27

The Work Team

The Chinese Revolution at the present stage is in its character a revolution against imperialism, feudalism and bureaucratic-capitalism waged by the broad masses of the people under the leadership of the proletariat. By broad masses of people is meant all those who are oppressed, injured or fettered by imperialism, feudalism and bureaucratic-capitalism, namely, workers, peasants, soldiers, intellectuals, businessmen and other patriots.

Mao Tse-tung, 1948

THERE WERE no higher cadres, no leading Communists, no persons with long revolutionary experience as organizers and propagandists among the people sent to Long Bow to help put the Draft Agrarian Law into effect. The team consisted in part of peasant leaders from Lucheng County who had only recently been promoted to full-time work outside their own villages; the other part of the team was composed of students and teachers from Northern University, many of whom were getting their first experience of village life. Altogether some 15 people joined in the work. However, the number actively engaged on the team varied from time to time due to the fact that some of those originally assigned to the task were later transferred to urgent work elsewhere, while others occasionally took leave to straighten out personal affairs at home, recuperate from illness, or harvest their crops.

The local cadres who were assigned to Long Bow were the equivalent of such peasant activists as T'ien-ming, Kuei-Ts'ai and Fu-yuan. After leaving Long Bow to become district cadres, those three were assigned to just such work teams in other "basic villages." It was their counterparts from other districts of the county who were appointed to the Long Bow team. In the interest of objectivity, people who grew up and became leaders in one village went to another village to help reorganize and vice versa. Such nuclei of local cadres on every team were then leavened and strengthened by the addition of intellectuals and students from distant places, many of them city bred.

The team which Ch'i Yun and I found in Long Bow reflected in microcosm the Chinese society from which it was formed. Almost every one of the social classes in the country was represented on it, including the gentry. Although the landlords as a class were a main target of attack, the coalition had always found room in its ranks for what were known as "enlightened gentry." As individuals, therefore, even landlords, or to be more accurate, sons and daughters of landlords, found their way to the Revolution and onto the team. This heterogeneous make-up of the land reform team was neither an accident nor a coincidence. It was the result of policy, the policy of the Communist Party of China, which viewed the Revolution as one vast action of many classes and strata against imperialism and feudalism and tried, even on the lowest level, to give life to that coalition.

Hou Pao-pei, the leader of the Long Bow team, came from Sand Market, a village in the Fifth District of Lucheng County only a few miles northwest of Long Bow. He was 29 years old, tall, strong, and dour. What one noticed first about Hou were his hands. They were large, powerful, calloused, more suited to grasping the handle of a hoe than to wielding a writing brush. These hands were attached to a pair of solid arms and these in turn to a raw-boned, rugged frame that rested on two ample feet always firmly planted on the ground. Despite his size and solidity, Hou moved gracefully and with vigor, though never quickly. Every move he made was careful and deliberate. He thought slowly and talked slowly, but he was no fool. He was absolutely honest, painfully shy, very much weighed down by his responsibility for the work of the team, and not at all sure about how to proceed. Though he felt himself poorly qualified to lead, it was easy to see why the county leaders had made him team captain. Hou was so thoroughly steeped in peasant ways and peasant culture that he hardly needed to ask what other peasants were thinking. He knew it already, as if by instinct. His speech was down to earth and full of popular proverbs, trite, pedestrian; yet when he opened his mouth people listened because what he said made sense.

"From childhood I was always very steady and firm," he told us when we asked him about his life. "Our relatives despised my family because we had nothing, but I would not humiliate myself before them. From the beginning I had the idea that if you fall on the ground you should get up by yourself. As the saying goes, 'Judge one's youth at three, judge one's manhood at seven.' When I was still a little child all my relatives and the villagers decided that I would either be a very able man or a very bad fellow. Though my family was poor we always said, 'We are poor but our will is not poor,' so I always tried my best to work and never asked help from anybody."

Hou, like so many of the active young men already described, had labored many years as a wage worker. At an early age he left home for a job as a room boy, later clerk, in a large, market-town inn. He returned to his village as a hired laborer, went into the hills as a coal miner, picked up seasonal jobs at harvest time, was conscripted into the labor gang that built the railroad to Changchih, escaped from this gang to become a rickshaw puller in the county seat, and ended up working in a large flour mill as a mechanic. He had thus seen a good deal of the country, had travelled to cities large and small, and worked with men from many places. Though the sophistication of the towns had not rubbed off on him, a lot of worldly knowledge had.

Throughout his wanderings Hou maintained close ties with the anti-Japanese resistance movement. His elder brother led the underground organization in Sand Market and was killed shortly before V-J Day by soldiers of the puppet Fourth Column. When the village was freed from Japanese control, Hou returned home immediately and joined the drive against the puppets and collaborators. He showed such courage and ability in this campaign that his neighbors elected him village head, chairman of the Peasants' Association and director of military affairs.

By the time the Settling of Accounts Movement began, Hou had become the leading figure in his home community. He led it so well that he was elected "*Fanshen* Hero" not only for Sand Market but also for the whole Fifth District. In the county-wide elections that followed he won the fourth highest number of votes as a model land reform worker. "For the prize I won a new plow," Hou said. "After the election we heroes were invited to a grand festival in the county seat. We saw plays and operas, both old style and new. Flowers were pinned to our tunics and we rode on horseback through the city. When we returned home we were welcomed by every village along the route. The people met us with parades and music and marched us through the fields to the border of the next village."

Hou was obviously not a man completely unknown to the people of Long Bow.

Hou's assistant on the work team was Li Sung-lin, known to all as "Little Li" because of his short stature. He was a plump jolly man of 26 who came from a middle peasant family of Bone Village, a community far back in the mountains that had never been occupied by the Japanese but had been repeatedly raided in an effort to destroy the guerrilla forces based there. In the course of the raids the Japanese killed the Li family ox and seized the Li family donkey, but all the people of the village escaped harm by hiding in mountain caves which the Japanese never found.

Li went to school until he was 15. Then he worked for two years

on his father's land. When the war began he joined the guerrilla government of the county as an orderly, but because he was literate soon won promotion to the post of stencil cutter, then to the position of secretary to the Third District, and finally to the post of assistant judge of the County Court. All of this work was carried out under conditions of guerrilla war, with the government constantly on the move and its personnel never knowing from which direction the next attack might come. Three times Little Li was surrounded by Japanese squads and each time he barely escaped with his life. Once the whole county staff climbed over the back wall of a compound as the Japanese broke down the front gate. The enemy caught and killed the county clerk and shot the magistrate's personal guard. Li had time enough only to pull on his pants and run. He lost his coat, his bedroll, and his precious fountain pen.

When the war ended Li was appointed to various important jobs such as editor of the local gazette, cadre in the organization department of the Communist Party, and vice magistrate of the Fourth District.

The other four local members of the team who stayed in Long Bow until the work was completed were Han Chin-ming, 30; Chang Ch'uer, 23; Li Wen-chung, 25; and Liang Chi-hu, 26. All of them had impressive records as guerrilla fighters and peasant organizers in their home villages. The background of Li Wen-chung, a good-looking man with enough energy and spirit for two, who had started life with no hope at all, was typical.

Li began his story by saying: "I was born in the village of West Snake River. My own family owned neither land nor house nor anything else. When I was two years old I was bought by a poor peasant who had no children of his own and was brought to Horse Square. This man—you could call him a stepfather—worked as a hired laborer, but because he smoked opium he never had any money. As for me, as far back as I can remember I worked for others or begged for food. Thus I lived until I was 14."

At 14 Li ran away from home and joined the Shangtang Guerrilla Corps, a detachment of Yen Hsi-shan's Provincial Army. Soon after he joined this force it was surrounded by the Eighth Route Army and went over to the revolutionary side. The young recruit found a place as a bugler with the famous Eighth Routers, but a few months later he was left behind because the detachment moved on to Shantung and he was considered too young to serve as a soldier.

Li then worked two years in a factory, served six months in a conscript labor corps, farmed at home, saw his stepfather die of starvation after trying to live too long on beancake, and barely crawled away alive himself to find work as a rickshaw coolie in

Taiyuan. There he was shanghaied onto a construction gang, escaped, worked as a coal coolie, and finally returned home a few months before his native Horse Square was liberated by the same massed attack of militia and regulars that reduced the Long Bow fort.

The former beggar immediately plunged into the anti-traitor and land division movements. He won a post of leadership in the community by helping to solve an inter-village fight over who should divide the property of one very rich landlord who had hoarded more than 37,000 silver dollars. Soon thereafter he was elected secretary of his local Party branch and then called to the Fifth District Office for full-time work. When the work in Long Bow began, Li Wen-chung was still single, a rare thing for a male over 18 years of age in Lucheng County.

Such were the local men who came to Long Bow to carry out the Draft Agrarian Law—all native sons, blood of the blood, flesh of the flesh of Lucheng County's people. They had all been through the searing catastrophes of war and famine, and all had taken a leading part in transforming village life after the liberation. To carry on this work came as naturally to them as breathing.

But to succeed in this work was something else again. Success depended on many factors: on one's grasp of a complex situation, on one's ability to analyze and organize, on the validity of the policies to be carried out. The key to all but the last of these was training.

Training for land reform work had started at the very highest levels of the Communist Party and the Border Region Government as early as October 1947. Long before the Draft Agrarian Law was made public it had been circulated to all leading personnel in the vast Shansi-Hopei-Honan-Shantung Border Region and had then been formally considered at a gigantic marathon conference. This conference, held at Yehtao, in the heart of the Taihang range, was attended by 1,700 leaders of county magistrate or regimental commander rank. The deliberations, which centered on the ideological examination of every participant, lasted 85 days.

Out of the Yehtao Conference had come an estimate that the land reform in the Border Region as a whole was still far from adequate. At Yehtao the idea that the revolution might have gone too far in some places tended to be overlooked. Plain warnings that middle peasants must never be made the "objects of struggle," that landlords and rich peasants must not be left without means of livelihood, and that commercial and industrial holdings must not be touched, though often repeated, in the main went unheeded. Emphasis was placed on the first of Mao's two principles: "Satisfy the demands of the poor peasants and hired laborers."

"We must start from the class outlook, the method, the stand of

the poor-and-hired peasants. We must stand firmly at their side; we must refer all things to them and do everything starting from their interest." These words of Regional Party Secretary Po Yi-po, words which represented only a part of his position, were raised aloft as the banner under which the Revolution should march.

As a result, when the members of the Lucheng Party Committee returned home from the Border Region Conference, they came intent on a shake-up. They immediately set about to study anew all pertinent data concerning the *fanshen* in Lucheng County. When statistics showed that thousands of poor peasants had not yet truly stood up, they assumed that this was because landlordism had not yet been thoroughly uprooted. And if, after three years of "thunder and lightning, drum and cymbal" campaigning, landlordism had not yet been uprooted in Lucheng County, could anyone but the Communist Party be blamed?

A quick and superficial check on the background of the comrades in the village branches convinced the County Committee that at least 40 percent of the local Communists were of landlord or rich peasant origin. The failure of the poor to *fanshen*, the commandism, the hedonism, the nepotism, and the favoritism so common everywhere they attributed to the counter-revolutionary class origin and disruptive activity of this large group.

As a result of this survey, the optimistic estimate that had been made by the county leaders in 1946 was reversed. In 1948, the Communist Party Committee of Lucheng County declared that land reform in the area under its jurisdiction had been seriously compromised, if not aborted.

A conference of all full-time political workers in Lucheng was immediately called. It convened at a village called Lu Family Settlement and lasted the entire month of February. Secretary Ch'en presented the County Committee's new estimate of the situation to the assembled cadres in great detail. He blamed himself and the Party members before him for the sorry picture and demanded and received from each participant a statement of class origin and a searching self-criticism of past behavior. Those who admitted serious errors received discipline in the form of warnings and suspensions. A few who subbornly refused to criticize themselves or justified their past wrong-doing were expelled from the Party. At the conclusion of the meeting, the majority went back to their work in the field prepared to lead a drastic redistribution of the land and wealth of their county and a drastic reorganization of village administrations, Party branches, and mass organizations.

In the minds of these men and women as they took up their new

tasks there lingered a vivid phrase from Secretary Ch'en's final report: "'He who cannot find poor peasants in the villages doesn't deserve to eat!"

****

The students and young teachers from Northern University who joined this nucleus of peasant cadres were from an entirely different world. Either directly or indirectly they were tied to the landlord class whose overthrow was the object of all their work. There was, for instance, the lean, sharp-nosed Professor Hsu, an intellectual from Peking. He had never known physical labor in any form, not to mention hunger or hardship. His experience of the actual life of the Chinese people was thus one-sided, to say the least. His academic qualifications, on the other hand, were impressive. As an economist he had read a large number of books, was an enthusiastic student of Marxism, and could debate the fine points of value theory with anyone. He looked upon his assignment in Long Bow as an opportunity for research, as a chance to collect first-hand material about Chinese rural life which would add to the theoretical insight which he had already stored up. He came to the village well supplied with books and writing materials, but was at a loss when face to face with the peasants. He found their accent hard to understand, their motives strange, and their manners uncouth. Professor Hsu, for all his good intentions, was like a fish out of water in the countryside. He made one mistake after the other.

Much better adapted to work in the village was my assistant and interpreter, Ch'i Yun. She was typical of the three women who came from the University. Although officially assigned only to help me, she soon became an important and lively addition to the team and was allocated as much work as any other member. Unfortunately, we were so busy attending meetings, interviewing peasants, taking down verbatim notes, and translating charts and papers that I never formally requested her life story, and she, on her part, volunteered very little about herself. Even her name was an assumed one that she had adopted in order to protect those members of her family who still lived in Nationalist-controlled regions.

About Ch'i Yun I learned only that she was a college graduate from a large coastal city who, very soon after the Japanese invasion of North China, went to Yenan. There she married a revolutionary of similiar background and bore two children. She rarely mentioned her husband but I gained the impression that he and she were separated, not only temporarily by their work but permanently by choice.

Because Ch'i Yun's own work took her away on long trips through the Liberated Areas, her two children were brought up in the nursery school for cadres' children in Yenan.

After the Japanese surrender in 1945, trained people were urgently needed all over North China. A great exodus by foot, donkey, and ox cart took place from Yenan. Ch'i Yun joined this exodus, worked as an interpreter for the truce negotiation teams set up by General Marshall's mission, and then was transferred to the Liberated Areas Relief Administration for similar duties. Her children, left behind in Yenan, moved eastward with their school when the Kuomintang attack on the Northwest began. In 1948 they were located somewhere in the mountains to the east of Changchih—close enough so that she was able to see them occasionally, make clothes for them, and tend their other special wants, but not close enough so that she could visit them every day or every week.

Ch'i Yun's round friendly face was not beautiful in any particular detail but, taken together, her features were attractive and feminine. By dress and coiffure she did nothing to enhance them, however. Her fine long hair was rolled up each morning and tucked under a visor cap in such a way that only a few wisps ever strayed to lend a touch of charm to an otherwise austere appearance. Her bulky padded suit completely concealed her figure. Only from the small size of her feet, encased in dainty, self-made cotton slippers, could one guess that her limbs might be graceful and well-proportioned.

I often thought what a hardship it must be for such a woman to live the life of a spartan revolutionary cadre in the bleak North China countryside after a childhood of relative luxury and comfort in the city. Yet she seemed to pay no attention whatsoever to cold, fatigue, lice, fleas, coarse food, or the hard wooden planks that served as her bed. For her this was all a part of "going to the people" who alone, once they were mobilized, could build the new China of which she dreamed.

Ch'i Yun's high spirits in the face of extreme physical hardship pointed up a curious fact which we discovered on our very first day in the village. This was that the morale of the intellectuals, for whom land reform represented a complete change in way of life, was far higher than that of the local cadres.

The local cadres worked steadily but without enthusiasm. When they met in the evening to discuss what had been done or to make plans for the future, they often sat for minutes at a time without saying a word. It was as if some heavy burden weighed upon their thoughts and inhibited their tongues.

Not so the students and teachers from Northern University. They plunged into the heart of village affairs with eagerness and enthusiasm,

made discovery after discovery about the life of their own countrymen, developed new and interesting friendships with people whom they would never have met in a lifetime of academic pursuits, and looked on the hardships involved partly as adventure and partly as steeling for future revolutionary activity, a test they hoped to pass without flinching. That is not to say that village life was much harder than life at the guerrilla University. In some ways it was less spartan. In Long Bow the food, at least, had some variety and occasionally a peasant's *k'ang* was warmed by fire. The same could never be said of the University, where neither wheat nor corn ever broke the monotony of boiled millet in the students' mess and fire never warmed the clammy stone corridors, the high-ceilinged rooms, or the backyard adobe sheds that served as dormitories for staff and students alike.

What made village life a challenge was the dirt and the squalor which surrounded the poorest peasants and the unbearable suffering that was the lot of so many victims of disease. While the itch of lice and the welts left by bedbugs were passed off jokingly as "the revolutionary heat," the suppurating headsores, malarial fevers, slow deaths from tuberculosis and venereal disease were not joking matters. Land reform workers slept on the same *k'angs,* ate from the same bowls, and shared lice and fleas with people diseased beyond hope of recovery. Yet I never saw anyone complain. They came prepared for this and for much worse.

Their training had no more been left to chance, to spontaneous revolutionary enthusiasm, than had that of the local cadres. The outlook of the intellectuals had been consciously developed during an extended period of education and discussion, criticism and self-criticism, that preceded the departure of all team members for the countryside. During the weeks of small meetings which occupied the time of all teachers and students after the promulgation of the new Draft Law, every person in the University, regardless of status, made a survey of his or her own past and examined his or her own class origin. In the freezing quarters where the students lived, they met day after day in small groups of 15 to 20 to study the class nature of Chinese society and to discuss where each one fit as landlord, peasant, bourgeois merchant, or free professional. In order to "join the revolution," persons with upper-class backgrounds had to give up all attachment to their pasts and take a firm stand with the workers and peasants. They had to resolve to apply in life the revolutionary principles which had so easily caught their imaginations in theoretical form and to bring their everyday behavior into line with their professed opinions.

For many individuals, taking a new stand was no abstract question

to be decided by cool reasoning simply on its economic or political merit. Their own families had been or soon would be under attack. Some of their parents had already been beaten to death by angry peasants. Some of them were apt to end up in charge of land division in areas where their own property lay. They had to face the possibility of accusations and actions leading to the destruction of their homes and families. The new Draft Law opposed all beating and torture, opposed any treasure hunt for buried wealth, opposed all "sweep-the-floor-out-the-door" solutions. Nevertheless, peasants and cadres had been carried beyond policy in the past and, if the battle became heated, might well be carried beyond it again. It would be naive to think that everything would be peaceful in the future.

Many participants found that they could not sleep at night. They lost their appetites and burst into tears when they faced this choice, or confronted past mistakes. Even the students from less privileged families found this educational process painful. They had to rethink their lives from the very beginning, re-examine all their values, and rededicate themselves to a cause that gave them no personal advantage whatsoever.

Yet those intellectuals who were changed by the process seemed to be grateful. The spartan life, the intellectual ferment, the group companionship, and the physical and mental well-being that developed as a result of remolding their ideology moved most of them deeply. They were exhilarated by the knowledge that they were drawing closer to the heart of the Revolution and were themselves undergoing an awakening, a metamorphosis from "I and my wants" to "we and our needs." They could feel the great thrust of this awakening both subjectively and objectively. When the call came to go to the villages they went eagerly to do battle with all of the past that was rotten, corrupt, and painful.

28

Those With Merit Will Get Some
Those Without Merit Will Get Some

Why should the poor and hired peasants lead? The poor and hired peasants should lead because they make up from 50 to 70 percent of the population, are the most numerous, and work the hardest all year long. They plant the land, they build the buildings, they weave the cloth, but they never have enough food to eat, a roof to sleep under, or clothes to wear. Their life is most bitter, they are oppressed and exploited and pushed around. Hence they are the most revolutionary. From birth they are a revolutionary class. Inevitably they are the leaders of the fanshen *movement. This is determined by life itself.*

Proclamation to the Peasants, March 1948
Shansi-Hopei-Honan-Shantung
Border Region Government

A NEW starting point for the work of the team was provided by an announcement explaining the meaning of the Draft Agrarian Law which was sent out by the Party Bureau of the Shansi-Hopei-Honan-Shantung Border Region and printed simultaneously in all the newspapers of that vast area. The announcement was couched in simple terms and outlined, in a few short paragraphs, just what the new law meant for peasants who, in spite of years of effort, had not yet *fanshened.*

Little Li, vice leader of the work team and a surprisingly accomplished orator, introduced the document to Long Bow Village by reading it aloud. As he read he stood at the end of a long loft that made up the second story of the foreign-style house that had once belonged to the absentee landlord and militarist, Chief-of-Staff Hsu. The building was now held as "surplus property" by the village office. Scattered about the loft, seated on bricks, chunks of wood, and an occasional folding stool, all of which had been carried up the steep ladder on the outside wall, sat about 50 or 60 peasants especially selected by the work team as the poorest in the whole community. The men sat in clusters, lit their pipes, smoked, or simply listened

with rapt attention; the women, grouped in their own coteries, worked busily at domestic chores. Some sewed shoe soles, some spun hemp, others wound cotton thread from large reels into balls. The mothers among them kept a watchful eye on their young children, ragged urchins with smudged faces and bare bottoms exposed from behind, who tumbled about among the assembled people, laughed, chased each other, and cried. Small babies, not yet able to walk, sucked at deliciously exposed, milk-swollen breasts or fell asleep in maternal arms blissfully unaware of the historic words that rang through the loft, claiming the power to change their whole lives.

"Brothers and sisters, peasants of the Border Region," read Little Li with genuine theatrical flourish. "In the course of the past two years our Border Region has carried on a powerful, enthusiastic land reform movement. Already over ten million people have thoroughly *fanshened* but there are still areas with a population of 20 million who have only partially *fanshened* or not *fanshened* at all."

From the nodding heads, the whispered asides, it was obvious that the peasants in the loft counted themselves among the 20 million whose *fanshen* was still incomplete.

"Now everyone must *fanshen.*

"There were some mistakes in the past. Some of our village cadres were landlords; others, even though they weren't landlords, listened to the landlords. Some soldiers' and cadres' relatives were landlords. These were not thoroughly settled with."

Without stopping to analyze whether this was actually true in Long Bow, the peasants accepted the statement with enthusiasm. It implied that there would be further struggles and further "fruits" and that they, as the organized poor peasants, would get these "fruits." They nodded and waited for more.

"Some families got more in the distribution because they were soldiers' relatives, or cadres' relatives. The fruits were distributed according to many systems, according to need, according to membership in the Peasants' Association, according to one's activities in the struggle. This was not fair. Because of this some got a lot, and others got very little."

Here indeed was something to savor. The peasants remembered the early struggles well. Politics rather than class had decided the outcome then. It was traitors and collaborators who had been attacked and those who beat them down who received the wealth. Later movements corrected but never entirely overcame these inequities. Religious prejudice, political suspicion, and a measure of favoritism continued to distort the results.

"That's exactly right," said an old woman who sat close to Ch'i

Yun, never for an instant ceasing to wind thread. "You had to be on the inside to get anything."

"The Draft Agrarian Law is designed to correct all such mistakes," declared Little Li, still reading from the document. "Articles One and Three call for destruction of the feudal system and the creation of a system of 'land to the tiller.'

"What does this mean? It means that no matter who you are, whether you are a county magistrate, a commander-in-chief, or an official of whatever level, if you are a feudal exploiter your property will be confiscated. Nothing will or can protect you."

"Hear that now!"

"That's the way it should be!"

"Nobody can escape this time."

These comments and many others in the same vein emerged at random, like corn popping in a pan.

"Article Six says that property will be distributed according to the number of people in the family. It is very simple—those who are politically suspect will get some, and those who are not politically suspect will get some. Those with merit will get some and those without merit will get some. Landlords will get a share and rich peasants will get a share also. Some middle peasants will give up a little, some will get a little, most will not be touched at all. That which was not equally divided in the past is to be divided. Those who got too little in the past will get more. Those who got too much will give it up. The surplus will be used to fill the holes. Everything will be divided so that everyone will have a fair share."

If the previous paragraphs had aroused enthusiasm, this paragraph sent it bubbling and rippling through the loft. The peasants were beside themselves with delight. Among them were at least a dozen who had been called agents, had received less than equal treatment because of it, and lived in the shadow of further attacks. For them the announcement cleared the sky. Politics, religion, furtive trips to Horse Square, collaboration, past mistakes, quarrels, personal vendettas, the weighing and balancing of thoughts and activities, merits and demerits—all these were declared irrelevant. The only thing that mattered was poverty. If you were poor you would get property—land, tools, livestock, houses.

"Do you understand what I have read?" asked Little Li over the hubbub engendered by his words.

"We understand it very well," said the old woman next to Ch'i Yun. "We only wish we could remember every word of it."

"It couldn't be better," said a man in a ragged jacket. "I myself never *fanshened*."

"Understand it? Of course we do!" declared many voices from all over the loft.

Little Li went on to declare that the poor peasants themselves must right the wrongs and unite with the middle peasants to elect a democratic Village Congress which could then supervise the work of all cadres and recall all those who abused their power. But the main point, the point that impressed the people most, had already been made: *Those with merit will get some and those without merit will get some. Everything will be divided so that everyone will get an equal share.*

****

The statement read by Comrade Li, which outlined the coming campaign for the mass of the peasantry, was supplemented by a far more detailed directive which explained to the cadres of the work team just how they were to go about accomplishing their major objectives.

According to this directive, which was issued by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on February 22, 1948, the villages of the Liberated Areas fell into three basic types. Included in the first type were those in which land reform had been successfully carried out and only minor readjustments and corrections were needed to complete the movement. The second type comprised the villages where equal distribution was more ragged, landlords and rich peasants still owned more and better land than the average and many cadres had received more than their fair share of the "fruits." In the third type were those villages where, in spite of certain efforts at equal distribution, land reform had not been effectively carried out and feudal relations of production still remained dominant.

The first task of the work team was to determine which of these types best characterized the village of Long Bow. In case of doubt, a complete class analysis of the community had to be made and the holdings of the various classes compared. Villages of the first type had to contain not only a majority of *fanshened* peasants (50 to 80 percent of the population) but the per capita holdings of the remaining poor had to be at least equal to two thirds of the per capita holdings of the middle peasants.

To determine the type of any village meant to determine the course of action which must subsequently follow. If the village were of the first or second type, the necessary economic adjustments were to be made as quickly as possible so as not to disrupt the year's production work, and the work team must then concentrate on the democratic reforms which were to usher in a new political life for the whole community.

If the village proved to be of the third type, then the whole Draft Agrarian Law had to be applied from the beginning. A Poor Peasants' League had to be organized, a campaign against the remaining gentry mounted, confiscation of gentry holdings completed, and equal distribution of all confiscated property effected. Only after all this was finished could the democratic reforms be undertaken.

Whether the situation in the village was good or bad, whether the land reform had been carried out well or poorly, future progress depended upon the quality of the political leadership inside the village and consequently on the quality of the members of the Communist Party branch. It was necessary therefore not only to classify the villages as outlined above but also to classify them according to the kind of Communist Party branch that existed in each. If a nucleus of Communists with reasonably good records existed, then the branch was called Kind I. Such a branch need only be re-educated by means of criticism and self-criticism meetings and encouraged to take a leading role in all future work. If the branch was dominated by landlord or opportunist elements then it was declared Kind II or III. Such a branch must certainly be reorganized, perhaps even dissolved. Political direction of the village must temporarily be turned over to the Committee of the Poor Peasants' League or the Peasants' Association and a new branch constituted only during the course of the reforms.*

The democratic reforms which were to accompany or follow the completion of the land reform program were to consist of:

(1) A re-examination of and reorganization of the Communist Party branch and a critical re-evaluation of the records of all village officials, whether Party or non-Party.

(2) The establishment of a sound Peasants' Association made up of the vast majority of poor and middle peasant families and led by democratically elected officers.

(3) The eventual establishment of a new village government composed of an elected Village Congress, representative of all social strata, and the appointment by this Congress of all village officers, such as the village chairman, the village clerk, the militia captain, the police captain, and the man in charge of public service.

Such in brief was the task that faced the work team in Long Bow. The members had to decide which type the village fell into and what kind of Communist Party branch it contained. On the basis of these estimates suitable organizational steps had to be taken and suitable reforms carried out.

* A Poor Peasants' League was an organization composed only of poor peasants and hired laborers. A Peasants' Association was a much broader organization composed of poor peasants, hired laborers and middle peasants.

Simply to make an accurate estimate of the true state of affairs was a major project. No outsider could hope to possess enough detailed information to decide who were middle peasants, who were poor peasants, and how much each actually held. To gather such information required the active support of all the peasants. First it was necessary that they acquire standards of judgment, and then they must collectively undertake the work of classification and evaluation.

In their haste to get started on more fundamental problems, the work team cadres in Long Bow did not wait until they had completed this arduous task of investigation before they made up their minds about the basic situation in the village. Without consultation among themselves, without taking any formal decision, they assumed that land reform in Long Bow had been stillborn. It followed that the village must be Type III and its Party branch Kind III. All mass organizations remained dissolved, all village cadres remained suspended, all Communist Party members continued to meet in secret session. Long Bow was treated as a village where the whole slate had to be wiped clean and the peasant movement had to be reorganized from the ground up.

The first step in any such reorganization had to be the creation of a new Poor and Hired Peasants' League. But before such a League could even be started, some determination had to be made concerning who were the poor and who the hired. A detailed classification of the whole community therefore became mandatory and the thoroughgoing investigation which the cadres had earlier bypassed crowded all other matters off the agenda after all.

29

Self Report, Public Appraisal

For those whose duty it is to give guidance and direction, the most essential method of knowing conditions is that they should, proceeding according to plan, devote their attention to a number of cities and villages and make a comprehensive survey of each of them from the basic viewpoint of Marxism, i.e., by means of class analysis.

Mao Tse-tung, 1941

"THERE ARE seven in my family. Last year, before the marriage of my son I had six."

So spoke Wang Kuei-pao. He was a heavy-set man perhaps 40 years old. Crow's-feet spread from the corners of his eyes. On his weathered face grew a ragged stubble of hair that had never matured into a beard.

"Why speak of last year? Speak of the way it is now. Soon you will have a grandson and that will make eight," said a wit from across the room. He was pressed against the side wall of the hut by the crush of people at the meeting and I could not even see who had spoken, as I myself was pressed against the opposite wall.

Wang, the expectant grandfather, continued his report unperturbed. "I have three and a half acres. I reap about ten bushels to the acre. My son is a teacher in another village. I have no draft animal."

"No doubt you are a poor peasant," said a third voice.

"That's easy. He's a poor peasant. He hasn't even *fanshened*."

"Your family has increased but your land remains the same. In the future you'll have even more mouths to feed." The speakers supported one another.

"Well," said Wang, with a bravado based on the security he felt in being poor. "Go ahead and classify me. Call me a rich peasant if you want to. It doesn't bother me at all."

But everyone agreed. There was not the slightest doubt. Wang Kuei-pao had been a poor peasant all his life and a poor peasant he remained.

A man named Ting-fu followed Wang. He reported three and a

half acres for three people, no livestock, no implements, a broken-down house of three sections, and a shared privy.

"Ting-fu has toiled his whole life through," said one of his neighbors.

"He is the hardest worker in the whole village," said another.

Ting-fu was classed as a poor peasant without further ado.

Thus classification of the classes began in Long Bow.

****

The handful of peasants who listened to Wang Kuei-pao and Ting-fu were "basic elements" chosen by the work team as the nucleus of the new Poor Peasants' League—a League which was to remain "provisional" until it assumed its final form. Their primary objective was to find others as poor as themselves who could swell the ranks until the new organization became capable of exerting leverage on the whole community. In the process they would also make a preliminary estimate of the potential allies (middle peasants) among their neighbors and of the "objects of struggle" (rich peasants and landlords) who still lived among them.

The classification method used was called *tzu pao kung yi,* or "self report, public appraisal." The "self report" meant that every family head must appear in person and report his sources of income and his economic position prior to the liberation of the village. "Public appraisal" meant that all members of the Provisional League must discuss each report and decide, by sense-of-the-meeting, on the family's class status.

Everyone knew that these classification proceedings could transform the Draft Agrarian Law from a general declaration of purpose into a concrete reality. Decisions concerning class status would eventually determine the future of every family. Those classed as poor peasants could expect to gain prestige as members of the new Poor Peasants' League and to acquire prosperity by coming into enough worldly goods to make them new middle peasants. Those classed as rich peasants could expect expropriation of all their surplus property, leaving them with only enough to earn a living like any other *fan-shened* peasant. Anyone classified as a landlord faced complete expropriation and then the return of enough property to live on. The classification, in other words, could not be regarded as an academic matter, as a mere nose count, as a census. It laid the basis for economic and social action that affected every family and every individual in the most fundamental way.

Because this was so the peasants took an extraordinary interest in

the classification meetings and gathered without complaint, day after day, to listen, report, discuss, and judge.

It soon became obvious that every family wanted to be classed as far down the scale as possible. To be called a middle peasant meant to receive nothing. Only those classed as poor peasants could expect to gain. Therefore every family wanted to be classed as poor, and every family head, no matter how poor, tried to minimize what his family had possessed prior to liberation and deprecate what the family had received since.

For the minority at the upper end of the scale, downgrading was even more vital. All the prosperous peasants were fearful lest they be shoved over the line into the rich-peasant category and lose out. Even the middle-peasant category included an upper group, the well-to-do, who could legitimately be asked to give up something. Those who feared that they owned enough to be called well-to-do wanted no part of any such condition and fought hard to convince their neighbors that they really had no surplus, that they were simply average middle peasants.

Since everyone wanted to be downgraded, since "poverty was best," I expected the final result of the classification to be a general shift downward. But this was not the case, and the reason for it was quite simple. The preliminary classification was undertaken by a group of families already designated by the work team as poor. It was in their interest to place others in higher brackets for two obvious reasons—in the first place, unless some families were classed as landlords, rich peasants, or well-to-do middle peasants there would be no property to distribute; in the second place, if there were large numbers of families classed as poor, whatever "struggle fruits" materialized would have to be spread thin. Clearly, the fewer families there were on the sharing end, the more each family would be likely to get.

The two contradictory trends, the desire on the part of all those being classed to be downgraded, and the desire on the part of those doing the classing to upgrade everyone else, tended to cancel each other out. In the course of the reports and appraisals the true situation of each family tended to be revealed.

For this happy result, credit must also be given to the method of discussion employed, a method that enabled every individual to talk over each case. This method was known as *ke ts'ao,* a word that literally means "ferment" and finds its American equivalent in the "buzz session." After each family presented its report, the chairman called out, *"Ke ts'ao, ke ts'ao."* Then all those who were sitting together in those natural clusters formed as people came to the meeting fell to discussing the case. They continued to discuss it until they more

or less agreed. As agreement was reached in various parts of the room, the hum of voices gradually died down. Then the chairman called out, *"Pao kao, pao kao!"* (report, report).

A spokesman for each group, designated on the spur of the moment by those who sat around him, then expressed the consensus arrived at by his companions in the course of their "ferment." If the opinions of the scattered groups did not coincide, the chairman tried to clarify the differences, review the facts in the case, and ask the family under consideration to report in greater detail. Then he called for another *ke ts'ao* and repeated this process until a real sense-of-the-meeting was reached. No votes were taken. To decide such matters by a vote meant to impose the will of the majority on the will of the minority, with all the hard feeling that such an imposition was sure to cause. Objectively, the work team felt, any family must stand somewhere in the scale. A real understanding of the family's condition should enable the peasant judges to place the family in its proper niche. To vote meant to admit defeat, to make a subjective rather than an objective decision. When no sense-of-the-meeting could be reached, the cadres advised putting off the classification until further study of the standards and further investigation of the facts clarified the whole picture.

The complete lack of facilities for any form of large gathering established ideal conditions for the informal *ke ts'ao* discussions that characterized Long Bow meetings. Instead of coming together in a room equipped with rows of chairs, such as would be found in any Western meeting hall, the peasants had to gather in some empty loft, some abandoned room, some quiet portion of the street, or in the largest of their private homes. Each had of necessity to bring his or her own private seat—usually a brick, a block, or a little stool made of wood and string—and sit down wherever the company proved most congenial. The groups that crystallized in this way formed natural discussion circles that made it possible for any meeting to switch to a "buzz session" without the least rearrangement or disturbance. Thus everyone had a chance to participate and express opinions whether or not he or she actually spoke to the gathering as a whole. This system enabled shy people to speak first in small groups and gradually build up confidence to the point where they were willing to stand up and talk before the multitude. Truth was well served by such an arrangement because what one person forgot another was sure to remember. The collective proved wiser than any individual, and in the end a consensus of the participants emerged.

For Ch'i Yun and myself these meetings served as a window opening on the inner life of the village. The peasants, who had seemed on

first acquaintance to constitute a fairly homogeneous mass—poverty-stricken yet energetic, ignorant yet shrewd, quarrelsome yet good humored, suspicious yet hospitable—turned out to be a most varied collection of individuals. Each possessed marked originality, and each faced problems peculiar to his or her situation that often obscured the general problem of livelihood, the overriding necessity to *fanshen*.

With a "well bottom" view of the world still limiting their vision, most peasants found it hard to separate their personal problems from the basic economic situation that was the root of their misery. They tended to concentrate on traits of character, unresolved feuds, past insults, and other peripheral issues to the neglect of the true criterion for determining class status—their own relation to the means of production.

The audience, also made up of peasants, was equally subjective. Time and again, Little Li, Ch'i Yun, and the other work team cadres who sat in on the meetings had to bring the discussion around to objective economic facts and warn against classifying some family in the upper brackets because the family head had collaborated with the Japanese, habitually beat his wife, or sided with his wife against his mother.

Yet so strong ran the feeling against exploitation, collaboration, and criminal behavior that sometimes the team cadres themselves were carried away. When this happened, their prestige and eloquence were such that they easily swayed the whole meeting.

30

Rich Man, Poor Man, Beggarman, Thief

The class status of most of the population in the rural areas is clear and can be easily differentiated without much divergence of view. Their class status should first be ascertained. In the case of a small proportion of the people whose class status is unclear and difficult to ascertain and where there is a divergence of view, they should be dealt with later and classified after thorough study and after obtaining instruction from the higher authorities. Impatience in determining the class status of these people must be avoided lest errors should be made which lead to their dissatisfaction. If any mistake is made, it must be corrected.

Liu Shao-ch'i

CHANG CH'I-TS'AI, one of the poorest individuals in the whole village, provided the first stumbling block to that nucleus of poor peasants who set out to classify the whole village in March.

The group had little trouble just so long as they dealt with typical cases. Heads of families had only to make the briefest kind of report before they were unanimously declared to be poor peasants or middle peasants. Consequently, during the first two or three days of the proceedings some 40 families were classed without controversy and most of those who were declared to be poor were invited to participate in classifying those who followed them.

When they got to Ch'i-ts'ai, however, the peasants disagreed sharply. The difficulty stemmed from the fact that he had never owned even a fraction of an acre of land. Furthermore, he had never worked on the land for others. All his life he had labored as a builder of houses. On the wages thus earned he had raised two sons and a daughter. A second daughter he had given away as a child bride during the famine year. After the birth of his fourth child his wife had died.

In the distributions of 1945–1946, Ch'i-ts'ai had received almost five acres of land, a donkey, one third of a cart, and many hundredweight of grain. This was enough to make him a middle peasant in 1948. His neighbors all agreed on that. What they found hard to decide was, what had been his class before liberation?

"His class was bare poor," volunteered several peasants after hearing Chang's report.

"But there is no such class as 'bare poor,' " protested Little Li, the work team cadre sitting in on the meeting. "There are hired laborers who own no land and work for wages on the land of others; there are village workers who also own no land but have skills such as carpentry, masonry, blacksmithing, and weaving; but there is no such thing as a class of 'bare poor.' "

The peasants, however, could not conceive of a way of life without land. To live without land was to live in a state of perpetual disaster. Anyone who had no land was "bare poor" and the sooner he acquired land the better. To set up a separate class of people who owned nothing and call them workers did not make sense.

The specific skill possessed by Ch'i-ts'ai also confused the issue. The peasants found it difficult to separate the man from his trade and arrive at the common category "worker." If he was not simply "bare poor," he was a housebuilder. But housebuilders could hardly constitute a class. Could his wife be called a housebuilder too? Could his children be called housebuilders? It seemed that only the person who practiced the trade could be classed according to that trade and hence be called a worker, if worker he had to be. The rest of his family should be something else.

When Little Li repeated his argument the peasants "gave up the gun" and agreed to call Ch'i-ts'ai a village worker, but it was quite clear that very few understood what this meant.

Another worker, Chang Huan-ch'ao, the blacksmith, posed an even greater puzzle. Some peasants wanted to call this hot-tempered, swarthy-complexioned man an exploiter because he did such poor work and charged so much for it.

"He's a middle peasant," said one neatly dressed woman with a reputation as an amorous widow. She spat out the words "middle peasant" as if they bore some sort of stigma. "He's a middle peasant because he earns good money as a blacksmith, and besides his work is no good. Last year he cheated me. He charged me an awful price but the work was no good and even the iron was poor. He exploited me."

"He's not skillful; we all know that," said a grey-bearded elder. "But if you don't want to be exploited by him you can always call in others to do the work. It's different with the landlords. With them you have no choice. You pay rent or you starve. But with Huan-ch'ao, if you don't like his work you can always take your job elsewhere."

"Go ahead, say what you think," said Chang himself, scowling

darkly. "Your opinions are very good and I would be the last to get angry."

"Truth is," said a second widow, "the tools you make are no good. You really should improve your workmanship."

"I accept your criticism," said Huan-ch'ao, desperately trying to hold back his rising temper. He knew that to explode now would land him in the middle-peasant category for sure.

"He's never been a skillful blacksmith," the grey-bearded man said again. "But if you say that for this reason he exploits you, then all blacksmiths must become very gloomy indeed."

Finally Yuan-lung, a young neighbor of Huan-ch'ao's, proposed a solution. "He's a poor peasant," he said with an air of finality. Several pipe-smoking cronies of the speaker hastened to back up this idea, but the women still looked doubtful.

"If you can't decide now, we'll discuss it later," suggested Little Li, but this suggestion won no more support than the other.

The League members finally agreed that since Huan-ch'ao had always owned a little land he should be called a poor peasant. This solution had one added advantage. It avoided the mysterious category of "worker."

In the case posed by Huan-ch'ao the peasants confronted a basic problem of economic theory. Their dispute arose from the obvious fact that the work done by different individuals, whether judged by the quantity or by the quality of the output, is not equal. In spite of this, wages and prices tend to standardize, a reflection of the socially necessary labor time required to turn out any given piece of goods. But to arrive at the concept of socially necessary labor time required a breadth of experience and a level of abstract reasoning that could hardly be expected of the peasants of Long Bow at this time. What they saw was a poor craftsman asking for the same return on his labor as a good craftsman, and this smacked to them of exploitation.

Ch'i Yun could hardly restrain her chuckles as she explained to me the give and take over Huan-ch'ao, the blacksmith. That a skilled worker could exploit the people who hired him was a startling idea to anyone with a Marxist outlook, and she marveled at the ingenuity of those peasants who had thought it up. She grossly underestimated their inventiveness, however, for on the very next day they found exploitation in an even more unlikely place—in the relation between a widow and her lover.

There lived in the village a lean old peasant named Wang who had long been in love with, or at least was wont to make love to, a rich peasant's widow named Yu Pu-ho. What little of value he possessed or

produced, Wang sooner or later brought to his prosperous and beloved mistress. While his own son and daughter-in-law hired out in order to eat, he skimmed everything edible from his homestead and sacrificed it on the altar of love. If his hen laid an egg, he offered it up. If the eggplant in his dooryard garden produced a firm purple fruit, he brought it around. He even neglected his own land to work long hours on that of the passionate widow.

When Wang's paramour came before the Provisional League, the spokesman for one group of women took the floor at once. "We think she is a double landlord. She exploits hired labor and she exploits her lover. She exploits everything he has, even the eggs from his hens."

At this everyone laughed except the prim black-clad widow herself and Old Wang. The latter, expecting the worst, looked anxiously around the room for some sign of disagreement.

Wang need not have been so concerned. The men did not agree with the women.

"If he's exploited, that's his lookout," shouted a well-groomed youngster from the warmest spot on the *k'ang*. "He wants it that way. What can we do about it?"

The "double landlord" classification was withdrawn.

Some peasants found still a third form of exploitation in the behavior of certain scoundrels or lumpen elements. Just as every Western city has its declassed people, its professional beggars, its small-time racketeers, and skid row derelicts, so every Chinese village once had its *yu min* or rascals, men and women without legitimate means of support, gamblers, "broken shoes" (prostitutes), narcotics peddlers, and drifters. In political tracts and mobilization speeches they rated only occasional mention, but in real life they were very much a part of every village scene.

In Long Bow the most notorious of these *yu min* was Wang T'ao-yuan. Of him people said, *"Hsiang yen pu li k'ou, shou tien pu li shou."* (The cigarette never leaves his lips, the flashlight never leaves his hand.) He had survived the lean years of the occupation on profits from heroin peddling, on brokerage fees earned selling other people's wives, and on the proceeds of the sale of his own wife, a record unsavory enough to have made him an object of universal scorn and hate.

Wang had reformed somewhat after receiving land in the distribution but he still shrank from hard work. Only a few weeks before he appeared to be classified he sent his nephew on a coal-hauling expedition instead of going himself. The temperature that week hovered around zero. The nephew did not know how to care for an animal

in such a frost. As a result, the one donkey owned by the family caught a chill, fell ill, and died.

In spite of all this, the peasants were curiously lenient with Wang T'ao-yuan. His broad comic face and genial disposition seemed to charm them. If nothing else he had always been a good companion. Because he knew how to laugh at himself and to make others laugh too, people found it difficult to stay angry at him for long.

But Cadre Liang, who passionately hated dope and purveyors of dope, was not willing to see T'ao-yuan get off so easily. Ignoring the economic criteria for judging the man's class, he slashed at the criminal nature of his past.

"Perhaps there are some who want to save face for T'ao-yuan," suggested Liang. "They had better think it over. Who led the entire family in smoking poison? If Long Bow had not been liberated they would all have died of starvation. And why did he sell the stuff? Why, in this whole village did no one else sell heroin but he? Let's ask why many an honest laborer among you has not yet *fanshened.* Then compare your condition with his. In the past, there were those who stood higher than the poor peasants. Now, after liberation they still have the upper hand. Why are such people always able to take advantage of every situation? Why? T'ao-yuan should be forced to explain his past."

Responding with alacrity to Liang's suggestion, T'ao-yuan said, "I began smoking heroin in the famine year and everything I had went to pay for it." There was a suggestion of languid sensuality in his stance and a puckish grin came and went on his face as he revealed his amoral past. "When I had nothing left I took my wife to Taiyuan. We were half dead from hunger before I finally found a buyer for her. He gave me six bags of millet. That sealed the deal."

Even to T'ao-yuan this sounded a little brutal so he added a twist to the tale that put the blame where it obviously belonged—on his wife.

"While I was out looking for work I had to leave my wife alone at the inn. She took up with another man. The master of the inn tipped me off and suggested that I get rid of her. He also found the buyer.

"I helped Wang Hsi-nan sell his wife too," continued T'ao-yuan, but once again he cleverly absolved himself. "Hsi-nan suggested it and even sought me out; he came over and over again. His wife was 'white, bright, and lovely,' but she was an idiot. She couldn't cook or sew. She couldn't even wipe her own behind. He got stuck with her and he wanted to get rid of her. He wouldn't stop pestering me so finally I undertook to sell her. I got nothing for my pains. Even after she was delivered I didn't have enough left over to buy heroin. I was

in terrible shape. But Hsi-nan played square. He at least found me some heroin.

"I know it is a bad thing to sell heroin. I exploited others. I preyed on the addicts. But now I have *fanshened.* I received land and property but I do not deserve any such thing. I know my *fanshen* was due to my poor brothers and I must thank them. I wish you would criticize me more."

"How do you feel about the death of your donkey?" asked a neighbor.

"I borrowed BRC 200,000* to buy the little bastard. Now it is dead. You can imagine yourself how I feel," said Wang, and he began to weep right there in front of the whole group.

"How do you feel about selling your wife?" asked several women.

Wang T'ao-yuan made no answer. He only wept more despondently.

"Well, you sold her, and now you weep about it!"

"No," said Wang. "I am not weeping for my bartered wife. I am weeping for my dead donkey."

To punish him they classed him as a middle peasant, but even this did not satisfy the women. "He ought to be classed as a landlord's running dog," said several. But they said it in a whisper because the men, on the whole, sympathized with Wang.

****

Disagreements over the class status of various Long Bow residents pointed up the need for accurate standards of comparison. In preparatory conferences the work team cadres had studied such standards. Now, as the problems of differentiation grew more and more complicated, they introduced them to the peasants of the Provisional League.

The standards they introduced were roughly the same as those adopted by the Communist Party of China in 1933 when the first "Land to the Tiller" policy was carried out in the old revolutionary base at Juichin, Kiangsi.** Most of the poor peasants, after two years of campaigning, understood the standards fairly well, but as they applied them the deficiencies of the relatively simple concepts of 1933 became more and more apparent.

The Juichin standards, it turned out, were strong in defining the center of gravity of each rural class, that pole which determined the special nature of its typical members and their special relationship

* BRC (Border Region Currency): 1000 BRC = U.S. $1.00

** These standards are given in full in the basic definitions of Appendix C.

to the means of production. The standards were weak, however, in defining exact boundary lines between the classes. They lacked the precision necessary to distinguish between the many borderline, atypical cases that showed up so frequently in real life.

By far the most important dividing line was that between the middle peasants and the rich peasants. The Draft Agrarian Law of 1947 had made this the great divide between friend and enemy, between the people and their oppressors, between revolution and counter-revolution. It was absolutely essential that this line be clear and unequivocal. Yet here the Juichin documents were most ambiguous. In describing middle peasants the document said, "Some of the middle peasants practice a *small* amount of exploitation, but such exploitation is not of a *constant* character and the income therefrom does not constitute their *main* means of livelihood."

Anyone using these standards would have to know exactly what *small, constant,* and *main* meant in order to carry out the intent of the law.

In regard to the difference between poor peasants and middle peasants the same kind of difficulty arose. On this dividing line the Juichin document stated, "In general middle peasants need not sell their labor power but poor peasants have to sell their labor power for limited periods." Another sentence indicated that even middle peasants sometimes did sell their labor power. In order to make a precise determination, one would have to know what was meant by *in general* and *limited periods.*

As classification progressed, both the cadres and the peasants in Long Bow keenly felt the need for something more precise. This need was met, in part at least, by a set of supplementary regulations issued by the Central Committee in the fall of 1947. On the dividing line between middle and rich peasants these regulations stated that an income received from exploitation that was less than 15 percent of the gross was *small* and hence permissible for a middle peasant. Anything over that was considered *large* and enough to put the family over the line into the rich peasant category.

On the dividing line between middle and poor peasants, the regulations made clear that the labor power sold by middle peasants was mainly surplus labor power or the labor power of the children and old folks. Any family that consistently sold the labor power of its able-bodied adult members must ordinarily be classed as poor.

Another keenly felt need was for some definite base period. Was one to consider the present status of the family, the status several years back, or the status in the light of several generations? When left to themselves, the peasants of Long Bow tended to go back two

and even three generations. This was in accord with habits deeply ingrained in the Chinese people, habits which had much precedent in the culture of the past. Under the old imperial examination system, for example, candidates had to prove not only that they themselves were not representatives of some barred category (boatman, actor, prostitute, or other "wandering" type) but also that their parents and grandparents were free of any such taint. Settlers in Shantung whose parents or grandparents had migrated from Hopei still regarded themselves as Hopei people.

This concept of hereditary social status helped to explain the wide support given to the campaign against "feudal tails" which had so sharpened the struggle and broadened the revolutionary target in 1946. Yet such a concept could hardly be said to conform to conditions of modern life. The disintegration of traditional Chinese society under the impact of foreign conquest, commercial dumping, dynastic decline, civil war and famine had introduced such a mobility into social relations (most of it downward) that it was no longer realistic to think of tracing back even five years, not to mention a few generations.

In view of these facts, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party added to the supplementary regulations a section which strictly defined the base period to be used in making a determination of class status. In areas liberated after 1945 it was to be the three years prior to the liberation of the village. For the Fifth District of Lucheng County this meant the years 1943-1945. Each family was to be judged according to its economic position during those three years alone. The fact that a family had once been very wealthy, rented out land, or hired many laborers, made no difference to its class status if, during the three years of the base period, its able-bodied members earned their own living or a major portion of it by their own labor. Likewise, the fact that a man had once been a poor peasant made no difference at all if, during the base period, he had collected rents, hired laborers, or loaned out money at usurious interest rates.

By the same token, inherited wealth possessed by families who labored for a living during the base period could not be touched. It mattered not in the least what the source of any family's wealth might be. If the able-bodied members of that family earned their living by the sweat of their brow during the three years prior to the liberation of their village, they themselves were not rich peasants or landlords and could not legally be attacked or deprived of any property.

In brief, the reforms called for in the Draft Agrarian Law were to be based on class status, not class origin, on current means of livelihood, not on past privilege or past penury.

31

The Revolutionary Heat

I began as a student and acquired at school the habits of a student; in the presence of a crowd of students who could neither fetch nor carry for themselves, I used to feel it undignified to do any manual labor, such as shouldering my own luggage. At that time it seemed to me that the intellectuals were the only clean persons in the world, and the workers and peasants seemed rather dirty beside them. I could put on the clothes of other intellectuals because I thought they were clean, but I would not put on clothes belonging to a worker or peasant because I felt they were dirty. Having become a revolutionary I found myself in the same ranks as the workers, peasants, and soldiers of the revolutionary army, and gradually I became familiar with them and they with me too. It was then and only then that a fundamental change occurred in the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois feelings implanted in me by the bourgeois schools. I came to feel that it was those unremolded intellectuals who were unclean as compared to the workers and peasants, while the workers and peasants are after all the cleanest persons—even though their hands are soiled and their feet are smeared with cow dung. This is what is meant by having one's feelings transformed, changed from those of one class to those of another.

Mao Tse-tung

THE CLASSIFICATION meetings continued for days. Hour after hour we sat in the ice-cold adobe dwellings of the poor and listened as discussion followed report and report followed discussion. We were glad when the press of people was such that padded limbs and torsos leaned against us from all sides. In such close quarters the heat generated by each participant helped to keep his neighbor warm. When the crush was great enough, body heat even took the chill off the air in the room. Unknown to me this close contact made inevitable a form of heat that continued to warm all participants long after the meeting was over.

One cold night as Ch'i Yun and I walked homeward across the flat toward Kao Settlement, I began to notice an uncomfortable burning sensation on the skin of my shoulders and up both sides of my neck. This soon spread to the small of my back and to those areas

of my stomach where a worn leather belt held my padded trousers tight against my flesh.

As soon as I got home I took off my jacket, turned it inside out, held it close to the burning wick of the single, bean-oil lamp allotted to me, and took a close look. The lining was alive with flat, crawling mites, some of them transparently white, others already dark with engorged blood. Lice!

So that was it. The ubiquitous vermin had found me already!

Having examined my jacket, I took off my pants. They were as alive with lice as the jacket.

My padded outfit could not be washed, nor could I in good conscience ask for another. There was only one thing to do—pick off the lice, crush them, and start over. I knew well enough how lice were hunted. How many times had I watched peasants sitting in the warm sun with their jackets over their knees pursuing the slow-crawling vermin, catching them between their thumb-nails and squeezing them until they burst? But that night, holding my jacket close to the flame, I could not bring myself to begin. I pictured to myself how the lice would snap and crumble, how the blood would spurt. I had no stomach for it. Finally I laid the jacket on the floor, found a pair of chopsticks, and picked the lice out of the lining as if I were picking delicacies off a banquet table. One by one I dropped them on a smooth brick and crushed them with a stone. By this aseptic but laborious method I gradually cut down the voracious army in my garments.

While I was in the midst of the hunt one of my English students came to the door. Shamefaced, I dropped the chopsticks and threw the jacket over a chair. It was too late. The student had seen what I was up to and began to laugh. Through him word soon spread to the whole University and into the village beyond that Old Han, the American, was catching lice with chopsticks and crushing them with bricks and stones.

Such was my baptism of fire, such my introduction to the notorious "revolutionary heat" that several generations of Chinese students and intellectuals had learned to bear without complaint because they felt that their country needed them among the people.

When the time came to search my clothes the second time I found that I was far less squeamish than at first. Soon I was hunting lice like a veteran and exhibiting the bloodstains on my thumbnails to anyone rash enough to tease me about chopsticks and bricks.

Just as I became accustomed to the lice I also became accustomed to other aspects of village life that had at first upset me: shaves from an itinerant barber whose hot but far from sterile towel made no

distinction between eyes half closed with trachoma and eyes as yet unharmed; once-a-month baths in the public bathhouse at Changchih where the flotsam washed from countless earlier patrons floated in an oily film on the steaming pools, where men relieved their bladders in one corner of the room and spat wherever they found it convenient; meals taken in the hovels of the poor where one shared chopsticks with people suffering from incurable disease and swallowed down, day after day, the dreary boiled corn dumplings called *ke ta;* daily encounters with privies in which night soil accumulated the year round and gave off such fumes of ammonia that tears started in one's eyes and the stomach churned.

Eating out was the real test. When we first arrived in the village the attack on Little Ch'uer had caused a general retreat. Team Leader Hou, fearing for our safety, had asked us to take our meals with the rest of the cadres in the District Office. But as the days went by, tension abated. After a couple of weeks Hou decided that we could eat out as the rest of the team members had already begun to do. Each day we took millet tickets issued to us by the University and gave them to a poor peasant's wife in return for our noon meal. In this way we gradually became acquainted not only with the most active poor peasants in the village, but with their homes, their wives, their children, and their less active relatives as well.

Some of these homes were as spotlessly clean as a dirt-floored, earthen-walled, paper-windowed North China hut could be made. The floors were swept, the *k'angs* dusted, the bright-colored quilts neatly folded back against the wall of the sleeping quarters, and the round-bottomed cooking pot, the bowls, and the chopsticks scoured until they shone.

In other homes we found the opposite condition. The dwelling of Tseng Chung-hsi, former puppet policeman and a peasant who had lost both house and land in the Anti-Traitor Movement, may serve as an example. Tseng was the informer who had betrayed So-tzu, Lai-pao, and Fu-yuan to the puppet captain in the Long Bow fort and so was blamed by the entire village for the deaths of the two resistance heroes. That he was still alive seemed incongruous, especially when one recalled the violence of the post-liberation reaction against puppets and collaborators. However, we found him not only alive but in possession of land and housing handed out to make up for that which he had lost. That the new equalled the old was doubtful. Tseng's whole family lived in a cramped shed that was divided into two equal parts. On one side were housed the farming implements and carpenter's tools that enabled him to make a living. Several chickens roosted on these implements and spread their drop-

pings at random on the floor. On the other side six people ate and slept—Tseng, his wife, two daughters (aged one and 13), and two sons (aged three and seven). The room was a shambles, smoke-blackened and cluttered with scraps, wheat roots, broken tools, crocks, and rags. On the narrow *k'ang* that filled the south end of the living space lay the eldest daughter. She lay under a grime-covered quilt; through its holes portions of her emaciated limbs protruded. She coughed, spat blood, and coughed interminably. For a year she had been immobilized there, near death from turberculosis. The rest of the family slept beside her, shared food and utensils with her, and breathed the same air she breathed in that stagnant, smoke-filled hell.

The odor of decay all but overpowered us as we came through the door. In addition to the strong aroma of baby urine that rose from the floor, the pungent scent of chicken dung wafting in from the adjacent room, and the swirling smoke from the wheat-root fire, the air was saturated with the rotten smell of the girl's lacerated lungs. Tseng's 30-year-old wife, thin, careworn, her face already wrinkled like that of a woman twice her age, served us lukewarm corn dumplings in bowls caked with the dried leavings of many a previous meal. For lack of any other resting place, we sat on the *k'ang* beside the dying girl and ate.

I knew that the bowls, the chopsticks, the very air that we were breathing was infected with tuberculousis, but I had to carry on as if nothing were amiss. This was a test of stamina such as every land reform worker went through. Unless one were willing to share the trials of other people, one did not deserve their trust. I thought to myself, "If Ch'i Yun can take this, I can too." One glance in her direction indicated that she was completely oblivious to her surroundings. She was eating her dumpling as if it were a sugar bun, and talking to Tseng's wife. She soon learned the woman's maiden name, where she came from, how much Tseng had paid for her, whether she had ever been to a village meeting, and what she thought of the Women's Association.

Ch'i Yun was magnificent. She was doing her job. The least I could do was to eat the corn in front of me.

Eating out brought us into touch with people in a way that a thousand meetings never could, and soon we became fast friends with a score of peasants who looked forward to our coming and vied with each other in issuing invitations.

Prominent among these was the old woman whom we had noticed winding cotton so intently as Little Li read the Announcement to the Peasants in Chief-of-Staff Hsu's loft. At every subsequent meeting she sought us out, filled us in on the background of the people

who appeared before the Provisional League for classification, and related to us all the latest gossip from the southwest sector of the village. At the same time she took an active part in the meetings herself. Ch'i-Yun decided that this woman was a genuine "active element" who could play an important role in the events to come and asked the District Office to arrange a meal in her home.

This old lady's married named was Wang. She was known to most of the villagers as Old Lady Wang, but because her husband was very old and no longer able to work, some ignored him altogether and called her Jen-pao's mother, as if she were already a widow. Jen-pao was the 18-year-old son whom she was sending through high school at the county seat on the proceeds of her spinning and weaving.

When we showed up for our first meal, Old Lady Wang never stopped working and never stopped talking.

"Every day that I work," she said, "I can earn ten catties of millet. Why should I waste time at all these meetings? Well, I want to know more and I think all poor peasants must *fanshen*. One can't just worry about oneself any more. If we don't unite none of us is safe."

That she wasted time at meetings was something of an exaggeration. We knew that she never came to a meeting without some work in hand and spent her time furiously reeling, stitching, or spinning. But we did not challenge her statement. No doubt at home she accomplished twice as much.

She proudly showed us her loom which she was threading in preparation for a new bolt of homespun cloth and boasted of all the skills she possessed such as spinning, weaving, fluffing cotton with a taut-stringed bow, and making shoes. She was one of the few women in the village who still knew how to weave at a time when that ancient art had suffered almost total extinction due to the cheap imported and coastal manufactured textiles.

The old lady told us how she had come from Shantung Province more than 20 years before, after her first husband had died. She, her mother, her brother, and her daughter ran out of money on the road. They tried to sell the little girl for enough cash to continue. A buyer was found, but when the time came to leave the child behind, both the grandmother and the child cried so bitterly that the man thought better of the deal. He returned the child and gave the family enough wheat flour to last them a few more days. But tragedy trod the heels of luck. Even before the wheat had been consumed, the little girl fell ill and died.

The surviving wanderers from Shantung finally arrived in the

mountains of Shansi as outright beggars. A distant relative arranged for Old Lady Wang to marry the laborer, Wang-shen, a man 20 years her senior. It was either marry or starve to death, so the handsome young widow consented. The match was ill-starred from the beginning. She was so badly treated by Wang's brother that her own mother and brother walked out one day in protest and were never heard from again.

"I did not hate him," Old Lady Wang said of the brother, who had long since died. "It was the old society that made him cruel. In the old society everyone oppressed others.

"During the famine year I peddled beancake. My pants wore so thin that people could see my *p'i ku* (buttocks) through the holes and made fun of me," she said. "Now things are much better. We got an acre and a half at the time of the distribution and 30 bushels of corn and millet. We also bought half a donkey, and I got an old felt mat for the *k'ang* for five ounces of grain. The cadres didn't want me to have it, but I got it anyway."

In spite of her improved condition, Old Lady Wang thought that she had not really *fanshened.* With only two sections of house, how could she take in a daughter-in-law when her son married in the fall? There would be no place for the girl and the land would hardly yield enough to support them. And what would happen when she had grandchildren? "The only other thing that worries me is the fate of my mother and brother," she said, wiping away involuntary tears. "They left so long ago! I often weep when I think of them."

But the tears soon dried on her cheeks as she got out her bow and began to prepare some raw cotton for the lining of a padded suit.

****

Old Lady Wang's home, though small, was often used for meetings. It was centrally located. It contained no small children underfoot who might disrupt the proceedings, and it was always neat and clean.

It was in this house that the poor peasant Chang Lao-pao clashed with his estranged wife over his class status and exposed another of those domestic tragedies left over from the old society, tragedies that corroded the very roots of Long Bow's social life and made a mockery of the vaunted Chinese family system so celebrated in the West.

One might suppose that the relations between a man and his wife should have very little to do with his class status, but in this case the relationship became central because the per capita holdings

of Chang's family varied greatly depending on whether one included his wife and daughter or not.

On March 20th, Lao-pao came before the Provisional League to make his "self report." He was a tall man with a leathery face and deeply wrinkled skin. It was hard to judge how old he was because the wrinkles made him look 50, whereas the vigor of his movements and the fullness of his muscles indicated that he might be still in his thirties.

Lao-pao said that in 1942 he owned three acres and supported four people. They got along well enough until the famine year. Then he took his family to Taiyuan. He brought them back in 1946. He had never owned livestock or farming implements. He said he was a poor peasant.

"But his wife always earned her own living," protested Old Lady Wang, well aware of what that meant in terms of sweat and pain. "Before 1942 she worked in another village as a servant. After that she hired out as a seasonal laborer and supported herself and her daughter. We can't count them in the family."

"Can you get along with your wife?" they asked Lao-pao. "If not, you are a middle peasant."

At this Lao-pao lost his temper.

"Call me any class you like. Call me a landlord if you want to."

"Let's call his wife and ask her," suggested Old Lady Wang.

"She's nothing but an old bitch," said Lao-pao. "Why should you ask her? You're here to class me. Why not do it according to my condition? If you don't believe what I say, do as you like."

He was just like a stone. Everyone agreed on that.

"The fact is, he can't get on with anyone but his mother. She's the root of the whole trouble," said several of his neighbors.

In spite of Lao-pao's objections, they called in his wife.

She turned out to be a thin browned woman, prematurely aged and clad in garments that were dirty, ragged, and many years old. They barely concealed two breasts which hung down like flaps of old leather over her stomach. Her hair tumbled in tangled knots before her face, some strands of it already grey. She talked rapidly, bitterly, but with spirit. She brought with her a wan little girl, about seven years old, but so small she might have been four. The youngster was also clad in rags. She stared silently at the crowd of peasants with her large black eyes and kept her mouth tightly shut.

"I have no opinion about his class myself," said Lao-pao's "old lady." "I've always been walked over by him and his mother. He's not such a bad man himself, but his temper is short. As for my mother-in-law, I can say nothing good for her. She never spoke

rudely to my face, but only clawed me when my back was turned and ran me down to her son so that we quarrelled. As for me, I worked as a servant in Horse Square, Yellow Mill, and many other places. Though they never gave me any cloth, still I made clothes for him and supported myself with my own hands. All my neighbors know that. I only speak true words."

"What about your class? Do you want to be classed as one family or separately?"

"It's all the same to me," she said, shrugging her lean shoulders. "I have no opinion." A sharp edge of bitterness was clearly discernible in her voice.

When they asked Lao-pao, he said the same thing. "I have no opinion."

His wife disputed this. "He doesn't want me to return home. We separated the year before last. I was out working. When I got back they had already moved into a new house and locked the door. I wanted to pack up and move there but my big box was too heavy for me to lift, so I went to his mother to ask for help. She said, 'If you want you can move it yourself. Otherwise stay where you are. We have no place for your big box or you either.' I knew what she meant. But since the *k'ang* was so big, big enough for ten boxes of mine, I asked her why she said that. Two people can hardly use one end of that *k'ang*. This started a quarrel. The neighbors came then. They tried to get Lao-pao to carry my box over but he refused. Since then I have lived in the old place by myself. He doesn't speak to me when we meet in the street."

"Lao-pao is always in a squeeze," said one peasant. "He dares not say anything to offend his mother, nor can he make peace with his wife. He's just like a hand towel, always in the middle and both sides lay the blame on him. But really, he only cares for his mother and abuses and beats his wife."

"Don't waste your time on this case," said Lao-pao to the meeting in general. "I know I'm just the dirty towel."

"Don't force him into anything," countered his wife. "I can live on by myself."

A reprimand from Cadre Liang and a sympathtic suggestion from Ch'i Yun that Lao-pao at least try to reunite his family had no effect

"If I had such a good wife, I would kneel down before God," said an old bachelor. He was the same man who had tried to smooth the way for the blacksmith, Huan-ch'ao. "You, you don't know how painful is the life of a single man. You had better look at it from all sides. How will you get on after your mother's death? You'd better take this chance to get off the stage."

But Lao-pao only shrugged at this too. They finally classed him as a poor peasant anyway, but as one who had now *fanshened.* He strode off cursing.

His wife stayed on and, as the meeting broke up, talked to the group of women that formed sympathetically around her.

"You can do nothing to help my family," she said. "My neighbors have already tried many times. It is no use. It's better this way. I live by my own work and my life is better than before. Then it was one quarrel after another. Once I asked him to get some water from the well. But he was too lazy to go. Later he got out some beans and started building a fire. I said, 'You're too lazy to get any water. How do you think you will cook those beans?' He hit me so hard I fell to the floor but I pulled him down with me and only the neighbors finally separated us. If they hadn't, one of us would be dead. Another time he cut my left arm with a spade. Once we cut wheat in the field. His mother brought food and we quarrelled. When she left he cut me across the forehead with his sickle."

After listening to these stories the women all said it was better for Lao-pao's wife to live alone. Then she could bring up her daughter in peace. "If you return, you will only suffer oppression. Only after your mother-in-law dies can you be reconciled."

That there was another side to this story we heard only later. Some of the young women, less sympathetic to Lao-pao's wife, told Ch'i Yun that the sharp-tongued woman earned money in other ways than labor, that she had conceived a child by another man, and that she had killed it with a needle after it was born. If this was true, the tragedy was only compounded.