

MAO TSE-TUNG

REPORT OF AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE PEASANT MOVEMENT IN HUNAN



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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The present English translation of Mao Tse-tung's *Report of an Investigation into the Peasant Movement in Hunan*, together with the editor's note, has been made from the Chinese text given in the second edition of the *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Volume I, published by the People's Publishing House, Peking, in July 1952.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

This article was written in reply to criticisms made both inside and outside the Party against the peasants' revolutionary struggles in 1926-27. Comrade Mao Tse-tung went to Hunan and spent thirty-two days making investigations and then wrote this report. The Right opportunists in the Party, headed by Chen Tu-hsiu, were unwilling to accept Comrade Mao Tse-tung's views and persisted in their erroneous opinions. Their chief mistake was that, scared by the reactionary current of the Kuomintang, they dared not support the great revolutionary struggles of the peasants that had broken out or were breaking out. To appease the Kuomintang, they preferred to desert the peasantry, the chief ally in the revolution, and thus landed the working class and the Communist Party in helpless isolation. The Kuomintang took advantage of this weakness of the Communist Party and was emboldened in the summer of 1927 to betray the revolution, launch its campaign to "purge the party," and make war against the people.

Commission on the Publication of
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tung, Central Committee of the
Chinese Communist Party

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THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PEASANT PROBLEM

During my recent visit to Hunan¹ I conducted an investigation on the spot into the conditions in the five counties of Hsiangtan, Hsianghsiang, Hengshan, Liling, and Changsha. In the thirty-two days from January 4 to February 5, in villages and in county towns, I called together for fact-finding conferences experienced peasants and comrades working for the peasant movement, and listened attentively to their reports and collected a lot of material. Many of the hows and whys of the peasant movement were quite the reverse of what I had heard from the gentry in Hankow and Changsha. And many strange things there were that I had never seen or heard before. I think these conditions exist in many other places. All kinds of arguments against the peasant movement must be speedily set right. The erroneous measures taken by the revolutionary authorities concerning the peasant movement must be speedily changed. Only thus can any good be done for the future of the revolu-

¹ Hunan was then the storm-centre of the peasant movement in China.

tion. For the rise of the present peasant movement is a colossal event. In a very short time, in China's central, southern, and northern provinces several hundred million peasants will rise like a tornado or tempest, a force so extraordinarily swift and violent that no power, however great, will be able to suppress it. They will break through all trammels that now bind them and dash forward along the road to liberation. They will send all imperialists, warlords, corrupt officials, local bullies, and bad gentry to their graves. All revolutionary parties and all revolutionary comrades will stand before them to be tested, and to be accepted or rejected as they decide. To march at their head and lead them? Or to follow at their rear, gesticulating at them and criticizing them? Or to face them as opponents? Every Chinese is free to choose among the three, but circumstances demand that a quick choice be made.

GET ORGANIZED!

The peasant movement in Hunan, so far as it concerns the counties in central and southern sections of the province, where the movement is already developed, can be roughly divided into two periods. The first period was the period of organization, extending from January to September of last year. In this period, there were the stage from January to June—a stage of underground activities, and the stage from July to

September when the revolutionary army expelled Chao Heng-ti¹—a stage of open activities. In this period, the membership of the peasant association totalled only 300,000-400,000, and the masses it could directly lead numbered only little more than a million; as there was hardly any struggle in the rural areas, so very little criticism was made on the association. Since its members served as guides, scouts, and carriers, officers in the Northern Expedition Army even had a good word or two for the peasant association. The second period was the period of revolutionary action, extending from last October to this January. The membership of the peasant association jumped to two million and the masses over whom it could exercise direct leadership increased to ten million people. As the peasants mostly entered only one name for each family when joining the association, a membership of two million therefore means a mass following of about ten million. Of all the peasants in Hunan almost half are organized. In counties like Hsiangtan, Hsianghsiang, Liuyang, Changsha, Liling, Ninghsiang, Pingchiang, Hsiangyin, Hengshan, Hengyang, Leiyang, Chenhsien, and Anhua, nearly all the peasants have rallied organizationally in the association and followed its leadership. The peasants, with their extensive organization, went right into action and within four months brought about a great and unprecedented revolution in the country-side.

¹Then ruler of Hunan and agent of the warlords of the Northern clique

DOWN WITH THE LOCAL BULLIES AND BAD GENTRY! ALL POWER TO THE PEASANT ASSOCIATION!

The peasants attack as their main targets the local bullies and bad gentry and the lawless landlords, hitting in passing against patriarchal ideologies and institutions, corrupt officials in the cities, and evil customs in the rural areas. In force and momentum, the attack is just like a tempest or hurricane; those who submit to it survive and those who resist it perish. As a result, the privileges which the feudal landlords have enjoyed for thousands of years are shattered to pieces. The dignity and prestige of the landlords are dashed to the ground. With the fall of the authority of the landlords, the peasant association becomes the sole organ of authority, and what people call "All power to the peasant association" has come to pass. Even such a trifle as a quarrel between man and wife has to be settled at the peasant association. Nothing can be settled in the absence of people from the association. The association is actually dictating in all matters in the country-side, and it is literally true that "whatever it says, goes." The public can only praise the association and must not condemn it. The local bullies and bad gentry and the lawless landlords have been totally deprived of the right to have their say, and no one dare mutter the word "No." To be safe from the power and pressure of the peasant association, the first-rank local bullies and bad gentry

fled to Shanghai; the second-rank ones, to Hankow; the third-rank ones, to Changsha; and the fourth-rank ones, to the county towns; the fifth-rank ones and even lesser fry can only remain in the country-side and surrender to the peasant association.

"I'll donate ten dollars, please admit me to the peasant association," one of the smaller gentry would say.

"Pshaw! Who wants your filthy money!" the peasants would reply.

Many middle and small landlords, rich peasants, and middle peasants, formerly opposed to the peasant association, now seek admission in vain. Visiting various places, I often came across such people, who solicited my help; "I beg the committeeman from the provincial capital to be my guarantor!" they would say.

The census book compiled by the local authorities under the Manchu regime consisted of a regular register and a special register; in the former honest people were entered, and in the latter burglars, bandits, and other undesirables. The peasants in some places now use the same method to threaten people formerly opposed to the association: "Enter them in the special register!"

Such people, afraid of being entered in the special register, try various means to seek admission to the association and do not feel at ease until, as they eagerly desire, their names are entered in its register. But they are as a rule sternly turned down, and so spend

their days in a constant state of suspense; barred from the doors of the association, they are like homeless people. In short, what was generally sneered at four months ago as the "peasants' gang" has now become something most honourable. Those who prostrated themselves before the power of the gentry now prostrate themselves before the power of the peasants. Everyone admits that the world has changed since last October.

**"AN AWFUL MESS!" AND
"VERY GOOD INDEED!"**

The revolt of the peasants in the country-side disturbed the sweet dreams of the gentry. When news about the country-side reached the cities, the gentry there immediately burst into an uproar. When I first arrived in Changsha, I met people from various circles and picked up a good deal of street gossip. From the middle strata upwards to the right-wingers of the Kuomintang, there was not a single person who did not summarize the whole thing in one phrase: "An awful mess!" Even quite revolutionary people, carried away by the opinion of the "awful mess" school which prevailed like a storm over the whole city, became down-hearted at the very thought of the conditions in the country-side, and could not deny the word "mess." The very progressive people could only remark, "Indeed a mess but inevitable in the course of the revolution." In a word, nobody could

categorically deny the word "mess." But the fact is, as stated above, that the broad peasant masses have risen to fulfil their historical mission, that the democratic forces in the rural areas have risen to overthrow the rural feudal power. The patriarchal-feudalistic class of local bullies, bad gentry, and lawless landlords has formed the basis of autocratic government for thousands of years, the corner-stone of imperialism, warlordism, and corrupt officialdom. To overthrow this feudal power is the real objective of the national revolution. What Dr. Sun Yat-sen wanted to do in the forty years he devoted to the national revolution but failed to accomplish, the peasants have accomplished in a few months. This is a marvellous feat which has never been achieved in the last forty or even thousands of years. It is very good indeed. It is not "a mess" at all. It is anything but "an awful mess." "An awful mess"—that is obviously a theory which, in line with the interests of the landlords, aims at combating the rise of the peasants, a theory of the landlord class for preserving the old order of feudalism and obstructing the establishment of a new order of democracy, and a counter-revolutionary theory. No revolutionary comrade should blindly repeat it. If you have firmly established the revolutionary viewpoint and have furthermore gone the round of the villages for a look, you will feel overjoyed as never before. There, great throngs of tens of thousands of slaves, *i.e.*, the peasants, are overthrowing their cannibal enemies. Their actions

are absolutely correct; their actions are very good indeed! "Very good indeed!" is the theory of the peasants and all other revolutionaries. Every revolutionary comrade should know that the national revolution requires a profound change in the countryside. The Revolution of 1911¹ did not bring about this change, hence its failure. Now the change takes place, which is an important factor necessary for completing the revolution. Every revolutionary comrade must support this change, or he will be taking the counter-revolutionary stand.

THE QUESTION OF "GOING TOO FAR"

There is another section of people who say, "Although the peasant association ought to be formed, it has gone rather too far in its present actions." This is the opinion of the middle-of-the-roaders. But how do

¹ The revolution that ended the autocratic rule of the Manchu dynasty. On October 10, 1911, under the influence of the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois revolutionary groups, a section of the imperial "New Army" staged an uprising in Wuchang, provincial capital of Hupeh. Similar uprisings in other provinces followed in rapid succession and the Manchu regime soon crumbled. On New Year's Day, 1912, the Provisional Government of the Republic of China was inaugurated in Nanking with Sun Yat-sen as President. This revolution at first triumphed through an alliance of the bourgeoisie with the peasants, the workers, and the urban petty bourgeois, but finally failed because its leading groups took to compromise. Giving the peasants no real benefits and yielding to the pressure of the imperialist and feudal forces, they let political power slip into the hands of Yuan Shih-kai, founder of the Northern clique of warlords.

matters stand in reality? True, the peasants do in some ways "act unreasonably" in the country-side. The peasant association, supreme in authority, does not allow the landlords to have their say and makes a clean sweep of all their prestige. This is tantamount to trampling the landlords underfoot after knocking them down. The peasants threaten: "Put you in the special register"; they impose fines on the local bullies and bad gentry and demand contributions; they smash their sedan-chairs. Crowds of people swarm into the homes of the local bullies and bad gentry who oppose the peasant association, slaughtering their pigs and consuming their grain. They may even loll for a minute or two on the ivory beds of the young mesdames and mesdemoiselles in the families of the bullies and gentry. At the slightest provocation they make arrests, crown the arrested with tall paper-hats, and parade them through the villages: "You bad gents, now you know who we are!" Doing whatever they like and turning everything upside down, they have even created a kind of terrorism in the country-side. This is what some people call "going too far," or "going beyond the proper limit to right a wrong," or "really too outrageous." The opinion of this group, reasonable on the surface, is erroneous at bottom. First, the things described above have all been the inevitable results of the doings of the local bullies and bad gentry and lawless landlords themselves. For ages these people, with power in their hands, tyrannized over the peasants and trampled them

underfoot; that is why the peasants have now risen in such a great revolt. The most formidable revolts and the most serious troubles invariably occur at places where the local bullies and bad gentry and the lawless landlords are the most ruthless in their evil deeds. The peasants' eyes are perfectly discerning. As to who is bad and who is not, who is the most ruthless and who is less so, and who is to be severely punished and who is to be dealt with lightly, the peasants keep perfectly clear accounts and very seldom has there been any discrepancy between the punishment and the crime. Secondly, a revolution is not the same as inviting people to dinner or writing an essay, or painting a picture or doing fancy needlework; it cannot be anything so refined, so calm and gentle, or so mild, kind, courteous, restrained, and magnanimous.¹ A revolution is an uprising, an act of violence whereby one class overthrows another. A rural revolution is a revolution by which the peasantry overthrows the authority of the feudal landlord class. If the peasants do not use the maximum of their strength, they can never overthrow the authority of the landlords which has been deeply rooted for thousands of years. In the rural areas, there must be a great, fervent revolutionary upsurge, which alone can arouse hundreds and thousands of the people to form a great force. All the actions mentioned above, labelled as "going too far," are caused by the power

¹ These were the virtues of Confucius, as described by one of his disciples.

of the peasants, generated by a great, fervent revolutionary upsurge in the country-side. Such actions were quite necessary in the second period of the peasant movement (the period of revolutionary action). In this period, it was necessary to establish the absolute authority of the peasants. It was necessary to prevent malicious criticisms against the peasant association. It was necessary to overthrow all the authority of the gentry, to knock them down, and even stamp them underfoot. All actions labelled as "going too far" had a revolutionary significance in the second period. To put it bluntly, it was necessary to bring about a brief reign of terror in every rural area; otherwise one can never suppress the activities of the counter-revolutionaries in the country-side or overthrow the authority of the gentry. To right a wrong it is necessary to exceed the proper limit, and the wrong cannot be righted without the proper limit being exceeded.¹ The opinion of this school that the

¹ "Going beyond the proper limit to right a wrong" is an old Chinese phrase. It means that, though the wrong is righted, the proper limit has been exceeded in righting it. This phrase has often been used as a pretext to prevent thorough-going measures and to justify mere patching and tinkering. It implies that the established order of things should not be utterly destroyed, but only certain remedial measures need be introduced for its betterment. Thus it provides a convenient formula for the reformists and the opportunists within the revolutionary ranks. Here Comrade Mao Tse-tung is refuting such people. When he says in the text, "To right a wrong, we must go beyond the proper limit; otherwise the wrong cannot be righted," he means that mass revolutionary measures, not reformist-revisionist measures, must be taken to end the old feudal order.

peasants are "going too far" is on the surface different from the opinion of the other school mentioned earlier that the peasant movement is "an awful mess," but in essence it adheres to the same viewpoint, and is likewise a theory of the landlords which supports the interests of the privileged classes. Since this theory hinders the rise of the peasant movement and consequently disrupts the revolution, we must oppose it resolutely.

THE SO-CALLED "MOVEMENT OF THE RIFFRAFF"

The right wing of the Kuomintang says, "The peasant movement is a movement of the riffraff, a movement of the lazy peasants." This opinion has gained much currency in Changsha. I went to the country-side and heard the gentry say, "It is all right to set up the peasant association, but the people now running it are incompetent; better put others on the job!" This opinion and the dictum of the right wing come to the same thing; both admit that the peasant movement may be carried on (as the peasant movement has already risen, no one dare say that it shouldn't), but regard people leading the movement as incompetent and hate particularly those in charge of the associations at the lower levels, labelling them "riffraff." In short, all those who were formerly despised or kicked into the gutter by the gentry, who had no social standing, and who were denied the right to have a