



Builders
of Anshan

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ANSHAN is China's main iron and steel centre. It is in Liaoning Province in the Northeast, and has a population of nearly 400,000. Rich fields of iron ore stretch under Kungchangling, Taku Mountain and other places, quite close to the city; while the great coal fields of Fushun and Penhsi lie only 70 miles away. Relics of ancient tombs, mine pockets and gangues show that over 700 years ago our ancestors were digging and refining the "treasures" hidden here underground.

But for some years before liberation the exploitation of this wealth had not been in the interest of the Chinese people. In 1915, the Japanese imperialists forced the concession of "special rights" in developing Anshan, and three years later they established in this city the "Anshan Steel Plant." They pursued a predatory policy of "industrializing Japan with China's raw materials," employing Chinese workers on starvation wages to mine the iron and manufacture iron and steel, and then shipping these vital materials to Japan.

Following our victory in the War of Resistance to Japanese Aggression in 1945, the American imperialists actively helped Chiang Kai-shek and transported his armies to the Northeast. When Chiang's men came into possession of Anshan under the pretext of "taking over," they ransacked Anshan completely, robbing and selling whatever machinery and equipment they could lay their hands on. So thorough was their plunder that when the Chinese People's Liberation Army freed Anshan in 1948, the whole area of the iron and steel works was overgrown with grass and weeds. Not a single machine re-

mained intact. On the eve of their flight from the city they declared, "It would take the Communists twenty years to restore Anshan; let them come and grow kao-liang here."

It was not long, however, before these prophecies were shown to be as false as the makers of them. For, within a few years, China's working class, led by the Communist Party, succeeded not only in restoring the iron and steel industry of Anshan but also in expanding it. The No. 7 automatic blast furnace was rebuilt, and a heavy rolling mill and seamless steel tubing mill were constructed. Today, any visitor on his way to Anshan can see from a distance row upon row of chimneys, water towers, blast furnaces and factory buildings, rising like a great forest.

Inspired by the cause of China's socialist industrialization, the builders of Anshan have displayed the greatest enthusiasm, dedicating all their knowledge and strength to the job. Many unsuspected talents have been discovered and many are the soul-stirring feats they have accomplished. In these pages we have given but a very small number of such talents and achievements. Few as they are, these instances are sufficient to show how rapidly China's working class has grown after throwing off the yoke and oppression of imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism and becoming the masters of the country. They also show how the Chinese workers have overcome mountains of difficulties and obstacles to go forward to rebuild a land, as economically and culturally backward as China was, into a great country with advanced industry and culture.

Editors

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Old Meng Tai

Lu Hao

I

In 1948, before the Kuomintang troops occupied Anshan the first time, Meng Tai and his family left the city, where they had lived for over thirty years, and followed the staff of the Anshan Steel Plant to Tunghua, to the east of Anshan.

When the train pulled into Tunghua, the evacuees were welcomed by the director, and many staff members from the plant. Then as soon as Meng Tai and his family arrived at the plant, the director called out to the kitchen staff: "They are tired and hungry after the long journey. Hurry up and prepare some food for them!"

When they had been assigned lodgings the plant sent over a bag of maize, a cart-load of coal, bed mats, stoves, pots, pans and other household necessities, including even rice bowls and chopsticks.

Later on the director often dropped in to inquire whether the family were still short of any thing.

Meng Tai stared at the director. He was dressed in an old, grey, cotton-padded suit which had many grease

stains. Though it was bitterly cold, he did not wear gloves. In fact the chief of the plant looked much the same as everybody else in the whole outfit. Meng Tai wondered why the director and his staff seemed to be concerned only about other people's welfare and not much about their own.

Such brotherly love and concern for others may have been nothing unusual for one who had lived long among the ranks of the revolutionary movement. But it was something completely new to a worker who had for several decades suffered under the oppression of the old society.

It was natural, at such a time, that Meng Tai should look back over his gloomy past. For many years, poverty and hunger had been his lot. Once starvation became so unbearable that he was forced to sell his belt to buy food and then all he got was a little bit of bean cake, and some cotton-seeds from which the oil had been extracted. In winter, the six members of his family only had three ragged cotton-padded quilts between them. He remembered an accident at work when his hands had got badly crushed. As he could neither get medical attention nor even a single strip of cloth to use as a bandage, he had had to go back to work with the wounds still open and bleeding. But now, now he had all he needed—lovely corn bread, beancurd, green vegetables, bedding, etc. And yet, the director would every now and then call to make sure the family got everything they needed. Whenever the director's wife chanced to see Meng Tai's youngest child, she would pick him up, hug him, and stroke his chubby face. This friendly atmosphere had a great effect on one who had lived all

his life in the indifferent, varied with cruelty, of the old society!

Here in Tunghua Meng Tai frequently heard his comrades talk about the people's revolution and its principles, this was all new to him and made him think.

Just then plans had been made to recondition two boilers. Everything was ready except the materials. It was annoying and exasperating to all concerned. Meng Tai turned up early for work every day. And every day he was unable to start work for lack of materials.

Depressed and restless, Meng Tai often went rambling around the plant. Now that he had been given security and did not have to worry any more about how he and his family were going to live he felt he ought to be doing his level best to serve and repay the country. How was he to find an outlet for his enthusiasm and energy? One day in his wanderings he ran across some radiator sections and water pipes lying around in a building destroyed by the war. He picked them up and carried them piece by piece back to his own shop.

When the other workers saw what Meng Tai was doing, they began to follow his example. From scrap-heaps, from under ruins and debris, from every nook and corner, they salvaged everything they thought useful, not even neglecting rusty screws. Gradually, these materials piled up until they had filled a small room.

As a result they were able to renovate the first boiler, using only scrap which didn't cost the country a cent.

This took place between the spring and summer of 1948, during the bitter battle for Anshan, on the eve of the city's liberation.

When Meng Tai returned to Anshan, the place was completely desolate.

He visited the iron smelting plant where he had worked previously. In the course of the war, this plant had suddenly stopped operation, with the result that some hundred tons of molten iron and ore had solidified in the blast furnace. Grass grew higher than a man's waist, all over the yard. The place was dead with not a breath of smoke coming from any of the hundred odd chimneys. On the railway lines the rails had separated from the sleepers. Trains of loaded tubs lay heeling over to one side with some of their wheels practically buried in the mud. Every windowpane was black with dust and soot, so that not a ray of light could pass through.

It looked as though the city could never recover.

In those difficult, heart-rending days, Meng Tai revisited the giant blast furnaces which, though they still stood up pointing to the sky, were merely gaunt shells. As he stood beside them, he found some men were already there clearing away the grass and taking down the water pipes for repair.

It upset Meng Tai terribly to see all this destruction. He knew how important it was to get the blast furnaces producing iron as soon as possible. But, in order to get the furnaces back into commission equipment and parts must be found. And, as at Tunghua, there were no parts available.

Then one day he remembered that during the time of the Japanese occupation the workers, as a mark of protest, would sometimes throw good machine parts and

accessories on to the scrap-heaps. "We shouldn't neglect the scrap-heaps," he said to himself. "There might be things in them that are now worth their weight in gold."

When he talked the matter over with his workmates, some laughed at him at first. They said: "Our Soviet brothers will surely help us to recondition all the furnaces, not just one. Why should you be worrying your head off?"

"That's a fine attitude to take; discarding things right under our noses because we are too lazy to go and get them?" Meng Tai retorted.

Still, many of them didn't think it worth while. His own younger brother argued with him, "What on earth do you want to bother about the things in the scrap-heaps for? They are just a lot of rusty rubbish."

"We aren't going to use them as parlour decorations, anyway. If we care only for fine appearance, we'll never produce any iron."

Just about this time the Party organization and local government of Anshan issued a call to all the workers to launch a campaign for collecting discarded metal equipment and materials—which fell in perfectly with Meng Tai's idea.

In his initial attempt, Meng Tai alone gathered scores of three-way cocks. Though they were dirty and rusty, yet some of them were fit for use immediately, while others only required a slight adjustment or repair to be serviceable. He had pieces of glass pulverized into fine dust and mixed with engine oil, and with this mixture he patiently polished and ground them, so that before long they were all gleaming as good as new.

No matter whether they were on or off duty, wherever they went, Meng Tai and his comrades in the pipe-fitting group were always on the lookout for parts. If it was only a nut he found, he would bring back to the stores. If he came across a fair-sized lump of coke on his way home, he would pick it up and bring it to the plant the next day.

Soon, all the workers at the blast furnace began doing the same thing. One day a labourer, Liu Chang-chi, told Meng Tai that in the scrap-heaps around the pig-casting machine there were a lot of parts. He did not know what they were and could not carry them back by himself. When the members of the pipe-fitting group heard of it, seven of them at once rushed to the spot. And, for two days, they went back and forth, fetching and carrying, until they had a room full of parts.

When the warehouse-keeper learned that the pipe-fitting group had been collecting various machine parts, he came over to see what they had found. When he saw Meng Tai holding a high-pressure steam valve in his hand, he told him: "If you people could do the repairing, we've got more damaged ones over at our place." When Meng Tai followed him to the warehouse, he picked up two valves on the way and eight more outside the warehouse, and in the warehouse he found more than twenty. Because they had all been thrown away as scrap, the warehouse-keeper let Meng Tai take as many as he could carry away.

At last, the work of recommissioning No. 2 blast furnace started, with Meng Tai and his comrades in the pipe-fitting group supplying a good number of valuable parts and accessories. When the plant director and

Party committee secretary personally called on Meng Tai to express their appreciation for what he had done, he took them to inspect the four rooms they had fitted up as stores. There they found all the shelves stacked full with no less than a thousand cocks, valves, elbows, pipes, etc., of various kinds.

This soon became known as the "Meng Tai Warehouse," whose fame rang through the country and whose value could not be expressed in mere figures. The warehouse played a big part in the speedy restoration of three blast furnaces as well as many other construction projects in Anshan.

III

Ever since the blast furnace had first got going again, Meng Tai always showed a keen concern over its safety, like a loving mother for ever worrying over her baby's health.

His home was not far from the plant. From the windows he could see the smoke rising from the blast furnace, and could tell by a sudden change in the colour of the smoke, if they were having any trouble. The furnace was always uppermost in his thoughts. Even after he had gone to bed at night, it weighed upon his mind, worrying whether the steam valves might leak and what to do if the water pipes should get frozen up. . . .

Then one day a mishap did occur.

One morning when he was walking over to the plant, he saw from a distance a kind of whitish fog rising in the air above No. 4 blast furnace, so dense that heaven

and earth were blotted out. From the middle of the fog came explosions like the detonation of hand grenades, with powerful flames flaring and curling sky-high. It sounded as though the whole blast furnace was being blown to pieces.

Meng Tai dashed forward and plunged headlong into the scene of fire and smoke, without a thought of danger, followed closely by two others of the pipe-fitting group. As he drew near the flaming furnace, his throat became parched, and he was attacked by a fit of coughing. Recovering, he caught sight of a shadow moving over from the furnace. He reckoned it must be the man on duty.

"What's the trouble? What's the trouble?" he yelled at the top of his voice.

"Don't know what's the matter with it!" the man replied.

Here Meng Tai was on familiar ground, he was an old hand who had worked at the blast furnace as a pipe-fitter for nearly thirty years. He had become so familiar with all the various equipment of the furnace that, ordinarily, he could fix up any part perfectly without having to bother to look at a blueprint. Whenever there was anything wrong with any of the hundreds of water pipes, he could quickly lay his finger on the trouble. Now, as he listened to the gust of sudden explosions and gazed at the rising canopy of fog-like steam and flashing flames, he unconsciously walked towards the centre of explosions.

The closer he got, the more terrific the explosions sounded and he felt as though he was in the middle of a concentrated bombardment. For a moment, it looked

as though the whole furnace would collapse and the mounting flames would overrun the place.

At the foot of the blast furnace, the ground was flooded with water and it was uneven and slippery, so that progress was very difficult; and it was easy to slip or trip over. Although he knew the ground well, Meng Tai could only get along by crawling on his knees and feeling his way with his hands, because everything was heavily wrapped in a fog-like shroud of steam. A number of water pipes had already burst on the lower part of the furnace due to the explosions. Water sprayed like fountains from the cracked pipes, saturating him from head to foot. The only thing he could do was to close his eyes and keep crawling and feeling his way along. Then explosions seemed to be going on right beside him, the noise was enough to wake the dead. Fortunately, he did not have a dry stitch on him by now, otherwise his clothes would have caught fire. By this time, he was already aware that the explosions came from the direction of the tap-hole of the furnace.

To get to the foot of the tap-hole, Meng Tai had to cross a ditch, by means of a narrow plank. He crawled along the plank on his knees, wriggling his way forward inch by inch.

Finally, he managed to get to the foot of the tap-hole, and could see what was the matter. The tap-hole had burst: and the molten iron streaming down had cracked the water pipes, the meeting of this liquid metal and the slag with the water gave rise to the explosions. Meng Tai quickly climbed up and turned off the pipes, while Li Kuo-an, the technician on duty, sent word from the signal room to have the blast reduced. By

then, practically all the slag had run out from the furnace, so the explosions gradually subsided, the flames thinned out, and the billowing steam died away.

IV

Owing to excessive strain and exhaustion, Meng Tai fell ill. He was sent to the hospital. But it is very difficult for a man like Meng Tai who had all his life been used to active work to stay in hospital. He had been in the hospital only a few days when he asked the doctor to discharge him.

"But you are not well enough yet," declared the doctor.

"I'm not too bad now," the patient implored earnestly.

"If that is the case, write me an application," the doctor rejoined.

If Meng Tai were to send in a formal application, he would have to state his reason for wanting to leave the hospital. But he was not yet recovered. He knew he would not be able to put forward any reason that would convince the doctors.

As Meng Tai hesitated, the doctor queried, "Are you worrying about anything?"

"No! There isn't anything to worry about. I know you are right. I am not really well yet," Meng Tai owned up. Then he continued: "You people here have been most kind and attentive to me. But this place is too far from the iron works, and inconvenient for my comrades there to come to visit me."