

## MAO'S REVOLUTIONARY DOCTRINE

### REPORT ON AN INVESTIGATION OF THE HUNAN PEASANT MOVEMENT

Under the early leadership of Chen Duxiu the Chinese Communist Party followed a policy of collaboration with the Nationalists dictated by the Comintern. Since this

ended in near disaster for the party in 1927 and brought about Chen's fall from leadership, Chen's writings and ideas do not figure prominently today in the orthodox tradition of Chinese Communist doctrine. By contrast, this report on the Hunan peasant movement by Mao Zedong (1893–1976), who was then of much less importance in the party hierarchy, came to be seen, after his rise to supremacy, as a document of the greatest significance to the development of the revolution.

After taking part in the formation of the Communist Party, Mao had been assigned in 1925 to the organizing of peasants in his native Hunan, where he became convinced of the enormous revolutionary potential of the peasantry. In this report, prepared early in 1927, Mao describes the methods used by the peasant associations and reveals with undisguised satisfaction the campaign of terror waged against local landlords and officials. These terror tactics became a feature of Mao's program of class warfare in areas taken over by the Red Army. Such a condoning of extremism is contrary to the dominant strain in Chinese thought, which favors moderation, compromise, and harmony, but has ample precedent in Chinese political practice and in peasant revolutions like the Taiping movement. Curiously enough, among the great deeds of the peasants that Mao lists (including the organizing of peasants' associations and cooperatives, tax reduction, price control, and so on) we find prohibitions on gambling, smoking opium, feasting, and drinking wine, which reflect the strain of native puritanism already encountered in Taiping teaching.

More significant is the relation of the party to the peasantry. Mao emphasizes the party's need to recognize the revolutionary potential of the peasants, but it is for the party, not the peasants themselves, to assume the leadership role. Peasant rebellions in the past had come to nothing because they lacked educated leadership and organization. This the party can now provide if it frees itself from academic ways of thinking taught in the new Western-style schools and identifies with the peasant mentality. Those ready to learn from the peasants, whatever their class origins (i.e., whether peasant themselves or not), can assume the leadership as the vanguard of the revolution, and it is this party vanguard that will be entitled to claim for itself the exclusive right to rule as the "dictatorship of the proletariat" (later spoken of as "the people").

In the passages that follow, there is ample evidence of Mao's capacity to see things through the eyes of the peasant, but there are signs also of the new revolutionary expectations proclaimed in the foregoing declaration by Li Dazhao.

### The Importance of the Peasant Problem

During my recent visit to Hunan<sup>2</sup> I conducted an investigation on the spot into the conditions in the five counties of Xiangtan, Xiangxiang, Hengshan, Liling, and Changsha. In the thirty-two days from January 4 to February 5, in villages

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2. Hunan was then the storm center of the peasant movement in China. Unless otherwise noted, footnotes in these selections are from the official text. [Ed.]

and in county towns, I called together for fact-finding conferences experienced peasants and comrades working for the peasant movement, listened attentively to their reports, and collected a lot of material. Many of the hows and whys of the peasant movement were quite the reverse of what I had heard from the gentry in Hankou and Changsha. And many strange things there were that I had never seen or heard before. I think these conditions exist in many other places.

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

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

Every Chinese is free to choose among the three alternatives, but circumstances demand that a quick choice be made. [pp. 21–22]

### Down with the Local Bullies and Bad Gentry!

All Power to the Peasant Association!

The peasants attack as their main targets the local bullies and bad gentry and the lawless landlords, hitting in passing against patriarchal ideologies and institutions, corrupt officials in the cities, and evil customs in the rural areas. In force and momentum, the attack is like a tempest or hurricane; those who submit to it survive and those who resist it perish.

### “An Awful Mess!” and “Very Good Indeed!”

The revolt of the peasants in the countryside disturbed the sweet dreams of the gentry. When news about the countryside reached the cities, the gentry there immediately burst into an uproar. When I first arrived in Changsha, I met people from various circles and picked up a good deal of street gossip. From the middle strata upward to the right-wingers of the Nationalists, there was not a single person who did not summarize the whole thing in one phrase: “An awful mess!” . . .

But the fact is . . . that the broad peasant masses have risen to fulfill their

historic mission, that the democratic forces in the rural areas have risen to overthrow the rural feudal power. [pp. 23–25]

### The Question of “Going Too Far”

There is another section of people who say, “Although the peasant association ought to be formed, it has gone rather too far in its present actions.” This is the opinion of the middle-of-the-rovers. But . . .

The opinion of this group, reasonable on the surface, is erroneous at bottom.

First, the things described above have all been the inevitable results of the doings of the local bullies and bad gentry and lawless landlords themselves.

Second, a revolution is not the same as inviting people to dinner, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing fancy needlework; it cannot be anything so refined, so calm and gentle, or so mild, kind, courteous, restrained, and magnanimous.<sup>3</sup> A revolution is an uprising, an act of violence whereby one class overthrows another. A rural revolution is a revolution by which the peasantry overthrows the authority of the feudal landlord class. If the peasants do not use the maximum of their strength, they can never overthrow the authority of the landlords, which has been deeply rooted for thousands of years. In the rural areas, there must be a great fervent revolutionary upsurge, which alone can arouse hundreds and thousands of the people to form a great force. [pp. 26–27]

### Vanguard of the Revolution

The main force in the countryside that has always put up the bitterest fight is the poor peasants. Throughout both the period of underground organization and that of open organization, the poor peasants have fought militantly all along. They accept most willingly the leadership of the Communist Party. [p. 31]

### Overthrowing the Clan Authority of the Elders and Ancestral Temples, the Theocratic Authority of the City Gods and Local Deities, and the Masculine Authority of the Husbands

A man in China is usually subjected to the domination of three systems of authority: (1) the system of the state (political authority), ranging from the national, provincial, and county government to the township government; (2) the system of the clan (clan authority), ranging from the central and branch ancestral temples to the head of the household; and (3) the system of gods and

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3. These were the virtues of Confucius, as described by one of his disciples.

spirits (theocratic authority), including the system of the netherworld ranging from the King of Hell to the city gods and local deities, and that of supernatural beings ranging from the Emperor of Heaven to all kinds of gods and spirits. As to women, apart from being dominated by the three systems mentioned above, they are further dominated by men (the authority of the husband). These four kinds of authority — political authority, clan authority, theocratic authority, and the authority of the husband — represent the whole ideology and institution of feudalism and patriarchy and are the four great cords that have bound the Chinese people and particularly the peasants. We have already seen the peasants are overthrowing the political authority of the landlords in the countryside. The political authority of the landlords is the backbone of all other systems of authority. Where it has already been overthrown, clan authority, theocratic authority, and the authority of the husband are all beginning to totter.

Theocratic authority begins to totter everywhere as the peasant movement develops. In many places the peasant associations have taken over the temples of the gods as their offices. Everywhere they advocate the appropriation of temple properties to maintain peasant schools and to defray association expenses, calling this “public revenue from superstition.” . . . In places where the power of the peasants is predominant, only the older peasants and the women still believe in gods, while the young and middle-aged peasants no longer do so. Since it is the young and middle-aged peasants who are in control of the peasant association, the movement to overthrow theocratic authority and eradicate superstition is going on everywhere.

As to the authority of the husband, it has always been comparatively weak among the poor peasants, because the poor peasant women, compelled for financial reasons to take more part in manual work than women of the wealthier classes, have obtained more right to speak and more power to make decisions in family affairs. In recent years the rural economy has become even more bankrupt and the basic condition for men’s domination over women has already been undermined. And now, with the rise of the peasant movement, women in many places have set out immediately to organize the rural women’s association; the opportunity has come for them to lift up their heads, and the authority of the husband is tottering more and more every day. In a word, all feudal and patriarchal ideologies and institutions are tottering as the power of the peasants rises. [pp. 45–49]

### Cultural Movement

With the downfall of the power of the landlords in the rural areas, the peasants’ cultural movement has begun. And so the peasants, who hitherto bitterly hated the schools, are now zealously organizing evening classes. The “foreign-style schools” were always unpopular with the peasants. In my student days I used to stand up for the “foreign-style schools” when, upon returning to my native

place, I found the peasants objecting to them. I was myself identified with the “foreign-style students” and “foreign-style teachers” and always felt that the peasants were somehow wrong. It was during my six months in the countryside in 1925, when I was already a Communist and had adopted the Marxist viewpoint, that I realized I was mistaken and that the peasants’ views were right. The teaching materials used in the real primary schools all dealt with city matters and were in no way adapted to the needs of the rural areas. . . . As a result, the peasants wanted old-style rather than modern schools — “Chinese classes,” as they call them, rather than “foreign classes” — and they preferred the masters of the old-style school to the teachers in the primary schools.

Now the peasants are energetically organizing evening classes, which they call peasant schools. The county education boards wanted to use these public funds for establishing primary schools, that is, “foreign-style schools” not adapted to the needs of the peasants, while the peasants wanted to use them for peasant schools. . . . As a result of the growth of the peasant movement, the cultural level of the peasants has risen rapidly. [pp. 56–57]

[Mao, *Selected Works*, 1:21–57]