

MAO TSE-TUNG

THE QUESTION OF AGRICULTURAL CO-OPERATION



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I

Throughout the Chinese countryside a new upsurge in the socialist mass movement is in sight. But some of our comrades are tottering along like a woman with bound feet, always complaining that others are going too fast. They imagine that by picking on trifles, grumbling unnecessarily, worrying continuously and putting up countless taboos and commandments they are guiding the socialist mass movement in the rural areas on sound lines.

No, this is not the right way at all; it is wrong.

The tide of social reform in the countryside—in the shape of co-operation—has already reached some places. Soon it will sweep the whole country. This is a huge socialist revolutionary movement, which involves a rural population more than five hundred million strong, one which has very great world significance. We should guide this movement vigorously, warmly and systematically, and not act as a drag on it in various ways. In such a movement some deviations are inevitable. That stands to reason, but it is not difficult to straighten them out. Weaknesses

or mistakes found among cadres and peasants can be done away with if we actively assist them. Guided by the Party the cadres and peasants are going forward; the movement is fundamentally healthy.

In some places they have made certain mistakes in the work, for example, barring poor peasants from the co-operatives and ignoring their difficulties, and at the same time forcing the well-to-do middle peasants into the co-operatives and interfering with their interests. But these errors have to be corrected by education, not just by reprimands. Mere reprimands solve no problems. We must guide the movement boldly, not act like one fearing the dragon in front and the tiger behind. Both cadres and peasants will change of themselves as they learn from their own experience in the struggle. Get them into action themselves: they will learn while doing, become more capable, and large numbers of excellent people will come forward. This "fearing the dragon in front and the tiger behind" attitude will not produce cadres. It is necessary to send large groups of cadres with short-term training into the countryside to guide and assist the agricultural co-operative movement; but the cadres sent down from above also have to learn how to work from the movement itself. Going in for training courses and hearing dozens of rules explained in lectures does not necessarily mean one knows how to work.

In short, leadership should never lag behind the mass movement. As things stand today, however,

the mass movement is in advance of the leadership, which fails to keep pace with the movement. This state of affairs must be changed.

II

Now, at a time when the nation-wide co-operative movement is taking tremendous strides forward, we still have to argue such questions as: Can the co-operatives grow? Can they be consolidated? As far as some comrades are concerned, the crux of the matter seems to be that they are worried about whether the several hundred thousand existing semi-socialist co-operatives—mostly rather small, averaging twenty odd peasant households each—can be consolidated. Of course, unless they are, growth is out of the question. Some comrades are still unconvinced by the history of the growth of co-operation in the past few years and are still waiting to see how things go in 1955. They may even wait another year, till 1956, and only if still more co-operatives are firmly established by then will they be truly convinced that agricultural co-operation is a possibility and that the policy of the Central Committee of our Party is correct. That is why the work this year and next is so very important.

To show the possibilities of agricultural co-operation, to show that the policy of the Central Com-

mittee of our Party on agricultural co-operation is sound, it is perhaps not without value for us to discuss here the history of the agricultural co-operative movement in our country.

Even before the founding of the People's Republic of China, in the course of twenty-two years of revolutionary wars, our Party amassed experience, after land reform, in guiding the peasants to organize agricultural producers' mutual-aid groups of a rudimentary socialist character. At that time, there were mutual-aid working groups and ploughing teams in Kiangsi Province, work exchange teams in northern Shensi and mutual-aid teams in various places in north, east and north-east China. In isolated cases, agricultural producers' co-operatives of a semi-socialist or socialist character also came into being. During the war of resistance to Japanese aggression, for instance, there was an agricultural producers' co-operative of a socialist character in Ansai County in northern Shensi, but at that time such co-operatives were not recommended.

Only since the founding of the Chinese People's Republic has our Party led the peasants to organize agricultural producers' mutual-aid teams on a more extensive scale and begun organizing agricultural producers' co-operatives, based on the mutual-aid teams, in large numbers—that is, for about six years now.

On December 15, 1951, when the Central Committee of our Party issued to local Party organizations

the first draft decisions on mutual-aid and co-operation in agricultural production to be tried out in various places, there were over three hundred agricultural producers' co-operatives. (This document was not published in the press in the form of Party decisions till March 1953.) Two years later, on December 16, 1953, our Party Central Committee issued its decisions on agricultural producers' co-operatives. By then the number of agricultural producers' co-operatives exceeded 14,000, forty-seven times as many as two years before.

That decision laid it down that, between the winter of 1953 and the autumn harvest of 1954, the number of agricultural producers' co-operatives would increase from this 14,000 odd to 35,800 odd, that is, only to two and a half times as many. But, as it turned out, during that year the number of co-operatives rose to 100,000, more than seven times as many.

In October 1954 the Central Committee of our Party took a decision to increase the number of co-operatives sixfold, from one hundred thousand to six hundred thousand. The result was 670,000 co-operatives. By June 1955, after preliminary weeding-out, the number was cut by twenty thousand, leaving 650,000—fifty thousand more than the planned target. The number of peasant households in co-operatives was 16,900,000—an average of twenty-six households to each.

These co-operatives are mainly in those northern provinces which were the first to be liberated. In most of the provinces liberated later, a number of agricultural producers' co-operatives have been set up. There are a fair number in Anhwei and Chekiang, but not very many in other provinces.

These co-operatives, generally speaking, are small, but among them are a few large ones, some embracing seventy or eighty households, some more than a hundred, and some whose membership runs into several hundred households.

Generally, too, the co-operatives are semi-socialist, but a few have passed into a higher stage and become socialist co-operatives.

While the co-operative movement in agricultural production among the peasants has been growing our country has already established a small number of socialist state farms. By 1957 there will be 3,038 state farms cultivating 16,870,000 *mou*¹ of land. They will include 141 mechanized farms (those existing in 1952 plus those set up in the course of the First Five-Year Plan) with 7,580,000 *mou* under cultivation. The number of non-mechanized state farms under local jurisdiction will be 2,897, with 9,290,000 *mou* under cultivation. During the period covered by the Second and Third Five-Year Plans there will be a great growth of state-operated agriculture.

¹A *mou* is one sixth of an acre.—*Translator.*

In the spring of 1955 the Central Committee of our Party decided that the number of agricultural producers' co-operatives should go up to a million. This means a little more than a 50 per cent increase—adding 350,000 to the original 650,000. Now I feel this increase is a bit too small. Possibly the former figure of 650,000 should have been roughly doubled, i.e., the number of co-operatives ought to be increased to 1,300,000 so that in each of the country's 200,000 odd *hsiang*¹ except in some border areas, there might be at least one or several small agricultural producers' co-operatives of the semi-socialist type which would serve as an example for others. These new co-operatives would gain experience and in a year or two become "veterans," and others could learn from them. From now to the autumn harvest of October 1956 is fourteen months, and such a plan for the establishment of co-operatives ought to be feasible. I hope the responsible comrades in the various provinces and autonomous regions will go back and look into the question, work out a programme suited to actual conditions and report to the Central Committee within two months. We shall then hold a discussion and take a final decision.

The question is whether the co-operatives can be consolidated. Some people say that last year's plan to set up 500,000 was too big, too rash, and that this

¹*Hsiang* is an administrative unit of one or several villages.—*Translator*.

year's plan to set up 350,000 is too big, too rash, too. They doubt if that many co-operatives can be consolidated.

Is it really possible to consolidate them?

Needless to say, neither socialist industrialization nor socialist transformation is easy. A host of difficulties are bound to crop up as some 110 million peasant households turn from individual to collective management and go ahead with technical reforms in agriculture. But we should have confidence that our Party is capable of leading the masses to overcome such difficulties.

As far as agricultural co-operation is concerned, I think we should believe: first, that the poor peasants, and the lower middle peasants among both the new and old middle peasants,¹ are disposed to choose the socialist road and energetically respond to our Party's call for co-operation—the poor peasants because of their economic difficulties and the lower middle peasants because their economic conditions, though better than before liberation, are still not too good. Particularly active are those among them who have a deeper understanding.

Secondly, I think we should have confidence that our Party is capable of leading the people of the coun-

¹Old middle peasants are those who were middle peasants before the land reform. New middle peasants are those who have risen to the status of middle peasants since land reform.—*Translator.*

try to socialism. Our Party has led a great people's democratic revolution to victory and established a people's democratic dictatorship headed by the working class, and it can certainly lead our people to carry out, in the main, socialist industrialization and the socialist transformation of agriculture, handicrafts and capitalist industry and commerce, in the course of roughly three five-year plans. In agriculture, as in other fields, we have powerful and convincing proof of this—witness the first group of 300 co-operatives, the second of 13,700 and the third of 86,000—100,000 all told—all of which were established before the autumn of 1954 and all of which have been consolidated. Why, then, should not the fourth group of 550,000 co-operatives formed in 1954-55 and the fifth group of 350,000 (our provisional target) to be established in 1955-56 be consolidated too?

We must believe in the masses; we must believe in our Party: these are two cardinal principles. If we doubt these principles, we can do nothing.

III

To gradually achieve agricultural co-operation throughout China's rural areas, we must seriously give the existing co-operatives a check over.

Great emphasis must be placed on the quality of the co-operatives. We must oppose any tendency to

neglect quality and concentrate solely on increasing their number or bringing a greater number of peasant households into them. That is why attention must be paid to checking over the co-operatives.

Co-operatives should be checked over not once, but two or three times a year. A certain number were checked over in the first half of this year (though in some places, apparently, this was done rather superficially, without taking enough trouble). I suggest a second checking in the autumn or winter of this year and a third in the spring or summer of next. Of the 650,000 existing co-operatives, 550,000 are new, set up last winter or this spring, and among these there are some "Class I" co-operatives, as they are called, which are pretty well consolidated. Adding the 100,000 old co-operatives already consolidated, the number already consolidated is not at all small. Can not these co-operatives already consolidated gradually lead the others to consolidate? They certainly can.

We should treasure, not hinder, every bit of socialist initiative shown by peasants and cadres. It is our job to live with, breathe the same air as the members and cadres of the co-operatives and the county, district and *hsiang* cadres, not hamper their initiative.

Only where all, or nearly all the members of a co-operative have made up their minds not to carry on should a decision be taken to wind it up. If only some members have made up their minds not to carry on, they should be allowed to withdraw, while the

majority continue. If the majority are determined not to carry on but a minority are willing, then let the majority withdraw and the minority continue. Even so, it is better than to wind it up. In one very small co-operative of only six households in Hopei Province, the three old middle-peasant households firmly refused to carry on and left. The three poor-peasant households decided to continue at all costs, stayed in, and the co-operative organization was preserved. The fact is, the road taken by these three poor-peasant households is the one which will be taken by five hundred million peasants throughout the country. All peasants working on their own will eventually take the road resolutely chosen by these three poor-peasant households.

With the adoption of a policy of what was called "drastic compression" in Chekiang Province—not by decision of the Chekiang Provincial Party Committee—out of 53,000 co-operatives in the province 15,000, comprising 400,000 peasant households, were dissolved at one fell swoop. This caused great dissatisfaction among the masses and the cadres, and it was altogether the wrong thing to do. A "drastic compression" policy of this kind was decided on in a state of terrified confusion. It was not right, too, to take such a major step without the consent of the Central Committee. As early as April 1955 the Central Committee gave this warning: "Do not commit the 1953 mistake of mass dissolution of co-operatives again, otherwise self-

critical examination will again be called for." But certain comrades preferred not to listen.

In the face of success, there are, I think, two bad tendencies: one is that "dizziness with success" which makes for swelled-headedness and leads to "Leftist" mistakes. That, of course, is bad. The second is letting oneself be stunned by success, which leads to "drastic compression" and to Rightist mistakes. That is bad, too. At the present time, it is the latter that prevails. Some comrades are stunned by the hundreds of thousands of small co-operatives.

IV

Preparatory work before the co-operatives are set up must be done seriously and well.

Attention must be paid from the very start to the quality of the co-operatives; the tendency simply to increase their number must be opposed.

Fight no battle that is not well prepared, no battle whose outcome is uncertain: that was the well-known slogan of our Party during the past revolutionary wars. It applies equally well to the work of socialist construction. If you want to be sure of the outcome, there must be preparedness, full preparedness. A great deal of spade work must be done beforehand if you are going to set up a group of new agricultural producers' co-operatives in a province, administrative

region or county. The main thing this work includes is (1) criticism of wrong ideas and summarization of experience gained in the work; (2) systematic and repeated publicity among the peasant masses of our Party's principles, policy and measures on agricultural co-operation; and explanation in the course of propaganda among the peasants not only of the benefits of co-operation but also of the difficulties that may be met with in expanding it, so that their minds are fully prepared; (3) taking into account the situation as it really is, drawing up a comprehensive plan for expanding agricultural co-operation for an entire province, administrative region, county, district or *hsiang*, and on the basis of this comprehensive plan working out an annual plan; (4) training cadres for co-operatives in short-term courses; (5) widespread expansion of agricultural producers' mutual-aid teams in large numbers and, whenever possible, getting such teams to join together and form combined groups of mutual-aid teams, so laying the foundations for further combination into co-operatives.

Given these conditions, it is possible, in developing co-operatives, to go a long way towards solving the problem of how to pay attention to both their number and quality. But still, once a group of co-operatives is set up, the work of checking them should be immediately undertaken.

Whether a group of co-operatives can be consolidated after it is established depends, first, on how well the preliminary spade work was done and,

secondly, on how well the work of checking is carried out thereafter.

The work of both setting up and checking over co-operatives depends on the Party and Youth League branches in the *hsiang*. For that reason, both tasks must be closely linked with the work of building up and consolidating Party and Youth League organizations in the countryside.

The local cadres in the rural areas should be the mainstay both in establishing and checking over the co-operatives, and they should be backed up in their work and asked to shoulder responsibility. Cadres sent from above should be an auxiliary force; their function is to guide and help, not to take everything into their own hands.

V

Members of agricultural producers' co-operatives must obtain higher yields than individual peasants and those working in mutual-aid teams. Output certainly cannot be allowed to remain at the level reached by individual peasants or mutual-aid teams: that would mean failure. What would be the use of having co-operatives at all? Still less can yields be allowed to fall. Over 80 per cent of the 650,000 existing agricultural producers' co-operatives did increase their yields. That is a cheerful picture, showing that mem-