaturity mentioned above. It was essential to take Chairman Mao's course and obey, the editorial insisted.

New weapons now came out of the stores. Rival factions did not dare oppose rebels who were now armed. In Canton, Anhwei, and perhaps in many other places too, revolutionary struggles threatened to turn into pitched battles, and the Centre had to cancel its last orders to the army.<sup>34</sup> The army was now divided between those who wanted the militia armed and those who agreed with the Centre that the Cultural Revolution did not justify taking such a risk.

The quarrel that arose on this issue continued until the dismissal of Yang Ch'eng-wu as Acting Chief of Staff. The original order was, however, countermanded in time to prevent further fatal clashes from developing.

At the very time when struggles were at their most violent, the theoreticians of collectivization were quietly laying down the policy that would emerge at the end of the Cultural Revolution. On August 22nd, the same day that

<sup>32</sup> Reprinted in *People's Daily*, August 6, 1967.

<sup>33</sup> Militia editorial of *PLA Daily*, August 18th, reprinted in *People's Daily*, August 20, 1967.

<sup>34</sup> See especially Chiang Ch'ing's speech of September 5, 1967, on the Anhwei problem (quoted in Chapter 9 below).

the British Legation in Peking was burned down, the *People's Daily* published a major article on the organization of the communes,<sup>35</sup> according to which it would have been absurd to wait for mechanization before achieving full collectivization as the peasants could not have used machines when production was organized on a household basis. This was the beginning of a campaign to strengthen the position of socialism in the countryside, a campaign for which the soldiers were to be the first propagandists.

We have seen above how there had been soldiers in the villages since the middle of February. 'We arrived in Hsipu on February 11th at the request of several commune members,' explained one political instructor who had been sent with two of his men to 'support the left' in a production brigade.<sup>36</sup> 'Where I went,' said another soldier in another story carried by the New China News Agency, 'nobody could read, there was only one person in the whole village who had finished school, there was no radio, and the peasants had never heard of the Cultural Revolution.' In places such as this, of which there may have been many, there was no point in starting agitation.

In Lank'ao,<sup>37</sup> a county which had established its revolutionary committee very early, on October 30th, the achievements of the Cultural Revolution for a whole *hsien* of some 400,000 peasants amounted to no more than the criticism of a landlord, an exhibition, some meetings at which old people told stories of the miseries of the past, and the distribution of the works of Mao Tse-tung. Every

<sup>35</sup> 'The Struggle Between the Two Lines on the Question of Agricultural Collectivization,' *People's Daily*, August 22, 1967, New China News Agency, no. 82202, English language series.

<sup>36</sup> 'How the men of the PLA supported the proletarian revolutionaries in a North Chinese village,' New China News Agency, no. 121310, December 13, 1967, French language series.

<sup>37</sup> Lank'ao was the territory of the hero Yu-lu, who alone at that time had been a secretary of the Party committee. It provided the province of Honan with its first *Hsien*-level revolutionary committee. New China, no. 012204, 1968, French language series.



peasant was given the 'three old favourites'<sup>38</sup> and 62,000 sets of the Selected Works were distributed. In short, disturbance in this district was kept to a minimum, while the interest of the peasants in new ideas was directed towards the Thought of Mao Tse-tung.<sup>39</sup>

The Cultural Revolution ended there with the realization of an agronomist's dream: a 'unified command' was established by the *hsien* revolutionary committee to 'guide the transformation of alkaline land into rice paddy and cotton fields.'<sup>40</sup>

### *Revolution and peace in the countryside*

The decision specifying where and how power was to be taken in the countryside was only reached on December 4, 1967. It took the form of a directive that the urban public only saw in a few Red Guard papers. It only concerned the rural zones, and the Centre may well have wanted to keep the announcement little known. It was strikingly similar to the draft directive of the previous year, a fact that by itself shows that the Cultural Revolution in the countryside was straightforward.

The seven-point directive of December 4th<sup>41</sup> did, however, contain two additions: some guarantees and a programme. On the one hand it assured the peasants that there would be no social changes in the countryside:

There is no need to make general modifications in the system of three classes<sup>42</sup> now current in the people's communes, with production teams as the basic level, or

<sup>38</sup> Three short homilies of Mao's: 'Serve the People,' 'In Memory of Dr Norman Bethune,' and 'The Foolish Old Man Who Moved Mountains.'

<sup>39</sup> New China News Agency, French series, no. 012204, 1968.

<sup>40</sup> New China News Agency, no. 107004, 1968, French series.

<sup>41</sup> Central Committee directive on the Cultural Revolution in the Villages, this Winter and next Spring, December 4, 1967.

<sup>42</sup> Former poor, middle, and rich peasants.

in the system of private plots. There is no need to alter them.<sup>43</sup>

On the other hand, it regulated what kind of power seizures should take place at the various levels of districts and production groups:

Districts controlled by those who have taken the capitalist road must, through power seizures, come back into the hands of proletarian revolutionaries, the main force of which are the poor and lower-middle peasants.<sup>44</sup>

This limited the inevitable overthrow of committees to the level of *hsien* and upward. Violent seizures of power in production brigades and teams were ruled out, and any changes in the control of production teams condemned.

It is not necessary to seize power in production teams. In brigades where a power seizure is necessary, the poor and lower-middle peasants must be relied upon in achieving a great triple alliance, and the question must be resolved by choosing a new leading group.<sup>45</sup>

The explanation for this policy was that the overwhelming majority of peasant cadres were good or relatively good.

Political activity thus seems to have been encouraged at *hsien* levels and above, while at lower levels all energies were to be devoted to production. Taken together, the guarantees given should have ensured that the winter and the following year would be free of disorder. Although nothing was said about the rebuilding of the Party, this would also have created favourable conditions for an operation needing old cadres who had been won over, and Leadership Groups strengthened with newcomers who had the confidence of the people. Article 5 of the directive specified that once an alliance had been achieved, Leadership Groups should be set up in the *hsien* and com-

<sup>43</sup> Article 4.

<sup>44</sup> Article 6.

<sup>45</sup> Article 5.

munes to direct the Cultural Revolution in production brigades and teams. As many cadres as possible would be taken back since not many power seizures would in fact take place. Finally, the poor peasants' associations were called upon to make their influence felt, particularly in the districts where political awareness was stirring.

The Centre and the 'provisional institutions' of the provinces worked together in December to bring about the creation of revolutionary committees in all the people's communes. The Peking papers stressed that the revolutionary committees of the *hsien* and other districts (or, in their absence, the preparatory groups for these committees) were responsible for achieving this.<sup>46</sup> In the countryside, more than anywhere else, the higher revolutionary authorities had to encourage their formation from above.

Be that as it may, in order to give the revolutionary committees in the communes some meaning it was necessary to explain the Cultural Revolution's policy towards the peasants. On November 23rd the *People's Daily* had laid down policy in a fundamental article<sup>47</sup> on which commentaries were to be based.

This article may well have reproduced the report that Ch'en Po-ta gave at the work meeting held by the Central Committee from October 21 to 27, 1967. The article was militant in tone, as became an attack on the evil policies of the past intended to inspire the new men who had to make the revolution. It condemned revisionism in agrarian policies in China and the usurpation of the Socialist Education Movement by 'China's Khrushchev.' It urged the proletariat and the former poor and lower-middle peasants to 'rely on the powerful strength of the people's dictatorship to consolidate and develop the socialist system of collective ownership, and to take the road of common prosperity.' In short, peasant revolutionary committees were to

<sup>46</sup> *Peking Daily*, editorial, December 15, 1968.

<sup>47</sup> 'Struggle between the two lines in China's countryside' by the editorial departments of the *People's Daily*, *Red Flag*, and *PLA Daily*. (English translation in *Peking Review*, no. 49, December 1, 1967, pp. 11-19; also published as a pamphlet by Foreign Languages Press under the same title.)

emerge on the impetus of criticism of the favours Liu Shao-ch'i had shown the peasants.

The caustic effect of this doctrine was somewhat offset by the guarantees contained in the more discreet directive of December 4th, and these guarantees were to be corroborated. The press was even to suggest that the credit of the policy of readjustment in 1960 should go to Mao Tse-tung.<sup>48</sup> This was a pledge that the regime would be reasonable as regards the three categories of peasants, the teams, and the private plots, since this was the policy of Chairman Mao.

Nevertheless, some groups of peasants were fighting on the side of reaction, which they had not previously been doing on their own account, it would appear. Were some of them against the inclusion of the poor peasants in the management of affairs? Or were the poor peasants making the mistake of trying to establish themselves by means of power seizures? Whatever the reason, incidents occurred, and there was even one in the suburbs of Peking. The 'Red Flag Commune' of the Takou Production Brigade had the doubtful honour of being mentioned in an official bulletin when it was ordered to hand over to the army within three days the murderers of three poor peasants.<sup>49</sup>

The soldiers sent on the 'support agriculture' assignment were few in number, and although some had been in the countryside since the Chinese New Year of 1967, most of them only arrived in the summer. During the year the confused cadres had been doing little to assert their authority, and their failure to act had affected public order, the control of production and markets, and the state's attempt to revive economic planning. Planning needed up-to-date information on the amount of land sown, and statistics on the goods put on sale in collective markets. 'For the last two years the Ministry of Agriculture has not been

<sup>48</sup> See Anna Louise Strong's *Letter from China*, January 15, 1968.

<sup>49</sup> Notice of the Peking Revolutionary Committee and the Peking Garrison of January 27, 1968. *Peking Daily*, January 27, 1967 (evening edition).

able to do this,' said Chou En-lai on February 2nd, 'it has been unable to give its co-operation.'<sup>50</sup>

In regions where authority had been in abeyance for some time, the absence of contact was even affecting public morality:

Feudal superstitions have returned to the villages. There are speculators to be found there; gambling goes on in public; land has been divided up; there are murders, theft and sabotage.<sup>51</sup>

The climate was not right for the establishment of revolutionary committees through assemblies, unless determined men were appointed by the authorities. The Centre thought that such men might be found among those who had positions in the militia. They had to take the place of the army in the triple alliance on revolutionary committees in places where soldiers could not be sent. Thus the militia members were supplied with the simple ideological weapons of slogans like, 'Fight selfishness and criticize revisionism,'<sup>52</sup>—in other words, reproaching the peasants with their loss of a collective spirit and spreading the campaign to repudiate Liu Shao-ch'i in the countryside. The press encouraged them and provided examples, drawing analogies between military problems and those arising in revolutionary struggles.

While the county revolutionary committees were exerting themselves with the militia to show the peasants that Liu Shao-ch'i's methods would only have benefited the rich, as a restoration of private interest would have reduced the poor peasants to serfdom, Peking was continu-

<sup>50</sup> Speech of Chou En-lai on February 2nd to representatives of revolutionary committees of the principle government ministries and departments.

<sup>51</sup> Speech by Li Te-sheng, commander of the troops stationed in Anhwei and chairman of the Anhwei Provincial Revolutionary Committee, quoted from Anhwei Radio by *China News Analysis*, no. 710, pp. 6-7.

<sup>52</sup> Slogan of Mao Tse-tung's put forward by Lin Piao in his National Day speech, October 1, 1967 (*Peking Review*, no. 41, October 6, 1967, p. 10).

ing its theoretical investigation of the problems of collectivization. The revolutionaries in the National Defence Scientific and Technological Commission were entrusted with producing a report to refute the 'theory of productive forces.' The report stated that, judging from past revolutions, 'major developments of productive forces are generally only achieved after changes in the relations of production.'<sup>53</sup>

#### *The strengthening of socialist positions*

The argument that a hurried collectivization could not succeed until the communes had been provided with agricultural machinery had to be refuted. All the doctrine of this period stressed that the necessary resources for the construction of socialism could only be achieved after collectivization. The rebels did not try to show that new relations of production were needed, but that the system established in an earlier stage of the revolution, which was being threatened, had to be strengthened. 'Only when the socialist position in the countryside has been firmly established has it been possible for the great proletarian cultural revolution to win victory after victory in the cities,' wrote Yao Wen-yuan six months later,<sup>54</sup> acknowledging that the poor and lower-middle peasants were resolute allies of the working class. He reckoned then, in August 1968, that the poor peasants had succeeded in guiding the revolutionary committees and the production brigades. He also confirmed by implication that the Cultural Revolution was content with strengthening the old system of teams, brigades and communes. He also showed that it seemed important at a certain moment to achieve revolutionary committees in the countryside and to stabilize the organization of the villages before any more progress could be achieved in the Cultural Revolution among students and workers.

<sup>53</sup> New China News Agency, French language series, no. 021206, 1968.

<sup>54</sup> 'The working class must exercise leadership in everything,' *Red Flag*, no. 2, 1968; see *Peking Review*, no. 35, August 30, 1968, pp. 3-6.

One might believe that this solution was somewhat easy on peasants who had achieved no revolutionary conquests and wanted to win no trophies. This hypothesis is strengthened by the way that at just this moment official documents suddenly started to speak of the leading role of the working class. But if we realize that the socialist revolution had taken place in the countryside over eight years earlier, and that it was vital not to sacrifice its gains, it is understandable that Yao Wen-yuan should have spoken of nothing more ambitious than consolidation.

The method chosen to make the institutions of the people's communes stronger and more revolutionary was not by overthrowing and replacing the existing authorities, but by reducing their numbers. Some posts were eliminated, and the poor peasants were probably more strongly represented than they had been before. This method was in accordance with the instructions of December 4, 1967, which sought to avoid unnecessary seizures of power. One example held up to the nation was that of Hsi-yang county in Shansi where, after the reform, the leading group of the revolutionary committee was only a third the size of the former Party committee; and the revolutionary committee had less than two-thirds the number of the members of the former *hsien* people's committee. This approach made it possible to achieve a Maoist majority in local revolutionary committees by eliminating conservatives, which was a step towards achieving a Maoist majority for the Party conference.<sup>55</sup>

It must be assumed that the poor and lower-middle peasants thus had an increased right to speak. Their associations were not given a set political role, except that they were given ultimate control over the schools where peasant children were educated. This fitted in with the Cultural Revolution's task of reforming the 'superstructure.' When Mao Tse-tung gave instructions that the working class would in future take over the running of education he

<sup>55</sup> A different method was adopted in the army, which was not purged. Party committees in the army were not reduced in size but were swollen with an influx of new cadres.

added, 'In the countryside the schools should be managed by the poor and lower-middle peasants.'<sup>56</sup>

The peasants learned in the classic manner how to organize themselves: they read about the recommended models in the press. Shuiyuan commune in Ying'ou county, Liaoning, had organized twenty schools, 'basically achieving the target of one school for each brigade.' Each school had 'a committee for the educational revolution, consisting of representatives both of the poor and lower-middle peasants, and of the revolutionary teachers and students.'<sup>57</sup> The press gave many other examples of schools run by poor peasants. The *People's Daily* carried at least one a day between October 18 and November 2, 1968.

Teaching was simplified and the length of the courses reduced. Some courses were based on Chairman Mao's Eight-Point Charter for Agriculture that dated from the time of the Great Leap Forward, and summarized the most useful lessons for the peasants: deep ploughing, soil improvement, heavy fertilization, water conservancy, seed selection, close planting, plant protection, field management, and reform of tools.

Rural schools found a method of practical teaching without ignoring the Thought of Mao Tse-tung and, in order that as many children as possible should have confidence that instruction led to progress, poor and lower-middle peasants became the guardians of knowledge.

<sup>56</sup> Mao's instructions reported by Yao Wen-yuan in the article quoted above. See *Peking Review*, no. 35, August 30, 1968, p. 4.

<sup>57</sup> 'Report of an investigation into the experience gained by Shuiyuan Commune, Ying'ou district, in carrying out the revolution in education' by *People's Daily* and *Red Flag* reporters. *Red Flag*, no. 3, 1968, and *Peking Review*, no. 39, September 27, 1968, pp. 19-22.