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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

This book tells, comprehensively and concisely, the story of China's countryside before land reform, the course which the land reform movement took, and the subsequent tremendous changes. It maps out the path by which the countryside will develop.

We hope that this book will give the reader a deeper understanding of this movement which was of historic significance in Chinese history.

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The agrarian reform movement which abolished feudal exploitation by the landlord class was an historic task of China's New Democratic Revolution. Led by the Chinese working class, and its party, the Communist Party of China, the Chinese people, after thirty years of struggle, achieved nation-wide victory in the people's democratic revolution in 1949. In the course of the next four years, ended 1953, agrarian reform was completed throughout the length and breadth of China's countryside (with the exception of some national minority areas, where the conditions are not yet ripe). By this the economic basis of feudal rule which had existed for thousands of years was swept away once for all. In truth, it is a world-shaking event, of great historical significance in itself, and an outstanding example of the correct application of the Marxist-Leninist theory on the peasant question to the practice of the Chinese revolution.

Let me explain in some detail several problems concerning this great movement.

1) The Position of the Classes in Old China's Countryside, and the Need for Agrarian Reform

Old China was a country where, for historical reasons, industry was undeveloped, and the overwhelming majority of the population, some 400 million, were entirely dependent on agricultural production for a living.

In spite of this, the system of land ownership was irrational in the extreme. Landlords and rich peasants, who constituted less than 10 per cent of the rural population, owned approximately 60 to 70 per cent of the entire cultivated land—in wide sections even more than 80 per cent—while the remaining 90 per cent of the agricultural population, farm labourers, poor peasants, middle peasants and other toilers owned only the remaining fraction.

Either because they had lost their land, or because they owned only very small plots, the great majority of peasants were forced by circumstance either to rent land from the landlords, or else to hire themselves out, living at the tender mercies of the landlords. Exploitation in the form of land rents, deposits, and exorbitant interest rates on loans in itself was ruthless and unbearable. Land rents amounted to as much as one-half and even two-thirds of the harvest. Furthermore, deposits had to be paid, on renting land, and "free" labour provided by the peasant. The rate of interest charged on loans was fantastically high—from 20 to 100 per cent on the original amount. Peasants who had once owned land lost it to the landlord, who took it for their debts. Under the weight of such rents and interest rates the great mass of the peasants could not earn enough for a decent meal or a shirt to their backs, despite their incessant toil the whole year round.

Moreover, the landlord class controlled the reactionary state power, and indeed its reactionary armed forces, who exacted forced labour, collected grain and tax, and enforced the payments of land rent and other debts. The landlord class did not scruple even to insult and misuse the peasants' wives and daughters, and break up

their families. The great mass of the peasants had no vestige of democratic rights under such rule. In order to maintain their privileges the landlord class acted in collusion with imperialism and the bureaucratic bourgeoisie, and thus became the mainstay of imperialist rule over China.

This feudal system of land ownership, characterized by relentless economic exploitation and political oppression of the peasants by the landlord class, at all times held back, where it did not make impossible, agricultural production itself. The landlord class's exploitation in the form of high rents and exorbitant interest rates, the profit-ridden practices of the capitalist commerce, of buying cheap but selling dear, the cruel economic plunder of imperialism, and the dead weight of taxes and duties imposed by the reactionary Kuomintang regime, placed the great mass of the peasantry in an impossible position: they could barely save themselves from abject poverty and utter destitution. They could barely maintain the humblest life, or keep up the simplest cycle of sowing and harvest; much less could they increase yields by ploughing back profits, or raise the level of agricultural production by the application of modern techniques. This system of land ownership, and all that flows from it, which was irrational in the extreme, drove the whole agricultural economy to the verge of bankruptcy. The "Decision on the Promulgation of the Outline of Agrarian Programme of China" adopted by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in October 1947, rightly pointed out: "Herein lies the basic reason why our nation has become the object of aggression, oppression and poverty, and has remained backward. This is the

fundamental obstacle to our country's industrialization, democratization, independence, unity and prosperity." The task, therefore, of overthrowing feudalism and carrying out agrarian reform was the central task of China's New Democratic Revolution.

2) The History and Basic Policy of the Agrarian Reform Movement

Shortly after its birth, the Communist Party of China drew up a revolutionary programme for the peasants in the light of the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism and its application to the actual practice in China's countryside. This programme recognized the stages to be passed, from the first stage of reduction of rent and interest rates, up to full agrarian reform. For some thirty years now, the Communist Party of China has led, and been integrated with, the great body of the peasants in their persistent struggle to carry out this revolutionary agrarian programme.

During the time of the First Revolutionary Civil War (1925–1927), it was under the leadership of the Communist Party of China that a peasant movement arose in South China and the Yangtse River Valley for rent reduction and reduction of interest rates, and in support of the Northern Expeditionary Army in its fight against the feudal warlords. After the defeat of this First Revolutionary Civil War, the best sons and daughters of the Chinese working class and the best Party members of the Chinese Communist Party, led by Comrade Mao Tse-tung, raised the glorious banner of land revolution in the countryside, created revolutionary bases, built the armed might of the revolution—the Chi-

nese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army (the forerunner of the Chinese People's Liberation Army), brought into being the rule of people's democratic power, and mobilized the peasants for a struggle in the countryside to confiscate and distribute land belonging to the landlord class. During the War of Resistance to Japanese Aggression (1937–1945), in order to unite the whole nation against the Japanese invaders, China's peasants accepted the proposal of the Chinese Communist Party, stopped further confiscation and distribution of land, and carried out an agrarian policy of rent reduction and reduction of interest rates, in loyalty to the Anti-Japanese National United Front. The enthusiasm which this policy had aroused during the eight years of this war, in the vast bases established behind the Japanese-held areas of North China, Shantung, Central and South China, gave added impetus to the mobilization of the peasants for waging revolutionary warfare; and guerilla war in these areas persisted right up to V-J Day. At the end of the Anti-Japanese War, the reactionary Kuomintang gang, led by Chiang Kai-shek and supported by United States imperialism, launched a civil war against the Chinese people; the great mass of the peasants were demanding a further solution to the land problem. The Communist Party led the peasants to confiscate and distribute the land belonging to the landlord class in the old liberated areas, which had a rural population of some 120 million. This kindled their revolutionary and productive enthusiasm and led to the strengthening and expansion of the armed forces and revolutionary bases. It was on this firm foundation that the defeat of the reactionary Kuomintang gang, and the nation-wide vic-

tory of the people's democratic revolution were finally achieved.

Upon the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Common Programme adopted by the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference specifically provided that the People's Republic of China "shall in a systematic manner transform the feudal and semi-feudal land ownership system into a system of peasant land ownership"; that "agrarian reform is the indispensable condition for the development of the productive forces and the industrialization of the nation. In all areas where agrarian reform has been carried out, the ownership of the land acquired by the peasants shall be protected. In areas where agrarian reform has not yet been carried out, the peasant masses must be mobilized to establish peasant organizations and to put into effect the policy of 'land to the tiller' through such measures as the elimination of local bandits and despots, the reduction of rent and interest, and the distribution of land." In June 1950, the Central People's Government promulgated the "Agrarian Reform Law of the People's Republic of China." The agrarian reform movement was vigorously carried out in the newly liberated areas, which had a combined rural population of over 300 million, and by 1953 this great historic task was, in the main, completed throughout the country.

The aim and substance of the agrarian reform was, as Comrade Mao Tse-tung pointed out, "to transfer the land from the hands of the feudal exploiters to the hands of the peasants; to convert the private property of the feudal landlords into the private property of the peasants; so as to ensure in this way the emancipation of the

peasants from feudal land relationships and to secure in the same way the conditions for changing an agricultural country into an industrial country." Thus it is decreed in the "Agrarian Reform Law of the People's Republic of China" that "the land ownership system of feudal exploitation by the landlord class shall be abolished and the system of peasant land ownership shall be introduced in order to set free the rural productive forces, develop agricultural production and thus pave the way for China's industrialization."

Owing to the clarity of the aim and substance of the agrarian reform movement, the correct application of the general line and policy of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and Comrade Mao Tse-tung, the vigorous leadership given in arousing the peasant masses, and owing to the practical experience gained by the Party and its leading cadres in the countryside in the actual agrarian reform movements in the old liberated areas before nation-wide victory was achieved, it was possible within the short space of three years, to complete agrarian reform in an orderly way in the vast newly liberated areas, with a combined rural population of 300 million.

The general line and policy of the agrarian reform was that "reliance should be placed on the poor peasants and farm labourers, while uniting with the middle peasants, neutralizing the rich peasants in order to eliminate the feudal exploitation system step by step and with discrimination and to develop agricultural production." The Agrarian Reform Law of the People's Republic of China is the embodiment of this general line and policy. When the Agrarian Reform Law was promulgated, Comrade

Liu Shao-chi made a report "On the Question of the Agrarian Reform," explaining in detail this general line and policy. And shortly afterwards, in conformity with provisions of the Agrarian Reform Law, the Government Administration Council of the Central People's Government published the "Decisions Concerning the Differentiation of Class Status in the Countryside," "General Regulations Governing the Organization of Peasants' Associations," "General Regulations Governing the Organization of People's Tribunals," and other laws and decrees concerning agrarian reform. It was precisely because of the correctness of these directives, policies, laws and decrees that the movement could be thus carried out in such a well-guided, systematic and orderly way, in the vast newly liberated areas.

The Agrarian Reform Law clearly puts forward the following policies: (1) The land, draught animals, farm implements and surplus grain of the landlords, and their surplus houses in the countryside shall be confiscated. (Section 2, Article 2.) The rural land belonging to ancestral shrines, temples, monasteries, churches, schools and organizations, and other land owned by public bodies shall be requisitioned. . . . (Section 2, Article 3.) (2) "Industry and commerce shall be protected from infringement. Industrial and commercial enterprises operated by landlords and the land and other properties used by landlords directly for the operation of industrial and commercial enterprises shall not be confiscated." (Article 4.) The reason why industry and commerce are to be protected is that they are indispensable to the peasants in their production and that the task of the agrarian reform is to eliminate feudalism rather than capitalism.

(3) "Land owned by rich peasants and cultivated by themselves or by hired labour and their other properties shall be protected from infringement." (Article 6.) The land rented out by rich peasants may be requisitioned only under certain specified conditions. (4) "Land and other properties of the middle peasants (including well-to-do middle peasants) shall be protected from infringement." (Article 7.) (5) "Revolutionary army men, dependents of martyrs, workers, staff members, professional workers, pedlars and others who rent out small portions of land because they are engaged in other occupations or because they lack labour power shall not be classified as landlords. If the average per capita landholding of such persons does not exceed 200 per cent of the average per capita landholding in the locality, it shall remain untouched." (Article 5.) The reason is that the land they own is of no great amount and by classing them as small land lessors the blow is struck home on the landlord class. (6) "Land confiscated or requisitioned shall be distributed by taking a *hsiang*[1] or an administrative village corresponding to a *hsiang* as a single unit. Land shall be distributed in a uniform manner according to the population therein, based upon the principle of allotting the land to its present tiller and making necessary readjustment in landholdings by taking into consideration the amount, quality and location of the land." (Section 3, Articles 10 and 11.) (7) After the confiscation of land and other means of production, ". . . the landlords shall be given an equal share so that they can make their living by their own labour and

[1] An administrative unit embracing several villages.

thus reform themselves through labour." (Section 3, Article 10.) These are the basic policies and content of the agrarian reform.

Apart from a correct policy, the other key factor in the successful carrying out of agrarian reform was the well-directed, unreserved mobilization of the peasant masses. Only by such mobilization, by giving a free hand to the peasants to carry out the reform and thus developing their enthusiastic co-operation in the struggle against feudalism could the landlord class be struck down, that class which had for so long imposed a tyrannical and deep-rooted rule upon the peasants. Such powerful feudal forces could not be thoroughly eradicated by placing sole trust on governmental orders from above, however many pages of orders would be sent out. It follows, therefore, that firm reliance should be placed on the poor peasants and farm labourers. For it was these sections of the peasantry which formed the backbone of the struggle against feudalism. Their demand for land was the most compelling; agrarian reform was intended mainly to satisfy this demand. These poor peasants and farm labourers were the most active and resolute elements in the struggle for land, and the Communist Party, in leading them for the fight, must, primarily and rightly, rely on them. Nevertheless, the interests of the middle peasants must be protected, as they, too, were in favour of land reform, in which some of their economic and political needs would be satisfied. A policy of this sort, namely, one of resolutely protecting the interests of the middle peasants, and properly satisfying their needs, must be adopted in the agrarian reform; for in this way they will unite solidly with the poor peasants and farm

labourers in a common struggle against feudalism, and the latter will not be left to do battle on their own.

Moreover, while our policy must rely in the first place on the poor peasants and farm labourers, and of uniting with the middle peasants, there is another group of allies which must be included: the working women and the other rural workers. These, too, must be drawn into the struggle, and welded into one mighty army against feudalism.

In this great mobilization of the peasants, and in carrying agrarian reform to a successful conclusion, the Party and the People's Government sent numerous groups of land reform working teams to the countryside. Members of these teams set about their job by going to the worst exploited and oppressed—the poor peasants and farm labourers. They lived with them in their homes, worked with them in the fields, and, with the bitter experience of the peasants as a starting point, brought them to understand the reason for their miseries, and to ask for a reckoning. "Who fed whom?" they asked. "Did the landlord keep you, or did you keep the landlord?" This use of their own experience as an illustration brought the facts home to the peasants, and aroused their class consciousness. Once this was stirred to the depths, their determination and courage knew no bounds. They manifested great zeal to do battle and strike down the landlord class, and saw the need to organize themselves as a mass force. The working teams directed this awakened ardour of the poor peasants and farm labourers to spread the news to their fellows, and unite the majority of them and the middle peasants, who had a common interest against the landlord class. They then

let the poor peasants and farm labourers themselves use the same methods of recalling past sufferings so as to kindle their class consciousness and readiness to do battle, among their fellows, with such success that the peasants themselves set up their own associations of poor peasants, farm labourers and middle peasants.

The active elements among the poor peasants and farm labourers, who were first mobilized, became the leading spirits, and formed the hard core of the peasants' association in this struggle against the landlord class and in uniting the masses. Thus it was that the leadership of the rural proletariat (the farm labourer) and the semi-proletariat (the poor peasant) was established. Other methods were also used, in this mobilization of the peasant masses—the setting up of training classes, meetings of activists from among the poor peasants and labourers and so on, in order to bring home ever more clearly the aim and substance of agrarian reform, and so enable one another to have a clear understanding of these policies, and turn them into their own weapons against the landlord class. The peasants themselves were then ready, through their associations to lead their own great "army" to actual struggle against the landlords, and to confiscate and distribute the land and to emancipate the peasants with the guidance of the policy and decrees of the people's government. We call this sequence of methods the Working Methods of Mass Line, and this method of work is the distinctive feature of China's agrarian reform. Facts speak for themselves; and the facts have proved that in this vast country of China, with its millions of population, weighed down for long years by feudal rule, only this working method,

only such total mobilization of the peasant masses, could carry through agrarian reform on such a gigantic scale, and consolidate its gains.

But the careful agitation, the education, and the organization of the peasants in the land reform movement was not an isolated event. It went hand in hand with the consistent battle against the landlord class. In brief, the typical sequence of events in freshly liberated territory was as follows: the peasants were first mobilized to clear their neighbourhood of bandits and local gangsters, next a campaign was started to reduce land rents and interest rates. Then came the confiscation and distribution of land and finally the verification of the decisions on distribution of land. The logic of events is clear. In the clean-up of bandits and gangsters, the bandits were eliminated, and the armed forces of the landlords disarmed. The doing of this established revolutionary rule in the countryside (a requisite for social reform); the power of the erstwhile landlord-dominated ruling clique was overthrown, and the peasants was thus aroused. In the next stage, the campaign for rent and interest rate reductions, the whole landlord class was further weakened, and the peasants brought to a more advanced stage of mobilization; moreover, their political predominance over the landlord class was established. It was upon such a groundwork, that preparations could be made for the key section of full agrarian reform—the confiscation and distribution of land. The final winding-up ratification was to go over the distribution, review any outstanding problems and see that all was in order. The whole series of militant class struggles served to raise the peasants' class consciousness to a high pitch, to mobilize

them thoroughly and eradicate the feudal classes; and so carry through our agrarian reform.

Furthermore, with a view to bringing the maximum pressure to bear on the landlord class, to isolate and eliminate them, so as to enable agrarian reform to be carried out smoothly, a policy was adopted accordingly to neutralize the rich peasants, to protect industry and commerce, and to make special allowances for small lessors. This policy succeeded. The urban petty bourgeoisie were thus won over to the side of the peasants in agrarian reform and the bourgeoisie had their guns spiked, having no reason to work against agrarian reform. Urban-Rural Liaison Committees were set up, with local representatives, to deal with problems which impinged on industry or commerce during the course of the agrarian reform. In this way, the policy of protecting industry and commerce, as laid down in the Agrarian Reform Law, was properly carried out and active support from the urban population for the peasants' struggle against feudalism was secured. At the same time revolutionary order in the towns was maintained. Thus in the struggle for agrarian reform, a united front against feudalism was created on a broadest possible basis.

3) The New Face of China's Countryside After the Great Achievements of Agrarian Reform

This mighty sweep of land reform over such a vast country annihilated centuries-old feudalism and freed over four hundred million peasants from slavery. They rose from being the beasts of burden of the landlord class, to being the rulers of their countryside, from being the slaves of the soil to being the masters of the