

Part II

A TEST OF THE NEWS

Chapter 5

WHEN THE RUSSIANS TOOK OVER CHINA

The Background

So far in this book we have reminded ourselves of the history of American involvement with China. We have seen how all kinds of erroneous reports about Chiang Kai-shek and about events in China were disseminated during the war, and how Chiang and his partisans have attempted to influence American public opinion.

But what can we test the news against? What constitutes accurate reporting? There is as yet no single definitive account of what has happened in China since the establishment of the Communist regime, and it may be many years before such an account can be written. But this does not mean that there have not been some decisive happenings in China during the last fourteen years about which there is now little or no dispute. (There is no dispute, for instance, that since 1949 Mao Tse-tung's government has continually been in effective control of China.) And while on less clearly observable facts there is no absolute measurement of accuracy, we are able to compare what we have read in our press with the eyewitness reports of other Western correspondents, industrialists, scientists, doctors, and economists, who have been able to travel to China and see what is going on there. And finally, of course, we can ask ourselves which reports in the American press have been self-contradictory, which have survived the test of time, and which have been proved mistaken by subsequent events.

In this section I shall apply these tests to American accounts of some of the more important developments that have taken place in China since the revolution.

In December 1949, not many weeks after the establishment of his new government in Peking, Mao Tse-tung went to Moscow to negotiate a "Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance" with the Soviet Union. China, after two decades of civil war and occupation by the Japanese, and a long period of misrule by Chiang Kai-shek, was in need of economic help and she turned to the one country that was likely to give it to her.

Subsequent events have shown us that the help the Soviet Union was prepared to give to the Chinese government was generous. Under the terms of the treaty negotiated by Mao in Moscow, a considerable number of Soviet technicians were to be dispatched to China during the next decade to set up factories and train Chinese in modern technology; many complete manufacturing plants—some of them very large—were sent from the U.S.S.R. and set up in China; an enormous amount and variety of essential equipment was provided to enable the Chinese to begin their industrialization. Blueprints, machinery designs, and technical data were given apparently without stint. Machine tools, trucks, locomotives, weapons, agricultural machinery, and geological and electronic equipment were provided in vast amounts.

It is a matter of historical fact—and the Chinese are the first to acknowledge it—that China's remarkably swift recovery after the civil war and the rapidity of her industrialization would have been quite impossible without the assistance provided by the

Soviet Union. All this flowed from the treaty that was being discussed by Mao Tse-tung in Moscow.

Nor was this all. Under the Yalta agreement of 1945 (while Chiang Kai-shek was still in power) the U.S.S.R. had demanded that the Chinese port of Dairen be internationalized, that Russian control of Port Arthur be re-established, and that the Chinese Eastern and South Manchurian railroads should be jointly controlled by Russia and China. Within a few years the Soviet Union renounced these rights which she had successfully claimed at Yalta. Port Arthur and Dairen subsequently were returned to the Chinese and the railroads that had been run as a "joint enterprise" were placed under exclusive (by then Communist) Chinese ownership and management.

Almost a decade later the Russians and Chinese found themselves engaged in a bitter dispute, but in the period we are discussing there was little evidence to suggest that there existed anything but the closest collaboration between the two great Communist nations.

A study of some of the items appearing in the American press during the early 1950's provides us with a classic example of how totally misleading speculation can be. It is true that very little direct information was available—the Russians and Chinese did not let us in on their discussions and plans. That was natural enough and was to be expected, and it was natural enough that our national curiosity was aroused as to what was going on in those discussions in Moscow. But what is not natural is to present speculation as if it were news, especially when the speculation turns out, as in this case, to be 100 percent wrong.

We can see here how some of the reporters, columnists, the China "experts" take their cues from each other; unanimity provides a measure of assurance. I maintain that we can also see how a myth, once it is firmly established, can linger on for almost a decade in the face of overwhelming evidence that disproves it.

But if the original surmise is wrong, it does not matter how many writers repeat it, or how distinguished they are, or how

"authoritatively" they express it, or how learnedly they can make speeches about it, or how much the government itself lends official support to it—it will remain false, and the public will to the extent to which the error has been disseminated be deluded.

Let us now turn to see some of the things the public was being told about Sino-Russian relations at the time of Mao's visit to Moscow and after. With the facts now available to us, it is a legitimate generalization to say that almost everything said about Sino-Russian relations at this time by the press, the government, the columnists, and the "experts" *had no basis in reality*.

The Story

... what is happening in China is that the Soviet Union is detaching the northern provinces of China from China and is attaching them to the Soviet Union.

—Secretary of State Dean Acheson in a speech to the National Press Club, January 12, 1950.

Mao was in Moscow. Dire predictions were headlined across the country. Eminent columnists wrote of "secret codicils" and editorials warned that another country had fallen into Stalin's hands. The fact that Mao had gone to Moscow in December 1949 and that the treaty was not signed until February was used as grounds for much speculation as to the harsh terms that the Russians were demanding of the Chinese.

The Secretary of State in the speech quoted above was specific. Outer Mongolia,¹ Inner Mongolia, Manchuria, and Sinkiang province (in all, about a third of the area of China, the press dutifully reported) was being taken over by the Soviet Union.

The *New York Times*, on January 22, 1950, editorially accepted the accuracy of Mr. Acheson's impeachment.

¹ The fact that Outer Mongolia had been a republic for almost a quarter of a century did not prevent Mr. Acheson including it as part of the China that was to be "detached" by Russia.

He stated that the Soviet Union was "attaching" areas in northern China, and they can certainly be attached without the formality of annexation. Outer Mongolia is already so "attached" by every standard. The Russian domination of the "autonomous" border area of western Manchuria and northern Inner Mongolia is obvious. The control of all Manchuria through the use of the railway network and the major part of it is already far advanced.

But this was really an old story—Mr. Acheson merely provided the official endorsement. On February 14, 1949, C. L. Sulzberger, Paris correspondent and foreign affairs expert of the *New York Times*, was reporting:

In northernmost China the Soviet Union, continuing the traditional eastward drive of Russian imperialism at the expense of Marxist ideology, is in the process of assuming direct control over a vast area extending from Turkestan across Mongolia and Manchuria to the Pacific Provinces of the U.S.S.R.

In the same year, on November 22, Arthur Hays Sulzberger, president and publisher of the *New York Times*, and Henry R. Lieberman, the *Times* correspondent recently returned from China, were addressing the fifteenth annual luncheon for automotive and industrial executives in Detroit. Mr. Lieberman informed the executives that the Chinese Communist revolution, "particularly in Manchuria, has been 'hi-jacked' by Russia."

With the Secretary of State's endorsement, the "take-over" story was given a new lease on life. On January 22, 1950, the *New York Times* added a further ominous note:

. . . the general pattern indicates at least the possibility that Communist China may sooner or later receive some sort of compensatory offer from the Soviet Union. . . . Expansion in the South may be Red China's recompense for submitting to Russian expansion in the North.

Where, one must ask, did the *New York Times* find its evidence for this "general pattern" of horse-trading between Stalin and Mao? From the *Times* bureau in Moscow, where the negotiations

were being conducted? I could find no report from there. The only published material I could find as a possible source for this editorial was a UP dispatch from Formosa printed a few days earlier. According to this report, Yen Hsi-shan—a notorious warlord from northwest China, then Premier of Nationalist China—declared "that the Chinese Communist leader Mao Tse-tung had 'swapped' huge areas to Russia for Chinese Communist domination of southeast Asia." Whether the *Times* accepted this undocumented (and untrue) statement from one of Chiang Kai-shek's henchmen as a basis for an important editorial, I do not know, but the editorial would seem to have been consistent with the statement.

Mr. Christopher Rand had cabled the *New York Herald Tribune* from Hong Kong on January 19, 1950, that to dominate a part of China, Russia would have to dominate it all.

It is believed here that Soviet Russia has much the same designs on the fringes of North China that Czarist Russia had: It wants to dominate them piecemeal, as Secretary of State Dean Acheson has recently suggested. *Times* have changed, however. Especially China has become much more unified than in Czarist times. This means that to dominate some parts of North China it is probably necessary to dominate the whole country.

The State Department on January 25 issued "background material, based on the large accumulation of reports and data available to this Government." The full text of the "background material" was carried by the AP and reported in the *New York Times*. In addition to repeating the Secretary of State's earlier statement the text declared that in Manchuria:

. . . the Soviet Union has placed the richest industrial area of China firmly behind the Far Eastern segment of the Iron Curtain. . . . Soviet strategic detachment from Chinese control is in progress in China's northern provinces as it is in certain European areas and, as in those areas, may be expected to proceed by carefully planned stages.

The State Department named names and places:

The Sha Ho Kon Vehicle Manufacturing Works, the Dairen Shipbuilding Yard and the Dairen Sugar Works are all under Soviet military control.²

The *Herald Tribune* on January 27, under the heading IMPERIALISM IN CHINA, ran an editorial:

The deadly nature of the thrust implicit in Secretary Acheson's charge of . . . Soviet alienation of Chinese territory . . . the evidence that the Communist regime in Peking is the tool and abetter of the process (foreign imperial domination) is more than serious: it is lethal. . . . This exposure of the actual march of the new Russian imperial exploitation, and of its Chinese tools and agents, is as deadly a weapon as any now remaining to us for the combat of Communism in the vast mainland Chinese areas which it has submerged in chaos and disillusion. . . .

But the *Times* was not to be outdone.

SOVIET SAID TO ASK FOR FULL CONTROL OF 7 CHINA PORTS WAS the banner headline given to a Paris dispatch by C. L. Sulzberger on January 29. According to Mr. Sulzberger's sensational disclosure, not only were the Russians now demanding full control of seven northern ports,³ but they were pressing the Chinese for three additional concessions: A labor force of five hundred thousand Chinese; increased shipments of food, especially grain ("from the rich Province of Manchuria—although disorganized and ravaged China faces the imminent threat of a disastrous famine");⁴ and finally far-reaching concessions were to be made to "minority" groups and in the very areas Mr. Acheson was detaching from China!

² In reply the Chinese (according to a January 30 report to the *New York Times* by Mr. Tillman Durdin) said the State Department's "background material" was "shameless fabrication." A few days later the New China News Agency said that not only did the State Department manufacture Russian control but it even invented places. According to the New China News Agency, there was no such place as Sha Ho Kon, where the State Department had conveniently set up a "Vehicle Manufacturing Plant."

³ One of the ports up for grabs, as listed by Mr. Sulzberger, was "Li Fu-chien believed to be Haichow." There is no port called Li Fu-chien; and this is probably a garbled version of the name of a Vice-Premier, Li Fu-chun.

⁴ Manchuria has never been a Chinese province, but the northeastern section of the country comprising a number of provinces. Actually the term "Manchuria" does not exist in Chinese but was invented by foreigners.

In return for all this, according to this remarkable story, the Chinese were demanding huge financial help and arms shipments. Mr. Sulzberger reported:

Latest advices indicate that the Chinese negotiators have not yet acceded to these demands. They have been countering with requests on an almost equally ambitious scale.

The result is that the bargaining that is going on . . . is on a basis of Oriental bazaar trading almost without historical precedent.

According to this astounding revelation from Paris, if the Chinese were forced to knuckle under and grant Moscow "the requested rights over their northern ports, they would concede the U.S.S.R. absolute control over the Yellow Sea."

In this front-page dispatch, Mr. Sulzberger managed to turn up much surprising news: Mao was not happy about the negotiations and so Chou En-lai and a "second wave" of Chinese delegates had to be called in; Mao may have fallen "seriously ill"; Moscow wanted the "most independent-minded leaders of Communist China to be absent from their country at the time," so that it would afford "more opportunity for a pro-Soviet faction . . . to consolidate its political position quietly while the limelight currently is focused on Moscow. . . ."

An amazing scoop—almost as if Mr. Sulzberger had had a private line from Paris right into the Kremlin!

On January 31, 1950, the *New York Times* reported that State Department officials generally gave credence to the Russian demand for seven Chinese ports as disclosed by Mr. Sulzberger. The State Department press officer, Michael J. McDermott, told a news conference:

The reports seem to be in line with Secretary Acheson's speech that Russia was in the process of taking over in North China areas.

On February 13, 1950, the Sino-Soviet Treaty was signed.

No mention of one-third of China being "detached"! No seven ports handed over! No five hundred thousand Chinese laborers

to be sent to Russia! It was left to Mr. Sulzberger three days later to explain why—under a four-column, front-page headline:

SECRET CODICILS TO SINO-SOVIET PACT SAID TO GIVE RUSSIA
KEY PEIPING POSTS AND LARGE FORCE OF CHINESE LABOR.

Specific indications were received here tonight that secret codicils to the new treaty of alliance between the Soviet Union and the Chinese People's Republic had been signed by representatives of the Moscow and Peiping Governments.

In this long dispatch, Mr. Sulzberger in effect repeated the Russian "demands" that earlier he had announced were being made on China—though he scaled down the number in the Chinese labor force to three hundred thousand. But he added some new secrets. A Soviet mission was to be established in the security and administrative branches of the Chinese government; Russian political commissars were to be installed in large Chinese army units under the guise of officer training programs; the Kremlin had prepared personnel, trained in Tashkent, to take over the administration of Sinkiang province.⁵

But where, one must ask, did Mr. Sulzberger obtain all his remarkable information? What were his sources? We can search in vain for any indication as to how trustworthy his informants might be. "Specific indications were received here tonight," he tells us.

What were the "specific indications" and where did they come from? He doesn't tell us. Instead, Mr. Sulzberger, in *this one dispatch alone*, used these as "sources" for his "specific indications": "it is understood"; "it is reported"; "responsible information that became available in Eastern European capitals," "satellite sources," "it is considered logical," "information available in interested capitals," "there is an inclination in certain quarters," "such circles speculate," "the following reliable information," "Peiping is understood to have urged," "However, it is

⁵ Following Mr. Sulzberger's disclosures of these "secret agreements," the New York Times quoted Chiang Kai-shek's representative at the UN, Mr. T. F. Tsiang, who assured the American public that "the Chinese Communists had 'sold' Manchuria and the province of Sinkiang to the Soviet Union under secret clauses in the Moscow-Peiping treaty."

reported," "it is furthermore reported," "are said to," "it is believed," "is understood to have made," "no concrete information is yet available. . . . However, it is known," "it is understood that," "it is understood" (again), "Moscow is said to," "it is reported that," "it is believed," (again) "it appears that," and "to date no reliable information has been received."

Thirty years earlier in their analysis of reporting about Russia, Walter Lippmann and Charles Merz had some harsh things to say about the use of vague sources. They thought that even more misleading than government statements that were not statements of fact were *anonymous* statements. Phrases such as "government and diplomatic sources," "reports reaching here," "it is stated on high authority that," place the reader at the mercy of opinion that he cannot check. Behind such phrases could be almost anybody—a minor official, a dinner table conversation, hotel gossip, a paid agent. "It is time to demand," they wrote, that the correspondent "identify his informants sufficiently" so that readers can judge the nature of the report. "He need not name the individual source but he can 'place' him."

However vaguely they were disclosed to the reader, the New York Times itself clearly had faith in Mr. Sulzberger's sources of information. An editorial on February 16—the day the story appeared—stated:

. . . the published agreement does not tell the full story but is supplemented by secret agreements which . . . would admit Soviet forces to Chinese bases and into the China Sea athwart our own Pacific lines of communications. . . .

For while making China another Soviet satellite, the Kremlin has managed to disguise this fact . . . the agreement itself is full of hidden traps. . . .

Three days later, the New York Times editorially dismissed the treaty's stipulation that "Russia would withdraw from control of Port Arthur and the Manchurian railways." (In fact, the Russians eventually did withdraw.)

Presumably the Kremlin believes that by that time puppetry will be so firm in Manchuria that nominal control can be a dispensable fiction.

The same editorial shrugged off the meagerness of Russian economic aid to China ("the real meat of it must lie in the undisclosed agreements. This is the window-dressing. . . .")

Nevertheless, even if the agreement is taken in its precise value it is hard to see how China has made any substantial gain. The Chinese have sold out their chances to be independent. . . . If Mao was horse-trading in Moscow he took a trimming. . . .

In May, reporting from Tokyo, Mr. Sulzberger was still handing over Chinese real estate to the Russians.

The Soviet Union is now engaged in the first stages of a long-range program to integrate North China into the economic structure of the U.S.S.R. with indications that political absorption of that vast area may be an ultimate goal. . . . there is ample reason to believe that Moscow's eventual desire . . . is to take over the entire enormous region between Vladivostok and the central Asia republics [a mere 2500 miles!] in order to construct a "land bridge" between the Maritime Provinces and Alma Ata.

It was not only the *New York Times* but other influential papers and the press generally which were confidently reporting the take-over of China. The specialists and scholars, on the other hand, appeared a little more hesitant to reach such sweeping conclusions. Their reports were generally safely ambiguous—they covered the subject "from all angles," leaving a series of possibilities so that whatever eventually happened they would not be too wrong. But they did not hesitate to soberly weigh the prospects of Russian domination of China.

Thus, for example, we find a leading specialist on Sino-Soviet relations, Dr. Robert C. North of Stanford University, referring to Sulzberger's findings which reported "Mao had agreed to furnish a large labor force for work in Siberia, had accorded key positions in China's army, secret police, and Communist Party to Soviet advisers, had consented to place seven Yellow Sea ports under Soviet supervision in case of war, and had 'sold' Sinkiang to the Russians."⁶ While this noted authority did not accept the

⁶ Robert C. North, *Moscow and Chinese Communists* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1953), p. 267.

full accuracy of these reports, he nevertheless thought them of sufficient importance to deal with them as a serious possibility.

When on March 26, 1950, it was announced that the Russians and the Chinese had set up joint oil and mineral companies for the development of Sinkiang province, and that both countries would split the costs and share the proceeds, it brought forth a flurry of "we told you so's." The *New York Times*, still hot for China's take-over, in an editorial a few days later referred to Sinkiang "now within the controlling orbit of the Soviet Union. . . . This type of generosity . . . can more accurately be called merely the economic prelude to annexation."

Mr. Acheson, who had "detached" Sinkiang from China back in January, was still, at a news conference on March 31, insisting "that the Soviet Union was moving 'on a grand scale' to detach Sinkiang Province from China." (*New York Times*, April 1, 1950).

Not one of these assertions was correct. All of Inner Mongolia, Manchuria, and Sinkiang province have remained completely under Chinese control. No Chinese labor force was sent to the Soviet Union. No ports were handed over. No Russians were given positions in the Chinese secret police or Chinese army. Russia, though she has driven some hard bargains, has never at any time, attempted to deal with China as if she were a "satellite." In the case of the joint development of Sinkiang's oil and mineral resources, the Russian share was later turned over completely to the Chinese. (The French correspondent and author, Mr. Tibor Mende, who visited Sinkiang in 1960, found that vast province likely to become one of China's principal industrial centers. "Sinkiang, according to all evidence," he reported, "is a showplace in multi-national relations for the rest of China.")

Russia's "annexation" of one-third of China was so well established by the press accounts that it became, to many, a matter of historical fact. Here are a few quotations to show this happening.

⁷ *China and Her Shadow* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1961), p. 207, and Part Three, Chapter 3, "Sinkiang, the New World Beyond the Jade Gate," pp. 214-29.

An AP message from Taipei, May 23, 1950, quoting Chiang's Defense Ministry, reported that four hundred thousand Soviet citizens were settling in Manchuria and thirty thousand Soviet advisers and technicians were attaching themselves to the Peking government.⁸

Dr. Ivar Spector of the University of Washington's Far Eastern Department, in one of a series of articles which appeared in the *Seattle Times* of June 4, 1950, wrote of Soviet encroachment in China and informed his readers that this process had gone so far that the Chinese were going to adopt a Russian alphabet.

A report from the UP correspondent in London on June 13 concerning the appointment of a new Soviet ambassador to Peking. "It was believed here that Panyushkin may seek to prolong Russia's grip on Manchuria."

"Michael Straight, editor of *The New Republic*, said yesterday that Chinese Communist troops probably were ordered into Korea by Soviet officials and their 'Manchurian puppets' without the consent of Mao Tse-tung, Red China's chief of State. . . ." (UP, Washington, November 10, 1950.)

. . . we can tell our friends in China that the United States will not acquiesce in the degradation which is being forced upon them. We do not recognize the authorities in Peiping for what they pretend to be. The Peiping regime may be a colonial Russian government—a Slavonic Manchukuo on a larger scale. It is not the Government of China. It does not pass the first test. It is not Chinese. It is not entitled to speak for China in the community of nations.

—Dean Rusk, Assistant Secretary
of State for Far Eastern Affairs,
May 18, 1951.

"It is now more than two years since Secretary Acheson declared that the Soviet Union's policy on the Asiatic mainland was one of "attachment." . . . The currently reported developments are a part of that process of attachment. If Mao Tse-tung doesn't know what the Kremlin is doing he is

⁸ The best estimates have shown that the Russians never sent many more than ten thousand technicians to China between 1950 and 1960. This was confirmed in a conversation I had in September 1960 with Mr. Saprnov, Senior Counselor at the Embassy of the U.S.S.R. in Peking.

not wise enough to lead a nation. If he does know, and connives at it, he is not honorable enough to deserve the respect of his innocent followers." (New York Times editorial, August 18, 1952.)

As the years went by and the promised "annexation" of China did not take place, a few lone voices were heard, suggesting that perhaps it might not occur at all. Writing from Hong Kong on September 20, 1955, Mr. A. T. Steele was reporting to the New York *Herald Tribune*:

Signs of cooperation between China and Russia have been far more numerous than evidence of disharmony. . . .

There is no visible evidence to bear out the view that Peiping is "taking orders" from Moscow. On the contrary, all outward signs are that the Peiping government is very much its own boss. . . .

But these assessments were in a distinct minority.

The Saturday Evening Post, in its issue of May 19, 1956, quoted a well-known French correspondent to the effect that it looked "as though the men in Peking have stopped even trying to remain Asian. They are forcing their people to absorb the West in a new way—the Russo-Communist Marxist type of western civilization."

Similar stories of a China under Russian domination continued almost until Sino-Russian differences became so obvious that further talk of this kind became quite meaningless.

The consequences of these erroneous reports were momentous.

To understand the full implications we must go back and see what the conditions were at the time.

Probably not many people now remember that between the establishment of the new Chinese government in October 1949 and the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950, influential voices were being raised suggesting that the United States should, like Britain and other Western nations, accept the Communist victory as a *fait accompli* and come to terms with this reality by recognizing Peking. It was still possible at that time to argue for the recognition of China without being considered subversive; in-

deed, throughout the country widespread discussion was taking place as to the wisdom or otherwise of recognition.⁹

Closely tied to the question of recognition was the question of China's representation in the United Nations. It seemed very possible at this time that the Peking government would be accepted as the real representative of the Chinese people, and as at this time no one was suggesting the creation of "Two Chinas," this would have meant the automatic withdrawal of credentials from the government of Chiang Kai-shek. As early as January 28, 1950, the *New York Times* was reporting that "two more members of the United Nations Security Council—Egypt and Ecuador—may withdraw recognition next month from Nationalist China and supply the necessary votes to seat a delegation of the Chinese Communist regime. . . ."

The seating of Communist China in the United Nations and that government's recognition by the United States, were, of course, precisely what those supporting Chiang Kai-shek in Washington most wished to avoid (see Chapter 4, "The China Lobby"). It was during this time—when recognition of Communist China and her admission into the UN both seemed possible, and even likely—that speeches by Secretary of State Acheson and editorials in influential papers such as the *New York Times*, disseminated the stories that the Chinese government was a "satellite" in the grip of the Soviet Union and that great parts of China's territory were being taken over by the Russians.¹⁰

One of the main purposes of granting diplomatic recognition to Communist China was to prevent her from becoming exclusively dependent on the Soviet Union. This story that China was already in the grip of the Soviet Union, and was even being dismembered by the Soviet Union, must have greatly influenced

⁹ For example, a large conference called by the World Affairs Council in San Francisco, with representatives of the State Department and others present, voted by a large majority for the recognition of Communist China.

¹⁰ It was not only in a single speech that Mr. Acheson made this charge. He repeated it in a press conference (reported in the *New York Herald Tribune*, February 16, 1950): "The Russians will attempt to use the treaty [of alliance with China] to make China as abject a satellite as Hungary or Romania."

those who might otherwise have been in favor of establishing normal relations with her.

The *New York Times* itself expressed it at this time in an editorial not long before the war in Korea started:

It [the Communist regime] has sold out, to Soviet Russia, vast properties and rights of the Chinese people themselves, and, again, in the words of the State Department, "placed the richest industrial area of China firmly behind the Far Eastern segment of the Iron Curtain." In these circumstances it is both our right and our duty to wait for further evidence before we recognize the Communist regime as a genuinely sovereign government. . . .

The *New York Times* then drew the logical editorial conclusion—*no recognition of China!*

Thus, at a moment of great historical decision which enormously influenced America's future, the people of America were being misled by accounts of events which were untrue.

The consequences of this are with us still.

Chapter 6

THE STARVING CHINESE

We have seen with what relative equanimity the Western press reported the perennial famines that were such a tragic feature of prerevolutionary China. Hundreds of thousands of deaths by starvation would occur in one part of China or another every year; and in bad years more than a million people would die. Those are the brutal facts.

The descriptions of those who have witnessed these famine conditions in China are horrifying to read: the population in wide areas reduced to eating bark and grass, small children, while they still had strength enough to crawl, attempting to alleviate their pain by eating dirt and sand; while quite often landlords would surround their loaded granaries with armed guards until the more fortunate peasants in desperation would sell them their remaining land, their tools, and mortgage years of future toil in exchange for just enough food for survival. Certain Western missionary and charitable organizations would attempt to give such help as lay within their power—but this could mitigate the condition of only a few engulfed in these disasters.

For the most part, though Westerners did not minimize the appalling human suffering involved, these famines were accepted as a tragic but inescapable fact of Chinese life. Brief reports of the worst famines would appear in the Western press; occasionally a three- or four-line dispatch would mention that famine conditions were reported from such or such a province; often large areas

would be stricken without any mention. So accustomed had the world become to starvation in China that it rarely caused headlines. The reports, such as they were, were matter-of-fact in tone, with no accompanying editorials or thundering criticisms of the Nationalist government.

With the establishment of the new government in Peking in 1949, two things happened.

First, starvation—death by hunger—ceased in China. Food shortages, and severe ones, there have been, but no starvation. This is a fact fully documented by Western observers, is acknowledged by the Western embassies in China, and is known, of course, to the highest official intelligence in our own country. No Western reporter who has traveled there, none of the resident Western correspondents who live there, no one who has ever traveled through the Chinese countryside and talked to the peasants has any doubts at all that this is true. The indisputable fact is that the famines that in one area or another constantly ravaged the farmlands of China, and the fear of starvation, which for so long had haunted the lives of the Chinese peasants, are today things of the past.

This tremendous fact of historic significance and the influence it has had upon the Chinese people's attitude to their government has been almost wholly ignored by the press. Indeed, the press has helped to create an image in the public mind of a China suffering more than it has ever done before. How many Americans, for instance, would believe a report like this?

The truth is that the sufferings of the ordinary Chinese peasant from war, disorder and famine have been immeasurably less in the last decade than in any other decade in the century.¹

The newspapers in America that I have studied conveyed quite an opposite impression. For an answer to this we come to the second change that happened as a result of the Communist victory in 1949.

¹ *The Times*, London, April 18, 1962.

From that time on the press—which until then had scarcely treated the very real farm problems of Nationalist China as news—began to take an inordinate interest in the food conditions inside China. The reason was clear. To many in the West it appeared that the most likely source of threat to the Peking government lay in a revolt of the people against it—a revolt arising from massive famine conditions. Signs of food shortages were seized upon, enlarged, exaggerated. Endless speculation took place, even within the most learned circles, as to how long it would be before the peasants would revolt.²

In May 1962 an unusually large number of Chinese refugees flocked to Hong Kong, and the overwhelming impression given in the newspapers was that it was starvation that drove them there. As we shall see (page 101), other accounts and official British government statements attest to the fact that the refugees were not suffering from malnutrition, nor did any of them seek political asylum or claim that they were fleeing Communism as such. The primary reason for this sudden flow of refugees in May 1962 appears to have been the reluctance of peasants who had become accustomed to city life to be sent back to the farms "to help agriculture." Food shortages and the general discomfort of life at this period were undoubtedly some of the causes for this exodus, but not starvation.

By reiteration impressions are deeply embedded in people's minds. I am convinced that for almost fifteen years, the great majority of the American public have been led to believe that conditions of almost perpetual famine have existed in China. And that this has been so largely as the result of mistakes by the Chinese government.

Let us examine in greater detail how this impression has been created—about a country whose improvements in its food conditions, as I and others found them, has probably been one of its greatest achievements.

² See Chapter 9.

1950—FAMINE IN RED CHINA—There seems little doubt now that famine in China this year will be catastrophic . . . the situation will be more critical than at any other time in a half century. (*New York Times*, editorial, March 26.)

1951—*Food riots* are reported among peasants. *Famine, floods* are back again. (*U.S. News & World Report*, March 16.)

1952—Shanghai is a city of hungry millions. (UP, Taipei, June 23.)

1953—FAMINE IN RED CHINA: . . . there is no hiding the fact that multiplied millions of Chinese are starving. (*New York Times*, editorial, June 24.)

1954—Red China's leaders are already tightening controls, increasing rationing measures, and trying to prepare against the pressures of starvation. (*Time*, May 10.)

1955—RED CHINA IN GRIP OF SPRING FAMINE: Signs of a spring famine in Communist China are filtering from the mainland. (Tad Szulc, Hong Kong, *New York Times*, April 24.)

1956—RED CHINA BESET BY SPRING FAMINE (headline, *New York Times*, March 27.)

1957—The threat of famine stalks millions of Chinese again this spring. (AP, Hong Kong, May 13.)

1958—Troubles are piling up fast in Red China. Peasants are deserting the collective farms. Cities are packed with hungry, jobless millions. . . . (*U.S. News & World Report*, April 4.)

1959—FAMISHED RED CHINA SLAVES STEAL PIGS' SLOP (headline Hong Kong dispatch, *New York World Telegram and Sun*, June 25.)

1960—In face of the hunger that stalks mainland China for the third straight year. . . . (*Time*, August 22.)

1961—Red China Hunger Reported Stirring Opposition: Taxed to the limit of their endurance by the tightest rationing of food in the modern history of China and near-famine conditions in some areas, the Chinese are reported to be re-

acting to the situation by rejecting Government regulations and even organizing anti-Government movements. (New York Times, April 15.)

1962—Communist China is a land of massive malnutrition and hunger. Three successive years of poor harvests have reduced the food available to most Chinese to little above the barest subsistence level. (Harry Schwartz, New York Times, April 22.)

1963—March and April will be the months to watch. It is then that food stocks will be lowest. Unrest among Chinese peasants is expected. Revolts are likely. . . . (U.S. News & World Report, January 7.)

The appearance of such reports in news sources was not halted even in 1957, the year that China had the largest harvest in its history. I was in China that year. I covered thousands of miles and everywhere saw evidence of the bumper crop. Not long after I returned to the United States, *Time Magazine* (November 11, 1957), in its news columns on Red China inquired, "Famine on the Way?"

Throughout the 1960-62 period, when famine reports were being given large play by the nation's news sources—papers, radio, and TV—there were other accounts and evidence that indicated that such famine reports were grossly exaggerated. On neither of my visits to China did I find conditions anywhere near as bad as had been painted in our press. In 1960 I traveled through areas in China—and reported this in *Awakened China*—where food rations were very tight indeed. But I saw no signs of serious malnutrition, and people who had lived and worked in China during the real famines in the past constantly reminded me that whatever food problems present-day China was facing, they bore absolutely no resemblance to the past.

Reuters, from their bureau in Peking, reported the food shortages, but never described them in terms of "famine" conditions (and some of these less drastic accounts appeared in our press). Competent and experienced European reporters also wrote accounts in China very different from the prevailing press reports about the disastrous conditions there. I feel sure that official Wash-

ington intelligence was well aware that the situation in China was not as disastrous as was being pictured.³

The press did open its correspondence columns, however, to some writers who wished to present a different account of conditions in China. An example of this was a letter written to the Editor of the New York Times on May 5, 1957, in reply to an editorial entitled, GUNS AND BUTTER, which had appeared on April 27. The writer of the letter, Professor Alexander Eckstein, is no sympathizer with Communism. He collaborated with Professor W. W. Rostow in his book, *Prospects for Communist China*.⁴ This, in part, is what Professor Eckstein wrote:

You very correctly point out that the emphasis in all Soviet-bloc planning, including Communist China, continues to be on heavy industry. However, you carry this conclusion much too far in an attempt to show that Chinese food production has badly lagged or declined so that ever-greater masses are exposed to starvation. The figures you cite to support this conclusion are grossly misleading. . . .

. . . all of the available evidence would tend to support the conclusion that food production on the Chinese mainland has grown appreciably in recent years. At the same time the efficiency of food distribution has been greatly improved. As a result, the Chinese Communist regime is in a position to quickly alleviate or prevent local famines which have been traditional in China throughout history.

Thus there is no evidence to support the often-held conclusion that China in recent years has been subject to repeated mass starvation.

A letter to the editor of the New York *Herald Tribune*, following some of Mr. Joseph Alsop's accounts of mass starvation on the mainland in the spring of 1961, is another attempt to correct a false impression. The writer, Sybil Cookson, of Sussex, England, quoted her own experiences as well as those of a friend "who has lived in Shanghai for many years."

³ On December 31, 1960, the Pittsburgh Press reported, "Red China Famine Doubtful by U.S." According to a UPI story from Washington, "Press officer Joseph W. Reap said, 'We are not aware of any Chinese Communist reports of actual famine conditions.'"

⁴ Professor Rostow was one of President Kennedy's principal advisers on foreign policy.

Having recently undertaken a three weeks' tour of China—visiting six cities and many country districts—my husband and I were astonished to read Joseph Alsop's recent report from Hong Kong suggesting that there is widespread famine in China and even a likelihood of a revolt against the present regime.

This report was based on information supplied by refugees, a small minority of disaffected persons, and I can only suppose that their stories have been embellished by propagandists eager to discredit the Peking government. In any case they are quite contrary to our impression formed in China itself last autumn. We were allowed to travel where we desired—in crowded streets, stores and holiday resorts. We visited communes, schools and technical colleges, hospitals and homes for old folk. Nowhere did we see any signs of disaffection, much less of famine, despite a disappointing harvest.

Having seen reports of "famine in China," Mrs. Cookson wrote to a friend who lived in Shanghai. The following are extracts from her friend's reply:

That China during 1960 experienced the severest and most widespread natural calamity of the past century is a fact. . . . To say that China is experiencing a famine is grossly untrue.

During the many years I have lived in China, I know what famine under the old regime was like when natural calamities were not as severe as those in 1960. Then famine refugees streamed into the cities, hoping to pick up a bit of work and perhaps a bowl of soft rice . . . at a relief kitchen . . . many existed by combing the garbage pails of the families who had food. . . .

People throughout the country have been and still are co-operating in their efforts to be sparing with food and to avoid waste, so that the supply will go round for all.

Other attempts to correct erroneous accounts of conditions in China were not so successful in reaching print. In the *New York Times* on September 10, 1961, Mr. Tillman Durdin, the *Times'* China expert, wrote of "mass discontent," "apathy," "mounting deaths," and mentioned a report by a British M.P. of a daily intake of six hundred calories. The medical absurdity of this

should be obvious—no human being, let alone a whole nation, can long exist on six hundred calories.⁵

I have before me a copy of a letter written on October 2, 1961, by a Chinese-speaking British doctor, J. S. Horn, F.R.C.S., addressed to the Editor of the *New York Times* and challenging Mr. Durdin's article. Dr. Horn had just returned home to London after a leisurely journey through central China. "As a doctor," he writes, "I should be quick to notice signs of malnutrition and a daily intake of 600 calories would rapidly produce severe symptoms. Yet the general health of the people appears to be good . . . I found the problems resulting from successive years of severe drought were being tackled with energy and confidence."

A careful search through the files reveals that apparently the *New York Times* never printed this letter.

These isolated attempts to bring the facts to the attention of our newspapers made no difference at all. Throughout 1961 the press published a fairly steady flow of reports of starvation in China.

Red China is in heavy trouble this time. "Natural calamities," crop failures, famine are only part of it. . . .

—*U.S. News & World Report*,
February 20

The population of China is starving. The starvation is methodical and rationed, but it is not even slow starvation.

—Joseph Alsop, *New York Herald Tribune*,
September 13

Things are going from bad to worse inside Communist China. They can get catastrophic. . . . It's a land of hunger. A major disaster in the making; the Reds soon may be fighting for their lives.

—*U.S. News & World Report*,
October 2

⁵ Mr. Joseph Alsop also reported six hundred calories as being the average daily intake—see Chap. 9, "Mr. Alsop's China," p. 178. See also Edgar Snow's chapter on this Alsop report, entitled, "The Year the Chinese Disappeared," in his book, *The Other Side of the River* (New York: Random House, 1962).

The story of starvation inside China . . . is far grimmer than the outside world has been told.

—Drew Pearson, *San Francisco Chronicle*,
November 5

. . . the sour-tasting new soy sauce is said to be made of human hair.

—*Time*, December 1

In the spring of 1962, when the number of refugees from nearby Kwangtung province suddenly increased, newspaper headlines and reports escalated the famine and starvation in China to its full height. Again at this time some voices were raised directing the public's attention to other facts—but the words were scarcely heard in the general clamor. In the House of Commons on May 22, the British Colonial Secretary said: "There is little evidence that the Chinese refugees attempting to enter Hong Kong were suffering malnutrition."

(May 28) *U.S. News & World Report*: "ASIAN MYSTERY: The MASS FLIGHT FROM RED CHINA. Deepening the mystery is the character of the refugees. Many are described as healthy men and women, aged 20 to 30 and showing no signs of malnutrition. . . ."

(May 30) *New York Herald Tribune* reported from Washington that Assistant Secretary of State Averell Harriman had stated that the refugees were "not starving. In fact, they did not show physical evidence of malnutrition."

(June 11) *The New Republic* carried an article from Hong Kong by Jacques Jacquet-Francillon: "Another hypothesis widely circulated throughout a part of the Western press on both sides of the Atlantic also fails to hold water: the famine theory. The refugees whom I saw and the many I was able to question were not people who had fled a land in the grip of real famine. There were no 'living corpses,' as they have too glibly been described. They arrived at the border in a state of exhaustion from four to five days of trudging the roads; but most of them had some food left."

These officials and eyewitness accounts made little impact. They were far outweighed by the huge and steady stream of hunger stories.

(May 15) AP reported from Hong Kong: "Refugees rounded up by Hong Kong patrols today claimed that hundreds of Chinese have died of starvation while trying to reach the border. One said it was impossible to get enough to eat to keep alive in his village. . . ."

(May 19) AP reported from Hong Kong: "Some 3,000 to 5,000 more refugees from hunger-ridden Red China streamed across the border before dawn yesterday."

(May 27) Tillman Durdin, in the *New York Times*: "The migrants in fact were fleeing grim conditions of hunger. . . . ' . . . It is now no longer considered absurd for observers of the China scene to talk of the possibility of a break-up of the Communist regime or revolt against it.'"

(June 18) *Newsweek* spoke of "the 60,000 hungry workers who swarmed out of China last month. . . ."

(June 24) The *San Francisco Chronicle*, in a report from its Hong Kong correspondent: "How many refugees from hungry Red China fled into crowded Hong Kong last month? . . . the truth is anybody's guess."⁶

By July the sudden flow of refugees was over and no longer of general interest to the American press. The stories about the "famine" in China were finally grinding to a halt, though they continued off and on until almost to the end of the year. But *U. S. News & World Report* (which had written on May 28 about the deepening mystery of the refugees—"Many are described as healthy . . . showing no signs of malnutrition") now provided its readers with a new report. On July 9 it ran a bold headline: THE FAMINE MAKERS—A REPORT ON WHY RED CHINA IS STARVING.

⁶ The real number of refugees was, indeed, "anybody's guess." "22,000 from the beginning of this month" (*Wall Street Journal*, May 18); Since May 1, "some 30,000 or more" (AP, Hong Kong, May 22). "An estimated 100,000 refugees had escaped to Hong Kong in recent weeks" (*Wall Street Journal*, May 28). "From the first of May until the 25th, 60,000 Chinese were shunted back and forth" (*Newsweek*, June 4).

And (just in case its busy readers did not have time to read the article itself) things were summed up in a subheading: HERE IS THE INSIDE STORY OF WHAT REALLY IS CAUSING THE FAMINE IN RED CHINA. THE CAUSE: COMMUNIST BUNGLING.

Thus, in spite of authoritative denials, statements from British government and U.S. officials, and eyewitness reports, the American public was left with an over-all impression that it was the "famine" in China that was the cause of the refugees.

Two days after *U. S. News & World Report* had run its "inside story of what is causing the famine in Red China," one of Britain's most eminent and respected businessmen addressed the Royal Asian Society in London. Mr. John Keswick has known China for a great many years—long before 1949—and has returned there a number of times since. The subject of his address was a visit he had just completed to China.

In the towns there were the usual crowds, and to the casual traveller's eye, they certainly did not appear to be starving, as has been reported in some of the press of the Western world.⁷

It was during the summer of 1962—when our papers were running endless stories about China's famine conditions—that I received a letter from a UN official—Mr. Chang Kuo-ho—who, with his American wife and three children, had recently visited his relatives in China. Mr. Chang wrote on July 4, 1962:

From April 14 to June 1 we were in China. We spent one week in Hangchow, enjoying its quiet beauty and then went to Shanghai for five days. From thence we went to Peking where we spent a month and a half.

After having seen so many of my relatives and friends in China I feel I can fully substantiate your view that "up to and including the present food shortage there has been no starvation in China." My father, aged 70, receives 27 catties

⁷ In this address Mr. Keswick described his journey by train through the fertile deltas of the Canton and Pearl rivers. "It runs comfortably, cleanly and on time." *U.S. News & World Report* on July 23, in its page devoted to "Washington Whispers," referred to an unidentified "Chinese businessman just out of Red China: Troubles there are deep and deepening in every conceivable way. For example, a train trip that took three days just a short time ago now takes eight days."

[approximately 35 pounds] of staples—rice, flour and/or other grains in varying proportions—a month; so does my brother, an engineer. The ration coupon required for each meal in a restaurant is usually four ounces, about a bowl and a half of rice, sometimes with a mantow (steamed flour roll). Laborers, of course, get more; a high-school student gets 33 catties [approximately 43 pounds]. Top level intellectuals receive additional coupons for other necessities and for better quality goods.

What is new is the introduction of "high class" commodities on the market, from refreshments up to say a bicycle or a radio. This has encouraged people to save both their money and coupons for something they really want, rather than spending their money always on food. The stores also have some goods to show on their counters. A few years ago it very often happened that as soon as a shipment arrived it was gone in a matter of hours. You referred to this in your remark that the Chinese are "concentrating on improving the quality of their products and increasing their diversity and range."

As far as our own living conditions were concerned, we could not have wished for more. We paid 1.50 yuan (60¢) for a portion of Keh-fon (blue-plate special) and three portions would usually suffice for the five of us, three of whom are children. (The children had a Western breakfast every now and then for a treat.) The standard of hospitality remained on a very high level. We were treated by our friends and relatives to many sumptuous dinners both in Shanghai and Peking. These were still seven or eight course affairs. It seems that in a restaurant coupons are required only for the consumption of staples—rice or flour. The trick, therefore, was to order a big dinner so that nobody wanted to eat any rice or mantow.

The fields around Shanghai, Hangchow and Canton, such as we could see, seemed in excellent condition. When we were in Hangchow it was the season for cabbage, wheat, broad beans and rape, and the fields could not have looked better, with glorious patches of gold in lush green. We detected a note of caution about the expected harvest. People were restrained in their estimates. The wheat fields around Peking were low when we arrived but were waist-high when we left.

This letter from a UN official is only one of many that I received from Westerners in China—visitors and residents—during the “famine” period. Quite obviously these correspondents were in no position to judge the over-all food conditions merely from their personal and therefore limited observations. But the letters did not convey an impression of a desperate and hungry people in the midst of a grim crisis.

At a time when most sources of public information in the United States were giving accounts such as those quoted, the *Far Eastern Economic Review*—a conservative and reliable businessman’s weekly published in Hong Kong—carried an article (issue of December 28, 1961) of quite a different order. It was written by Gilbert Etienne, assistant professor at the Graduate Institute of International Studies, Geneva, who had recently returned from China.

The study of present-day China constitutes above all a lesson in prudence and caution. Eye-witness accounts by foreigners are few and often embody a bias either too favorable or too hostile. . . .

Evidence gathered from non-communist informants as well as our own observations enable us to confirm that it is wrong to speak of real famine, or, as some have done, of general famine. Districts where the situation was particularly serious were pointed out to us, but the conditions there are far from the mass starvation that China has known in the past. Rationing is very strict, though distribution between areas where there is a surplus and those deficient is much better arranged than in the past. . . .

And not quite a year later, when the worst of the shortage was past, one of Britain’s most knowledgeable diplomats, Mr. Malcolm MacDonald, had something to say after his return from a visit to China. Mr. MacDonald, son of a former Prime Minister, who has served as U. K. Commissioner-General in South East Asia, British High Commissioner to India, British Representative to the Geneva Conference on Laos, and Governor-General of Kenya was reported as follows in the *New York Times*, which was one of the instances of a different assessment:

He voiced the opinion that the Chinese people and the Government were in a confident but not complacent mood. He noted reports that the second 1962 harvest was better than in the last three years. . . .

“In the old days hundreds of thousands or even millions would have died,” he said. “The first effective organization for the distribution of food in China’s history had prevented starvation in the last three years,” he said.

Comparing conditions in China with those prevailing in 1948, when he last visited the country, Mr. MacDonald said that the standard of living, although low in contrast to industrial nations, was “remarkably improved.”

He said the Government had learned from mistakes made during the “great leap forward” instituted in 1958, and had less optimistic goals. The result is that “national economic development is going forward again.” (*New York Times*, November 4, 1962.)

On January 1, 1963, this editorial appeared in *The Times* of London:

. . . For two years past the words famine and starvation have been bandied about and there have been those who even foresaw the fall of the present regime in China because of bad harvests and the failings of the “great leap forward.” . . .

. . . Most of the dispute over how much food Chinese have been eating in the past three years centres on the evidence of refugees who cross the border into Hong Kong. Many of the experts question this evidence, arguing that the refugee is sometimes biased, rarely accurate, usually interested in painting an adverse picture. . . .

. . . one reason for general discontent in China could be the fact that a relatively efficient rationing system now spreads the burden whereas in the early decades of this century deaths by starvation in China would run into the hundreds or thousands every year in some part of the country and would exceed a million once in a decade on the average. But there were few “observers” eager to report the fact in those days. . . .

By the spring of 1963 there was abundant evidence that a marked and general improvement in the food conditions of China

had taken place. On April 11, 1963, the *Far Eastern Economic Review* devoted many columns to special reports on the food situation from Shanghai and Peking. (American correspondents in Hong Kong made little or no reference to these reports.)

From the magazine's Shanghai correspondent came this account:

When staple food and cotton became short due to bad harvests, the Government introduced a strict uniform rationing of them throughout the country, but kept the prices down at the original minimum, compatible with the earnings of the larger section of working people. . . .

The scheme gave full protection to the wage earner in the lower bracket of pay. . . .

At present, meat, fish, poultry, eggs, vegetables, etc. are obtainable from the co-operatives in cities in unlimited quantities and without restrictions of any kind, at about double the price of rationed supplies, which continues as heretofore. . . .⁸

Since November last year there has been a substantial reduction in prices of meals in all restaurants, and especially for coffee, cocoa and chocolates: for those items reductions ranged from 50 to 80%. . . .

. . . Coffee and cocoa (with sugar added) are being sold to the public through food stalls at Yuan 0.1 and 0.12 a glass, [approximately 4/10¢ U.S.] and chocolate is sold in the form of candies and sweets in wrappers, on cakes and in bars. . . .

. . . the milk drinking habit among the coming generation, and especially as nourishment for babies and children is now almost universal in cities. In recent years the shortage of fresh milk was acutely felt. . . .

Now the supply has resumed the normal level to regular customers, and bottled milk has become available from provision stores. Recently, after a long absence, butter has appeared on the market. . . .

. . . Lately tinned foodstuffs of pork, chicken and duck meats, fish and vegetables have become available in free sale, as well as various preserves, jams and fruit juices. . . .

While the easier food situation is evident in Shanghai and other large cities, persons returning from visits to their rel-

⁸ This is basically the same system that was followed in Britain during war-time rationing.

atives in the interior all proclaim that locally produced food-stuffs are plentiful in the country, their prices are generally lower there than in cities and that commune members with reserved land at their disposal to cultivate are well off.

And an article by Colina MacDougall, citing an official Chinese (Hsinhua) dispatch, reported as follows:

The Chinese government is taking good care that there should be no immediate recurrences of the serious shortage of vegetables which hit the country in 1961 . . . Peking residents at least now have an abundant supply of vegetables all the year round, even in winter months. . . .

The average daily supply for the city . . . over the last year was 2,500 tons, which probably means at least a pound of vegetables per head per day. . . .

Peking reports that all these vegetables were grown in hot-houses, since for four months a year the climate is too cold for outdoor cultivation. . . . The area under hothouses, is said to have increased 20 fold since 1949. . . .

. . . communes deliver by lorry and cart to more than 1,000 vegetable markets and larger restaurants in the city. This system too has ensured a steady income to the communes and Peking claims that their earnings have risen 50% in the past five years.

But, apparently, firmly implanted concepts take a long time to change even in the most official circles. Six weeks after these reports, and others, were available, Mr. Chester Bowles was still following the "starving Chinese" line. In a talk at Stanford University on May 20 Mr. Bowles—who had been Under Secretary of State, and was soon to take up his post as Ambassador to India—was still referring to "a hungry Communist China," which,

. . . unable to get the help it needs from Russia to feed its multitudes, [China] will probably try to expand within the next few years . . . China is in a pretty grim situation. . . . The only choice open to China is to make a grab for the rice fields of Southeast Asia. . . .

and he spoke of the Chinese as "people who live on fifteen hundred calories a day."

Two days before Mr. Bowles made his speech, another report about China was circulated by the AP to papers throughout the

country. By this time, after nearly three years, stories about China's "starvation" and "famine" had all but petered out. The "collapse" so confidently predicted just hadn't happened. In the press, an occasional story, such as this AP dispatch, was appearing. The report was by Mr. Richard P. Lister, a British author and former industrial metallurgist who had just returned from China:

China is vast and we saw only a fraction of it. All the same you cannot spend half a day in Naples without knowing the deep poverty or a morning in Stockholm without seeing that the Swedes are thriving. In the China we saw, there were no signs of despair. There were poverty and hard living but the people seemed to have enough to eat and enough to wear. Above all, they had hope. Things were getting better and they could see that happening. . . .

Floods, harvest failures, international complications all appear to be things to be overcome rather than moaned about. Do they worry about overpopulation? Indeed not. For the moment it's perhaps a blessing. . . .

. . . output of food is increasing at a spectacular rate. Floods are being brought under control, irrigation is improved and the organized labor of the village commune does lift the individual from the despondency of fruitless toil.

The Chinese seem as confident of the future as they are of their place in the scheme of things today. Perhaps even more so. (San Francisco *Examiner*, May 19, 1963.)

But the constant reiteration by our press of the "starvation" stories made an impression that could not be corrected by occasional accounts such as these. The image retained in the minds of most Americans is of a China whose people live in conditions of almost perpetual hunger.

Chapter 7

THE MATHEMATICS OF SUFFERING

I. The Cost of Progress

The world we live in today, with all its marvelous achievements, is still a world in which the life experience for most people is one of prolonged suffering.

The facts are sadly familiar to us. Between one-third and one-half of the world's population suffer malnutrition.¹ Every day some ten thousand people die of malnutrition or starvation—more than at any time in history; in India alone fifty million children will die from lack of food in the next ten years.² Two-thirds of the human race have an average per capita income equivalent to fifty or sixty dollars a year. Seventy percent of the food-growing families of the world still use wooden ploughs or hoes, the least efficient tools for raising food; and only 2 percent possess power implements.³ A college graduate in India is lucky if he can find work that will pay him more than five dollars a week. Only a very small percentage of the world's people have access to a hospital when they fall ill. The electricity generated in the whole of the Indian subcontinent would be insufficient for the needs of New York City. Women in the United States spend more on cosmetics than the combined total of the national budgets of all the African countries that have won their independence since the war.

¹ Reuters report of the First International Congress of Food Science and Technology, London, September 18, 1962.

² *Newsweek*, June 17, 1963, reporting on the World Food Congress held in Washington under the auspices of the UN.

³ *Die Weltwoche*, Zurich, September 6, 1958.

The facts shock us, and then numb us. What the statistics represent is so far outside our own experience that we can make no identification with the human realities behind them. We cannot *feel* what it means to be this poor. But whether we can feel it or not does not alter the fact that this is the world we live in. Those of us in the advanced Western countries represent a small and favored minority—15 percent of the world's population, consuming 55 percent of the world's goods. And there are hundreds of millions of human beings who are determined that it isn't going to remain that way!

How is a poor country to become less poor?

To begin to lift itself up out of poverty, squalor, and illiteracy, a nation needs to save. An irrigation pump, a school, a bicycle factory, a road, an iron plough, cannot be obtained unless someone has saved money to buy it with. *There is no other way.* And for a nation whose people are barely surviving, saving means suffering, and with suffering come social tensions and unrest. The suffering and social tension are less if the people understand their collective goals and if the effort is shared equally, and in these circumstances pride, the sense of joining in a common struggle, and mutual support is greatly enhanced. The social tension is great when the suffering is unequal and when one class of people not only are escaping the suffering but are actually benefiting from the suffering of others.

Western progress came with suffering. Britain led the world in industrial emergence—but at what a frightful human cost! The suffering in Britain was not shared equally by all. It is not long ago, as history goes (in the lifetime of my grandfather) when children of seven and eight were sent down the coal mines of South Wales and girls of nine worked fourteen hours a day in the textile mills of Lancashire. From their present position of economic security the British forget—they probably wish to forget—their own dark legacy.

Two generations or more of British working people were sacrificed to enable Britain to save and to advance: farmers and shepherds and village craftsmen were herded into the dark slums

of the industrial cities to live in conditions that would not today be permitted for animals. This appalling human exploitation enabled a relatively few people, a single class, to get rich, and from their savings more factories and mines and mills and railroads and ships could be built. Britain built an empire on the accumulated wealth of a very few—and with the empire the burden of suffering was shifted somewhat from her own island people to those abroad whom she had subjugated and was in a position to exploit. Because the suffering was not imposed equitably but with injustice, the social tensions at home in Britain's Industrial Revolution were great. The rise of Britain as an industrial power was marked by continual riots, unrest, and savage reprisals—and at times the firing of rifles by a well-fed army on defenseless and despairing workers. And Britain in its day had its refugees—hundreds of thousands of them, fleeing to the colonies, to America, to anywhere where life seemed to offer something better than the unspeakable conditions in that emerging industrial nation.

Britain became rich and powerful, but the effects of those times and the class antagonisms which they engendered are deep within her society still.

And the United States?

The United States began its life under extraordinary favored circumstances. Here were vast farming lands as yet untouched, and below the ground almost limitless natural resources quite unexploited. And above all, the wealth of the British upper class was available for the early capitalization of American industry. With the exception of the indigenous Indian population which was dispossessed, America might have been spared the suffering that would otherwise have come in its period of industrial growth.

But in spite of these uniquely favorable conditions, America did not escape her share of human suffering. In using Negro slavery and Mexicans for its agrarian development (and cheap imported labor from Europe for its industries), America also inflicted its share of injustice and misery on others. The "internationalized colony" of the Negro population, as far as cheap labor is concerned, served the same purpose as Britain's colonies overseas.

And with slavery, there emerged two social-economic systems within America so disparate and contradictory that only a savage and prolonged civil war could again unify the country—and the six hundred thousand dead of that war must be added to the human cost of American advance.

We need to remind ourselves of these historic facts, not to feel guilty or wring our hands, but to enable us to understand some of the extraordinarily difficult problems that today face the underdeveloped countries of the world. And we mustn't forget that the emerging countries have no exterior "colonial" people and resources to exploit, nor an internal slave population, which so significantly helped the development of the British and American economies.

There are several other essential and inescapable conditions that must be met if backward countries are to advance, and one of them is the fullest possible mobilization of the surplus that has accumulated in the hands of the wealthier classes. In some backward countries there is in fact no shortage of surplus. Twenty-five percent of India's national income, for example, is at the disposal of a minute and largely unproductive strata of the population. (A *London Times* dispatch from New Delhi—see page 141—reported that about 1 percent of India's population earns nearly half the national income.) In Latin America vast revenues today find their way into the hands of a very small elite, revenues which if prudently used for the advancement of the national economies would enable these countries to make a start on the road to economic development and social regeneration.

However, such mobilization of existing and potential economic surplus is bound to meet with the determined opposition from the property-owning strata, the "small class, whose main interest is the preservation of its wealth and privileges."⁴ *The fundamental challenge that faces all backward countries* is to overcome the implacable resistance of the class that at present enjoys the possession of power and wealth. Until this challenge is faced and met there

⁴ United Nations, *Measures for the Economic Development of Underdeveloped Countries*, 1951, par. 37.

is almost no possibility of a genuine program of economic and social progress.

As their position is progressively challenged, the ruling elite in backward countries tend to increase their measures of repression. Waste, extravagance, corruption, absentee landlordism, and disregard for the welfare of the people characterize nearly all of these countries. The ruling groups are prepared to squander vast sums on sprawling bureaucracies and on large military establishments the sole function of which is to keep the regimes in power and to provide the instruments of repression. Under these conditions the peaceful transformation of a country from a state of squalor, stagnation, and oppression toward an advancing social democracy becomes impossible. Hostility and desperation mount and the people are at last left with only one recourse—the physical removal of the elite that has for so long oppressed them. What at one stage might have been accomplished peacefully can at a later stage be done only with violence.

To overcome the resistance of a repressive ruling class, to mobilize all existing surplus capital, and to save—these are the three basic problems that confront every backward country, in Africa, Asia, or Latin America. These three essentials represent the inescapable costs of economic growth. Some countries are as yet unwilling to meet these costs, or, if the people themselves are willing, they are still too weak to overcome the resistance of those defending their positions of power and privilege. Other countries, such as China, have understood these realities and have been prepared to act on them. China recognized, as Russia did, that no progress was possible until their regressive ruling classes had been overthrown. They recognized also that no progress was possible without the mobilization of all existing savings, and that further savings could only come through work. And, finally, they recognized the obvious fact that if the hardship and effort that are inevitable during the early stages of primary accumulation were to be equitably shared, the economic direction must be centralized.

Both Russia and China, once their regimes were established, took immediate steps to improve the social conditions of the peo-

ple. They expanded educational opportunities, improved public health and medical facilities, and gave security for the old. But at the same time the basic rule of national saving was never forgotten—that during the period of primary accumulation the people's per capita production had to rise more rapidly than their per capita consumption. In other words, the individual's standard of living could improve, despite greatly increased work, only relatively slowly.

One of the extraordinary features of life in China today, as I found when I was there, is the extent to which this basic economic lesson is understood by even the humblest peasant. He knows that he is expected to work harder than ever before and he knows why improvement in his standard of living can at this stage rise only relatively slowly. Because this first lesson in economics has been explained and re-explained to the masses of people in China, because they can begin to see around them the benefits deriving from collective saving, and above all because the people themselves have insisted that the work and effort be shared equally by everyone, there has been significantly less social tension in China during the past decade than Russia experienced in the equivalent stage of her "primary accumulation."

Today the Russian people are finally reaping the rewards of forty years of effort and denial. They submitted to a system of austerity, economic discipline, and forced marches to higher production goals because *this is the only way a very backward country can advance itself*. The inequitable class exploitation that enabled Britain to industrialize and advance would not be tolerated today by any country in the world. Russia has passed its stage of primary accumulation and her people are now enjoying a rapidly rising standard of living. If she maintains her present rate of increase and we do not increase ours, the Russian people will—in the lifetime of our children—be enjoying the highest standard of living in the world, with the most comprehensive system of social security. This is what an extremely backward nation can do if it comes to grips with the essential economic laws which govern economic growth.

But as Professor Gilbert Etienne—who has studied the Chinese efforts at firsthand—has written in his very careful account of the Chinese economy:

The scope of their task was much greater and the lack of capital much more serious than faced the Russians in 1927, which prevents the Chinese from drawing inspiration too closely from the Soviet pattern for growth. For lack of capital, human investment and mobilization of the masses were undertaken much more systematically than before 1957. . . .

The method of application may be criticized but, at the heart of the problem, experiments observed in other Asian countries lead us to think that clear and decisive progress will remain uncertain if Asia limits itself to classic methods of financing, whether Soviet or Western. Somehow or other it is necessary to stimulate more efficiently the energies of the masses. . . .

To sum up . . . the great leap certainly does not lack interest. On the contrary it deserves careful study for even in non-communist underdeveloped countries certain Chinese lessons might be taken note of . . . it is useful to ponder the stern struggle of the Chinese at a moment when certain Asian and African countries tend to see in foreign aid the key to every problem, and suppose that all that is required is a fair distribution of the resources of the globe. . . .⁵

It is true that those countries that already have an accumulated surplus, and have gained knowledge in industrial techniques, can help the underdeveloped countries to mitigate the inevitable hardships that come when a poor country begins to save. But no amount of aid from outside can be a substitute for the basic savings that can come only from the energies of the indigenous population. India, for example, in the past ten years, has received in aid \$6.5 billion dollars—a prodigious sum. But until India finds ways of releasing the latent energies of her own people, and to tackle the problem of primary accumulation, all that this foreign aid can do, at best, is to prevent the total disintegration and collapse of the Indian economy; it cannot in any significant way advance it.

There is an understandable reluctance in the West to face these

⁵ *Far Eastern Economic Review*, December 28, 1961.

hard requirements of economic growth in less-favored countries. America historically never went through the period of feudal suppression that today has so many people in its grip. We have nothing in our own national experience to help us feel the helplessness and fury that is moving those who wish to break their chains. Our own revolution—led by a cultivated and politically conscious upper class—is far behind us; we shrink from the thought of social tension and violence. We hope that by providing some of our own surplus capital, our technical knowledge, and our goodwill, economic advance can be promoted sufficiently quickly to prevent the hungry masses from breaking into violent action.

This hope is not likely to be fulfilled. We are placing altogether too much reliance on foreign aid. It will require far more than aid from abroad before economic and social advance is possible in the poor countries of the world. The necessity—understood by the Chinese—of finding ways to release the energies of their own people, rather than to rely on foreign aid, is slowly being acknowledged.

For example, an editor of *The Christian Science Monitor* wrote an article on March 20, 1963, after returning from a visit to Asia, in which he asked (*italics mine*):

. . . what of the race between Communist and non-Communist standards of living? What of the race between India and China?

His own answer was:

It is best not mentioned in a loud voice . . . The kind of agricultural drive that the Communists themselves attempt, the all-out effort with the entire country mobilized to propel it, is India's and South Asia's next and greatest need.

II. The Cost of Stagnation

. . . the undeniable material accomplishments of the Chinese Communists have cost dearly in terms of human freedom and human dignity.

—Robert C. North
(*Moscow and Chinese Communists*, p. 264)

With this statement, Dr. North added his support to a tired cliché which even by 1953 had been repeated a hundred times and which has been heard a thousand times since. Whenever a scholar like Dr. North, or a newspaper writer, is confronted with undeniable evidence of progress in China, the use of this cliché makes it appear that it would have been better if no progress had been made at all.

. . . the high price in human lives and human misery that the Chinese people have had to pay for Chinese Communist achievements.

—A. T. Steele, New York *Herald Tribune*,
September 16, 1956.

The Chinese Communists have forced agriculture ahead by a series of power drives . . . the human cost was nightmarish.

—Editorial, *The Christian Science Monitor*,
March 13, 1962.

There are many others.

Even before reaching page one of his "history" of the early years of the Chinese government, the scholar Richard L. Walker (see Chapter 4, "The China Lobby") murmured the usual incantations: "The cost of the tremendous task of remaking China in the Soviet image has been unbelievable in terms both of human and of cultural destruction." Throughout his book Mr. Walker appears to be obsessed by "human costs" in China—"a cost in human destruction which staggers the imagination."⁶

Another scholar, Dr. Y. L. Wu, wrote about Peking's early problems "in managing and expanding a rather confused and lethargic economy" (a quaintly restrained description of Chiang Kai-shek's corrupt and rotting economy in 1949), and "the human suffering and sacrifice its policy has exacted."⁷

⁶ *China Under Communism—The First Five Years* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1955), Introduction p. xii and 153.

⁷ *An Economic Survey of Communist China* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1956), Introduction p. 3.

Tillman Durdin, several years later in the *New York Times* for April 27, 1958, cabled from Hong Kong:

Peiping says impressively high production is being achieved. . . . But the effort that is being put forth by the Chinese people must be somewhere near the limit of human endurance.

(A week later, on May 4, *The Times* headlined a Reuters dispatch, not from Hong Kong but from China itself, which presented quite a different picture: SUNDAY IN PEIPING IS A DAY OF JOLLITY, STORES, CAFES, BATHHOUSES AND THEATRES CROWDED—REDS FIND REST USEFUL.)

And *Time Magazine* on December 1, 1961, in nearly ten pages of text and pictures on the subject "Red China—The Loss of Man," presented a picture of almost unrelieved catastrophe, but managed to detect "some gains."

But whatever the gains, they do not begin to offset the price imposed by Peking through oppression and misery. Today no one can be sure how many people share this misery. . . .

It is a disturbing fact that none of these commentators and scholars have suggested possible alternative policies that might have been open to the Chinese government. Most would say, no doubt, that to have returned to the appalling conditions under Chiang would have been unthinkable; and they might generally agree that the first achievements of Mao's government were impressive. The mobilization of the energies of the people, the stabilization of a runaway inflation, the steps taken to equalize food supplies, the reconstruction of rundown factories, the distribution of land to the peasants, the great advances in public health, and the expansion of educational facilities—all these were vital if yet further disasters were not to fall upon the Chinese people. From the moment that the Communists took over, the widespread starvation that had become a recurring nightmare of Chinese life became a thing of the past. And yet these accomplishments, we are told, were achieved only at a "human cost" so terrible that they outweighed the benefits they brought.

Press and scholar alike repeat the cliché but provide no clues as to what the government could have done. Dr. North takes pity on the Chinese for their loss of dignity and freedom. What dignity and freedom did they have to lose? Neither dignity nor freedom is possible when life is dominated by the most elemental anxieties of survival.

Is it possible that some of those who now talk of the "human cost" of China's progress are unconsciously expressing nostalgia for the China that they knew? For the Westerner, as we have said, life was good in the old China. He remembers the good food, the gracious houses, the polite servants. He may remember wistfully how much the American dollar could buy. His was a life of easy ascendancy. He did not need to feel a responsibility for the people or the country. And within this narrow circle of privilege, life in China must have exerted an extraordinary charm.

I have noticed that many of those who recall their life in China and talk most of the "human cost" that has been paid for today's achievements tend to remember not the children scratching in the garbage heaps, the tiny bundles—the dead infants—in the streets, the coughing rickshaw men, the disease, the dirt, the appalling squalor. They remember—it is natural enough—the gay parties and the flowered dresses at the Shanghai race course (in the enclosure reserved for foreigners), the Sunday picnics in the Western Hills outside Peking, the dinners in the courtyard under candlelight, the leisurely tiffins at the club, the quiet talks with refined and Westernized Chinese friends. Those who recall this life must do so with a certain anguish, knowing that it has all been quite swept away. Is it just possible that this is the "cost" they speak of?

The great mass of the Chinese have no such memories and no nostalgia at all for the China that is gone. Talk to a Chinese today about his "loss of freedom" and he would laugh in your face.

As I wrote earlier:

When a Chinese worker or peasant says he is freer today than he has ever been in his life, he means it. And he sounds as if he means it. Perhaps he doesn't mean it in our way, for he has never known the particular forms of political and

social freedom which have been the product of our own historical past and which are the fruit of our relative physical security.

A Chinese uses the word "freedom" in a very personal down-to-earth, non-theoretical sense. He is not talking about abstractions but experience. He means that he is at last free to eat, and not to starve; he is free of the landlord and moneylender; he is free to develop skills and to exercise talents which would otherwise have remained hidden; he is free to send his children to school, and when they are ill there is a doctor who can help to make them well; he is free to look at the future with hope and not with despair. For him these are all new freedoms. And it's not such a bad list!

As for dignity, I think it is very probable that the forty million people of minority races in China who for the first time are enjoying complete political and social equality with all others, would say their dignity has been enhanced, not lessened. The Marriage Law . . . released the women of China from the miseries of a very degrading feudal system.⁸

I would like to see Dr. North ask a young woman of China today if she feels her "human dignity" has been infringed!

Before our professors, whether or not they have ever been in China, express too much solicitude about the fate of the "individual" and the loss of his freedom and dignity, they might pause a moment to recall that the freedoms and "individualism" we enjoy did not arrive out of thin air, they did not come out of nothing.

The liberties and political democracy we have today *had to be fought for*. They are the result of a good many years of bloody trial and error—first in Britain, then extended to the United States. Many brave men sacrificed their lives to achieve them. Those who talk so easily of the "free world" should remember, and perhaps with a humility that does not come easily, that our favored condition on this planet is still sustained at the expense of others. What our professors choose to call our "human dignity" is possible because of our relative affluence, an affluence based even today largely on exploitation of peoples in less-favored lands.

And for those who forget this and who pin their hope for the

⁸ *Awakened China*, pp. 388–89.

underdeveloped countries on aid, this extract from an article in *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* by a Pakistani may be a useful reminder:

But why are we poor? Mostly no doubt through our own follies. But let me humbly suggest that it may partly also be that we are financing some of the prosperity of the rich. Year after year I have seen the cotton crop from my village in Pakistan fetch less and less money; year after year the imported fertilizer has cost more. My economist friends tell me the terms of trade are against us. Between 1955 and 1962 the commodity prices fell by seven per cent. In the same period the manufactured goods went up by ten per cent. Some courageous men have spoken against this. Paul Hoffman called it a "subsidy, a contribution paid by the underdeveloped countries to the industrialized world." In 1957–1958 the underdeveloped world received a total of \$2.4 billion in aid and lost \$2 billion in import capacity (through paying more for the manufactured goods it buys and getting less for what it sells), thus washing away nearly all the sums received in aid.⁹

The scholars in the China field before 1949 expressed very little concern over the lack of freedom there or the monstrous injustices of the social system under Chiang Kai-shek. Nationalist China's stagnation brought forth no sympathy for the "human dignity" of the Chinese people then. And it strikes much of the world as a little ironic that those who cry the loudest about the loss of freedom and dignity in China are members of a society that prevents a large section of its own people from enjoying any dignity at all, and where soldiers carrying rifles have to accompany small children to school lest they be stoned by mobs.

As Max Horkheimer astutely observes, throughout history "the value of the individual has been extolled by those who had an opportunity of developing their individualities at the expense of others."¹⁰

It is not often that I find myself in philosophical agreement with the late Mr. John Foster Dulles, but even he appeared to have a

⁹ April 1963. "Diseases of the Rich and Diseases of the Poor," by Abdus Salam.

¹⁰ *The Eclipse of Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 178.

closer grasp of the realities than our professors with their talk about the "loss of freedom and human dignity."

We can talk eloquently about liberty and freedom, and about human rights and fundamental freedoms, and about the dignity and worth of the human personality, but most of our vocabulary derives from a period when our own society was individualistic. Consequently, it has little meaning to those who live under conditions where individualism means premature death.¹¹

But if (as I believe) there has been a serious failure on the part of those who have reported on events in China to present thoughtful alternatives to the programs which they have so severely criticized, they are guilty also of another failure. Nowhere do they attempt to place the Chinese experience in any kind of relation to what is going on in other parts of the world (with the exception of India, which I will deal with presently).

There is a cost to be paid for progress—no one can possibly deny this; but a cursory view of other underdeveloped countries might have reminded these writers that perhaps there is a much grimmer price to be paid for *not* progressing.

In reading accounts of other underdeveloped areas one is aware of a wholly different tone of voice to the one used when our writers deal with China. Here there is no high moral indignation, no singling out of government leaders for blame, or if they are blamed they are never spoken of, as the present Chinese leaders so often are, as if they were totally evil men.

At about the same period when the press was devoting a tremendous amount of space to describing the "famine" and "starvation" in China, *Newsweek* (August 27, 1962) contained this account of South America:

Just a few hours by jet from New York or Chicago live more than 200 million people in the vast reaches of Latin America, and it is doubtful if one-tenth of them know what it is like to go to bed with a full stomach. The great cities glitter opulently—Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, Mexico City; but beneath the glitter and in the hinterland are odious

¹¹ *War or Peace* (New York: Macmillan, 1950 and 1957), p. 257.

and despondent slums where liquid-eyed Indian children scrounge for scraps and handouts while their parents labor for wages of twenty cents a day or less. This is the wasteland of the Western hemisphere, a land of misery whose poverty is as stark as any in the world. Here the nearest thing to peace is a kind of embittered apathy, and the only known order is confusion.

On August 20, 1962, the *Los Angeles Times* was describing how "750,000 live in tin and packing crate shacks in slums on Buenos Aires fringe." On November 15 of the same year a *New York Times* editorial dealt with Peru:

A little news item from Lima, Peru, tells a potentially big story. It is about Indian peasants—8,000 of them—in the old Inca capital of Cuzco, high in the Andes, clashing with the police. They were expressing a protest, the specific motivation of which was less important than the general discontent that pervades the southern part of the Peruvian highlands. . . . They live in such poverty as to be outside the money economy, and are not only illiterate but do not speak Spanish.

This is the kind of problem that the Alliance for Progress is trying to alleviate by encouraging land reform. In Peru, with its very small, hereditary land-owning class and a military junta that is doing little or nothing, it is hard to achieve such reforms. The social structure has changed relatively little in the last four centuries. Now, for the first time, the people are learning that their poverty, illiteracy, and disease are based on social injustice. The Communists preach revolution; we preach evolution through reforms under the Alliance for Progress.

A week later the *New York Times* editorial column spoke of riots in Chile:

. . . Anyone doubting Chile's difficulties need only read the frank and courageous pastoral of the Chilean Bishops issued on September 18. Two sentences will explain the basis for such discontent as the Santiago riot demonstrated: "Serious statistical studies, based on official sources, tell us that one-tenth of the Chilean population receives about half of the national income, while the remaining nine-tenths must

subsist on the other half. This means that a great part of the working class does not receive wages commensurate with the norms of social justice."

. . . As with other such situations in Latin America, help and understanding from the United States are required—and time.

One cannot help but compare the note of understanding solicitude adopted in this editorial with the tone of voice of an editorial—also in the *New York Times* (December 30, 1960)—dealing with "Famine in China."

. . . Moreover, we may suspect that the system of People's Communes, with its fantastic effort to reduce the individual Chinese peasant to the status of a work ant in an ant colony, has played a role in the present catastrophe.

From the Philippines came a report in *The Christian Science Monitor* (January 8, 1963):

According to government statistics, there are at present about 1,000,000 Filipinos totally unemployed, and another 3,000,000 under-employed. Of a population of 29,000,000 some 5,000,000 are earning from \$48 to \$60 a year; 20,000,000 are earning from \$75 to \$250 a year; and four million are earning more than \$250 a year.

Philippine Secretary of Finance Rodrigo Perez said that the statistics "mean that 25,000,000 [i.e., 86% of the population] are worrying about where their next meal will come from.

And in *The New Republic*—an editorial on January 5, 1963—a report on Brazil:

. . . the nation's 10 million landless farmers earn between 25 and 50 cents a day, and face starvation in a bad crop year. . . . 80 per cent of the arable land held by 2 per cent of the proprietors. . . . From two to four infants out of ten in the northeast die before they are a year old. . . .

These few reports are enough to give us a terrible glimpse into what happens in the countries that have not yet been able to lift themselves up from their basic poverty—here we can see the human price that is exacted for *not* progressing.

Substitute the names of the countries and the cities and we would see China before the revolution—but in China on so much vaster a scale. The French correspondent, Robert Guillain, who is a sharp critic of today's regime, nevertheless recalled the conditions of the past:

Before, it was appalling—that truth predominated over every other. Poverty, corruption, inefficiency, misery, contempt for the people and for the commonweal, these were the elements that made up the most wretched nation on earth. And I knew China then.¹²

We need these reminders of the past, these tallies of the cost of stagnation, if only as milestones to see the prodigious distance the Chinese have come. Twenty thousand bodies, on average, picked up off the streets of Shanghai every year (37,000 in 1933); three million lives lost in 1931 in central China through flood and famine; over a million in 1942 in Honan province. And the landlords hoarding grain while babies ate grass and roots. And young girls sold to slavery or prostitution so that at least they would eat. Areas the size of France with virtually no doctors, and rickshaw men with a professional life-expectance of eight years. . . . *This was the China of the past, but it is not the China of today.* This was the price the Chinese people were paying for stagnation, until with indescribable efforts they rose and shed their nightmare past.

In the light of these historic facts, one must ask: By what right do our well-paid writers and our comfortable scholars now presume to tell us that the Chinese people have paid too high a price for their advance?

III. *The Indian Way vs. the Chinese Way—A Case History of Self-Deception*

Two Asian nations, both preponderantly peasant, both with vast populations, both attempting to lift themselves up from a condition of immemorial poverty—and both with new but very

¹² *Le Monde*, Paris, quoted in *The Long March* by Simone de Beauvoir (The World Publishing Company, Cleveland and New York, 1958), p. 485

differing forms of government. It is little wonder that our newspapers like to see these two great people as engaged in a "race," the outcome of which will either help or damage us in the cold war struggle.

Differences of physiological conditioning, of resources, of climate, and countless differences of social tradition, make this concept of a "race" largely meaningless, but nevertheless the comparison is there and some useful lessons may be learned from it.

And, of course, for a host of reasons, we want India to "win."

The outlook has never been promising; but when the relative rates of progress discourage us we are assured that though material progress in India has been slower, it is being achieved more democratically, more "humanely," with less authoritarian control, with greater stability, and that in the end India will far outdistance a China that has progressed only by driving its people forward "to the edge of endurance" and at a "frightful human cost."

If we believe this, we had better wake up.

I have been to both countries. I have walked through Indian villages and Chinese villages. I have seen the advances in technology in both countries. I have talked with students and teachers, and writers, peasants and workers, and at length with both the prime ministers. I have watched the children playing in the city streets and studying in their schools. I have walked through the slums of Calcutta and the slums of Shanghai—the very worst of them.

And I say we had better stop kidding ourselves.

I know as certainly as I know that I am writing this book that if the press and the politicians continue to tell us that India under her present system will eventually win this "race" with China, or that her way is more "humane," or more stable, or more orderly, or likely to meet more nearly the spiritual and material aspirations of human beings—then I say they are using words with little relation to reality.

India is "freer," yes. For the very few. It is a more decentralized, more pluralized society. More lethargic. Much more easygoing. For the privileged much more comfortable. In the universities the

British liberal tradition has taken firm root. You can spend delightful days with young university students in stimulating speculation over the widest possible range of topics, in a way that is not possible in China today. I don't for a moment want to minimize the value of these things and I would be sad to see them sacrificed.

But the issue is not quite so simple as it sounds.

The Indians in their university may read Burke and Bentham and Locke and Thoreau—they are very bright and intellectually ingenious, these young Indians—but they appear curiously unrelated to the teeming life of India. I was brought up sharply one day talking with a small group when one of them said: "How *bored* we are with our own country!" and I noticed the "we" and looked quickly at the others, and in their expressions I could see nothing but agreement. A remark like that might have been heard in the days of the Kuomintang, among those of the wealthier Chinese students who had lost hope in the future of China. But it is utterly impossible to imagine a Chinese student saying it today. A Chinese student is not unrelated to the life around him, he is *involved* in it—involved personally, directly, emotionally. His own likes and dislikes are secondary and almost irrelevant to him, for the central fact of his experience—the fact which gives his life meaning and which has released his abundant energy—is precisely this involvement with his people and his country.

So we are confronted once more with that crucial equation in the strange mathematics of suffering—and perhaps it has no final answer—how are we to balance freedom for the very few against poverty and stagnation for the many?

But this question, when it confronts actualities, appears somewhat theoretical. The reality is that the average child of a peasant or worker in China today has better health, better food, a better chance for education, greater security, and is likely to live longer, than the average child of an Indian peasant or worker. If he is musical or has a gift for writing or painting, he stands a far greater chance of finding opportunities to develop his talents. If he becomes a scholar or technician he will never—as happens so often in India—find his skills unwanted.

In material development, in technology, in industrial production—the advantage lies decisively with China. Here are a few facts. The press largely ignores them, but we had better not.

Item. Though left in 1947 by Britain with a more advanced industrial base, India by 1962 had increased her steel production only to 3,707,000 metric tons. China that, prior to 1949, had never produced more than two million tons of steel had, by 1960, increased production to 18.4 million metric tons,¹³ *five times the production of India* (or about twice the Japanese steel production at the time of Pearl Harbor).

Item. China's grain production in 1962 was estimated at 185 million metric tons;¹⁴ India's grain production for the same year was eighty million metric tons.¹⁵ Allowing for differences of population, this indicates that China's per capita grain production was 56 percent higher than India's.

Item. By 1960, India's rate of investment was barely one-tenth of her national income; in China it was three times higher.¹⁶

Item. China's rate of industrial growth in the decade before 1960 was about three times faster than during the same period in India.¹⁶

Item. India's investment has been assisted by foreign aid which, up to August 1962, amounted to more than \$6.5 billion;¹⁷ China's investment came almost entirely out of her own current production.

The Christian Science Monitor, in an editorial on March 13, 1962, entitled "Red China Reappraised," made one of the rare

¹³ *Far Eastern Economic Review*, April 18, 1963.

¹⁴ At the time of this writing, China has given no official figures for the year 1962, but the *New York Times* (February 4, 1962) reported an estimate by experts in Hong Kong of 185–90 million tons. *The Christian Science Monitor* on the same day reported estimates of 180–85 million tons. I have taken the mean figure.

¹⁵ A report from New Delhi, *The Times of London*, March 11, 1963.

¹⁶ Tibor Mende, *China and Her Shadow*, p. 262.

¹⁷ The U.S. share alone was \$3.952 billion between July 1945 and mid-1962. (Report by Presidential Advisory Committee on Foreign Aid. *New York Times*, March 22, 1963.)

references to these comparisons with India (and this at a time when the press, including the *Monitor* itself, was talking of China's "famine" and speculating about her "collapse"):

"The Great Leap Backward" is a much used current phrase enjoyed by all.

... a quick check of any newspaper file will confirm this one-sided flow of information. Weaknesses of Chinese Communism are played up. Its accomplishments too often ignored.

... Growing evidence suggests that China is moving ahead far more rapidly than India into economic development. ... Comparisons by individual industries and even by crops are equally impressive.

Though statistical comparison with China is not often made, reports in the press (until the border fighting began in October 1962) were voicing increasing concern about the health of India's economy. Something was clearly going very seriously amiss in spite of \$700 million-a-year aid from this country. As early as 1960, India's Finance Minister was warning that India's resources were almost at rock bottom and that there was no scope for running them further down. He also said that India would have to depend wholly on foreign aid for the financing of development plans.

The danger is that such assistance may replace ordinary trade ... leaving the Indian economy chronically dependent on American aid. ...

Indian sales abroad have expanded only 3% in the last decade. ...

—*The Wall Street Journal*,
June 22, 1962.

For the past three years ... production of food grains in India has been static. ... The population ... now multiplies at a rate of 11 million a year. The rate of acceleration is still mounting.

There is in India a general lack of a sense of urgency about the food problem ... the yield of India's fields has increased only fractionally, if at all, in the past 30 years.

—From a special report on
India's agriculture, *The Times*
of London, March 11, 1963.

. . . production far short of plans and in some cases even declining. . . Profits from nationalized industries: Target \$950 million. Actual profit \$5.4 million, .03 percent of investment.

—Reporting on the first year of India's Five-Year Plan, *Newsweek* (July 9, 1962).

India's Finance Minister is chasing through the capitals of Europe in pursuit of \$220,000,000 to finance the second year of the 3rd Five Year Plan; meanwhile India's liquid assets have been dropping inexorably to new all-time lows.

Barron's, July 16, 1962.

Considering India's many troubles, it seems clear that foreign aid for a program of accelerated industrialization may raise as many problems as it is intended to solve.

—*The Wall Street Journal*,
June 22, 1962.

Today India's foreign exchange reserves have practically disappeared and there is no money to pay for maintenance imports. . . India is increasing, not decreasing, its reliance on foreign capital.

—*The Christian Science Monitor*,
November 15, 1962.

These are indications of a foundering economy.

Some savings, some advances there have been; but the effort, the sacrifice involved, has been unequally applied. In a feature story entitled "Social Injustice in India," *The Wall Street Journal* on July 16, 1962, reported that the production of things needed by the poorer people has been increased very little (matches, 1.1 times; cotton cloth, 1.4 times; soap, 1.8 times), while the production of things used for the wealthier people, items that are mostly just "curios" to the poor, has been increased by much more (radios, 5.9 times; sewing machines, 9.6 times; rayon yarn, 21 times). The needs of the well-to-do, a fraction of the population, have in the words of the report, "been very well looked after." While the price of foodstuffs rose by 48 percent, the prices of luxuries and semi-luxuries "remained comparatively steady until recently, when some relatively slight increases occurred."

Not everyone in India is poor. A report from Bombay in the *San Francisco Chronicle* on December 31, 1962, described how a father (an aluminum merchant) spent sixty thousand dollars on his daughter's wedding—"scented water was sprayed even on the lamp posts"; how a cloth merchant spent forty thousand dollars on his sixty-fifth birthday celebration, and how a former maharaja threw a "wedding party" costing fifteen thousand dollars for the "marriage" of his pet dog. While on April 15, 1963, a report in the same paper tells us that Calcutta is a:

. . . city of incredible extremes: extremes of human degradation superimposed on extremes of vast wealth. The wealth belongs to the enormous business firms. . . Their proprietors (still mostly British) maintain a standard of elegance in their homes which is probably equalled only by Texas oil barons. Yet only a mile away, the impoverished huddle in their packing-case shelters and brush their teeth in gutter water.

Another aspect of social injustice—age-old and difficult to eradicate—is India's system of castes. Though abolished by law nearly two decades ago, discrimination against the "untouchable" still continues.

. . . the centuries-old practice of discrimination against the lowly Untouchable caste has faded in India's major cities. But in the rural villages where most of the country's 453 million live, segregation of Untouchables is still widespread—and often violently enforced.

Age-old restrictions [include] bars against Chamars using umbrellas, riding horses or sitting on carpets. . . .

64.5 million [one-seventh of the population] Untouchables [are] . . . barred from temples, forced to use special teacups in teashops, and frequently refused service by barbers. . . .

—*Newsweek*,
February 11, 1963.

It is almost axiomatic that when a backward nation attempts to advance without a basis of social and economic justice, tensions and violence will result. India is no exception.

I remember when I was in India in the summer of 1959, I noticed a not-very-prominent account in the papers of a riot in

Calcutta. On August 30 twenty thousand people rioted in Nagpur. The next day, and for four consecutive days, raging mobs surged through the streets of Calcutta—a mass riot that was only subdued after troops and police opened fire, leaving many dead. (I could not help thinking at the time what our press would have made of this incident if it had occurred in Shanghai and not in Calcutta! It would have been another indication of Chinese Communist “brutality,” and, of course, another sign of the “imminent collapse” of the regime.)

This tragic event in Calcutta is not an isolated incident. Mr. Bradford Smith, who spent two years in the Quaker International Center in New Delhi, wrote an article in the February 10, 1962, issue of *The Nation* entitled “Chronic Violence in India.” He said that hundreds of organizations hold meetings in praise of *ahimsa* (non-violence).

Yet India is plagued with outbursts of mass violence that often get beyond the power of the police to control. No day passes without some news of a mob conflict. . . .

The Government of India is engaged in a desperate race with time, to see whether it can raise the standard of living sufficiently to maintain democracy as the accepted means of solving its problems. . . .

The social friction generated by poverty, ignorance, linguistic differences and the caste system are . . . increasing rather than lessening.

In 1962, *U.S. News & World Report* (which has often predicted the “collapse” of the government in Peking) sent a correspondent to India. His report on Calcutta was published on September 24. I have been to Calcutta; I have seen these same sights; and I can honestly say that nothing like this exists in China today.

CALCUTTA: CITY OF NIGHTMARES

Just look at Calcutta, and you get an idea of the problems that India faces. Filth and poverty are a way of life. Sudden death is commonplace.

. . . as yet, all the aid given by the United States and Russia and all the efforts of the Indian government have not yet succeeded in reversing the downward trend. . . .

Walk through one of the more than 3,000 officially designated slums, and you see why Prime Minister Nehru once called Calcutta a “nightmare city.”

I toured a slum known as “The Garden of the Litchi.” A trade-union official was my guide. We walked through a maze of dark alleys, wide enough for only two people. Under foot was mud, garbage, cow dung, even human excrement.

We turned into small courtyards where large families live in tiny, windowless, dirt-floored cubicles. The drinking water there comes from shallow wells. “We tell them, ‘Boil the water,’ but few do it,” my guide said.

Near the wells are the privies. They are supposed to be emptied by “Untouchables,” lowest group in India’s caste system. Some privies are neglected for weeks, months. You can see where they have overflowed into ponds of greenish, scummy bathing water.

Pot-bellied youngsters, curious to see a foreigner, swarmed out. “Long live the red flag!” they shouted at us. “Victory to the Communist Party!”

That is the India we do not often hear about when we talk about the “humane” Indian way to progress.

It was left to an American Ambassador, J. Kenneth Galbraith, to express the brighter side of things. Speaking to the House Foreign Affairs Committee in Washington, the Ambassador to India claimed that “India today is one of the success stories” of Asia. “Red China, by contrast is a failure.” The reason for this success? Mr. Galbraith said: “Aid, including in a very substantial measure American aid, has made this possible.”¹⁸

A rather more profound analysis of India’s situation came to my attention not long after I had read Mr. Galbraith’s report on India’s “success story.” A comparison of Japanese and Indian development showed little cause for the kind of optimism expressed by Ambassador Galbraith:

It is, of course, risky to generalize about a sub-continent. But it is broadly true to say that Indian agriculture cannot achieve its potentialities without a social revolution. In most areas, the land reform has failed in what should have been

¹⁸ *U.S. News & World Report*, May 7, 1962.

its primary object: to give the peasant an incentive to improve the land and increase productivity. If he is not a sharecropper, forced to give an average of 50 per cent of his yield to men who in fact, if not in law, are landlords, he is at the mercy of the moneylenders, charging interest rates up to 200 per cent. Laws passed to end abuses have remained very largely a dead letter and the local government officers have not power to interfere. Hence the peasant does as little work as possible; India's greatest source of productive energy remains untapped.¹⁹

This report was in a foreign journal.

Many heart-rending accounts of the appalling conditions in India appear in our press, but the writers never really reach the heart of the matter. Nor do these correspondents and editorial writers seem aware that the condition just described—the non-use of India's greatest source of productive energy, her people—is precisely the problem that China has successfully tackled.

The same report from the *New Statesman* continues:

Indian planners dismiss western criticism of their attitude to agriculture on two grounds. They point out that production has in fact increased from 50 million tons of food-grains in 1951 to nearly 80 million tons today; and that, in any case, the U.S. will always make good deficiencies from her surplus. . . .

The argument that the U.S. will always rescue India from a shortage of basic foodstuffs not only makes nonsense of the plan's express object of securing self-sufficiency, but misses the whole point. The primary object of an agricultural revolution is not to raise food production but to draw the villager out of the self-contained world of subsistence living and into the monetary, consumer market. At present, more than half the population of India lives, for all practical purposes, outside the economy—indeed, outside civilization as we in the West know it. Half the sub-continent is completely cut off from the process whereby wealth is generated. Yet under the second plan, agriculture got only 11 per cent of the budget; even under the third plan it gets barely 14 per cent.

Moreover, such measures as the government is taking

¹⁹ *New Statesman*, London, June 1, 1962. "The Tortoise and the Hare," by Paul Johnson.

to promote rural advances tend to peter out the nearer they approach the actual village level. The pyramid of Indian bureaucracy, immensely efficient at the top, crumbles at the point of impact with the masses, particularly in the agricultural sector. Indian civil servants do not like the countryside, particularly in the backward areas where they are most needed; once removed from their desks, they often become bewildered and nervous. . . .²⁰

I have quoted at some length from this thoughtful analysis not only because I believe it to be a true one, but because it makes some points which our press—as it lulls us into optimism with its assurance that "the humane Indian way will win in the end"—rarely makes. Especially important is the necessity of bringing the peasant population *into* the wealth-producing economy and not leaving him outside, and bringing him also into the *consumer market*. Anyone who has seen the village industrial workshops in China (there are hundreds of thousands of them in all), many producing comparatively sophisticated goods, or has compared the number of items that the Chinese peasants own and use in their homes with what they had before the revolution (or with the conditions of the Indian peasants), knows how successfully the Chinese have *brought their peasant population into the economy*.

As Mr. Paul Johnson pointed out, another essential is to get the city intellectuals and the "civil service" *involved with rural life* if rural advance is to take place. This, too, the Chinese have achieved, with students, teachers, and government officials from the city regularly participating in the work of the villages. But how they have been ridiculed and scorned for it by the press and the scholars in our country!

We have already seen that two of the inescapable conditions of progress in backward countries are the fullest attainable mobilization of the potential economic surplus, including that of the wealthier classes, and that the immense efforts that are required in the period of primary capital saving must be equitable.

In India neither of these conditions has been met.

²⁰ *Ibid*.

Several years ago Paul A. Baran, Professor of Economics at Stanford University, brilliantly summarized the reasons for India's failure to advance. Discussing the Congress Party, which still controls India's national policies, Professor Baran wrote:

Yet this breadth of the national coalition which accounted for the enormous strength of the Congress Party in the days of its struggle for national independence at present nearly paralyzes the administration that it supports. . . . Setting out to promote the development of industrial capitalism it does not dare to offend the landed interests. Seeking to mitigate the most outrageous inequalities of incomes, it refrains from interfering with the merchants and money-lenders. Looking for an improvement of the wretched position of labor, it is afraid to antagonize business. Anti-imperialist by background, it is courting favors from foreign capital. Espousing the principles of private property, it promises the nation a "socialist pattern of society."

. . . Anxious to reconcile irreconcilable needs, to compose radical differences, to find compromises where decisions are inevitable, losing much valuable time and energy in bridging recurrent conflicts within its fold, this government substitutes minor reforms for radical changes, revolutionary words for revolutionary deeds . . . the regime . . . is powerless to mobilize what is most important: the enthusiasms and the creative energies of the broad popular masses for a decisive assault on their country's backwardness, poverty, and lethargy.²¹

As long as a large share of India's agricultural proceeds is not used for the improvement of agricultural conditions but continues to be withdrawn by the landowners in the form of rent, India's farming will remain stagnant and the people will continue to be underfed. As long as a large share of the profits of India's industry are allowed to go abroad to foreign owners, and of what remains almost half continues to be distributed in the form of dividends, India's industry cannot find the necessary capital for its growth and development. But to take steps to correct these con-

²¹ *The Political Economy of Growth* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1957), p. 222.

ditions would require the government of India to *challenge the domestic and foreign moneyed interests*—and this the present government is neither able nor willing to do.

India's advance, like that of China's, in the end can come only under a government that is ready to meet this challenge. Conflict of some kind will probably be inevitable, for history (our own included) has shown that those in a position of power do not often give up without a fight. But conflict can be minimized, *if the issues are tackled in time*. Revolution is change that has been denied too long. By evading the real requirements for economic growth, by dodging its responsibility and postponing a genuine program of economic and social reform, the government of India is jeopardizing its historical opportunity—to transform in as peaceful a way as possible a great country from a state of unspeakable squalor and oppression to that of a rapidly advancing modern state.

As far as our press is concerned, very little space has been devoted to any basic analysis of India's predicament. Easy phrases such as "India's democratic way" have covered up a lot of non-thinking. Mr. Galbraith tells us that "Red China . . . is a failure" and that "India today is one of the success stories" of Asia; and Mr. Everett D. Hawkins, a Professor of Economics and Sociology at Mount Holyoke, produces a comparison equally startling:

The "Big Leap Forward" in 1958, even discounting rosy Chinese reports, indicates real physical increases in production with an all-out regimentation of the work force and with wages rising less rapidly than productivity. India, on the other hand, is opposed to forced labor and expropriation. She has emphasized food and higher standard of living. . . .²²

I wish that Ambassador Galbraith and Mr. Hawkins could walk through any village in India and then compare it with the life that today goes on in an equivalent village in China! And how, one must ask the professor, can *any* country attempt to raise itself from a state of backwardness without "wages rising less rap-

²² *Current History*, December 1958, p. 335.

idly than productivity?" If he has invented a new economic theory he should announce it—I can assure him it will be wildly cheered by backward nations throughout the world.

India's border dispute with China affords a clear example of how some newspaper reports, far from being rooted in objective facts, fluctuate with the varying moods of official sentiment.

We have seen how in 1962 reports from India indicated a developing crisis in its economy. In July, India's Finance Minister was "chasing through the capitals of Europe" trying to raise \$220,000,000; how assets had been "dropping inexorably to new all-time lows"; how India's foreign exchange reserves had practically disappeared; and how her industrial production was "far short of plans" and was "in some cases even declining." The over-all impression conveyed by these reports was that India was virtually bankrupt and that her production on all levels was faltering.

With the outbreak of the border fighting in October, these gloomy views vanished from the columns of the press. Overnight, it seemed, the Indian economy had moved forward—and so rapidly that within a few days we were being told that one of the chief reasons for the Chinese action along the border war was because India's economy was too successful!

Some quotations in chronological order from the press mark an upsurge in a country's economy so phenomenal that nothing like it has been seen in the world before!

... They [the Chinese] have been trying to demonstrate to Asia that they have the answer to the salvation of mankind, but they have made such a ghastly mess of their revolution that they have now turned their guns on India to halt the more democratic development of that country.

—James Reston, *New York Times*,
October 21, 1962.

... Peking may want to force India to divert resources that would otherwise go into building an economy that could outshine China's in Asia.

—*New York Times*,
October 28, 1962.

India, by a mixture of planning, incentive and free enterprise, has made undeniable strides out of poverty, in glaring contrast to Red China's inhuman regimentation which has brought nothing but hardship and near famine. The invasion may be aimed at disrupting India's political and economic life. In broadcast after broadcast, Peking hammered at India's "retrograde economic system" and U.S. aid.

—*Time*, November 2, 1962.

It is not a struggle for a few acres of land, it is a struggle for a way of life.

—Report of a speech by an
Indian author, *San Francisco
Chronicle*, November 3, 1962.

It is a terrible thing now to see war intervening. This dislocation of a very promising economic effort might be precisely what the Communist Chinese most want to achieve. . . .

—Editorial, *The Christian Science Monitor*,
November 3, 1962.

Our development through freedom was achieving a degree of success which, if it went on, would have convinced people that this was the way to develop.

—A report of a speech by the
Indian Ambassador. *New York
Times*, November 11, 1962.

With India surging ahead of Communist China in peaceful development, Communist China had to force India to divert her limited resources.

—UPI, from Washington,
November 20, 1962.

The whole uncommitted world was comparing India's economic advances as a democratic nation against the Peking Government's slips and stumbles. . . .

—Robert Trumbull from Hong Kong,
New York Times, November 25, 1962.

India has been making slow but orderly progress in building an industrial base for a better life for her people. China is in serious economic difficulties. The "Indian Way" with its reliance on democratic freedom is becoming a more attractive model in Asia.

The undermining of India's economic progress may, therefore, be one of Peking's principal objectives.

—Editorial, *New York Times*,
December 10, 1962.

India's democratic progress has obviously been too successful for China's own liking. . . .

—“The Cost of India's Defeat”
by Elizabeth Partridge, *The Nation*, January 26, 1963.

For a few weeks—during the border fighting with China—the remarkable “boom” in India's economy continued. It did not last long. The success story was soon replaced by the tragically familiar details of poverty and stagnation and a growing reliance on foreign aid.

. . . an economy only imperceptibly inching forward . . . one per cent of the Indian population . . . possesses 75 per cent of its wealth, an imbalance which has been increasing in recent years.

—*Liberation*, January 1963.
Report from New Delhi

One factor encouraging complacency . . . is the supply of food grain free of foreign exchange under the American plan. . . .

—*The Times of London*,
March 11, 1963.

[India] . . . is likely to ask for 6 billion rupees [\$1,260,000,000] of economic assistance at the forthcoming meeting in Washington.

—*The Christian Science Monitor*,
April 16, 1963.

. . . meanwhile vital steel targets are falling behind schedule.

—*The Christian Science Monitor*,
April 18, 1963.

Last year's growth rate of 2.1 per cent was slower than the growth . . . of the population increase.

—*The Christian Science Monitor*,
April 18, 1963.

Agriculture production still shows no improvement over that of the last decade, which itself was only half of the rate envisaged for the third plan period.

—*The Christian Science Monitor*,
April 22, 1963.

Further indications of India's economic plight were contained in a report by Reuters from New Delhi on September 6, 1963. According to this report Dr. Lohia, a member of the Lok Sabha, “maintained that 270 million Indians lived on less than four annas a day [about 4¢ U.S.] and between 100 and 150 million Indians had a daily income of less than two annas [about 2¢ U.S.].” Mr. Nehru claimed that average income per head in India is about 15 annas [about 17¢ U.S.] but a *London Times* dispatch from New Delhi pointed out that what the Prime Minister had overlooked was that about 1 percent of the population earns nearly half the total. “Whether or not statistics support Dr. Lohia's claim . . . it is plain already that Dr. Lohia was more nearly right than the Prime Minister.”

(In striking contrast to India, by early 1963 reports from China indicated that after three years of recession the Chinese economy was again moving sharply upward—and this without any foreign aid.²³)

Stagnation in India is likely to continue until the Indian people and government are ready to come to grips with economic and social realities and are ready to pay the price that change demands. Whatever the mistakes the Chinese have made, and they have made many, they at least recognized the economic laws that govern a poor nation's advance, and acted on them. India, in avoiding these realities, has no alternative but to rely increasingly on foreign aid to keep its economy from total collapse.

In 1962 India received more U.S. aid than any other country,

²³ “New evidence digested by American officials has led them to a considerably more respectful and sobering view of the prospects of the Communist Chinese economy. . . . The administration is somewhat reluctant to publicize its changed view. The chief reason is the fear of putting India in an unfavorable light at a time of great Sino-Indian tension.” *The Oregonian*, Portland, March 11, 1963—reprinted from the *Washington Post*.

See also “Postscript from Peking.”

and her demands will not grow less. The main function of such aid should be to provide the Indian authorities with *time*; time to initiate some of the profoundly important changes that will enable the country to draw on its own resources and grow from its own strength. Tragic as it is, similar aid in the past has brought no such result, but has tended rather to allow those in power to postpone once again reforms that were already long overdue.

Though foreign aid can never be an answer to India's needs, while she can rely on it she is not likely to meet the supreme challenge, the mobilizing of the latent resources within the country itself: the potential savings in the hands of the few and the abundant energies of the people themselves. Nor can India ever do this while she maintains a system of economic privilege and gross social inequality.

These are some of the great issues of the world we live in, but the press has not helped us at all to understand them. In its reporting and by a kind of Alice-in-Wonderland interpretation, it is attempting to convince the American people that the remarkable progress in China has been a disaster for the Chinese people, and that India's stagnation is really "the better way."

Chapter 8

650 MILLION SLAVES

I. Meanwhile, Back on the Communes, the Family Was Being Destroyed

In the summer of 1957, when I was in China, almost 97 percent of all agricultural land was owned by what were known as "advanced co-operatives." Land and farm implements were held in common, and at harvest time, the profits were divided among families in proportion to the days of labor each family had contributed. These co-operatives on an average consisted of between one hundred and two hundred families.

Small units like this meant that no real modernization of agriculture (in other words no sizable increase in food output) was possible. Especially when it came to the building of dams and the development of irrigation canals, single co-operative farms were often found to be too small, and several co-operatives would need to pool their labor, machinery, and materials. Large-scale irrigation works often cut across land owned by several co-ops. Also, at a time when the government was pushing mechanization, farm machinery was usually too expensive for an individual co-operative to finance on its own, and several might then share in the purchase of a tractor or other machine. For these very practical reasons, during 1957 and early 1958 informal mergers of co-operative farms

began to take place in various parts of the country—they were called *ta shé*, “enlarged co-operatives,” or co-op federations.

These sporadic mergers of co-operative farms were the forerunners of the communes.

There was another, even more basic, reason why co-operative farms could never be the final step in the evolution of China's agriculture. Though they represented a vast improvement over anything that had come before, the co-operatives were incapable of solving the two fundamental problems that confront almost every undeveloped country in the world: namely, the chronic unemployment, or underemployment, of the peasant population; and secondly, their virtual exclusion from the nation's wealth-producing activities.

Contrary to the prevalent mythology here, the period 1949–56 found the average Chinese peasant's material betterment, limited as this was, on the upswing. For example, the elimination of landlordism had enabled the peasant to keep far more of his crop than ever before. In addition, the vast flood control, irrigation, and reforestation projects that were immediately embarked upon by the new government served to help take up some of the peasant's slack season. Again, contrary to the myth, these projects did not rely on “slave labor” but, as was reported by an official Indian delegation visiting China in 1954, each worker was paid according to his work and was guaranteed a minimum wage.¹ Nevertheless, the fact remains that at this time China's peasant population generally remained outside the national monetary economy, and its time spent in agricultural production was not much more than that of the peasants of nations such as India.

While at peak periods—during harvest time, for instance—there was work for all, for most of the year there was always an acute shortage of work. A survey made in 1955 showed that the average number of days (or day equivalents) worked by Chinese peasants (men and women) was only 130 days a year—for men alone the figure would be somewhat higher. By 1957 (the last year before the communes) men and women in the advanced co-operatives

¹ New York Times, July 17, 1954.

were still only working the equivalent of 161 days a year.² (The figure for India was approximately 135 days a year.)

Thus, for more than half the year, five hundred million peasants in China were not engaged in farm work. And whatever the cumulative benefits of their labor on national projects, such as building dams and reservoirs, these were not immediately contributing to the gross national product of China. And this, it must be remembered, was in a country attempting to accumulate savings so as to be able to establish the base for a modern industrialized nation. This meant not only a slow pace in capital accumulation, it also represented a vast wastage of a valuable source of productive labor that was needed to go into large increases in agricultural production. The small, independent, co-operative farms with one or two hundred families in each, and with small financial resources, were in no position at all to provide a solution to this centuries-old problem. Therefore, in 1957 China's peasants were still basically subsistence farmers—as they still are in India and most other underdeveloped countries—cut off from the growing modernization and advancement of the nation as a whole.

If the five hundred million peasants in China were to be brought into the national wealth-producing economy and were in turn to reap the benefits of national progress as consumers, an altogether new and radical solution was required.

The informal association of co-operative farms taking place here and there in 1958 indicated that the time had come for a new advance. It is clear from his writings that Mao Tse-tung had long been aware that the small co-operative farms could not meet China's agricultural basic problems. In the summer of 1958, after visiting one of the “enlarged co-operatives” in Honan province, where members had extended their association into a more formal structure, Mao expressed his approval. Great publicity was then given to these new developments, and the amalgamation of co-

² An extensive prewar survey made in China by Professor J. R. Buck showed that on average the number of ten-hour work days (or day equivalents) of the Chinese peasant was then 133 per year. This and the other figures quoted are taken from a valuable report on the rural communes by Shigeru Ishikawa of the Institute of Economic Research, Hitotsubashi University, Japan, and printed in the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, September 29, 1960.

operatives into larger units spread very rapidly throughout China. These amalgamations now began to be known as "communes."

Before this movement began, China's agriculture was based on 740,000 small "advanced co-operative" farms; within a few months the whole of China's rural life was transformed, as these co-operatives were amalgamated into twenty-six thousand (later consolidated into twenty-four thousand) communes.

But the communes were much more than "co-operatives—only larger." Commune managements took over the direction not only of the agricultural work, but the organization of rural industries, banking, road-making, education, the establishment of communal dining halls, the enlargement of medical facilities—clinics and hospitals, and all public works.

The change-over was far too sudden, and far too swift. The enthusiasm and the muddle were vast. The fiscal details of the transfer of ownership of property rights from the co-operative to the commune must alone have been a nightmare of improvisation. Peasants were taken from urgent agricultural work to build schools and dining halls and medical clinics. In most communes basic food was given free as part of the wage system but some, in their initial enthusiasm (believing that "communism had arrived"), were supplying free clothes, free haircuts, free everything. Some communes declared that all personal possessions—even bicycles and pots and pans—should henceforth be considered communal property. Day nurseries sprang up everywhere so that women could be free to participate in the commune work force. Some communes even attempted to move in one leap into the final stages of communism—and gave "to each according to his need," expecting all to "give according to their abilities." Consumption as a result soared and stocks were soon exhausted.

All this was happening during a year when harvests in China (even when all allowances have been made for exaggeration) surpassed even the 1957 record level—deluding many into the belief that it was the commune system, rather than good climatic conditions and other causes, that had created this bumper crop.

Vast plans were drawn up, and some were actually put into

effect, for rural re-housing to make the living conditions of the peasants more comparable to those in the cities—but plans were always based on the retention of the Chinese family unit of three generations. This was specifically laid down in a government directive (emphasis mine):

Nurseries and kindergarten should be run well, so that every child can live better and receive a better education there than at home, so that the children are willing to stay there and the parents are willing to put them there. *The parents may decide whether their children need to board there, and may take them back at any time they wish.* The old existing houses must be reconstructed step by step; new, picturesque townships and village settlements must be built by stages and in groups; these will include residential quarters, community dining rooms, nurseries, kindergarten, the Homes to Honor the Aged . . . schools, hospitals, clubs, cinemas, sports grounds, baths and latrines. The construction plans of townships and village settlements should be thoroughly discussed by the masses. We stand for the abolition of the irrational, patriarchal system of family life inherited from the past and for the development of family life in which there is democracy and unity. . . . Therefore in building residential quarters, *attention must be paid to making the houses suited to the living together of men and women, the aged and the young of each family.* It is true that the Chinese people have broken the feudal patriarchal [family] system. It must be known that this patriarchal system has long since ceased to exist in capitalist society and this is a matter of capitalist progress.³

Under the direction of anyone who had ever had experience in construction work, industrial workshops were set up in all villages and small towns of rural China. Within a few months no fewer than six hundred thousand workshops had been constructed and were functioning. Many of these were at first very primitive; some were housed in reconstructed cowsheds or old barns. Larger, state-run industries would provide and set up the necessary machinery and would send engineers from the cities to train the

³ "Party Resolution on Questions Concerning People's Communes." December 10, 1958, *New China News Agency* (English translation).

young peasants to make simple parts and components needed in the factories. The young Chinese peasants—who had until then never been exposed to machinery of any kind—took to these workshops with immense enthusiasm, and often more immediate agricultural work was neglected.

These young people, both girls and men, were astonishingly quick to master the necessary mechanical skills, and already by 1960, when I returned to China, some of these workshops were turning out sophisticated apparatus of high precision and good finish. It never ceased to astonish me to walk into a decrepit building in some remote village and find inside peasant girls working at fifteen or twenty modern precision lathes, or in special dust-free rooms assembling delicate electronic apparatus that had to meet the very closest tolerances.

With all these new developments in high gear through the summer and fall of 1958, a collective euphoria appears to have gripped the Chinese people—and even the leaders were not immune. While the communes were being established in the countryside, in the cities tremendous—and often highly successful—efforts were being made to increase industrial production. Hours of work were stepped up, production targets continually increased; one factory would compete with another and factory workers at the end of the week would wait for the production statistics to be announced as eagerly as we might wait for the baseball results. The “Great Leap Forward” was in full swing.

By the end of the year the general disarray in the countryside had become obvious. The agricultural production returns were found to have been grossly exaggerated. Discontent was being voiced by peasants who had been persuaded to give up their own possessions; many found that the work expected of them was too great.

As the initial élan gradually subsided, it was realized that stubborn agricultural problems cannot be solved overnight. Sober appraisals of 1958's great efforts were made, and decisions and instructions were formulated that brought the commune effort on to a far more realistic basis. Those who had given up their private

possessions could reclaim them; homes were returned to private ownership; work hours were cut back to a maximum of forty-eight hours a week (except during harvest time). Many rural rehousing projects were postponed until more immediate agricultural needs were met.⁴

In the course of the next few years other changes in the commune system were found to be necessary. Greater initiative in the management of agricultural work was granted to the smaller village units; the authority of the party cadres, who often knew little about agricultural techniques, was very much restricted; a certain proportion of land was returned to the peasants for private production. All these corrections show that the communes had been introduced too rapidly. But though changes in the structure of the communes have been considerable, the commune has retained administrative control over such things as schools, medical services, the homes for the old people, the commune workshops as well as the public services such as road-making, irrigation development, banking, and the purchase of mechanical equipment such as tractors, harvesters, pumps, etc.

During the food shortages of 1960–62 a few Western observers felt that it was the existence of the new commune administrations which made possible effective rationing procedures and equitable distribution of food resources, thus preventing what might otherwise have been a vast national calamity, with perhaps millions dead from starvation and the diseases that come with malnutrition. This opinion, which was to be proved correct, was exactly opposite from that voiced by American experts who contended that China's “famine” was a *result* of the commune system.

The errors had been many, and the Chinese are the first to admit it. It is easy for us to scoff at what now can be seen to have been obvious, and often ludicrous, errors. The faults and the changes in administrative structure led to press reports and com-

⁴ I would estimate that by 1962 only a comparatively few peasants, perhaps 2 percent, had been given new homes either in individual houses or in family apartments. Ninety-eight percent of the peasants were living in precisely the same small huts and houses that they have always lived in.

ment stating that the communes had been "abandoned" as "failures."

Thus, an AP report from Hong Kong in early 1961 declared:

Communist China has abandoned its "big leap forward" and is breaking up the people's communes, both launched 2½ years ago with great fanfare.

The headline for this startling news in the San Francisco *Chronicle* on January 29, 1961, ran: RED CHINA DROPS FARM COMMUNES.

Some China experts in this country were insisting that the revisions had been so drastic that the communes "existed in name only." The truth of the matter is that the communes have continued to exist and have never been "abandoned." There was great emphasis in our press on the mistakes, the bungling, the overestimation of the 1958 grain figure, the return of initiative to the smaller village groups, while the achievements have been almost wholly ignored.

(Though the communes had been "dropped" in 1961, the *Chronicle* on April 22, 1963, reported: "Even through the depths of winter the largest cities, Peking and Shanghai, are reported to have been well supplied with vegetables and fruit grown in communes on the outskirts of the city.")

As a result of the commune movement China is the first major backward peasant country that has virtually solved the age-old problem of rural underemployment. With the establishment of village industries and workshops there is now no shortage of work, however the seasonal agricultural demands may fluctuate. The peasants of China, who as recently as 1957 were on the average only working productively for 161 days (or day equivalents) a year, today are working 300 days a year. An Indian trade-unionist whom I met in China in 1960 told me that the elimination of rural underemployment, in his view, was the single most impressive achievement of the Communist regime.

Hundreds of millions of peasants today are no longer merely subsistence farmers but are fully integrated into the wealth-producing activities of the nation as a whole. They are now within,

and not outside, the national monetary economy; they are involved in it as wealth producers and as consumers.

Already in 1960 (to my astonishment) the communes were having to set up banks for the personal savings of the peasants—such savings would have been unthinkable before 1949. A detailed survey of banking in Asia by a Shanghai correspondent for the *Far Eastern Economic Review* appearing in the issue of April 11, 1963, shows how far the masses of the Chinese people are now included in the monetary economy. It reported that the branches of the People's Bank of China

in any city and throughout the country are even more numerous than the postal and telegraph branches. . . . There are frequent nation-wide campaigns for promoting thrift and encouraging savings by all and sundry. Every branch and agency of the Bank handle savings accounts. . . . Accounts of public utility companies, house rent and taxes are usually paid by customers direct to the account of the enterprise with the Bank, through any branch or agency. . . . Since a bank agency is found in every locality and community, no matter how small, this arrangement is convenient to the working people. . . .

In sharp contrast, the section of the report dealing with banking in India tells us: "Quite a large part of the economy is still non-monetised. . . . Bank offices are concentrated mostly in a few big towns."

As I have seen myself and as other travelers to China have also reported, the social amenities available to the Chinese peasants today are widespread. They now have education, medical services, community cultural activities, movies, old-age security. They no longer have to wait from harvest to harvest for payment but are given a regular wage. They enjoy opportunities to develop hobbies of all kinds. They can train as nurses, teachers, veterinarians, mechanics, electricians. There are schools to teach reading and writing to those who missed school in their childhood; and traveling libraries bring books to the remotest villages. For the first time, millions of peasants are able to read—and do! This would have been inconceivable even a few years ago.

And nearly all these advances were made possible by the establishment of the rural communes.

Now let us turn to see what was reported to us about the communes.

It was in the autumn of 1958 that this new word "commune," with its ominous undertones, began to appear in our press. Some new and tremendous upheaval was shaking China's society. Very few facts were at first available, but the press left us in no doubt that whatever the facts were, they were very sinister. Soon the news was out—the Chinese government was deliberately reducing the 650 million people of China into a condition of the most abject slavery.

Under the communes, which merge collective farms and even urban districts into large groupings, individual homes are often eliminated and members live in communal houses and eat in mess halls.

—Tillman Durdin, from Hong Kong,
New York Times, October 16, 1958.

On November 14, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles gave his official endorsement to these stories. In a speech before the representatives of Colombo Plan, assembled in Seattle, he declared that the Chinese were "imposing mass slavery on 650 million people." They had "degraded the dignity of the human individual" and "had created a vast slave state."

This hint from high officialdom was all that was needed. For example, Marguerite Higgins reported:

The United States now concludes that the drive to organize mainland China's 500,000,000 peasants into militarized barracks life based on communes is well on the way to being an accomplished fact. . . .

(To build enough barracks to have 500,000,000 peasants in barracks life "well on the way to being an accomplished fact" within a few weeks is an astonishing logistical feat! Especially in a country where lumber is scarce. China was apparently able to

accomplish within a few weeks what the U.S., throwing in *all its national resources*, might have been hard-pressed to do in five years!)

Miss Higgins continued:

As one official put it, what Mao Tse-tung has done . . . makes Stalin look like a piker. . . .

It is not only Washington that is appalled by the regimentation, which finds women "liberated" from their homes and placed in barracks separated from their husbands and everyone from teen-age youth to oldster trained to put gun worship over ancestor worship.

—New York Herald Tribune,
November 25, 1958.

Mao Tse-tung has herded more than 90% of mainland China's 500 million peasants into vast human poultry yards. . . .

Even the old folks, for whom the commune has established "Happy Homes," are kept busy with scheduled chores. . . . when the inhabitants of the Happy Homes die, their bodies are dropped into a chemically treated pool and converted to fertilizer. . . .

Logical next step . . . is the "Saturday-night system," under which a married woman worker lives in a factory dormitory, is alone with her husband only on the odd Saturday night when she has the use of a dormitory room all to herself.

—Time, December 1, 1958.

[Time's memory erred. The family had already been destroyed 6½ years earlier. On June 18, 1951, Time had reported:

Chief among the traditions under all-out Red attack is China's revered institution, the family. . . . Marriage, except for the purely functional reason of procreation, is officially discouraged everywhere and permitted only after long investigation of the couple's political reliability. . . . Newlywed party members are permitted to live together for one week only, thereafter sleep each at his own place of work. . . . Party members' children usually are taken from the mother at the age of six to eight weeks and boarded by the state. . . .

But *Time* must share with the New York *Times* the honors for the early discovery of what the Chinese Communists were doing to the family. Five years before the communes, the *Times* was raising its editorial hands in horror on October 3, 1953:

Of the countless crimes of the Red regime of Mao none has been as terrible as the crime against the minds and hearts of the good Chinese. . . .

There is first of all the assault upon the mores and morals of the good Chinese family, . . .]

But seemingly with the arrival of the communes, the families had to be destroyed all over again.

. . . In theory all mainland China is now in the process of being reorganized into communal living. The children are reared in nurseries. The men and women live in communal dormitories, eat in communal mess halls, and work in military-type organizations. . . .

—Joseph C. Harsch, Special Correspondent of *The Christian Science Monitor*, December 10, 1958.

Three days later, the same reporter wrote:

Not all people in China are yet living in the communal dormitories, eating in the communal mess halls, handing over their children at birth to the communal nurseries. . . .

But he implied that it would not be long! And what appalling sacrifices the Chinese peasants were being forced to make:

In the Chinese experiment there is, in theory, no room for personal luxury, and no future for personal savings. In most communes the individual is in theory provided by the commune with all his needs. "Needs" do not include spending money, cars, motorboats, private garden plots, private housing, or dachas in the country.

—*The Christian Science Monitor*, December 13, 1958.

Having considered the dreadful implications of peasants denied their cars and motorboats, Mr. Harsch later in the month concluded that what was going on in China was

. . . the greatest mass sacrifice of human heritage, human comfort and human effort in all time.

—December 24, 1958.

For over a year the newspapers poured out vivid accounts of the horrors taking place in China. In December 1958 Mr. R. H. Shackford wrote a series of articles entitled "Chain Gang Empire" for the Scripps-Howard newspapers. The series began unequivocally: "Abolition of the family is an avowed, primary sociological objective of Red China's new commune system—the first serious effort in history to put a whole nation on what amounts to a prison chain gang." One of the drawings accompanying this series showed a row of skulls on a blood-spattered wall, upon which were written (in letters of blood) "Family destruction," "bestiality," "slave labor." Mr. Shackford found nothing but unmitigated evil in what was going on.

Each commune has about 10,000 families, but can go as high as 20,000. Each member of these families capable of doing anything becomes, in fact, a slave of the commune which, in turn, is a slave of the central state regime in Peiping.

—December 16.

Husbands and wives are being separated. Children are being raised by the state in institutions run by Communist Party functionaries. Grandparents are being herded into "houses of happiness" for the aged if they can't work. . . .

—December 17.

Official policy on individualism is clear: there will be no more individuals in China if Mao has his way. Individualism is listed with parochialism and capitalism as a major sin against communism.

—December 18.

Mr. Shackford's sources of information for this frightful description of developments in China are not cited. In the course of these articles, he referred to unnamed and undated Chinese publications, an anonymous "Communist writer," unidentified reports, and an undated copy of the Catholic publication *America*, from which he extracted this quotation (not giving the name of

the author): "Here is a nightmare phantom of collectivism which for open horror, gross inhumanity, and sadistic ambition dwarfs any devil materialized within the Communist bloc in 41 years."

On December 17, 1958, *The Christian Science Monitor's* chief Far Eastern correspondent asked: "And finally, will the average Chinese accept the new social and economic strait jacket with docility? Will he relinquish his children, his home, his wife, and his independence?"

Two days later, the *Monitor's* regular Hong Kong correspondent, Takashi Oka, apparently had news that the Chinese building industry had after all met all quotas: "... almost all of mainland China's 500,000,000 peasants have been herded into 'people's communes.'"

Though the barrack construction program was apparently proceeding successfully, the enslaving of 650 million people was meeting some difficulties. In a long dispatch from its correspondent in Tokyo, the UPI on December 18 discussed the likelihood of revolt:

Competent students of Chinese affairs in Manila, Singapore, Bangkok, Taipei, Macao and Hong Kong told me these troubles could even include open revolt—on a scale much larger than anything the Communists obviously are experiencing and putting down with force right now. . . .

Since the communes destroy the family system, each man is more or less on his own. If he is separated from his family and made a mere unit in a machine, his family no longer is a "hostage" and he has nothing to lose if he revolts to throw off his chains.

Since husband and wife are separated and can be together perhaps only once every two weeks, the commune system is not likely to be voted the most popular way of life, however much it may appeal to the political bosses of China.

Throughout 1959 and into 1960, the press continued to give accounts of the horrors of the commune system and the "nightmarish" life of the people in them. On October 1, 1959, in an editorial entitled: "Ten Years of Red China," the *New York Times* commiserated with the Chinese people:

... the peasant masses ... found out too late the reality behind the initial attractive Communist promises of land reform. In the past decade they have been deprived of their land and dragooned first into collective farms and then into communes whose Draconian severity of regimentation has no analogue even in Soviet experience. . . .

... We may suspect that no people has ever been forced to work so hard and for so little as the Chinese people these last ten years. . . .

They have suffered much in these years and have been regimented as has no other people of modern times by the most totalitarian regime of the twentieth century.

In the liberal monthly *The Progressive*, an article by Hyman Kublin, a professor specializing in Far Eastern history at Brooklyn College, declared:

Never before in the long span of Chinese history has the power of the state and its manipulation impinged so heavily and directly upon the people in the myriad towns and villages. Gone are the days when the toiling peasant could express with surety his dictum of government. . . .

(And never before, I might add, in the long span of Western scholarship, has a China "specialist"—and a Fulbright scholar to boot—ever before talked about "the toiling peasant" of China expressing "with surety his dictum of government"!)

I have given only a small fraction of the literally hundreds of articles, editorials, learned reports, and foreign correspondents' dispatches that appeared in the press describing the development of the communes in this general manner. My selection, I think, is a fair sampling—and chosen chiefly from the more distinguished organs of American journalism. In looking through the files, I was struck by two things—first, the high degree of uniformity in all the accounts. There were variations, of course, but they all followed the central theme that the Chinese people were in the grip of a ruthless regime.

The second striking impression I obtained was the paucity—indeed, the virtual non-existence—of any thoughtful interpretation. Even if these dreadful things were happening, there was little to tell the reader why they were happening, except in the

shallowest possible terms. A quarter of the human race was being "enslaved" by the most "ruthless dictatorship in history," but we were really told nothing more. And being told nothing could only reinforce the first conviction, that the Chinese leadership are men of almost limitless evil intent.

The commune movement began in 1958, between my two journeys to China. In 1957, I had already experienced the shock—the almost disorienting bewilderment—of coming to a country and finding it so very different from the country that I had been led to expect. I knew the extent to which the press had misled me once. I was on guard. So I read the accounts of the communes with a very great deal of skepticism—especially the reports about the breakup of the families. (I felt I knew the Chinese well enough to know that if any government attempted to break up the family, it could only end in being broken up itself.)

And yet—and this is testimony to the pervasive effect of any lie if it is reiterated sufficiently—I returned to China in 1960 expecting to see some very disturbing changes. Some reports, of course, I had dismissed. I could not conceive of *any* government, however much it desired to, being able to build enough barracks for five hundred million people within a few weeks. Those statements condemned themselves. But I must admit I expected to see *some* barracks, *some* ominous changes in the mood of the people, at least *some* indications of brutal treatment. In other words, I could not bring myself to believe, in spite of my skepticism, that these reports that I had been reading had no basis in reality.

While in China in 1960, I was able to talk to the ambassadors and staffs of most of the Western and neutral embassies about the communes; I had long discussions with well-informed Europeans, including technical experts, who had been in China several years; I traveled thousands of miles, spent days in communes of my own choosing; I walked to work with peasants and ate with them in their communal dining halls. I found nothing to justify the reports that I had been reading in our press. I also found that these reports were not credited—indeed were ridiculed—by the diplomatic representatives of Western countries in China.

It should be pointed out that all the while the stories and opinions quoted above were appearing in this country, some factual material on the communes was being published abroad. These reports were by Canadians, Europeans, and Asians who wrote from firsthand observation in China.

I would like to offer a few samples of some accounts of the communes in China which sharply conflicted with what we were being told in our daily papers (*italics mine*):

Renée Dumont, Professor of Comparative Agriculture at the Agronomic Institute, Paris, in an article entitled, "Chinese Agriculture":

Without the *active and voluntary participation* of the *majority*, the mountains would not have been terraced nor would the terraces have been held in place by gravel, nor would the gravel have been humped, basket by basket, from the river beds. It is my impression that the Chinese Party has succeeded, after due deliberation, in marrying its authority to the peasant's consent, a consent obtained by protracted explanations.

—*Le Monde*, Paris, October 12, 1958.

Edward B. Joliffe, lawyer, leader of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation of Ontario:

Having visited such communities this year—and having entered many a peasant home forty years ago—I am amused by the story, zealously spread by certain writers from their posts in Hong Kong and Formosa, that the peasants (five hundred million of them) are kept in the co-ops by coercion and terror.

—*Maclean's Magazine*, Canada,
November 22, 1958.

An article by Professor Charles Bettelheim of the Sorbonne, entitled "China's Economic Growth," states:

I think that one must first of all recognize that the manner in which Chinese economy and society are developing presupposes an essentially energetic direction which can be neither of a bureaucratic nor of an administrative nature, nor, still less, come in the shape of pressure from the police (as some people imagine). Such growth implies great clear-

ness of thought, a lucid vision of all the possibilities of development, of the manner in which these possibilities are inter-connected, of the effort which each and every one is prepared to make in order to transform these possibilities into reality. This development also implies that this lucid vision does not remain the privilege of some people who keep aloof from the masses, but on the contrary, is shared by the masses.

... Once the masses understand that technique has nothing mysterious about it, one witnesses the extraordinary development of enterprises run by local authorities and co-operatives, one witnesses a real technical revolution coming from the masses themselves.

—*Economic Weekly*, Bombay,
November 22, 1958.

Sir Herbert Read, eminent British poet and art critic, was in China in 1959, Sir Herbert was President of the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London.

The nature of the revolution that has taken place in China is not yet known to the Western World. . . . It is difficult for anyone who has not been to China to realize that within the year 1958-59 an entirely new form of social organization came into existence in this country—a form that owes little to the Soviet pattern and that may for this reason be of great significance to other parts of the world. . . .

A commune is distinguished from a collective farm, or a state farm, in that it is not concerned solely or even primarily with agricultural products, but is a way of life for a region. It includes all the small industries on which agriculture is immediately dependent, as well as all questions of trading and supply, education, health, welfare, cultural amenities and military defence ("home guards"). . . .

I have mentioned autonomy as one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Chinese commune. . . . Such autonomy is economic, but in the case of the People's Commune of China, it is also political. I made a particular point of clarifying this question, because it is always assumed that communism must be bureaucratic. The communes do receive visits (about once every two months, and after ten days' notice) from agricultural and economic (accountancy) experts sent from Peking or the provincial capital; but the purpose of these visits is to aid and advise the communes. . . .

It does not matter what the system is called: it is a living reality and the Chinese Communist Party itself claims that it is an entirely new form of social organization . . . *what counts more than statistics is the happiness and contentment of the peasants.* Their standard of living is still far below that of Western European standards, but it is four times as high as it was ten years ago. . . .

—*Eastern Horizon*, Hong Kong,
September 1960.

"A Visit to China" by Sir Cyril Hinshelwood, President of the Royal Society (Britain's most eminent scientific body):

There is much that is tremendously impressive and admirable in the New China: there is, of course, no doubt that an upheaval of a far-reaching kind has taken place: there are some aspects of the socialist state which are uncongenial to a Westerner: but most of the things for which, at a distance, I had admired and loved the old China, seemed to me to be intact, and some indeed appeared to be fostered more sedulously than ever. China possesses, of course, a communist organization with what most of us here regard as the inevitable restrictions associated with it. But the Chinese people never had much personal liberty and *it is quite likely that many of them are now freer in some ways than they have ever been.* And certainly the constructive achievements are very impressive indeed. . . .

The total picture was warmer and more human than I had been led to expect. . . .

The commune I visited, I must confess, did not seem an unhappy sort of place.

—*The Oxford Magazine*, Oxford,
November 5, 1960.

Dr. Joseph Needham of Cambridge University, eminent historian of Chinese science and a Sinologist, who served during World War II as scientific attaché to the British Embassy in Chungking, writing of a trip made to China in 1958:

Current criticisms of the "communes" seems to rest often enough on limitations of outlook characteristic of highly industrialized Western societies. People here who dislike the idea of families eating in restaurants and canteens know only Western homes provided with gas stoves, electric wash-

ing machines, etc.—if they had had any experience of the slavery of the Chinese woman throughout the ages to the charcoal or brushwood stove and the primitive water supply, they would understand that the cooperative farm or works restaurant and the public bath today seem more like heaven on earth to millions. . . . Emancipation of women to follow careers, whether on the farm, railway or factory, or in intellectual work, is one of the most remarkable features of present-day China, as I know from personal contact with innumerable friends all over the country. Nor am I particularly shocked by the idea of restaurants where one does not have to pay, having enjoyed many a meal under such conditions in the kibbutzim of Israel as well as in the educational institutions of my own country. This is a matter of pride in China today, not of compulsion or regimentation. . . .

—*New Statesman*, London, December 20, 1958.

From these extracts we can gain an idea of the general impression that the communes made on an internationally known French agronomist, a Canadian lawyer and politician, a distinguished French economist, a British art critic, one of England's foremost scientists, and a Cambridge University scholar acknowledged throughout the world as in the forefront of living Sinologists. Each was aware of the complexity and scope of the changes that the Chinese were attempting to bring about in their society; each was able to examine these endeavors at firsthand; each clearly approached the commune movement with an open attitude and with an understanding of the historical circumstances in which the Chinese were attempting to solve their age-old problems of backwardness and poverty. These men are all acknowledged experts in their field. While critical of some aspects of the communes, they were unanimous in their judgment that the communes had achieved much. If there are features that characterize each of these accounts, it is fairmindedness and a balanced judgment.

Let us now turn from these examinations of a social phenomenon affecting half a billion people to a description of the communes presented by one of our own leading China experts, Mr.

A. Doak Barnett. Mr. Barnett is frequently cited as an authority on China; his contributions are sought by leading periodicals; his book *Communist China and Asia* is considered in America as a standard reference book.⁵ Mr. Barnett has not been to China for more than fourteen years—through no fault of his own. He has not been able to examine the working of the communes as the others have, to learn about them at firsthand. Some of the men we have quoted—and a host of others equally well qualified—had provided firsthand reports of what they had seen in China by the time Mr. Barnett wrote his book.

This, in part, is how Mr. Barnett describes the communes he has never seen, and I invite the reader to compare what he says with the extracts that we quoted above:

The communes have portentous implications for China's future. Economically, they represent an audacious attempt to organize and mobilize the entire rural population behind a regimented, intensive campaign to develop both agriculture and rural industry. They have greatly expanded the labor force that the regime can control. . . .

Perhaps the most startling features of the communes have been the social innovations. If carried through to their logical conclusion, these will give Peking a degree of political control over the Chinese population which is almost Orwellian. . . . Meals are to be eaten in communal mess halls rather than in the home. Children are to be put into communal nurseries, which ultimately are to become full-time boarding institutions. Old people are to be put into special homes for the aged. The many functions which women have traditionally performed at home—sewing and weaving as well as child care and cooking—are to be taken over by the commune. . . . Where practicable, the rural population is to be rehoused either in new villages or in special barracks-like buildings. . . .

. . . all of these measures are undermining the traditional role of the Chinese family.

The decision to embark upon the communization program is perhaps the Chinese Communists' biggest gamble to date. In treating the Chinese people callously, imper-

⁵ Published for the Council on Foreign Relations by Harper & Brothers, New York, 1960.

sonally, and ruthlessly, as raw material to be organized and manipulated by the state for its own purpose, they may be going too far, even for a totalitarian regime. . . .⁶

In my book *Awakened China*, I gave some detailed descriptions of communes I visited in 1960 and how the peasants could hardly believe what I was saying when I asked them about the "separation of the families." Edgar Snow had the same experience:

Near the civic center I inspected several new brick homes. Most residents were in the fields, but before a two-room cottage I met a lady of sixty-five working in her tiny garden of sunflowers and cabbages. She invited me in for tea and I sat beside a fine old Chinese table, several chairs and a teak chest. . . . The furniture had been acquired during the division of land—and landlord's furniture.

Rice simmered in a pot over a new brick cook stove in the tiny vestibule; water was available from a new well. Here the old lady lived with her son and daughter-in-law, both of them at work. . . .

"You do the family cooking?"

"A little breakfast for everyone, yes. The children eat where they work. We have supper together in our team dining room. It's great blessing, being able to take meals outside."

"In what way?"

"Ai-yai In every way. No scrambling for fuel, preparing food, dish washing, pot washing, smoking up the house! Of course the cooking is not always the best. When we get tired of it we eat at home."

"Was there ever any attempt to make your son and daughter-in-law live apart, in separate barracks—to divide men from women?"

My question had to be repeated and explained by the interpreter. The old lady looked at me in astonishment. Of course not. Could that be "human"? She wanted to know if it was practiced in my country.⁷

These sources I have cited, reporting in such sharp contrast to what some of our own press and specialists were saying, only scratch the surface of reliable information that was published

⁶ *Communist China and Asia*, pp. 24-25.

⁷ *The Other Side of the River*, p. 449.

abroad in those early days of the communal system. Prominent visitors from many Western countries and in every conceivable field, who went to China at the time, returned home and wrote and spoke about what was taking place—scientists and industrialists, scholars and doctors, writers and painters, bankers and economists. And whatever their criticisms, they described China and the newly established communes in much the same manner as the men I have just quoted. Yet, with rare exception, daily newspapers in the U.S. did not avail themselves of the opportunity to use such reports.

The press in our country was right in recognizing the commune movement as something of profound importance, and that it created many fundamental changes in the life of the people concerned. It was undoubtedly right in assuming that not all the peasants of China supported these changes with enthusiasm; but it was wrong in concluding that the commune movement was imposed on the mass of the people against their will; it was proven wrong when it continually speculated that a "revolt" of the peasants was likely—for it didn't happen; it was wrong in reporting that the five hundred million peasants had been herded into barracks (I must repeat that I have yet to meet any reporter or observer who was in China who claims he has seen these barracks, or a foreign embassy official in Peking who gives this story any credence).

We must therefore conclude that on all essential questions concerning the communes, the general impression conveyed by our press and our experts was misleading. Rumors were reported as fact. Reports by refugees were far too heavily relied on. The conditions that gave rise to the communes and the basic agricultural problems that required solution were never adequately analyzed. Accounts of the communes were exaggerated, and the little interpretation that was attempted was meaningless because it was itself based on inadequate or erroneous information.

It was in this manner that the American people were informed about an event of extraordinary significance and complexity that affected a very large proportion of the people of our world.

II. The Exquisite China of the Past

A theme running through many of the press accounts about the communes is the "destruction" not only of the family, but "traditional society." Distress at the departure of ancient values was expressed by Mr. Tillman Durdin in an article contributed to the *Atlantic Monthly* in December 1959:

Methods have been ruthless, devious, and destructive of traditional human values. . . .

Overturning the old social order, based on Confucian precepts of family loyalties, filial piety, respect for age, supremacy of male over female; and veneration for ancestors and tradition, the Communists have reshaped China's millions. . . .

W. W. Rostow expressed the same misgivings about Communist designs on tradition four years before the communes were begun:

. . . the major effort of the Communist regime has unquestionably been to strike at the foundations of traditional Chinese society. . . . The Legalist concept, which has been present, but generally muted, in Chinese society for almost two millennia, is now again attempting to destroy the age-old, generous, humane moderate tradition.⁸

The image of the Chinese as a humane and generous people for many years was powerfully implanted in the American mind. Mr. Harold Isaacs, in a study of American attitudes toward the Chinese people, found that by a large majority of a representative panel, there was recurring mention of the Chinese as a "superior people," and of:

China's ancient and great culture; a beautiful, wonderful, cohesive culture; its great civilization; a bond of ancient traditions; a culture devoted to the arts and sciences; . . . great respect for Chinese thought, Chinese architecture, cus-

⁸ *The Prospects for Communist China* (published jointly by the Technology Press of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and John Wiley and Sons, Inc., New York, 1954), pp. 118-19.

toms, mores . . . the wise old Chinese; a great and noble race; a people highly cultured for many centuries. . . .⁹

These deeply implanted images in the minds of Americans who had not been exposed to the realities of Chiang's China were profoundly shaken when the Communists took power, and they were finally shattered at the time of the Korean conflict when it was discovered that these humane, wise Chinese, whom we thought of in terms of philosophic calm and patience, as "un-mechanical" and artistic, could fly jets and handle artillery and were able to fight our Army to a standstill. The old image vanished and in its place, as Isaacs reported in his book, there came a quite different one. The principal ingredient of this new image of the Chinese was the idea of their vast numbers; we began to think of them in terms of the "human sea," the "expendable hordes," "the faceless mass," "fanaticism," "cruelty," "treachery," and the picture of them as an urbane, humorous, likable people, deeply attached to ancient traditions, gradually vanished from our mind.

Neither of these oversimplified concepts of the Chinese, of course, has any validity, but the earlier, idealized, image was sufficiently ingrained in our consciousness and was there for so long, that many could only relinquish it with pain and remember it with nostalgia.

No people—and I do not apologize for repeating this so often—can be understood except in terms of their own history. If we are to understand the Chinese of today we must relate them to a past that is real and not to a past that is unreal. We should heed these words of Professor Keith M. Buchanan, of the University of Wellington, New Zealand, who was in China in 1958 when the communes were in their first stages of development and who reported afterward:

. . . if we want to understand the almost feverish energy and the dedication with which the people of China are throwing themselves into this gigantic task of economic development, we must keep in our minds a picture of old China—not the China of exquisite jade carving and golden-

⁹ Harold R. Isaacs, *Scratches on Our Minds*, p. 89.

roofed pagodas and elegant scholarship, but a country of poverty and exploitation. A country where children with swollen bellies died by the wayside, and the peasants ate roots and grass; a country where the collapse of the 1911 Revolution left the peasant and factory worker at the mercy of a rapacious ruling class; a country where the gap between the rulers and the ruled was so great that \$6 billion of American aid failed to ensure the survival of a corrupt and despised regime.¹⁰

In the course of thousands of articles, hundreds of editorials, and so-called expert analyses, American readers rarely have been reminded of what China was really like. Newspaper experts like Mr. Durdin, scholars like Mr. Rostow, and their colleagues can write movingly about the "social order, based on Confucian precepts of family loyalties, filial piety, . . . and veneration for ancestors"; the "age-old, generous, humane moderate tradition," and so on; but they remain silent regarding the unspeakable conditions which the Chinese were attempting to eradicate—and of which Professor Buchanan from New Zealand reminds us.

They failed to relate the Chinese revolution and the commune development to the real China of the past—if they had done so they might have understood, and helped us to understand, what the Chinese revolution was about. They might then have spoken of these tremendous efforts objectively. And, of course, in not relating the present to China's past, I believe they missed the main point. Mr. Richard Walker, for instance, as long ago as 1955 (three years before the communes) was saying that the purpose of the 1950 distribution of land to the peasants was "all too clear. First, complete destruction of the traditional pattern of rural life. . . ."¹¹ Indeed it was! And anyone who knows what that "traditional pattern of rural life" was like would say: *And why not!*

As a newspaper and magazine writer, Mr. Jack Belden spent many years in China before 1949, traveling widely through the country areas. In his famous book, *China Shakes the World*,¹²

¹⁰ "The Many Faces of China," *Monthly Review*, New York, (May 1959).

¹¹ *China Under Communism—The First Five Years*, p. 137.

¹² New York: Harper, 1949.

Mr. Belden gives us a vivid picture of the realities of life in China:

Have you ever considered what it means to be a Chinese in the interior of North China? Almost completely outside the influences of modern science and twentieth-century culture, the peasant was a brutal, blundering backwoodsman. He had never seen a movie, never heard a radio, never ridden in a car. He had never owned a pair of leather shoes, nor a toothbrush and seldom a piece of soap. . . .

A characteristic North China peasant proverb was the following: "Husks and vegetable peelings are foodstuffs for half a year." Truly startling revelation! It meant that the peasant could not even eat grain under the old rule, but only the grain shells or husks. . . .

The average consumption of millet, from what peasants in the poorer areas of North China told me, used to be two and four-fifths bushels a year. In the richer grain-producing areas it was only four bushels a year.

Rich area or poor area, the consumption of meat for the average farmer was only one and one-third pounds a year. Just about the weight of a good T-bone steak you might gobble down at one sitting.

In the cotton-producing areas, farmers used to get two and two-thirds pounds of cotton cloth and the same amount of raw cotton a year per person. In the areas where cotton was not produced, a man got only one pound of cloth and a half a pound of cotton.

Figures. But those figures spelled tragedy for the peasant. A man used to be lucky to have rags. Suits were often shared between two and three people. When a father went out, he would put on the family pair of pants and leave his daughter naked on the bed. A man and wife would split a pair of pants between them. No wonder in North Shansi women did not go out into the fields.

. . . The Chiang regime could not reform as long as it dared not attack the landlords. And it dared not attack the landlords because in essence it represented feudalism itself.

What do we mean by feudalism? Technically speaking, the name is incorrect. And certain learned philosophers, both Chinese and foreign, have taken great pains to point

out that feudalism does not exist in China because there is no serfdom; that is, men can sell their labor freely. It is true that China abolished this formal type of feudalism many years ago, just as it is true that the penetration of the West destroyed the self-sufficient natural economy of the centralized feudal society and placed much of Chinese life under the demands of a money economy, though with few progressive results, as we have seen. But this manner of looking at the problem of China is academic in the extreme and takes no cognizance of the feudal remnants that exercise such an important role in the lives, thoughts, customs, habits and emotions of the people. In abolishing serfdom, the Chinese did not entirely do away with the power of the landlord to conscript labor, to jail debtors and to control the life and even death of his tenants; it did not completely abolish child slavery, the custom of buying and selling girls nor the system of concubinage or forced marriage. All of these conditions are irrevocably bound up with the rule of the landlords and the gentry. . . .

The institutions of slave girls, concubinage and forced marriage were also irrevocably tied to the landlord system. All the fine Kuomintang laws on this subject were meaningless unless landlordism itself were abolished. Slave girls not only worked in landlord homes in the interior, but were bought by merchants and shipped to Shanghai where they were forced to become prostitutes or, if too ugly, factory girls. In this they had no choice, being bound over to the party who had contract to their bodies. Far from helping to end this system, the revolutionary army of Chiang Kai-shek helped to perpetuate it. In various Kuomintang army headquarters I have seen with my own eyes officers call in the local gentry and ask their aid in securing young girls for their use as long as they were in the territory. The girls, so obtained, were not prostitutes, but generally the virgin daughters of poor farmers. . . .

If the villages behind Chiang Kai-shek's lines remained comparatively peaceful, that was only because the peasant was awaiting leadership and an opportunity to rise. . . . For this simple man, born to tenant, feudal slavery, to an overworked and crowded plot of ground, stunned into obedience beneath the grasping landlord's hand, dispossessed from his land by crooked deals and savage violence,

robbed of his wife's caresses and his children's laughter, suddenly rose with an impassioned thrill and, under the threat of death itself, began to demand land and revenge.¹³

In examining, as I have had to do for purposes of this work, the innumerable references to the communes in books, in the press, in speeches, in scholarly essays, I was struck by the very great contrast in the tone of voice customarily used when speaking about the communes—or the Chinese revolution generally—to the tone of voice adopted when discussing the conditions of China under Chiang Kai-shek. This is worth examining, for it tells us much.

Mr. Richard Walker, for example, in his book *China Under Communism—The First Five Years*, uses these charged words and phrases in his introduction alone: "masters" (three times); "fanatically"; "inhumanity"; "unbelievable cost in terms of human and cultural destruction"; "ruthless"; "people . . . eliminated"; "submit abjectly to total control"; "new Chinese despotism." On other pages of this book he suggests that the Chinese people were "kept in an almost perpetual state of mass hypnosis" (p. 77); in addition, "mass mobilization and mass hypnotism" (p. 99); "cost in terms of brutality and human suffering" (p. 127); "Under Mao's government fear has crept into every soul" (p. 214); "the floods of 1954 offered one more opportunity for instilling terror" (p. 231); "Machiavelli" (p. 241).

A scholar of Dr. Robert North's considerable reputation uses these words in one of his studies: "communist engine of frightful proportions"; "diabolically"; "high cost to freedom and dignity"; "Bolshevik supervisors"; "brutally clear"; "Machiavellian" (several times); "regimentation"; "slavish efficiency"; "totalitarian curtains."¹⁴

And John King Fairbank of Harvard employed such terminology as: "totalitarian monster," and quoted another writer's reference to the Chinese as "blue ants."¹⁵

¹³ Ibid., pp. 129-58.

¹⁴ *Moscow and Chinese Communists*.

¹⁵ *The United States and China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 315.

This list could be continued, but enough has been quoted to indicate the intensity of moral and human indignation which even scholars felt when they addressed themselves to developments in Communist China. The point I wish to make is that scholars and apparently others, as far as I have found, felt no such moral outrage when considering conditions in pre-revolutionary China. It is extraordinary to me to see with what understanding and detachment they were able to view the China of Chiang Kai-shek.

Unlike Professor Fairbank, Mr. Richard Harris of *The Times* of London has been twice to Communist China. He lived and worked in China many years before 1949. He totally rejects the "ants" description of the Chinese. Speaking on the B.B.C. in February 1961, Mr. Harris begins a discussion with the author, Mr. Nicholas Wollaston, with these words: "People who, in writing or talking about China, refer to 'the ant-state' or 'the organization of ants' seem to me to have no feeling at all for what the Chinese are like. Whatever one's views are about organization, the people who are being organized are not, and never have been, ants." To this Mr. Wollaston, who has also been to Communist China, replied: "I absolutely agree. . . ."

Mr. Walker has a range of epithets to describe the Communist regime, yet when it comes to what I consider the unspeakable conditions of exploitation and misery of the Chinese peasants in Chiang's time he refers calmly to the "*malpractices* of some of the large landowners." Dr. North, who talks of the Communists with high moral indignation, is able to write with admirable restraint when on page 202 of his study he finds it necessary to criticize Chiang. "Unfortunately," says this China specialist, "the integrity and efficiency of Chiang Kai-shek's government were open to a *measure of legitimate criticism*." And later, on page 240, North notes that Mao's victory in 1949 was accomplished "partly by virtue of China's wartime confusion, weakness, and disillusionment, partly through exploitation of Kuomintang *inadequacies*. . . ." (my emphases).

Professor Fairbank, who uses such words as "monster" and

"evil" about the government of Mao Tse-tung, uses far gentler words about a phony 1948 currency reform. By means of this "reform," Chiang and his officials—before retreating to Taiwan—all but squeezed the remaining savings of gold, jewelry, and foreign currency from the middle class, netting themselves the equivalent of about two hundred million American dollars. Without mentioning the corruption involved in this deal, or the cynicism with which it was executed, the professor describes it as a currency reform "which collapsed."

It is also interesting to note certain changes made in some of Professor Fairbank's earlier criticisms of Chiang's actions. For example, on pages 190-91 of the 1948 edition of his widely read book *The United States and China*, we read that

. . . Chiang was able by military force and political manipulation to take over the leadership of the revolution and consolidate his position. He treacherously crushed the vigorous labor movement in Shanghai. . . . The new Nanking Government expelled the Chinese Communists from its ranks and instituted a nation-wide white terror to suppress the Communist revolution.

In the 1958 edition (p. 176), Chiang no longer *treacherously* crushed, but merely crushed what is now described as the *Communist-led* labor movement. Chiang no longer instituted a nation-wide *white terror* to suppress the Communist revolution but a nation-wide *effort*.

Though it is a well-recorded fact that Chiang did indeed institute an appalling slaughter of what had been his former associates (see for instance the description in the *New York Times* of the "ruthless slaughter" in Canton, quoted in Chapter 3), the 1958 edition of Professor Fairbank's book substitutes for another reference to the "white terror" (p. 192) the phrase (p. 177) "military campaigns."

And finally, the New Frontier's own Professor W. W. Rostow, in his *Prospects for Communist China*, who on page 27 finds the Communist land reform "often bloody" and "ruthlessly executed," four pages earlier described Chiang's wholesale massacres

of his former Communist associates in 1927 in very restrained words. "Chiang," says Rostow, "completed the removal of the Communists from the KMT structure, killed many Communist leaders, and did what he could to destroy the Communist organization. . . ." Six pages prior to this, Rostow discussed the "chronic financial corruption in the KMT" which was "incontestable" with no discernible note of moral disapproval and he apparently saw it primarily in terms of placing Chiang in "*awkward circumstances*." (emphasis mine).

"Awkward circumstances," "inadequacies," "open to a measure of legitimate criticism," "malpractices"—it is almost always in such restrained terms that our academic experts write about the corrupt and vicious regime of Chiang Kai-shek. This is as misleading to the public as the general press reporting. No one reading the later works of these experts would find an adequate picture of the regime which the great masses of the Chinese came to loathe and which they finally rejected—a regime supported by a narrow and selfish upper class whose main preoccupation was the retention of its position of power and privilege. No student could learn from the books of these scholars the depth of the animosities which Chiang had aroused, nor the level of degradation to which the ordinary Chinese had for so long been reduced.¹⁶

To remind ourselves of these realities we must turn to the words of Theodore H. White and Annalee Jacoby—written at a time of greater frankness about Chiang's China:

. . . the civilization of China in our own times, rested on the effective enslavement of the common man. He was chained to his land and ensnared in a net of social convention that made him prey to superstition, pestilence, and the mercy of his overlords. He shivered in winter, hungered in famine, often died of the simple hardship of his daily

¹⁶ I am here referring primarily to American scholars writing since 1949. Journalists, writers, and correspondents provided American readers with accounts of conditions under Chiang—e.g., Belden, Peck, White, Stowe. Since 1949 these accounts by American writers have been reduced to the merest trickle. The best and most comprehensive firsthand account of Communist China by an American is Edgar Snow's *The Other Side of the River*, published in 1962.

life before he reached maturity. On this base rested the thinnest conceivable superstructure of a leisure class that profited by the peasant's toil and preserved for posterity the learning and graces it had inherited from antiquity.¹⁷

¹⁷ *Thunder Out of China*, p. 20.

Chapter 9

MR. ALSOP'S CHINA

To several million readers the thoughts, observations, and judgments of Mr. Joseph Alsop help to make up their picture of the world they live in. Three times each week from coast to coast go his columns entitled "Matter of Fact." Alsop is a columnist with a mission and a hope. His mission—to warn his countrymen of impending calamities; his hope—that he will be able to arouse us to our danger before it is too late.

To Mr. Alsop the Chinese Communists are an embodiment of all that is evil and brutal. Year after year his "Matter of Fact" columns have pointed out the monstrous catastrophe that has befallen the Chinese people.

I do not know Mr. Alsop and I have no reason at all to doubt that he writes his columns and articles with a very high sense of duty to the American public. For more than ten years he has been writing of the dangers that China has presented to our security and interests. As early as 1953 he was hinting at the most ominous possibilities.

Mr. Alsop's warning: Southeast Asia has everything that China needs. The rice, the rubber, the minerals, timber and petroleum. . . .

Southeast Asia will still be soft and virtually undefended two years from now. . . .

Unchallengeable Chinese military power; an acutely painful problem in China; a wonderfully easy solution of

that problem across undefended borders . . . such is likely to be an explosive combination in Asia in the rather near future. . . .

—October 12, 1953.

As a matter of fact: China has not yet moved into Southeast Asia. The "explosive combination" of ten years ago has not yet exploded.

Mr. Alsop's warning: On June 6, 1954, Mr. Alsop, with his brother Stewart, was telling his readers that the Chinese Communist government "is preparing to pick up Indo-China"; and reported Chen Yi's "fall from power and favor."

As a matter of fact: China never "picked up" Indo-China; Chen Yi today is Foreign Minister.

Mr. Alsop's warning: . . . [There is] the clear possibility, almost verging on the likelihood, that the United States will end by having to fight an atomic war for Formosa's off-shore islands.

—March 3, 1955.

As a matter of fact: There was no war, atomic or otherwise.

Mr. Alsop's warning: The scheme of the communes is frankly intended to transform the whole countryside of China into a series of slave farms, of a character without any modern parallel.

The probable horrors of this new phase in China go beyond the bounds of normal imagination . . . it is a reasonable forecast that the Communist massacres will pass a hundred million human beings.

. . . One way to relieve China's internal pressures, diminish the need for massacres and ease the situation generally is to add the resources of China's rich neighbors to the southward to China's own inadequate resources. And in these circumstances it is unwise to ignore the possibility that the attack on the off-shore islands is the first, tentative, venture of a much more ambitious scheme of conquest.

—October 6, 1958.

As a matter of fact: Having (unlike Mr. Alsop) been to many communes in China I believe the description of them as "slave farms" has no basis in actuality.

There have been no "massacres" in the communes and

there are Western experts who believe that the existence of the communes' administrations made equitable distribution of supplies possible during the food shortage period and prevented famine conditions.

No attempt has been made to "add the resources of China's rich neighbors to the southward."

Mr. Alsop's warning: . . . the present labor corvees comprise close to 100,000,000 people. In other words, the number of Chinese currently engaged in forced labor is a good deal more than half the population of the United States. . . .

—January 4, 1959.

As a matter of fact: For this statement no sources are quoted except nameless "official analysts." I do not believe that anyone who has seriously studied developments in China at firsthand would support this view.

Mr. Alsop's warning: Among the tiny number of Americans who know the factors in the problem there is almost breathless excitement about the rebellion in Tibet. It can, they say, shake the Chinese Communist regime vastly more profoundly than the rebellion in Hungary shook the Soviet regime. . . . The strain of the Communes plus the strain of Tibet can just imaginably equal a general explosion.

—April 10, 1959.

As a matter of fact: There were no indications that the regime was "shaken"; there has been no general explosion.

Mr. Alsop's warning: On this date he told his readers that the Chinese were reduced to dining on afterbirths.

—May 12, 1961.

As a matter of fact: It is now generally acknowledged that there was a serious food shortage in China but no famine.

Mr. Alsop's warning: [Will] China explode as a result of this ruthless experiment?

When any government has embarked upon a course that appears to require tens of millions of human sacrifices a year, one must surely consider the possibility of failure. . . .

. . . in ten years the individual ration will be raised to . . . 1,500 calories per day. . . .

To this blood-chilling resume, one must add . . . testimony from the Chinese mainland [pointing] to a serious breakdown . . . of the public discipline of the drilled, intimidated people.

—May 17, 1961.

As a matter of fact: The Chinese regime has not "failed." There have been no human sacrifices. The average ration is now far above 1,500 calories per day and rising. (See Chapter 6, "The Starving Chinese.") There has not, as far as we know, been any breakdown of public discipline.

Mr. Alsop's warning: The Chinese Communist government is now providing the Chinese people with a national diet averaging 600 calories per day. . . .

—September 13, 1961.

As a matter of fact: Medically this makes no sense.¹ The Chinese would all now be dead. There are still 700,000,000 of them left.

Mr. Alsop's warning: . . . the Chinese masses are now receiving a nationwide average of 1,300 to 1,600 calories per day. . . .

. . . this being the case, the figures raise the question whether Communist China is not caught in a remorselessly descending spiral from which a vast upheaval of some sort is the only likely way of escape.

—April 13, 1962.

. . . the evidence is clear that Communist China is now suffering from an acute generalized industrial breakdown. . . .

Once again . . . the question has to be asked whether Communist China is not caught in a remorselessly descending spiral.

—April 16, 1962.

As a matter of fact: Food production up; industrial production up; international trade up. No descending spiral, remorseless or otherwise.

¹The Food and Nutrition Board of the U. S. National Research Council gives 709 calories as the minimum for the maintenance of a thirteen-pound (two- to six-month-old) *baby*! (Home and Garden Bulletin No. 72, U. S. Department of Agriculture, *World Almanac*, New York, 1962.)

Mr. Alsop's warning: THE COMING EXPLOSION IN RED CHINA,
 heading of his article in *The Saturday Evening Post*.
 —August 11, 1962.

As a matter of fact: Still no explosion in sight.

This article in *The Saturday Evening Post*—"The Coming Explosion in Red China"—is worth examining in some detail. Virtually the same article, in an extended form, appeared under another title, "On China's Descending Spiral," in the July-September 1962 issue of the *China Quarterly*, a leading Western journal addressed principally to scholars and specialists in the China field. A number of passages in both articles were identical; others were identical except for a phrase or a few words; the theme was the same in both.

Mr. Alsop paints a very grisly picture of the conditions in China and what he believed lay in store for the Chinese people. Using mostly *The Saturday Evening Post* article, we can summarize Mr. Alsop's views as follows:

The serious plight of Communist China raises a basic political question: Are there any limits at all to the sufferings that a police state can inflict on the people they have in their grip? Remembering Stalin, some people might think there are no such limits, but Mr. Alsop believes that there is a point beyond which it would be dangerous to push the Chinese people. He points out that Mao could much more easily attain his ambition to make China into a military-industrial giant if there were fewer people in China. But suppose, he says, that an order went out to send half of China's six hundred million to the slaughter houses (in the *China Quarterly* the figure used was one-third) and that another order was given to "compost the 300,000,000 plus corpses for fertilizer, which the Chinese fields need very badly" could Mao, Mr. Alsop asks, really rely on his orders being carried out?

He thinks not, and this shows that there is a point beyond which it would become dangerous for Mao to inflict suffering on his people. The question then arises whether China may not already be moving toward the "explosion point."

It seemed clear to Mr. Alsop when he wrote his article that

China was caught in a "remorselessly descending spiral"; each year "growing hungrier and hungrier and producing less and less." He thought this downward spiral might even be "self-perpetuating." If the harvest in 1962 was good the spiral might be reversed, but he saw little hope of this. In fact, he rather suspected that the downward spiral itself "almost forbids a generous harvest."

The initial "down-twist" began with the "most megalomaniac proclamations" ever heard from the Chinese leaders. This was when the communes were organized—"vast, drilled rural slave-labor camps, each comprising 30,000 to 40,000 peasants, in which at the outset even love was supposed to be rationed, with husbands and wives sleeping in different communal dormitories." (He gave no such description of the communes for the more scholarly readers of the *China Quarterly*.)

The second phase of China's "plunge into misery" led the leaders to reverse many of their policies. All capital construction was stopped. Output from existing plants suffered a "vertiginous drop" without parallel in any other country since World War II. By the winter of 1962 industrial production in China "was expertly estimated" at no more than 30 percent capacity.

In the countryside there was a corresponding retreat, almost a rout, with the communes being "dismantled and dismembered." As far as food was concerned, Mr. Alsop thought that in the "late winter of 1962" the average diet level was from 1300 to 1600 calories a day. He didn't think the peasants could have been so "hideously undernourished" for three years on end so he says, "we may guess" that by the end of 1959 the average diet level was about 1800 calories a day and that it dropped after that.

Those, therefore, were the main features of the second down-twist in the spiral. It was "far more terrible" than the first. During the first down-twist the peasants had to "pay with misery" for industrial growth. On the second down-twist industry itself "fell into ruin." Unless China was rescued by a good harvest (which he had already said was unlikely) an even more terrible third down-twist was to be expected.

Discussing the exodus of refugees and the military buildup against Chiang Kai-shek's possible landing, Mr. Alsop thought

these developments "much less ominous" than an order that 30 percent of the people of China's cities must be sent back to the countryside. To have between fifteen and thirty million people shifting for themselves in a countryside "already deep in misery" was like loose parts rattling about in machinery already dangerously out of order.

The reason for China's downward spiral, Mr. Alsop traces to the fact that Mao was attempting to follow a pattern of industrialization set by Stalin. Stalin got away with it because the standard of living in Russia was higher and could drop 50 percent and still have a safety margin. China had no safety margin at all. Mao as a result pushed his people "far below a bearable subsistence level" and the result was "catastrophic." We can infer that it was catastrophic because whereas Stalin never hesitated as he strode to his goal "through rivers of blood," Mao soon quailed and began desperately to try to repair the damage he had done—and this was not because he was "either more humane or less ruthless" than Stalin.

These attempts to correct a disastrous situation, Mr. Alsop says, have failed. The depression of the living standard of the Chinese in 1959 was "like stoving a huge hole in the bottom of a boat."

(The idea of a hole in the bottom of a boat was developed further in the *China Quarterly* version. Before mentioning the hole in the boat, Mr. Alsop said that the "plunge into misery" of the Chinese peasants in 1959 was "different in character from the plunge into misery" of the Russian peasants in 1929. "It had the same kind of difference as a benign and a malignant tumor. It went vastly further. It was very much more terrible, causing Mao to quail where Stalin had not quailed." It is at this point that Mr. Alsop suggested that the Chinese leaders were like people trying to lighten their boat by throwing just about everything overboard to lighten it—but the boat continued to sink lower in the water. It could now be lightened only by throwing the passengers overboard as well—in other words, by deliberately reducing China's population.)

Coming back to *The Saturday Evening Post* version, we next find Mr. Alsop showing how even the return of tiny plots of land

to the peasants for their private use led to terrible results. According to Mr. Alsop, one-quarter of all available fertilizer in China is human excrement. As even the most rigorous police state "cannot control the individual's disposition of his own excrement," the peasants naturally used it on the privately owned plots of ground. Mr. Alsop asks us to imagine what happened when more than a quarter of the available fertilizer supply was used on only half of 1 percent of the usable land. He gave this private use of human excrement as one of the reasons for the bad harvests.

Mr. Alsop believed that the Chinese population had stopped growing and was possibly even declining, because of the desperately low level of nourishment.² In fact, he thought this population decline was Mao's best hope. His problems would be greatly simplified if the population was massively reduced. "If Mao can just hang on somehow while the people he leads are reduced by something like a quarter," he might yet win through, though at the cost of 150,000,000 lives. This is quite a possible solution but something would break "before a quarter of the Chinese are exterminated by their government's own acts."

Before a quarter of the population is exterminated, the regime itself might collapse—a palace revolution might bring in a new set of Communist leaders. But Mr. Alsop thinks this is unlikely. It is more probable that Mao will continue on, "battening down a hatch here and making a concession there and hoping for an upturn." (*China Quarterly*) But if this hope comes to nothing, a breakdown of the entire system might occur. No Western nation in modern times has experienced the "nadir of wretchedness" (*China Quarterly*) which is the present condition of China. The system might break down in China; and if the army rallied to the people the system would break down.

² In an interview with Edgar Snow, reported in the *New York Times* of February 3, 1964, Mr. Chou En-lai indicated that the very opposite might be the truth—that far from a declining population growth the Chinese government is faced with the problem of an increasing growth. After speaking with approval of the Japanese achievement in reducing their rate of population growth to 1 percent, Mr. Chou gave reasons as to why the Chinese are not likely to be able to equal this within the next few years: "For example, with improved living conditions over the past two years, our rate of increase again rose to 2.5 percent!"

"All, indeed, is uncertain except one thing: China's descending spiral cannot continue unendingly without causing at least one of the three kinds of breakdown" outlined in the article.

That, I believe, is a fair summary of Mr. Alsop's article, "The Coming Explosion in Red China."

The basic hypothesis on which Mr. Alsop's argument was grounded, the *raison d'être*, as it were, of the entire exercise, was soon disproved by events.

Shortly after the article appeared, the food shortage in China was generally acknowledged to have eased, industrial production was again moving upward, and foreign trade statistics showed that China's commerce was once more expanding. Within a short while a high British official reported after his visit to Peking that effective organization for the distribution of food had prevented starvation, that conditions were improving, that national economic development was going forward again; and this general assessment was confirmed by *The Times* of London. But if Mr. Alsop replies that this information was not available to him before he wrote his article, but only afterward, then let us point out some of the evidence which was available long before his piece appeared which might have suggested to him that perhaps his basic surmise was erroneous.

Three months before the Alsop article appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post*, the British government announced officially in the House of Commons that the refugees arriving in Hong Kong showed no signs of malnutrition (and this would hardly indicate they had reached a "nadir of wretchedness"). About the same time the authoritative *Far Eastern Economic Review*, which is published weekly in Hong Kong, included in its issue of May 24 an article by Colina MacDougall discussing the question of the refugees. She had written:

Everyone who has seen the refugees has commented that they do not seem to be starving . . . their stories are roughly the same: they are people from the rural areas of Kwangtung, some of whom had worked in Canton and been sent back to the farms in the "aid agriculture" drive.

. . . They all give food shortage and the general discomfort of life as their reason for coming. None of the refugees has claimed political asylum, or said that he was escaping from the Communist regime as such. That many would welcome the opportunity to go to Taiwan . . . is doubtful.

Food shortage and discomfort—that was indeed a reality; but surely a far cry from the "plunge into misery"—very much more terrible than the Russian, so terrible that it caused "Mao to quail where Stalin had not quailed"! There are other facts that might have given Mr. Alsop pause. The average nutritional level in China, even during the food shortage, was significantly higher than in India, but no one was suggesting that India was on the point of "exploding." Following a trip to Southeast Asia and Hong Kong, on July 31, 1962, a Scripps-Howard correspondent reported that "there is not one shred of evidence known to the West that famine threatens Communist China." In addition, the Reuters dispatches from China, while reporting food shortages, failed to make any mention of the coming explosion Mr. Alsop was predicting with such certainty. There was also Professor Gilbert Etienne's very careful and sober analysis of conditions in China (see page 115), based on his own direct observations.

These reports and others might have suggested to Mr. Alsop that things in China were not as desperate as he believed.

In the subsequent issue of the *China Quarterly* there appeared ten "commentaries" on Alsop's essay by China "specialists." They took up thirty-four pages. They were full of the normal academic solemnities. Seven of the ten were scholars working in the United States or Britain; two were British correspondents; one was a European "news analyst" working out of Hong Kong. Of the ten, to the best of my knowledge, only one had ever set foot in China since 1949. Michael Lindsay of American University in Washington had worked with the Communists in North China during World War II and returned there—his most recent visit—for a brief period in 1954. Several of the ten gave general support to Alsop's thesis; some hedged, partly agreeing and partly not; some voiced serious reservations; but—and this is to me the really aston-

ishing fact—all but one treated this Alsop article as a contribution worthy of scholarly discussion. Only Mr. Kenneth Walker of the London School of Oriental Studies differed. I quote part of his comment:

I found it difficult to decide whether or not to accept the Editor's invitation to comment on Mr. Alsop's article. To accept was to indicate a willingness to treat it seriously, even to imply that I recognized it as an authoritative contribution with scholarly claims. I do not, however, regard the article in this way at all, but an essay in wishful thinking. In commenting, then, I am giving the article more publicity than it deserves. On the other hand, it has been put to me that as Mr. Alsop is a famous journalist, some readers of *The China Quarterly* will accept his views on China as gospel. In spite of the arrogant and categorical tone of the article, I find it hard to accept that many readers of the journal will believe that Mr. Alsop's views are current doctrine among all those who try to study China's economic development, but in case there are some, perhaps one or two comments will make it clear that it is not so. . . .

After subjecting Mr. Alsop's use of the comments of refugees to a devastating analysis, Mr. Walker concluded:

Meanwhile, it is important that the few shreds of evidence available on China's economic position should be used with care. We must not try to answer questions which cannot be answered. Our conclusions and claims must be fully documented; our assumptions clearly stated. . . . On all these points I consider Mr. Alsop's article to be deplorable. It will hardly convince the Chinese Government that to let scholars and journalists into China for lengthy periods would necessarily give rise to more responsible comment.³

Why did the editors of the *China Quarterly* run this piece in the first place? Did they really consider it worthy of scholarly debate? Why did they select these particular specialists to comment on it? Why choose men who had never been to Communist China but who could only attempt to understand it from

³ *China Quarterly*, October–December 1962.

the outside?—with the exception of Michael Lindsay, who *had* been to Communist China, who had formerly worked with the Communists there, and (judging from his books and writing) is now one of the sharpest critics of the regime. Why were at least *some* of the very fine scholars who have seen China recently not chosen?

Is it any wonder that we remain tragically ignorant of the facts about China?