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Conrad Brandt, A Documentary History of Chinese Communism, Harvard U. Press, 1952, pp. 80-89

MAO TSE-TUNG: REPORT ON AN INVESTIGATION OF THE PEASANT MOVEMENT IN HUMAN (Feb. 1927)

I. AGRARIAN REVOLUTION

Seriousness of the Peasant Problem. On a thirty-two-day (Jan. 4-Feb. 5, 1927) inspection tour of five hsien (districts or counties) of Hunan--Hsiangtan, Hsianghsiang, Hengshan, Liling, and Changsha--I have collected a considerable body of materials by listening carefully to reports made by ~~the~~ experienced peasants and comrades in the peasant movement at informatory meetings held both in county-seats and villages. Many aspects of the peasant movement directly contradict what we have learned from the gentry in Hankow and Changsha. Some unique incidents have never been seen or heard of before. These conditions, I think, prevail in other provinces too; thus various arguments against the peasant movement must be controverted immediately and the erroneous decisions of the revolutionary regime (i.e. the Wuhan government) in regard to the peasant movement must be quickly corrected. Only thus can the revolution benefit in the future. The further development of the peasant movement is a tremendous problem. Within a short time, hundreds of millions of peasants will rise in Central, South, and North China, with the fury of a hurricane; no power, however strong, can restrain them. They will break all the shackles that bind them and rush towards the road of liberation. All imperialists, warlords, corrupt officials, and bad gentry will meet their doom at the hands of the peasants. All revolutionary parties and comrades will be judged by them. Are we to get in front of them and lead them or criticize them behind their backs or fight them from the opposite camp? Among these three alternatives every Chinese can choose freely, but the current situation demands a quick decision. The following are the results of my inspection and my opinions are presented in detail for reference by revolutionary comrades.

Let's Organize. The Hunanese peasant movement, as regards the well-organized counties-in-central and southern Hunan, can be divided into two stages: the first being that of organization, from January to September 1926. Within this stage, there was a secret period from January to June and an open period from July to September, when the revolutionary armies were engaged in the Ousting of Chao (Chao Hang-shi, then governor of Hunan). In that stage, the total membership of the Peasant Associations did not exceed 3,000,000 or ~~the~~ 4,000,000, and the masses under their direct command totalled just a little over 1,000,000. There were few instances of conflict inside the villages; hence there was only a little criticism from the different classes in this regard. Because members of the Peasant Associations served (the revolutionary army) as guides, scouts, and coolies, some officers spoke even favourably of them. The second, or revolutionary, stage lasted from October (1926) to January of this year. The membership of the Peasant Associations jumped up to 2,000,000 and the number of people under their direct command increased to 10,000,000. (When joining a Peasant Association, the peasants usually put down one name for the whole family; thus 2,000,000 members means 10,000,000 people.) About half of the entire peasantry in Hunan is organized. In such places as Hsiangtan, Hsianghsiang, Liuyang, Changsha, Liling, Ningsien, Pingkiang, Hsiangying, Hengshan, Hongyang, Leliang, Chenhsien, Anhwa, etc., almost the entire peasantry has been incorporated into the Peasant Associations and take orders from them. After organizing themselves extensively, the peasants began to take action. Thus, within four months, an unprecedented agrarian revolution broke out.

Down with the Village Bosses (t'u-hao) and Bad Gentry. All Power Belongs to the Peasant Associations. After the peasants organized themselves, action ensued. The major targets of their attack were the t'u-hao, bad gentry, and illegitimate landlords, as well as the old patriarchal ideology, corruption of city officials, and undesirable village customs. This attack was like a hurricane: only those could

survive who bent to its force. As a result, privileges of the feudal landlord class, thousands of years old, were totally swept away. Their prestige and prerogatives were altogether abolished. After the overthrow of the gentry's power, the Peasant Associations became the only organs of power and "all power to the Peasant Associations" became literally true. Even such trifles as quarrels between married couples were referred to the Peasant Associations for settlement. No problem could be solved independently of the Peasant Association membership, whose every word passed for a command. In the villages the Peasant Associations became the authority for everything (seeing to it that), "whatever was prescribed, was done." Outsiders could comment only favourably, not critically, on the Peasant Associations. Bad gentry, t'u-hao, and illegitimate landlords were deprived of their right of free speech; (so) nobody dared to voice objections. Under the Peasant Association regime, the top-layer t'u-hao and bad gentry fled to Shanghai; the second layer fled to Hankow; the third layer to Changsha, and the fourth layer to the county-seats (hsien cities), while the small fry of the fifth layer and below surrendered to the Peasant Associations in the villages.

"I contribute ten dollars, so please let me join the Peasant Association," pleaded the small-fry bad gentry.

"Ha! Who cares about your bloody money?" answered the peasants.

Many middle and small landlords, as well as rich and middle peasants who formerly opposed the Peasant Associations, now begged for admission to them. I met a number of those people in the places I visited, and they said: "I beg the commissioner from the capital (Changsha) to endorse me!"

At the time of the Manchŭ dynasty, when the population census was made, there were two kinds of census, one regular and another subsidiary. Decent people were registered in the regular census and bad elements such as bandits, etc., were registered in the subsidiary census. At present the peasants in some localities have threatened those who opposed the Peasant Associations with the remark: "You will be registered in the subsidiary census!"

Those who were afraid of being registered in the subsidiary census tried by various means to gain admission into the Peasant Associations, not resting till their names were included in the rosters. Often the Peasant Associations refused categorically and threw them out; then they spent their days in suspense, like homeless wanderers. Such a condition is called "Ta ling" (lit., a lone wanderer) in the local slang. Thus, the so-called "peasant society" that was despised by most people four months ago has become a thing of glory today. Those who knelt before the gentry now knelt before the power of the peasants. Indisputably, the situation before last October and that after it belong to two (different) worlds.

Very Bad and Very Good. The peasant revolt in the countryside awakened the gentry from their sweet dreams. When the news reached the cities from the villages, the urban gentry protested tumultuously. On first arriving in Changsha, I met people of different backgrounds and heard a lot of gossip. From the middle social strata to the KMT right wing the general comment was: "very bad." Even some revolutionary (-minded) people did not object to this comment, especially when they used their imagination as to the conditions in the countryside. Some progressive elements only remarked apologetically: "Though this is bad, it is inevitable during the process of revolution." All in all, nobody entirely denied the epithet "bad." But as pointed out previously, it is actually the rising up of the best peasant masses to accomplish their historic mission; it is the rising up of the democratic forces in the countryside to overthrow the feudal forces in the villages, which is the true goal of the national revolution. Sun Yat-sen devoted forty years to the national revolution; what he wanted but failed to achieve has been accomplished by the peasants in a few months. The patriarchal, feudal t'u-hao and bad gentry, together with the illegitimate landlords, were not only the foundation of the dictatorial regime of the past several thousand years, (but also) the tools of the imperialists, warlords, and corrupt officials.

This is a great achievement unprecedented in the past forty years or several thousand years. This is "very good"--not in the least "bad", and not at all "very bad." To give credits where they are due, if we allot ten points to the accomplishments of the democratic revolution, then the achievements of the urban dwellers and the military units rate only three points, while the remaining seven points should go to the peasants in their rural revolution. The comment "very bad" is obviously an argument to serve the interests of the landlords and crush the peasants; it is obviously an argument of the landlord class, which tries to preserve the old feudal order by obstructing the establishment of a new democratic order; it is obviously an anti-revolutionary argument. No revolutionary comrade should blindly repeat such remarks. If you are a person of firm revolutionary ideology and visit the countryside, you will experience a satisfaction never felt before; tens of thousands of slaves--the peasants--are overthrowing their man-eating enemy. The action of the peasants is entirely correct; their action is "very good." "Very good" is a slogan of the peasants and other revolutionary groups. All revolutionary comrades should realize that the national revolution requires a tremendous change in the villages. The Revolution of 1911 did not achieve such a change, and therefore it failed; now there is such a change, and it is one of the major factors in the accomplishment of the revolution. Every revolutionary comrade should support this movement; otherwise he is against the revolution.

The Problem of "Excesses." Another group of people say: "Peasant Associations should be organized, but their actions are too excessive." This is the argument of the middle-of-the-road group. But what are the facts? The peasants in the villages have indeed been "disorderly." The power of the Peasant Associations being supreme, the landlords have been prohibited from speaking up and their prestige is wiped out. This is like stepping on the landlord after striking him down. The phrase is coined, "All landowners are t'u-hao and all gentry are bad." In some places those who owned fifty mou of land or more were automatically called t'u-hao and those who wore long gowns were all branded as bad gentry. Their names being recorded in the subsidiary census, t'u-hao and bad gentry were fined, required to make contributions, and had their sedan chairs smashed. Some people forced their way into the homes of t'u-hao and bad gentry who were hostile to the Peasant Association, and killed their pigs and commandeered their grain. The ivory beds of the daughters and daughters-in-law of the t'u-hao and bad gentry were stepped upon by the dirty feet of the peasants. On the slightest provocation men were paraded down the streets, wearing tall paper hats (such as are worn by criminals en route to punishment). "Wile gentry! Now comes our day!" Actions were unrestrained; things were turned upside down, and terror swept some of the villages. This is what some people called "excesses", "going to the other extreme" or "unspeakable." This kind of comment appears superficially correct, but actually it is erroneous.

First, the above-mentioned incidents were the result of oppression by the t'u-hao, bad gentry, and illegitimate landlords, who bore down on the peasants with their power and privileges. Thus (the peasants') tumultuous resistance is only a reaction. Their resistance is most intensive and disorderly where t'u-hao bad gentry and illegitimate landlords have wreaked the worst damage. The peasants' eyes make no mistakes. Who is bad and who is not bad; who should be punished most severely and who should be punished lightly; the peasants judge this most clearly; only very seldom do they hand out undeserved verdicts. So even Mr. T'ang Meng-hsiao (General T'ang Sheng-chih, militarist supporter of the Wuhan government) once said: "When the peasants attacked the t'u-hao and bad gentry in the villages, they were right in nine out of ten cases."

Secondly, revolution is not a dinner-party, nor literary composition, nor painting, nor embroidering. It cannot be done so delicately, so leisurely, so gentlemanly, and so "gently, kindly, politely, plainly, and modestly" (quoted from

the Analects of Confucius). Revolution is insurrection, the violent action of one class overthrowing the power of another. An agrarian revolution is a revolution ~~made~~ by the peasantry to overthrow the power of the feudal landlord class. If the peasants do not apply great force, the power of the landlords, consolidated over thousands of years, can never be uprooted. There must be a revolutionary tidal wave in the countryside in order to mobilize tens of thousands of peasants and weld them into this great force. The excesses described above result from the tremendous revolutionary enthusiasm of the peasants. In the second (revolutionary) stage of the peasant movement, such acts are very necessary. In this second stage, an absolute peasant power must be established, no criticism of the Peasant Associations should be allowed; the gentry's power just be totally liquidated, the gentry knocked down, even trodden upon. All excesses in the second stage have a revolutionary significance. In fine, every village should be in a state of terror for a brief period; otherwise, counter-revolutionary activities in the villages cannot be suppressed, and the gentry's power cannot be overthrown. To correct wrongs one must go to the other extreme, without which they cannot be righted. The argument of this group (against peasant "excesses") appears superficially different from that of the former group; but in reality it is based on the same viewpoint, being an argument for the interests of the privileged landlord class. This kind of argument retards the development of the peasant movement and serves to sabotage the revolution. We cannot but oppose it firmly.

XI. THE VANGUARD OF REVOLUTION. The "p'i-tzu" movement (i.e. the movement of rural "undesirables"--paupers, gamblers, loafers, et al.).

The KMT right wing claims: "The peasant movement is a p'i-tzu movement--a movement of peasant loafers." This argument was widely circulated in Changsha. When I visited the villages, the gentry told me: "Peasant Associations are all right, but their present leadership is unacceptable and should be replaced." This comment has the same meaning as that of the (KMT) right wing, namely, that the peasant movement is all right (it being already in existence, no one dares to say otherwise), but that the present leaders of the peasant movement are not all right, especially those in the lower units, all of whom are allegedly p'i-tzu who used to go around in worn-out shoes, carry broken umbrellas, wear blue gowns, and gamble. In brief, all those who used to be despised and trodden down by the gentry, who had no social standing and were deprived of their right to speak, are now raising their heads. They are not only raising their heads, but are holding power in their hands. They have become kings of the village Peasant Associations (the lowest units of the Peasant Associations), which they have turned into deadly weapons. They put their muscular, swarthy hands on the heads of the gentry. They bind the bad gentry with ropes, put tall paper hats on them, and parade them through the villages. Their crude curses are heard every day by the gentry. They give orders to all, standing above all, where previously they stood below. Hence this is called "abnormal."

Revolutionary Vanguard or Revolutionary Heroes. An issue or a person can be viewed from two opposing angles; thus two contradictory arguments can be arrived at. "Very good" and "very bad" is one example; "p'i-tzu" and "revolutionary vanguard" is another. As recounted above, the peasants have fulfilled a long unfulfilled revolutionary mission, performing the major task in the national revolution. But is this revolutionary mission, this major revolutionary task, carried out by all the peasantry? No. The peasantry is divided into three sub-classes: rich, middle, and poor peasants. Their conditions differ, and so do their concepts regarding the revolution. During the first stage, rich peasants (those with cash and grain surpluses) picked up the news that (the Nationalist revolutionary army) had been routed in Kiangsi, that Chiang Kai-shek had been wounded in the foot and flown back to Kwangtung, that Tochow had been recaptured by Wu P'ei-fu, and that the Peasant Associations would not last long nor would the Three People's Principles

(San-min chu-i) expand, since they had never existed before. When managers of the village Peasant Associations (many of them p'i-tzu) approached the rich peasants with the membership list, saying: "Please join", some of the rich peasants replied blandly: "Peasant Association? I have lived and tilled the land here for many decades but have never heard of any Peasant Association; yet I still eat my rice. I advise you not to start such a thing." "To hell with the Peasant Association; heads will roll and troubles flow," answered other rich peasants. But believe it or not, the Peasant Associations have lasted several months already and even dared to oppose the gentry. Some gentry in the adjacent districts who refused to turn in their opium pipes were arrested and paraded through the villages by the Peasant Associations. Some big gentry in the cities were even killed (such as Yen Yung-ch'iu of Hsiangtan or Kang Chih-tse of Ninghsiang). On the anniversary of the October revolution, at anti-British rallies, and at the general celebration of the victory of the Northern Expedition (of 1926-27), more than 10,000 peasants raised banners of various sizes, amidst poles and hoas, and paraded in great strength. Then the rich peasants began to feel perturbed. At the celebration of the victory of the Northern Expedition, they heard that Kiukiang had fallen, that Chiang Kai-shek had not been wounded in the foot, and that Wu P'ei-fu had finally been defeated. Also the slogans "Long live the Three People's Principles", "Long live the Peasant Associations", and "Long live the peasants" appeared clearly on colourful handbills. "Long live the peasants; do these men deserve that?" The rich peasants were deeply disturbed. The Peasant Association thus assumed an important role. Its members said to the rich peasants: "Your names will be registered in the subsidiary census!" and "In a month, the membership fee for new-comers will be ten dollars!"

Under such conditions and threats the rich peasants gradually began to join the Peasant Association. Some paid the membership fee of fifty cents or one dollar (the stipulated fee is ten cents), and some were admitted only through the good offices of a third party. Some die-hards still refused to join the Peasant Associations. When the rich peasants joined the Peasant Associations, they usually put down the name of a sixty- or seventy-year-old family patriarch because they were still afraid of being conscripted. They did not work enthusiastically for the Peasant Associations, ~~they usually~~ even after joining, but remained passive. As to the middle peasants (those having no surplus cash or grain, nor debts, but barely maintaining a living), they adopted a wavering attitude, thinking that they would not benefit much from the revolution. They had rice in the pot and were not disturbed by creditors knocking at their door at midnight. On the basis of "precedent" they brooded: "Will the Peasant Associations survive?" "Are the Three People's Principles going to last?" Their consolation was: "Probably not!" They held that everything would be decided by the will of Heaven. "Organizing a Peasant Association--who knows whether the will of Heaven favours it or not?" In the first stage, when members of the Peasant Association ~~went~~ entered the households of the middle peasants with the Peasant Association roster and said: "Please join!" they answered "Do not rush me!" Only when the Peasant Associations became very powerful in the second stage did the middle peasants begin to join up. They are better than rich Peasants as Peasant Association members, but rarely become active, and retain their wavering attitude. Only one group in the countryside has fought hard and relentlessly from the very start: the poor peasants. Out of the secret stage into the open stage, it was they who fought, who organized, and who did the revolutionary work. They alone were the deadly enemies of the t'u-hao and bad gentry, whose bastions they attacked unreservedly. They alone were capable of doing the destructive work. They asked the rich and middle peasants: "We joined the Peasant Association long ago, why do you hesitate?" The rich and middle peasants answered sarcastically: "You have not a single tile above you, nor a needle-sized (strip of) land beneath you--naturally you joined the Peasant Association!"

It is true that the poor peasants have nothing to lose. They are the outcasts or semi-outcasts of the village, and some of them are literally "without a single tile

above and without a strip of land below. Why shouldn't they join the Peasant Association? According to an investigation made at Changsha, the poor peasants constituted seventy per cent, the middle peasants twenty per cent, and the rich peasants ten per cent (of the total) peasantry. The poor peasants can be further classified as very poor and poor. The very poor--twenty out of the (total) seventy per cent--are entirely without occupation, having neither land nor capital; with nothing to live on, they have to run home soldiers, or hired hands, or beggars or bandits. The remaining fifty per cent constitute the poor (peasants) who are partially without occupation, but who have a little land or capital, though not enough to meet their expenses. Thus they suffer all year long--handicraftsmen, & tenants (except rich tenants), and owner-tenants. (The percentage of poor peasants may be less in other hsien than Changsha, but the difference is slight.)

This multitudinous mass of poor peasants is the core of the Peasant Associations, the vanguard in the overthrowing of feudal forces, accomplishing the not-yet-accomplished revolutionary mission. Without the poor peasant class (in the words of the gentry: without the p'i-tzu), no revolutionary conditions would exist as they do now in rural areas; and the t'u-hao and bad gentry could never be overthrown to complete the democratic revolution. The poor peasants (especially the very poor) secured the leadership of the Peasant Associations because they were the most revolutionary. During the first and second stages (of the peasant movement), the chairmen and committee members in the lowest units of the Peasant Associations (village Peasant Associations) were almost entirely poor peasants. (In the village Peasant Associations of Hengshan, fifty per cent of the cadres came from the very poor peasant class, forty per cent from the poor peasant class, and ten per cent from poor educated elements.) This leadership by the poor peasants is very essential. Without the poor peasants, there will be no revolution. To reject them is to reject the revolution; a blow at them is a blow at the revolution. Their revolutionary course is faultless from beginning to end. They have cost the t'u-hao and bad gentry "face." They have thrown the big and small t'u-hao and bad gentry to the ground and have trampled on them. Many "excesses" of theirs during the revolutionary period have been a revolutionary necessity.

Some hsien magistrates, hsien Party headquarters, and the Peasant Associations of certain hsien in Hunan have already committed a number of errors. Some even dispatched soldiers to arrest the lower cadres of the Peasant Associations at the request of landlords. In the prisons of Hengshan and Hsianghsiang hsien, many chairmen and committee members of the village Peasant Associations are imprisoned. This error is extremely grave. Unintentionally, it strengthens the position of the reactionaries. The mere fact that the illegitimate landlords rejoiced and that the reactionary atmosphere thickened when the chairmen and committee members of the village Peasant Associations were arrested is sufficient to expose the mistaken nature (of the arrests). We should oppose such anti-revolutionary slogans as "p'i-tzu movement" and "lazy peasant movement", while taking special care not to help the t'u-hao and bad gentry (even unintentionally) by attacks on the leading class of the poor peasants. As a matter of fact, though some of the poor peasant leaders have indeed been "gamblers without gainful occupation", the majority of them have since reformed. They themselves now prohibit gambling and clean up banditry. Where the power of the Peasant Associations is strong, local gambling is completely prohibited and banditry disappears. In some localities it is safe to leave articles unattended on the roadside and doors unlocked at night. According to (my) investigation in Hengshan, eighty-five per cent of the poor peasant leaders are now reformed, able, and hardworking people. Only fifteen per cent still retain some of their bad habits. These can only be called "a few undesirable elements", but one should never imitate the slander of the t'u-hao and bad gentry by branding them as "p'i-tzu". As regards these "few undesirable elements", Peasant Association discipline should be improved by mass propaganda and individual training among them, under the slogan "strengthen the discipline of the Peasant Associations!" Indiscriminate arrests by soldiers, which cost the faith of the poor peasant class and strengthen the position of the t'u-hao and bad gentry, should definitely be avoided. This point deserves the utmost attention.