The People Have Strength

Sequel to "YO BANFA!"

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PREFACE

China was asleep, and has now awakened. All over the vast expanse of her land, the awakening has come. Every day it becomes more urgent that the peoples of the rest of the world should come to realise this fact. The problem is how to reach their understanding, to bring home to them that the China they felt they knew no longer exists, and that a strong, organised country stands in its place. How to let them know of the industrialisation that swings forward with increasing momentum, a planned industrialisation that will be so great a factor for world peace and stability. How to paint the picture of a new China that is ready to trade with all countries on a basis of equality, peace and friendship; a China that provides an unlimited market for the fruits of the hands of craftsmen of other lands; a China which will no longer take opium or foreign soldiery, but which will take good machinery and pay for it; a world power from which it is no longer possible to wrest concessions, but which with all sincerity promotes a peace movement and cultural exchange; the people of China, so great a section of the total number of all peoples, now decisive and able to speak as an organised nation.

Everywhere there is real change, though to tell of it in any detail would be a stupendous task. All that has been done in these pages is to put together some diary notes to make a sequel to those published in 1952 under the title of "Yo Banfa!", in the hope that they will bring some clarity to those whose future demands that they be clear on this fact—the simple one that now the people have strength in the village, on the farm, and in the factory; the ordinary people of China—organised and sure of themselves as they take the lead in pushing forward to better livelihood, now so sure a hope.

All over the world there must be a growing interest in the sources of this strength, for it is the strength that is inherent not only in the common people of China, but also in the common people of every land. It is a strength that strikes fear into reaction, but which lights up the path of advancing mankind.

The writer is grateful for the help that Shirley Barton has given in the editing of this manuscript. Since it was completed over a year has passed, so that one final entry has been added giving a brief summary of a few of the things that have happened in this time, so as to bring the reader up to date. The tempo of change is so breathless in today's China that statistics of results soon lose their meaning as bigger victories are gained. In the affairs of people, however, the important thing for all to realise is that the change which came in 1949 was a deep and abiding one, and that in the power of their new organisation, the people have strength.

Rewi Alley

Peking, June 5th, 1954

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The cover, the Multiple-Arch Dam of the Futseling Reservoir which froms part of the Huai River Project, is an oil painting by Wu Tso-jen.

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SANDAN, 1951-1952

September 20th It is just two years ago this morning since I sat on the mound at the Lei T'ai and looked over the school roofs to the city gates through which, the previous evening, the last thousand of the warlord Ma's troops, given orders to kill some fifty of our students and demolish the school, had fled with their task unaccomplished. The Liberation Army had cut off their retreat and they had taken to the North Mountains, whence they were routed later.

Two years after, recalling those days, one still feels the strong sense of liberation.

And so today's meeting to open classes for the autumn term also celebrated the coming to Sandan of the new era of people's power.

The boys had decorated the meeting-hall with big pictures of the popular leaders; there were Chairman Mao and General Chu Teh behind the speakers' platform, while at the sides Dr. Sun Yat-sen looked across with the eyes of a dreamer, seeing the China of the future, at Premier Chou En-lai, his decisive, practical face wearing its sure smile.

Our meeting went on through the morning, speakers talking about the different aspects of the new plans for industrialisation and the responsibilities of technical workers. Students were asked to forget the word "I" and to substitute "we" for it, to think in terms of the collective group rather than in terms of the individual; to tie freedom with necessity; and to remember that they were in school as the representatives of the people; to learn new techniques and methods which they would bring back to the people so that the economic freedom of all might be advanced.

Down the long hall, faces took on a more intent look, faces cupped in hands, faces looking out of the open windows, faces staring down at the fingers that could and would do so much in the day that was theirs.

For here we all were, gathered in a crude enough meeting-hall, built with our own hands in the expectancy that such a day would come. Now it was here and around us was all the great Northwest, with its incredible resources, waiting for organized man to reach out and take.

Looking down all those faces, each a window for the struggling, gay, impetuous spirit that lay behind it, I thought of all our toiling together and how all that had been done would now be a basis for appraising the new problems in the new era.

It has been good to have been with them over these years. It is better to know that now the way lies clear in front of them.

It was a magnificent day and in the afternoon I went out to the coal pits; saw the good pile of coal mounting up; saw the keenness of the workers to bathe and clean up as they left the job; just another indication of their new sense of responsibility and of having a place in the scheme of things.

On the way home, just past the village of Wa Yao Kou—the pottery-making village—I got off my bicycle and climbed up on the bank at the side of the road to rest a while and take in the autumn evening.

To the south, the great barrier of the Chi Lien Shan—the South Mountains with their glaciers and everlasting snows; providing a background for the broad sweep of steppe that sloped to the foothills; to the north, directly behind the city, the heights of Lung Shou—the Dragon's Head Mountains—separating us from the Inner Mongolian grasslands of Ningsia Province, lying into the sun dry and hard. On these ridges had once run a spur of the Great Wall which winds through the green oasis of Sandan below me, near the white highway along which stream convoys of trucks to and from the oil wells and from the province of Sinkiang to the west.

The trees around Sandan are changing colour and golds stand against the long yellow walls of the city and against the line of white-washed practice workshops we have erected on the bank of the stream outside the South Gate.

It is all very satisfying to drink in, and as I look there comes a bunch of children returning from school. "Ni kan shu-ma, Lao Ai?"—"What are you doing, Old Ai?"—they ask. "Wo kan ni men,"—"Looking at you,"—I reply. "Kan wo men kan-ma?"—"And why are you looking at us?"—"Ni men na-mo hao kan."—"Because you are so good to look at." And they all laugh and stream off and soon in their wake I hear the song they are singing, *Tung Fang Hung*—"The East is Red" and know that for them it is very happily so.

Then on my bike down the last cutting at good speed, over the stream in a cloud of spray and pushing up the rise the other side and in through the little west gate of our city, down through the avenue of trees and past our students coming and going from their various sections; back to home and supper.

September 21st Last evening, in the bright moonlight, I went on a round of study groups outside the city.

At the first, in the Textile Section, Apprentice Wang was being criticised for breaking tools which he had borrowed without permission and then putting them back in the store without confessing the breakage. He is in the Carpenters' Shop but had spoiled a valuable set of taps and dies taken from the Textile Section's store.

No doubt he had made some mistakes, Wang offered, hoping to escape further criticism, but still the array of accusers kept nailing him down relentlessly to specific faults and pressing that he recognise them clearly and resolve to amend his individualistic ways.

In the next section, Cho Ssu-chen was the centre of the enquiry. He had gone to the Paper Section and had stolen the tomatoes which the boys there had carefully nurtured. The incident had been reported to the editor of the wall-newspaper, Kwang Shing-teh, which put Cho Ssu-chen in such a rage that he hurled a stone at Kwang Shing-teh, hitting him on the leg.

"And what if the stone had hit Kwang Shing-teh on the head and killed him?" The voice was that of Cho Ssu-chu, younger brother of the culprit. (That the younger brother should criticise the elder is a minor revolution in itself in a China where the one

of the chief Confucian virtues was strict obedience to the elder brother.)

Other examples of anti-social behaviour were cited against him. Apparently the score had been mounting up. "And why does he sit with his notebook in front of him but taking no notes of what we are all saying?" One of the girls asks evenly; for it is a rule at criticism meetings that the person criticised should note down what is said and think over it carefully.

At the pottery, a Minlo trader's son is being discussed. He had been assigned to the school coal-mine to help produce the coal that was to fire the pottery kilns.

A coal mine worker takes the floor. "He sneered when we said that coal is the property of the people," he says indignantly. "His attitude to the workers is backward."

Another criticises, "He is lazy and sleeps in. He gets to the coal mine late and others have to do his work for him."

The accused, who is sitting next to me, squirms uncomfortably and then, gripping his bare, sandalled foot with one hand tightly, answers, "I know that is all wrong," and then, even more earnestly, "I really will change this time."

Then up go hands of boys and workers. "He said that before," "How do we know he means it this time?"

I push out through the Pottery gates and ride the bike over empty streets, back into the city. One of the two guards at the gate challenges me and I respond, "Bailie School inspecting study," and the two guards grin in understanding for to them, also, daily discussion is part of their lives and a stepping stone to progress.

September 22nd "Criticism and self-criticism" is in full swing; of which Textile technician Chao says, "Why, this is like the locomotive that pulls the train, it's so full of power!"

Chang Sung-tien, an old kiln stoker who has smoked opium for most of his life, says that when he realised that the working class was now the most important class and that he had therefore become a man of responsibilities, he decided to cut out opium and to get up early in the morning, a thing he had not done for years. After the first struggle, he said, he had felt much better and not ashamed of himself any more.

Then came the case of a machine-shop technician who, wrap-

ped up in himself and his individualistic dream, opposed collective working and actually ruined important technical jobs entrusted to him rather than share responsibility with others. When criticised he lost his temper and struck the leader of the group across the face. The leader kept himself in hand and did not retaliate but turned the matter into one for discussion. Now the culprit is writing out his life history, which will go before his group for study, to see what background he has for his non-cooperative attitude, why he will not work with others, why he is, in effect, "against the people".

At the meeting yesterday which reviewed the results from the first stage of this intensive course of study it was explained to all that if this man could realise where his mistakes lay and be prepared to give his technique honestly for the benefit of the people, then the whole group should sincerely accept him as a working comrade and help him to get the best results.

We discussed the first fruits of the past few weeks' study; how one group had set themselves the task of repairing two old Diesels with which to run a generator to provide more power for the various works of the school, staying up till three each morning to fulfil their goal on time; and what this meant in terms of increased production; how the Tannery Section had decided to clean up the whole place, to scrub all the scraping boards, jars, tables, and so on in their spare time and had stood for hours in the frozen stream, barelegged but in the highest spirits; and how two boiler chimneys had been erected this autumn. The second completed in the teeth of a snowstorm.

Everyone realises now that the right way to think is closely allied with the right way to work and the right way to work is that which brings the results planned for.

Later To one who has seen the opium racket battening on the despair of a people it was something to hear an old village worker like Chang Sung-tien get up and tell so breezily how he had changed the habits of a lifetime.

Before liberation, opium was, of course, "prohibited", but though one could not see, as during the Japanese occupation, fields of poppy fringing the railway line, KMT officials and military, linked with the feudal landlords in the back areas, used the law

to their own advantage and profited richly from the secret trade in the drug. Ample supplies had been tucked away in their storehouses and these were augmented from many an illicit field in remote parts of the country.

The chief gangster of Sandan county had plenty of connections with the opium ring and saw to it that those dependent on him got sufficient supplies of the drug to keep them dependent.

Chang Sung-tien was one of these and did not realise the extent of his exploitation until liberation gave him a chance to think and analyse in company with others.

Now, of course, the abolition of opium is tackled from many angles as well as the legal one.

Firstly, the whole organisation of a people's society is against it so that any who had the temerity to even talk of growing, selling or smoking the drug would be severely criticised.

In Sandan, the selling of opium, which had become quite open in that distant area, disappeared like magic right after the liberation. The second-hand dealers who had exploited the opium-smoking families, seizing the chance to sell up their furniture and belongings, must have joined in public work or found other jobs; anyhow they were no longer seen going down the street with a big painted vase under one arm and some old clothes under the other.

Secondly, who among the ordinary people would want to grow opium? No need to run away from conscription and hide in the mountains, making a living from growing the poisonous weed as many tried to do during the KMT terror, when no man was safe in his home.

The total result is that nowhere in the whole of the northwest —the once poor and exploited, run-down and backward northwest —does one smell the sickly reek in inns, down village streets, or on the clothes of those in the markets.

The real has come to stay and drugs and dreams are at a discount.

September 23rd She stood defiantly and with a toss of her head said that while she had been wrong to curse the technician his attitude to her had not been correct. He had behaved like a factory manager. He had told her to use a machine that was not

as good as the others, and when she had refused he had told her to pad cotton and when she had refused that told her to do hand sewing. She felt she had been quite justified in refusing all—and said so in so many words, with all the assurance of a sixteen-year-old.

The leader of the study group, which had been discussing the problems of "Individualism and Personal Freedom", gently asked her to continue with her statement; to say all that she had to say as long as she wanted to say it.

Then the time came for questions. One lad asked the technician if the machine would really run. Yes, it would—not so well as the other machines, but somebody had to use it. And the girl in charge of the Padding Section had said that she was short-handed that day and could not keep up with the padding. One by one the props that the individualist had put up around her were deftly removed until finally there was very little she had to say, and I left Group I, in the Tailoring and Knitting Section, to go across the compound to Group II, where the same process was being undergone.

In this case the individual hero had been stealing soap, paying off private debts with it. And the flashy fountain pen, the nice notebook in which he entered the various criticisms of the meeting, had been purchased from the same "personal freedom" income.

He was a good, decisive speaker, direct and hard-hitting. But the group was not impressed. Even as in Group I, his props were one by one skilfully removed and his bluster deflated as proof after proof was brought forward.

One girl said, "He wants to live in the new society but can't let go of the old. He tries to stand in the middle. Though we try to make a comrade of him he still wants to profit from the group as no one else can. His thinking is against the group."

At this point I retreated as matters were evidently very well in hand and passed on to still another discussion meeting.

It was being pointed out by the group leader how the masses get their strength—from collective action, with each unit understanding the whys and wherefores of the struggle. Whether in economic planning or in production, in study or in play, if the problem has been thoroughly discussed and each member under-

stands all about the issue at hand, the group will get the results aimed for.

It is something that in the most populous country of our world, in every village, in every factory, in every school, in every organization, there is clear understanding that in such collective action is power greater than that of any obscene bomb the crazed minds of greedy men may invent.

In pre-liberation times, without the strength of the awakened masses giving our struggle both support and direction, it was impossible to progress as now.

In those days our cooperative group was one of the small progressive islands trying to defend its shores and build up democratic livelihood in the sea of corruption that was Kuomintang society held in place by all the might of American imperialism.

Time and time again, as was inevitable, corruption seeped through. Today, looking through an old diary of mine, I came across the following entry, dated May 7th, 1943, which gives some picture of the times:

"What are we to do about the case of the Co-op Federation Chairman of Paochi? He has stolen nine bales of cotton yarn. He is a member of the same secret society as top KMT officials, so we could not arrest him in Paochi. We tried in Sian, but the gang leaders there told the KMT police to have nothing to do with the case.

"The whole group controlling the cotton yarn, on which so many thousands of weavers and their families depend, on which the war efforts depend, are gangsters. They organise the loafers, the squeezers, the bandits against the people. They wear smart uniforms or long silk gowns, they give themselves high-sounding titles, but they are a bunch of maggots on a festering wound. Demoralisation follows in their wake. Cooperative members say: 'What's the use?' Cooperative promoters say, 'We might as well be in on this also. After all, we have families. After all, these racketeers are trusted government men. After all, what chance have we? Meiyo banfa! (Nothing we can do!)'"

Again, on May 9th of the same year: "Lying by the roadside near the railway, in the rain that fell sullenly, as I was coming home from Imenchen last evening, was an old Honan peasant. He would not talk, but just lay there. No one bothered to even

look at him. Tragedy is too common these days, with the Japanese wolves in Honan and profiteering wolves on our side of the lines. I continued to beg him to get up and out of the rain, but he just looked at me and said quietly, 'I must die,' and refused either to budge or to say any more.

"Probably his family had died and there was no longer any way in which he could live. No use telling anyone. No one would be interested enough to do anything. There were too many dead Szechuanese soldiers lying by grave mounds, being torn to bits by dogs—a new kind of offering to bygone ancestors. This is the national tragedy of the gangster Kuomintang leadership of today, backed now by the brand-new American armies that fly so gaily 'over the Hump'. The war as a new branch of business to be expanded for all it is worth, with the real Chinese people, the conscripts who stand in oversized clothes, being lectured by a gangster officer, covered with pistols and wristwatches, fountain pens and badges, his gold teeth glittering in the sun as he opens his trap and shouts: 'If you attempt to run away you will be shot! No question of that!'

"These pitiful kids will have nothing to gain from the new armies, the new aeroplanes. Their hope lies with those who are of their own kind, who fight in the new way they have learned, and of whom the Japanese are most fearful. Hungry little faces under peaked caps, staring wistfully into food stops where fat traders belch and spit contentedly; thin backs accustomed to beatings; the soul of China, dragged through the mud, harried by greedy profiteers on both sides of the lines; yet the China that will one day win—no question of that!"

And again, on May 10th, 1943, the following bit: "On the way to Shwangshihpu village from Paochi, passed two old men living in one of the redoubts built by KMT armies, which dot the countryside without rhyme or reason. Two very old men, skinning a dead dog they had found. So very old were these two men, with large goitrous necks and skinny arms. They had collected some wild greens and had an earthenware pot boiling, into which they dropped bits of the dog. Their watery eyes looked at me, and they said in answer to my protest, 'Nothing else to eat. Meiyo banfa. No way out.' A grisly sight on a

bright May day, with blossom on the hills, the willows green and wheat caressed by the wind that blew so softly." . . .

September 25th Today Land Reform has started in Sandan. The streets are lined with the National Flag, brilliant crimson starred with gold. Every house is decorated with it except the deserted townhouses of the old landlords, shuttered and quiet. They have now become the property of the people and await their new uses. The families of the old landlords will be given enough land to work themselves and to provide enough for them to live on.

Outside the city one may see the little groups going from field to field, each carrying a red flag, which is planted firmly in the centre of the area being dealt with, while the peasants concerned and the land reform cadres go on with the measuring. Some of the cadres have come from distant cities, from universities and law schools, and though they come to help and to teach, they, too, are getting their first basic training in the problems of the countryside, and beginning to realise how much they have to learn from the peasants and farmers who make up 80 per cent of their country's population.

This land reform is another stage in the great battle being fought over the length and breadth of all China, cleaning up the oppression, the tragedy of the past and giving the common man a completely new deal.

It is against such reform that the money of the American taxpayer has been poured into armaments, into the support of vicious and corrupt administrations of the past.

Yet here is victory in full swing and with it the whole country is alive and eager. The worst of the old landlords, the *orh-pa* —"rotten eggs"—who have killed and oppressed the people, will come before people's courts and sentences will be meted out in accordance with their crimes.

In the cases where convicted killers are sentenced to death, the western reactionary press will scream with all its might—that press which was silent during the long years of Kuomintang terror and mass "executions", right up to the mass murder, before they fled the Liberation Army, of prisoners in hundreds of jails. In Sandan we knew that the KMT was on the way out when we

heard, beyond the city walls, the shooting of all the prisoners in the local jail. No fuss was made in any capitalist newspaper about that, but for the execution of those proved to have committed the most fiendish crimes the world reactionary press weeps tears of sympathy, circulating fantastic lies in the attempt to back up its claim of "red terror".

As I write this, there marches past our school gate with shovels on their shoulders, singing, a batch of prisoners from the local jail. They are those who have persecuted the people in the last stage and who have been sentenced by the people's court to periods of detention. They look a cheerful enough lot now, brown with work under the sun, bodies free of the accumulated fat of sloth.

"Reform through constructive work" is the slogan of the local house of detention. There is no doubt that these will come back into society with a new viewpoint and a new attitude towards the rest of the community.

When one looks at the former gang leaders, their finery of silk gowns and satin shoes gone, their faces become hard and brown like those of the other peasants, the skin of their chests and backs a healthy colour, one wonders anew at the system that gave them the power to destroy themselves and others in the old society, to destroy the people's hope and pull men backward. All they needed then was a brain a little more cunning than the rest, the right kind of friends and relatives, and a complete lack of scruples. Today the Land Reform movement, in which so many people, from schools, from administrative organs, from peasant associations, join, can see through the glib words, the greedy motives of the old. The land has returned to the tillers thereof, progress is underway for the cooperative working of the soil for the benefit of the producers who make society.

The success of land reform wherever it has been carried out is an enormous victory for the Chinese people, in the history of the common man's advance along the road of peaceful construction. Even the landlords who have been brought back amongst the people will be grateful for the change; for the old class society in the villages was a hideous distortion which harmed all taking part in it.

September 27th "Yes, the blue, eared pheasant,"—or did he say the "blue-*eared* pheasant"?

"Dr. H. H. Kung gave us an aeroplane to fly over the Chi Lien Mountains but we could not get through to Lake Selanor, the place where the pheasant is. The mountains were too high." "On the previous expedition I took two dead specimens back to our Museum, but this time we were out to get live ones. . . ." "And did you get them?" "No, we had to call the expedition off. . . ."

The speaker was a tall, military-looking man who was staying at the hostel in Kweiyang where our truck had pulled in for the night, on its way from Burma to Chungking.

Other voices chimed in: "Yes, we have been in the villages, measuring the heads of the Miao tribes. We have measured a great many now. They are very interesting."

The speakers were women, members of another American expedition, operating from Kweichow.

The voices rose and fell—"blue, eared pheasants", or "blue-*eared* pheasants", I wondered which. . . . My sky-high malarial fever as I squirmed around on the bed made the sound of voices which came through the open door of the living room even more unreal than they were. . . . The measurements of the skulls of the Miao people . . . mixed with the sights one had sent on the Burma Road, the recent Japanese advances, the problems of production in Gung Ho, the wild, tangled political situation where those who really fought the Japanese were being stabbed in the back by those whom the world believed were fighting the Japanese. . . . All this mixed up in a feverish dream with pheasants' ears and Miao skull measurements.

This morning we went out to look at some houses, now the property of the Peasants' Association, which had once been the haunts of the most profligate landlords in this area. Now we proposed to rent some for technicians' housing and other school uses.

On the rounds, we dropped in on the county party secretary. "Come and see my Chi Lien Shan pheasant!" he cried, and his wife threw out some grain and a big, blue bird emerged from the backyard with tall, beautiful white tufted ears. A farmer had brought it from the South Mountains, which is the local name for

Chi Lien Shan, and had sold it on the street in Wuwei as a wild chicken.

The problem is now solved. The pheasant is blue. It has tall, white ears. Any Museum or Zoological Gardens in the world, provided they can make the necessary arrangements with the People's Government, can come to the home of the party secretary in Sandan and inspect it for themselves.

This one is a female. I shall ask the peasants, when possible, if they have one to sell. Chang Ping-kwei, the lad who looks after the affairs of the Lei T'ai, has just come in and says that the farmers in other counties backing on the South Mountains often catch this nearly extinct pheasant and that several have been raised in captivity.

So the chances of the true scientists of the world knowing more of this bird will still be with us.

September 28th Tonight when I visited the study groups outside the city walls I found the workers discussing how the two years of liberation had affected each and all of them.

One said that when he worked for landlord Tu he got very little to eat, had one ragged sheepskin coat for clothing and bedding, and when he wanted to leave found that he owed Tu money and had no wages coming to him at all. Now, in these two years since liberation, he had already been able to take a wife.

A Minchin County man talked of what new irrigation had done for the peasants of Minchin in these two years.

Another worker said that a great thing was that everybody now knew who was his friend and who was his enemy; that it was really very simple; there were people who would construct the country and people who were against construction because they were greedy for themselves.

A small fat boy sitting on the *kang* (heated bed platform) with his chin on his knees said that he was once nearly murdered by the Hasa (Kazakh) nomads. Now these people come down to the cities and are friends with everyone.

Another told how in his old home the enmity between the Mohammedan people and the Han people was so great that they were frightened to go down to the river at night to get water for fear of attack. All of this had disappeared. The minority peo-