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IN A
CHINESE VILLAGE:
TEN MILE INN**



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A CHINESE VILLAGE
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REVOLUTION IN
A CHINESE VILLAGE
TEN MILE INN

by
ISABEL and DAVID CROOK



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This book shows how one backward village
became a revolutionary bastion

‘... the revolutionary forces... must build the backward
villages into advanced, consolidated base areas, into
great military, political, economic and cultural
revolutionary bastions....’

MAO TSE-TUNG¹

¹ From ‘The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party’ (1939) in
Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, Vol. III (p. 85). Lawrence and Wishart 1954.

PREFACE

In the middle of the civil war between the Chinese Communists and the Kuomintang, the writers floated on a barge down the Grand Canal, through no-man's-land and into the Liberated Areas.¹ At the end of November 1947, they finally reached the cluster of villages in the foothills of the Taihang Mountains which formed the capital of the Shansi-Hopeh-Shantung-Honan Border Region.

There they were asked to submit a written plan of what they were interested in doing in the Liberated Areas. The plan submitted consisted of an outline for a detailed study of land reform in one village.

Meanwhile, the writers were invited to stay at the Border Region Government Guest House in the village of Ten Mile Inn. This in itself was closer to the realization of their aims than it may sound, for the 'Guest House' consisted of a number of rooms scattered in different villagers' homes. The writers slept in one home, ate in another, and visited fellow visitors and members of the staff in still others. This, together with having a free run of the village, permitted a fair amount of informal observation. In a short time the writers were granted permission to go a step farther and to carry on a preliminary investigation of the village while waiting for the official decision on the plan which they had submitted.

The village government cadres² were told that the writers were

¹ These were vast but scattered areas in North China, with a total population of 140 millions, which had been organized under Communist leadership to resist the Japanese.

In November 1947, these areas comprised sixteen separate Border Regions, each with its own anti-Japanese united front government. The Shansi-Hopeh-Shantung-Honan Border Region—so called because it was situated on the adjoining borders of the four provinces—had a population of thirty millions.

² 'Cadre' is the current translation of *kangpu*, a term covering various types of government and Communist Party administrative and political workers—officials, civil servants and staff at all levels.

foreign friends who had come to learn about the Liberated Areas; so were the Communist Party members. Consequently we were treated in a friendly fashion by the great majority of the villagers, who never begrudged the time to answer our questions—or to bombard us with their own.

Besides the villagers themselves, the personnel of the Border Region Government offices, which were located in the village—such as the Public Relations Department, the Reception Centre for students fleeing from the Kuomintang areas, the South Hopeh Bank—were extremely helpful.

This period of gathering background information included a careful study of the daily newspaper, especially of the reports of the Border Region Agrarian Conference which was then in session. When the Conference was over, Yang Hsiu-feng, Chairman of the Border Region,¹ found time to discuss the writers' plan with them. It was then mutually agreed that it would be most valuable to study the operations of one of the work teams which were to be organized in accordance with the Conference decisions. These work teams were to guide the peasants throughout the whole Border Region in putting the Agrarian Law into effect and 're-organizing and purifying the ranks of the Party'. Chairman Yang explained to the writers that the Border Region Central Bureau of the Chinese Communist Party was going to organize a special team which would take the lead in setting the campaign in motion. This special team was to operate in the vicinity, and Ten Mile Inn was to be its second 'break-through point'. This at once gave our background material possibilities of proving of direct value. We asked and were given permission to make Ten Mile Inn itself the object of our detailed study.

Collection of Material

There were still six weeks till the work team was due in the village. During this time the writers not only had a chance to gain further useful background knowledge, but the villagers had a chance to become familiar with the writers. In time, instead of being regarded as something distinctly unusual, the writers' presence was taken for granted and did not distract attention from the matters on hand.

¹ Yang Hsiu-feng is now Minister of Education in the Chinese People's Government.

PREFACE

The collection of the material was the work of a team, the size and composition of which varied at different periods. Miss Chu Chung-chih, Mr. Yang Piau and Mr. Li Huan-shan all took part at one time or another. The one permanent member of the group, besides the writers, and the one who carried the heaviest burden of work, was Mr. Li Ti-hua. Mr. Yang Fang-hsiung, of the South Hopeh Bank, whose job included studying the results of rural banking policy in the village, also provided much useful information.

The most essential part of the material was collected during the Campaign for the Adjustment of Land Holdings and the Purification and Reorganization of the Party. This Campaign lasted from February 26th to April 15th, 1948. During this time, as at all others, the writers were given every facility for observing and investigating what was going on. The only limitation imposed was that of their own ability to understand what they saw and heard. They were, however, given every opportunity to overcome this limitation in individual talks with the rank-and-file members of the work team as well as with its leaders, up to and including Chang P'an-shih of the Central Bureau. They were also permitted to attend meetings of all sorts—of the villagers themselves and of the work team; and to examine a mass of written material—village documents, statistical records, instructions to the work team, etc.

Besides this, the group members observed what was going on in the ordinary course of village life. They attended village meetings on aid to soldiers' families, on winter production, production loans, etc.

Since all the investigators lived in various villagers' homes, they had an opportunity to get to know several families quite intimately. The rooms occupied by the Border Region Reception Centre and Guest House were allocated by the peasant union. They had formerly belonged to landlords, rich peasants¹ and others who, rightly or wrongly, had been 'struggled against' by the people and had had their houses partially or totally confiscated. However, in most cases the former owners still occupied part of the house. These 'struggle objects' constituted the very section of the population whom it would normally have

¹ For definition of these terms see Appendix, p. 183.

been most difficult to approach; but close daily contact with them gave us as clear a picture of the life of the disenfranchised as we were able to obtain of the other more confident and communicative peasants.

Presentation: Use of Quotations, etc.

The frequently used quotations are not based on inference or deduction; they are statements actually heard by the investigators or reports made by the villagers of things they actually heard. The statements and reports have been edited and freely translated, but they have in no case been invented.

There has been no attempt, in the interests of artistic presentation, to reduce the number of characters by making composite types. All the characters are real persons.

Acknowledgements

The list of people to whom the writers wish to extend their thanks, without in any way implicating them in the book's short-comings, is long. First and foremost, of course, are the Chinese members of the investigation team who bore the brunt of the work of collecting the material on which the book is based.

We are particularly indebted, too, to Professor Raymond Firth of the London School of Economics for his constant help and encouragement.

Several students of the Foreign Languages Institute helped with the translation of various documents and reports.

It goes without saying that the book could not have been written without the facilities accorded by Chairman Yang Hsiu-feng and other officials of the Shansi-Hopeh-Shantung-Honan Border Region.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge our indebtedness to the Scarborough Fellowship Fund for its generous support.

I. AND D.C.

Peking, 1958

CONTENTS

	Preface	vii
	Geographical Note on Ten Mile Inn	xv
	Prologue	xvii
	List of Local People	xxi
I	On the Eve of the Japanese Invasion <i>The Land and the Tiller The Family, Real and Ideal— The Village, Divided and Ruled</i>	1
II	Pillars—and Pedestals—of the Old Society <i>Members of the Fu Clan Members of the Li Clan— Members of the Wang Clan Landlords outside the Village —One of the Pedestals</i>	18
III	The Kuomintang Retreat: The Communists Resist <i>The Twenty-four Commanders Commander Huang comes to Ten Mile Inn 'The Sun Rises in the West'—The Eighth Route Army comes to Ten Mile Inn</i>	31
IV	Ten Mile Inn takes its Stand on the Anti-Japanese Front <i>The Militia—The Women's Association—Taxation—'In- viting the Rich to Contribute' The Village Co-operative The Peasant Union The Village Communist Party Branch</i>	40
V	Famine and Counter-famine <i>'Disaster Relief and Spring Cultivation Movement' 'Digging out the Landlords' Hidden Grain' The 'Clearing-up Debts' Movement—Organizing Mutual Aid—The Co-operative and Women's Production The Movement to Reclaim Wasteland—Ten Mile Inn's Labour Heroes</i>	56
VI	Introducing the New Middle Peasants <i>Strengthening Organized Resistance—The New Middle Peasants in Office The Case of the Secret Agents—Political and Economic Progress</i>	74
VII	Ten Mile Inn under its First Elected Government <i>The Bean Elections—Reduction and Payment of Rent and Interest—The Women Advance, on One Sector—The Peasant Women's Association</i>	94

CONTENTS

VIII	The Destruction of Feudalism: Act One	109
	<i>'The Allied Struggle of the People of Town and Countryside'—The 'Black Lands' Campaign—The Fugitives— The May Fourth Directive—'Looking for Spears among the Millet Stalks'</i>	
IX	The Destruction of Feudalism: Act Two	138
	<i>Some Landlord Leadership lingers on—'Dividing the Family' Campaign—'Digging-out the Air-raid Shelters'— 'Washing Faces and Rubbing Off Smudges'</i>	
X	Achievements of Eight Years of Democratic Reforms	160
	<i>New Land-ownership Winter Production and Mutual Aid —Social Changes—Political Changes</i>	
	Epilogue: 'One Step in a Ten Thousand League March'	173
Appendices:		
I	Communist Policy: An Historical Sketch	176
	<i>The Soviet Period—The War against Japan —The Liberation War Period</i>	
II	'The Thought of Mao Tse-tung'	182
	<i>Classification—The Mass Line</i>	
	Index	188

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Between pages 48–64

1. The terraced hill fields of Ten Mile Inn.
2. Village gates—Ten Mile Inn.
3. The main street in the Fort.
4. Meals are sociable affairs.
5. The stone causeway leading to the Fort.
6. Chinese New Year, 1948.
7. Wang Fu-hsin, Clerk of the village government, and Wang Hsi-t'ang.
8. Mural on wall in village street showing peasants denouncing landlord in land reform campaign.

Between pages 112–128

9. Village 'cadre' making an announcement through the village loudspeaker
10. Wang K'e-pin, the poor peasant who became the first village head.
11. Rolling a field with mule-drawn stones after planting.
12. Peasant broadcasting some sesame seeds among the millet. Sesame seeds are a very important crop in the north.

LIST OF LOCAL PEOPLE

13. Ploughing—in preparation for sowing millet.
14. Village woman harvesting wheat just outside Ten Mile Inn.
15. Carrying home the seeder after planting millet on one of the terraced fields up the hillside.
16. Man carrying loads of wheat on pole at harvest-time.
17. A typical 'trade-and-transport' cavalcade from Ten Mile Inn.
18. The market in Chao Village, three miles from Ten Mile Inn.

MAP

The Village of Ten Mile Inn

xxiv

Geographical Note on Ten Mile Inn

Ten Mile Inn is situated in the foothills of the T'aihang Mountains at the meeting-place of the four provinces—Shansi, Hopeh, Shantung and Honan. This meeting-place was the centre of the Shansi-Hopeh-Shantung-Honan Border Region, which in the latter half of 1947 covered an area of about eight hundred thousand square miles in the four provinces. Its seventeen million acres of cultivated land supported a population of thirty million people.

The Border Region was divided, for administrative purposes, into five sub-regions; each sub-region into four to six districts; each district into roughly five counties (hsien). The counties, in turn, were divided into ten or so sub-counties (ch'ü), each with thirty or so administrative villages (hsiang). Ten Mile Inn, being larger than an average village, was an administrative village, with its own complete government structure.

Wu An County, which was in the T'aihang Sub-region, lies wholly in the foothills of the T'aihang Mountains, and consists entirely of hilly country dotted with small plateaux. Its 165,000 acres of cultivable land maintained a population of some 300,000 people, leaving the agricultural families, which is to say the majority, with about half an acre per head. This small size of holdings was typical, not only of Wu An County, but of the T'aihang Sub-region, and, in fact, of the Border Region as a whole.

The county has considerable deposits of iron and coal—at this time relatively undeveloped—though progress made in this direction by the Japanese had been maintained and advanced since VJ-Day. Wu An is also rich in medicinal herbs, and its inhabitants had for many decades dominated the commerce in this commodity in cities hundreds of miles away. Its 505 villages, too, were noted for their brickmakers, tinsmiths and sievemakers, who ventured far afield, some of them plying their craft as far away as Manchuria and Inner Mongolia.

Feudalism

The word 'Feudalism' is used throughout this book to translate the Chinese term 'feng chian'.

In current Chinese usage 'feudalism' means that system of society in which most of the land is owned by landlords whose main income comes from rent and usury, and by rich peasants who, though they work the land, derive a quarter or more of their income from rent and/or usury. The majority of the peasants own little or no land and rely on renting land or working as labourers.

Politically the villages are controlled by the landlords, who have power of life and death over the peasants.

Chinese society in the period prior to 1949 is defined by the Chinese Communists as having been 'semi-feudal, semi-colonial'. Though the villages contained elements of both feudalism and capitalism, the aim of the reforms described in this book was the elimination of the feudal, not of the capitalist, element.

PROLOGUE

Approaching Ten Mile Inn from Wu An County-town twenty miles to the east, the dirt road winds along beside the boulder-strewn bed of a river, dry nine months out of the year. The valley narrows and the hills rise steeply, their lower slopes laboriously terraced, their tops bare and eroded. Near the village both road and river swing to the south; at this point the expanse of stones is over a quarter of a mile wide, and much once-fertile valley bottom land has been lost through the floods of former years.

From a distance there appear to be two villages rather than one. Down in the valley, straddling the highway, is the main village, or 'the Street' as it is usually called; to the north-east, climbing up the side of the hills is 'the Fort', formerly a landlord citadel.

The entrances to all the courtyards of the Fort face inwards, and the bare and solid backs of the buildings, in which windows are few, small and high, present a formidable wall. On the lower side the height of the walls is accentuated by the hillside, which has been carved out to make a sheer face that adds considerably to the height of the wall. The Fort has two gates, now largely ornamental, but as the one close to the hills is approached only by narrow footpaths and that facing the Street by a steep, S-shaped cobbled causeway, the Fort is still inaccessible to the wheeled vehicles which rumble along the highway. The architecture of the citadel alone speaks volumes of the past relations between landlord and peasant.

It was the end of November 1947 when we reached Ten Mile Inn. The stalks of the Indian corn still stood in the surrounding fields, but the cobs were already plucked. They lay in golden heaps on the beaten-mud threshing floors on the outskirts of the village and in between the Fort and the Street. Some corn, too,

could be seen drying in the autumn sun on the flat roofs of grey cement which alternated with the more elegant but less useful ones made of curved tiles.

Our mule-cart jolted through the picturesque south gate, which, being unjoined by any wall, was an example of decorative tradition rather than practical protection; for the Street, unlike the Fort, was historically the home of the people who had little wealth worth protecting. Above the graceful arch, in bold white letters, was inscribed a line from a popular old folk tune set to new words: 'Mao Tse-tung is the great star of salvation of the Chinese people'.

There were slogans, too, on the walls of many houses. At some gateways were bright red posters to show that these were the homes of volunteers who had joined the People's Liberation Army in the recent recruiting drive. These 'gate-post seals' were no mass-produced pronouncements, but individual expressions of appreciation, each different from the other. One of them read:

'To Comrade Wang Lei-shen

During this time of mighty nation-wide offensive you volunteered to join our ever-victorious army in its advance.

Glory to the volunteers who will speed across the Yellow and the Yangtse Rivers.

To capture Chiang Kai-shek alive and defend our happy lives.'

Chiang Kai-shek figured prominently in a colourful mural painted on a wall farther down the street. He was shown as the central figure of a group composed of Wang Ching-wei and others notorious in Chinese history as traitors to their country. On another wall was chalked up the day's edition of the 'Blackboard News' copied from the *People's Daily*, which always contained a simply written feature especially for this purpose.

Although the village street was part of the highway, it contained only one shop of note—the co-operative. This was housed in a building more pretentious than the rest, with fortress-like battlements which once protected the wealth of Wang Feng-ch'i, a rich peasant grain speculator and money dealer. Now it sheltered the co-operative's stocks of salt and matches and cigarettes and similar commodities brought in from outside to this still largely

PROLOGUE

self-sufficing economic unit. Besides the co-operative there were a couple of inns and restaurants catering for passing carters and pedlars; and in the former temple of the God of War, adjoining the north gate, was a celebrated mutton-soup shop known far and wide as a good pull-up for carters.

All of these, particularly the co-operative, served as social centres. Before them were gathered groups of men discussing their trade-and-transport expeditions which formed the major secondary occupation during slack agricultural seasons such as this.¹ The women formed their own groups, for though in the past ten years they had emerged from centuries of confinement to the home, it was still not seemly for them to mingle with men in the streets. They sat in small groups in gateways or other sheltered spots on the sunny side of the street, spinning or reeling yarn, stretching great skeins of newly-washed cotton yarn or hanging up pieces of newly-dyed cloth. Others were making cloth shoes for the army, in which the women of the mountain areas were especially skilled.

The children, in whom China is so prolific, swarmed everywhere, adding their shrill cries to the other village sounds—the rumble of wooden-wheeled carts on the pot-holed street; the musical chant of the doughnut pedlars; the braying of the donkeys which in a prosperous North China village takes the place of the equally discordant motor-horn; the clang of the pick and hoe intermittently striking stones, echoing down from the hillsides where a mutual aid group was breaking fresh ground.

Such was the writers' introduction to Ten Mile Inn in November 1947.

¹ Trade-and-transport (shihk'an) meant buying goods such as chinaware and coal at the place of production, transporting them some distance by animal or on shoulder-carrying poles, and re-selling. The profit really amounted to payment for transportation rather than ordinary commercial gain.

LIST OF LOCAL PEOPLE

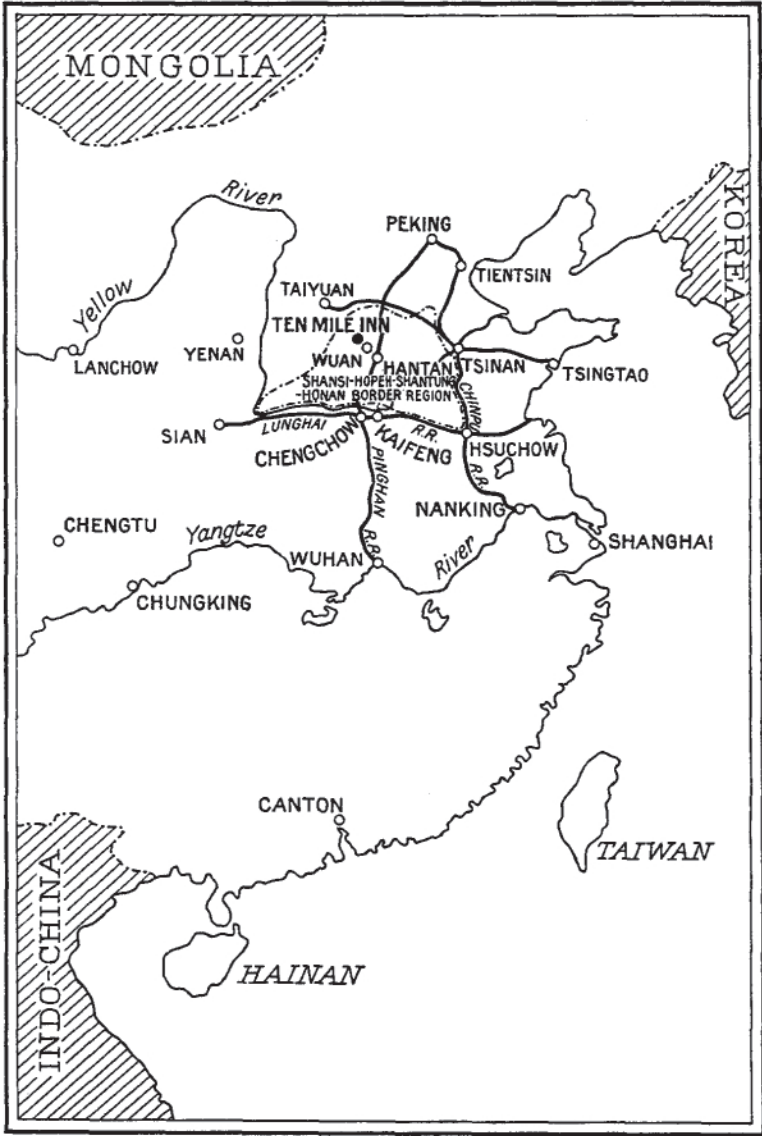
- Chang Chi-cheng*: Landless labourer who first had the courage to stand up to the usurers in the movement to pay off debts. 60, 64
- Chang Hsin-hai*: The biggest landlord of Wu An County. 27, 28, 111–12
- Chang 'Lao-wantze'*: The most powerful landlord in the locality of Ten Mile Inn. 27, 28, 77
- Chang Szu-chueh*: A big landlord of Wu An County. 111
- Fu Chang-so*: Poor peasant nephew of the rich peasant Fu I-tze. 98–9
- Fu Ch'i-feng*: Mother-in-law who caused her daughter-in-law to commit suicide. 102–3
- Fu Ch'in-yuan*: Poor peasant, one of the first to expose landlords' false gifts. 116
- Fu Hsin*: Landlord, cloth merchant, one-time manager of the village co-operative, later a second class 'struggle object'. 18–20, 22, 51, 138–43
- Fu I-tze*: Rich peasant, assistant manager of the notorious Hsin Hsiung Shop. 20–1, 154–5
- Fu Kao-lin*: One-time poor peasant, second chairman of the peasant union. 76–7
- Fu P'ei-chien*: 'Lawyer', procurer of women for local Kuomintang officers. 21, 152
- Fu P'ei-yin*: Manager of the notorious Hsin Hsiung Shop, usurer, dealer in heroin. 20, 154
- Fu Shou-liang*: Middle peasant, agent of the landlords. 19, 20, 22, 38, 55, 64, 84, 85–90, 114, 125, 139, 152
- Huang Shib-liang*: An officer of the Kuomintang 53rd Army who took up his headquarters in Ten Mile Inn for a time. 31–3, 38
- Li Fa-k'uei*: Rich peasant, Kuomintang *pao*-head, one of Commander Huang's middlemen. 24–5, 32, 65–6, 152

LIST OF LOCAL PEOPLE

- Li Feng*: Rich peasant, usurer and owner-manager of the 'Mountain Products Depot'. 23-4, 54, 114, 117, 122-3, 144, 149
- Li Wei-shu*: School teacher son of the rich peasant Li Feng. 143-5, 149
- T'ien Ch'uan*: First of the maltreated daughters-in-law of Ten Mile Inn to have her case solved by the women's association. First village labour heroine. 73
- Tuan Sheng*: One of the more powerful landlords in the locality of Ten Mile Inn. 27, 99
- Wang Chen-chi*: Poor peasant, early supporter of the Communists, organizer of the first mutual aid group in the village, labour hero and subsequently a sub-county government cadre. 40, 63-5, 72, 129
- Wang Ch'i*: Militiaman, one-time village clerk. 78, 84
- Wang Chia-chi*: Manager of a silk shop and a budding landlord, later a fugitive from the village. 121-2, 125, 129
- Wang Ch'ueh-de*: Middle peasant woman, first chairman of the Ten Mile Inn women's association. 43-5, 134
- Wang Feng-chi*: Rich peasant grain speculator and money dealer, one-time Kuomintang *pao*-head. xviii, 26-7, 123
- Wang Fu-hsin*: One of the first of the peasants to have the courage to struggle for his new rights, later village clerk. 61
- Wang Hsi-t'ang*: One-time poor peasant craftsman who took part in the early struggles, became a Communist Party member and was the first elected village head. 93, 95, 96, 98, 102, 133, 157, 166
- Wang Hsiang*: One-time poor peasant woman, head of the peasant women's association. 104-7
- Wang K'e-pin*: Poor peasant, first chairman of the Ten Mile Inn peasant union. 52-3, 59, 76-7, 150
- Wang K'uei-chen*: Poor peasant, most famous story-teller of Wu An County. 103-4
- Wang Nan-fang*: Poor peasant, carpenter, early supporter of mutual aid. 64
- Wang Pan-yen*: Second biggest landlord of Ten Mile Inn, biggest hirer of labour, Kuomintang *pao*-head, and head of the village branch of the Kuomintang Party. 25-6, 54, 55, 80-1, 82-3, 152
- Wang Shao-chen*: Poor peasant, labourer, secretary of the village Communist Party branch. 72, 93, 96, 157

LIST OF LOCAL PEOPLE

- Wang Shao-yi*: First village director of production, staunch supporter of equality for women. 70-2, 134, 150
- Wang Shao-yu*: One-time poor peasant, later village head for brief period. 80-1, 84-6, 90
- Wang Tse-yin*: One-time secretary of the village Communist Party branch, later village head, then sub-county government cadre. 91-3, 129
- Wang Wen-sheng*: Poor peasant, one-time beggar, later vice-village head. 28-30, 156
- Wang Wen-tang* ('*Old Wen-tang*'): One-time village public security officer, later a sub-county government cadre, 84-5, 129
- Wang Ying-hsiang*: Fourth son of the rich peasant Wang Feng-ch'i, criminal, heroin pedlar, suspected agent of the Japanese.
- Yang Tze-an* ('*Lion Wang*'): Brigand, later commander of local puppet troops. 109-10



THE VILLAGE OF TEN MILE INN

It was with these guiding principles that the Chinese Communist Party set about the task of converting the poverty-stricken superstitious, backward village of Ten Mile Inn into a stronghold of the revolution.

I

ON THE EVE OF THE JAPANESE INVASION

The Land and the Tiller

What was it like in Ten Mile Inn when the landlords ruled?

Then as now the fields were fringed with persimmon and apricot trees and thorny pepper bushes. The main crops were millet, wheat and Indian corn, with beans, cabbage, spinach and various types of pumpkin. Then, as now, on either side of the village the hills rose sharply, their sides laboriously terraced. The terraced fields went up the hillsides like gigantic, tapering staircases, the small fields at the top finally petering out into cultivated patches at an angle of forty degrees, on which only castor-oil bushes would grow. On the summits themselves grey stone outcropped through the thin grass on which a few sheep and cattle grazed. There was no land to spare for these meagre flocks lower down, for every possible foot of earth was tilled.

The old men of the village remember when there were over 5,000 mu¹ of cultivable land in Ten Mile Inn. Then the floods of 1917 carried away 1,000 mu of the best valley bottom land and left 1,000 mu of stony river-bed in its place.

Practically everyone of the village's 1,500 people depended for a livelihood on cultivating the 4,000 odd mu which then remained. The few exceptions were members of a handful of landlord and rich peasant² families whose income was derived wholly or partly from rents, usury or business interests. But the overwhelming majority had to eke out a livelihood by labouring

¹ One mu equals roughly one-sixth of an acre.

² These terms denote carefully defined classes. For their definition, see section on classification in Appendix II, p. 183.

R.C.V.—r

on their tiny plots of land. They engaged in back-breaking toil with simple tools whose design had changed little in the course of a couple of thousand years. Many peasants farmed widely scattered plots at a distance of over a mile from both the village and each other. Yet every field was tended as intensively as if it had been a window-box.

For every ten humans in the village there was only one draught animal. If these had been evenly distributed, there would have been two animals for every five families; as it was, the twenty richest families had two animals each—five times the average. The remaining families owned only ‘one leg each’, as the peasants say when four of them share a donkey. That was on an average, though. Most of them owned ‘not even one hair of a donkey’.

The family was the working unit, with the men working mainly in the fields, the women mainly in the house. For the latter the most gainful employment was spinning and weaving. But cotton and spinning-wheels and looms cost money, and the better-off a family was the more equipment they would have and the more money and clothing they could make. For the men there were profitable sidelines during the winter months, but these too demanded capital. And capital, like the draught animals, was concentrated in a few hands. Those without it, men and women alike, were condemned to months of unemployment every year.

Although by the standards of twentieth-century industrial society, rich and poor alike might seem to have lived poor enough lives, the difference between them showed sharp contrasts. The twenty richest families averaged nearly two-and-a-half times as much land per head as the middle peasant¹ families and nearly seven times as much per head as the families of the poor peasants and hired labourers. It was the members of these poor families who died or emigrated first in times of famine; who were forced by poverty to kill or sell their children; who were driven by hunger to join the warlord and bandit armies; who were imprisoned for non-payment of taxes or lost their meagre property by default for non-payment of debts. Differences of class were a matter of life and death.

The lack of non-agricultural work stemmed from failure to develop village industry. The landlords found it more profitable to invest in the textile trade in Yangyi market town, seven miles

¹ See Appendix II, p. 183.

north; or to trade in walnuts or medicinal herbs and other mountain products. These could be sold in the county town twenty miles east on the edge of the plain, or farther east still in Hantan City on the Peking–Hankow Railway.

But the most profitable trade of all was that in money, of which the majority of peasants were always in need. Interest rates ran from around 2 per cent per *month* to 100 per cent for twenty days or 1,825 per cent a year!

The whole apparatus of law and order—police, militia, army and civil administration—were at the disposal of the landlords to enforce re-payment of debts or to carry out confiscation of security in case of default. The rule was so closely followed and money-lending such a safe and profitable proposition that some landlords of Ten Mile Inn borrowed from their wealthier fellows in other villages in order to re-lend to the peasants of their own.

One or two landlords did the same with land, renting it from richer owners in neighbouring places and then sub-letting it or hiring farm-hands to work it. But even with the addition of this sub-leased land the holdings of the Ten Mile Inn landlords were not great, and there were less than fifty families of tenants out of a total of over four hundred.

Two types of tenure were common in the village: under the first, the tenant received only land from the landlord and at harvest-time gave him half the crop (divided under the eagle eye of the landlord's agent); under the second, the landlord supplied not only land but also tools, manure and animals and the tenant gave him 70 per cent of the crop. A third type of tenure was used by the bigger landlords, including those in Stone Cave Village, only a mile away. This was to set a fixed rent, instead of a proportion of the crop, and to collect it regardless of the quality of the harvest. Under this arrangement the tenant might find, in a bad year, that his entire crop barely sufficed to cover the rent alone.

But this type of renting was uncommon in Ten Mile Inn, whose landlords, compared with those in certain other parts of the county (one of whom owned 40,000 mu), were decidedly small fry.

Nevertheless, small fry though they were, the Ten Mile Inn landlords had their own association which fixed the price of agricultural labour on a take it or leave it basis. To leave it meant

added suffering for those without land enough of their own. But full-time farm-hands were even fewer than tenants; and most of them came from other, still poorer villages farther back in the hills. The Ten Mile Inn villagers had their own explanation for this importation of labour. They said that locally-hired farmhands would answer calls of nature at home, thus depriving their employers of valuable fertilizer; and the landlords were so stingy that rather than lose this they hired men from other villages who had to 'live in'.

While the number of labourers brought into Ten Mile Inn was small, that of peasants who left it seeking long- or short-term employment was large; for the great majority had too little land to make a living. As a result many became itinerant brickmakers during the slack agricultural season. They travelled far and wide, and the brickmakers of Ten Mile Inn were famous in four counties. When fortunate enough to secure employment, the brickmakers earned more in a month than a farmhand could earn in a year (throughout most of the 'thirties a farm-hand earned from thirty to thirty-five silver dollars—say, forty to forty-eight shillings—a year). But brickmaking had its ups and downs, so though widespread, it was altogether too irregular and undependable to afford a reliable income for a definite number of months every year. Nevertheless, in 1937 as many as 201 families had men engaged in this craft. Other sidelines were less popular, there being only sixteen carpenters, less than ten builders and masons and a handful of part-time miners. A few villagers found employment in cloth or general stores in market or county towns, but this tended to be a full-time job rather than a part-time supplement to labour on the land.

It would be misleading to regard all these non-agricultural jobs as merely supplementary. In fact, they were all part and parcel of a system which, though based on agriculture, could not function efficiently without other forms of production. Without their secondary occupations the poor peasant families, who constituted five-eighths of the village's population, could not have survived even at their customary miserable level. Ten Mile Inn, like other peasant communities, stood on two legs—farming and handicraft. With one or the other dislocated it was bound to be a crippled society.

Before the Communists came, Ten Mile Inn was in just this

crippled condition. Holdings had long since become uneconomically small, for according to Chinese inheritance traditions the land was divided equally among all the sons. Village crafts were in much the same condition as agriculture; all were stifled by lack of capital.

A few of the many hard-pressed peasants, lacking capital or any sort of reserves, became the rent collectors and hired toughs of the landlords and rich peasants. In this way they hoped to rent a plot of land on favourable terms, to receive some household employment, or to compete successfully for the few available jobs in what little landlord or rich peasant-owned village industry there was. These peasants were called by their fellows, with a mixture of hatred and envy, 'dog's legs' or 'running dogs'.

Although some landlords and rich peasants borrowed money from near-by villages to lend in Ten Mile Inn, others left capital idle, like the peasants' labour. In richer villages close to Ten Mile Inn, when the struggle against the landlords and rich peasants finally began, hoards of their money were found hidden or buried in the ground; some of it had been there for generations.

Besides this, the inheritance system of dividing the land equally among all the sons meant that with each succeeding generation land-holdings were divided into smaller and smaller fragments.

Most landlords and rich peasants tried to keep themselves from falling into this pit of land-fragmentation by supplementing their income from rents with business or usury. The traditional aim was in each generation to add so much to the family estate by purchase, foreclosure and other practices, that each son could inherit as much as his father had done before him. Since usury supported by police power yielded a far higher rate of profit than productive enterprise, it was by far the most practical method of realizing this aim. Demanding the most extortionate rates of interest might thus be interpreted as an act of loyalty to the family. This diversion of capital into usury hampered more than ever the development of production; and in the long run it made the problem more insoluble than ever for the very great majority.

The Family—Real and Ideal

The most important institution socially as well as economically was the family. Though a common tradition and an ancient legal

code had united the villagers in acceptance of an ideal family pattern, family life was actually different in each of the main classes. Among the middle peasants, for instance, the family usually consisted of five people, a number which permitted the division of labour between agriculture, household and secondary occupations that is the basis of peasant prosperity.

The poor peasants and labourers on the one side and the landlords and rich peasants on the other departed from the norm. The twenty wealthiest families averaged seven to eight members, while the families of the poor peasants and farm labourers averaged three to four. This is not surprising, for it was the poor who sold or even gave away their children to those who could support them during their early, non-productive years. Though in time both boys and girls might add to the family income or do farm or household work, daughters were the more commonly disposed of; for they left home on marriage and helped to make secure the old age, not of their own parents, but that of their parents-in-law. Sons, on the other hand, would some day become responsible for their parents' livelihood, so it was only in the utmost desperation that a father would dispose of one.

This preference for boys reflected a generally patriarchal outlook.

Traditionally the father was head of the family. The land, home, tools and other property were held in his name and he alone could dispose of them as he wished. This power to buy and sell extended even to the family members themselves, and the family head could buy or sell his wife or children. He could also beat them—even to death—without running foul of the law. While holding all these rights, he was also responsible for the actions of any member of the family he controlled. This liability was greatly increased under the paochia system of administration.¹ The father, being the family's legal representative, was also responsible for the payment of its taxes. Naturally all those rights and responsibilities were in practice affected by the personality, ability, intelligence and health of the formal head of the family. In some cases a particularly capable woman or grown-up son, especially one engaged in some profitable enterprise, might be the real power behind the family throne. But the conventional family was patriarchal.

¹ See below, p. 15.

Here there was a distinction between the landlord family and that of other classes. This lay in its property, the importance of which was even more pronounced than among the middle and rich peasants. Landlord families in general were more patriarchal than others, and were most patriarchal of all when the livelihood of every individual family member depended not on his own labour but on a share of the proceeds from property, title to all of which was vested solely in the family head. In Ten Mile Inn, however, most of the landlords were of the 'managing' variety who engaged in some sort of business enterprise, and in so far as the sons helped their father in the family business they had some independence; so did wives who came from exceptionally wealthy homes to which they could turn for support if they were ill-treated.

In fact, strains and frictions were general in family life. 'Not even a good official can solve family problems' was a popular saying. While among the mass of the labouring peasants quarrels were the outcome of poverty and excessive toil, in the landlord families they had a different source. Petty personal quarrels arose over property, out of boredom born of idleness or because of enforced submissiveness to the family head which resulted from economic dependence. There was also, in landlord families more than in any others, a strict and patriarchal code of seniority according to which youth had to bow before age and women before men.

The status of women, in fact, was low in every class. As one woman later commented:

'In the old days the men used to talk about village affairs on the street, but we never dared take part. And when someone came to the door and called out, "Is anyone at home?" we women ourselves would answer, "No, there's nobody home". Women didn't count as human beings.'

The women's position was made worse by the fact that they married, for the most part, into villages to which they were strangers—so they did not have the long-standing friendships which the men were able to have with their fellow villagers. Once married, their social life was almost completely limited to the family circle and the women of the two or three families of the immediate neighbourhood.

Even within the family circle the relationships between the women-folk were as a rule bad, for there was a tradition of tyranny of mother-in-law over daughter-in-law. The mothers-in-law as a rule had public opinion and tradition behind them; if their treatment of their daughters-in-law was harsh, it was because the treatment they themselves had received as young brides had hardened and embittered them. Numbers of them maltreated their daughters-in-law to the extent of causing them physical injury or even of driving them to suicide.

It was not surprising, therefore, that many daughters-in-law felt that their only hope lay in trying to win their husbands' support in the family struggle. The mothers-in-law loved to quote, with an air of grievance, the well-known couplet:

‘The daughter-in-law sits on the kang¹
And whispers in her husband’s ear.
He decides to pay no attention to her complaints—
But they lodge in his heart.’

Some daughters-in-law were denied the opportunity of whispering complaints in their husbands' ears, for quite a number of young village men lived away from their homes. Because of the very restricted economic possibilities in the villages, it was common among young men of all classes to seek their fortunes elsewhere—some in the cities and towns, others on the distant frontiers. Literate young men of landlord and rich peasant families or of the upper stratum of the middle peasant class tended to work in shops. The illiterate middle, poor and landless peasants sought jobs as brickmakers or labourers—even as far afield as northern Manchuria.

Some husbands went away and were heard of no more. This was especially the case with the illiterate. Some fell ill and died; others could never make enough money to cover their travelling expenses back to the village. Among the better-off (particularly amongst the shop assistants) many became adjusted to their new lives and gave up all thoughts of returning to the old, or only made occasional visits to their village wives and families.

This adjustment to living away from home was made easy for the men by the customs of the old society, which permitted them to take concubines, with whom they might lead a satisfactory family life in the town. But the wives left behind in the villages

¹ Heated brick bed.

had no corresponding right to take other husbands. They were legally condemned to perpetual grass-widowhood. They might, of course, enter into illicit relationships. If a woman was compelled to do this through having been left with no means of livelihood, her action might be grudgingly allowed to pass. Amongst those not driven by want, however, especially amongst the 'respectable' rich peasants and landlords, such a course would have ruined a woman's reputation.

This reflected the existence of different marriage customs among different classes.

Among all classes it was common for children to be betrothed extremely young, in some cases soon after birth. And among all classes marriage was an important business deal generally arranged by the family head with or without the aid of a middleman. But there was a very wide variation in the nature of the transaction.

In landlord, rich and middle peasant families (that is, in roughly 30 per cent of village families), before any marriage took place the groom's father normally sent new clothes, various ceremonial gifts and, most important of all, a sum of money to the bride's family. To this the latter were supposed to add a similar amount. The combined total of these contributions was used for purchasing the dowry, which according to local tradition was supposed to consist of thirty-two pieces of clothing and eight pieces of furniture. Both parties to the transaction were involved throughout in a contradiction between gaining face and saving money. Marriages were apt to be ruinously expensive.

Wealth and influence, of course, were not the only things considered in these marriages. Labour-power, too, was a most important consideration, particularly among the middle peasants, and the health, strength and household skills of the bride were carefully taken into account. Besides this, family prestige, personal character and the love and concern of a father for his children also played their part. So did feminine beauty, though in this it was neither the face nor figure but the feet that counted most! The local saying for judging the beauty of a bride was: 'Thirty per cent for a pretty face; seventy per cent for lily feet.'¹ But in general the whole way in which the marriages were arranged by the parents, not by the bride and groom themselves, emphasized their largely economic character.

¹ Small, bound feet.

Among poor peasants the economic considerations, though equally important, were of a different sort. Most important was the question of expense. This explained the prevalence among them of a special type of marriage arrangement—that of the ‘home-raised daughter-in-law’ (t’ungyanghsi) who left home as a child, immediately on betrothal, to live with her future husband’s family.

A family living near starvation level could ill afford to support a daughter. And the prospect of her leaving home to marry as soon as she was able to earn her keep made it practical to cut the loss by disposing of the girl as soon as possible.

The burden of her upkeep was thus passed over to the family of her future husband. For them the expense was not a total loss, but an investment, for the young couple would later have the duty of supporting them in their old age.

The advantages to the groom’s family of this form of marriage was, in the first place, that they made sure of procuring a wife for their son who, because of the serious shortage of women, would have stood very little chance of getting one in any other way. In the second place, the cost of doing so was spread out over a number of years. Thus marriage expenses were met on the instalment plan, and did not come as a sudden heavy blow to the frail household economy. The actual wedding ceremony, which would be performed while the young couple were still in their teens, would be only a very simple affair, with just a few close relatives invited to a meal.

These home-raised daughters-in-law were the most oppressed section of the whole society. In most cases they had been bought outright and in their early years were regarded as small, rather useless slaves. They were begrudged the food they ate, and were driven to work by the poverty-stricken families, which having bought them and being compelled to support them, were anxious to get some return on their investment.

Being entirely cut-off from their own families (in many cases not even knowing who they were), they had no one to stand up for them. With brides of other classes the situation was different. A landlord, rich peasant or middle peasant family considered it a loss of face if one of their daughters was known to be seriously ill-treated by her husband’s family. The girl’s father and brothers

might go to law or mobilize a force of friends or relatives to go and seek redress. In such circumstances the threat of suicide by a daughter-in-law was often enough to bring about better treatment. But the home-raised daughter-in-law could count on no support from family, friends or the law. On the contrary, she was universally despised.

Her problems were not only acute but extremely widespread, for the poor peasants among whom the home-raised daughter-in-law type of marriage was most common were the most numerous class in the village.

Though home-raised daughters-in-law were usually sold by their parents at the age of five or six, some families were so poor that they could not consider supporting a daughter for even that number of years. They killed their daughters at birth.

Though this practice was condemned, it was winked at in the case of the poorest. Among them it caused a chronic shortage of women, which in turn still further intensified their marriage problems; for since there were not enough women to go round, it was naturally the poorest of the poor who had to go without. They could not compete successfully in even the cheapest form of marriage arrangement—that of the home-raised daughter-in-law. Their sons were left to arrange their own marriages, if they could, when they were grown men. Then, since girls normally married in their teens, they were forced to seek wives amongst the widows or deserted or runaway wives. (Of these last there were always a certain number—drawn from the oppressed home-raised daughters-in-law of other places.) Because of this, marriages amongst the poorest tended to be unstable. In addition, because of the marked shortage of women, there were always a great number of poor men without wives at all. This included the overwhelming majority of long-term hired labourers.

Thus, there was a continual disintegration of the family among the poor peasants and farm labourers. But the breakdown did not lead to the emergence of a new type of family. Instead, the poorest families died out, being unable to arrange marriages for their sons. The future generations of poor were the descendants of bankrupted middle and rich peasants and landlords.

Some of the poor peasant bachelors frequented prostitutes, as did some landlords and rich peasants. But in reality the cases

were different. With the latter classes illicit relations were not a substitute for marriage; they were generally merely diversions from it, or attempts to escape from an unsatisfying marriage which had been entered into solely with an eye on wealth.

But however unsatisfactory his marriage might be, every landlord's son married. To marry and to continue the male line was regarded as a duty to one's ancestors. The poorest, of course, in their inability to marry at all, failed in this duty. But they and all classes were drawn into various social and religious activities connected with their ancestors through the institution of the clan.¹

The Village—Divided and Ruled

Ninety-five per cent of the families in Ten Mile Inn were named Wang, Fu or Li, which indicated that these were the major clans of the village. Each clan had its own temple or hall dedicated to the clan ancestors and had the task of organizing entertainment during the first full moon of the new year (according to the lunar calendar). For this purpose every clan had its own organization. The Lis in the Fort, for instance, had a special committee known as the Heaven and Earth Society. They also had a special set of musical instruments and a carnival float, which played a conspicuous part in the great New Year's procession which wound its way through the village streets, with music, dancing, sword-play and mock battles.

These last often broke out into real fights, for they symbolized the rivalry which was especially noticeable between the Lower Village, where the Wangs were in the great majority, and the Fort, which was the stronghold of the Fuses and Lis. Even the two Fort clans were often at loggerheads. Thus the basic, underlying conflict in the whole village—that between landlord and rich peasants on the one hand and middle and poor peasants and labourers on the other—was partially obscured by an apparent unity of these classes within the clans.

Each of the clans had its own cemetery, which was the site of the most important clan ceremony, the yearly sweeping of the ancestors' graves. This took place during the half-month period

¹ The Chinese term is 'chia tsu'.

² One of the twenty-four half-monthly periods into which the Chinese solar calendar is divided.

known as 'Clear and Bright',² which usually falls during April, and was an occasion for feasting, the money for which came from clan lands.

Control of these lands, like all important clan affairs, was in the hands of the landlords and rich peasant elders of the clan committee—membership on which was limited to those possessing a specified amount of land. Control of the clan land put the elders in a position either to make money (by renting it to themselves) or to dispense patronage—for according to tradition, clan land was always rented at below the normal market rate.

Part of the income from the clan lands helped to finance education, and the clan halls and temples served, among other things, as schools. These were attended by those boys who could be spared from work on the farm or from odd jobs around the house, such as looking after their younger brothers and sisters. For all but the wealthier few, labour was the first consideration, and learning had to be crammed into spare time during the couple of years when the boy was able to absorb something but was still of little help to his parents.

With the majority of pupils, school attendance was highly irregular and the lessons were soon forgotten. The girls had no share even of the little knowledge that was gained; not one woman in the entire village was literate. Apart from a number of peasants' sons who became town shop assistants, it was primarily the sons of the landlord and rich peasant elders who actually ran the clan that benefited from its schools. Control of the school, like that of the land which financed them, helped make the clans an instrument for consolidating the wealth and power of the landlords and rich peasants.

About half of the villagers belonged to an organization known as the Yellow Incense Society whose members believed that the head of the society could cure diseases. His technique for doing this consisted in many cases of closing his eyes and entering into silent communion with the gods about the patient and his illness. Though this treatment may not always have been effective, it had the great advantage of being free. As a result, those who were too poor to employ an old-style village doctor consulted the society head for cure or consolation. This last, at least, could always be counted on even if the patient died, for all members in

good standing were guaranteed a place in paradise. This was secured by leading a virtuous life. In a society strongly influenced by the teaching of Confucius, virtue meant above all knowing one's station in life and fulfilling one's obligations to one's elders and betters. The Yellow Incense Society, though its membership was drawn largely from the peasants, was, like the clan, decidedly helpful to the landlords in keeping society to their liking.

An even more important instrument for this was the temple association of the whole village. In fact, until the Kuomintang took them over only a very few years before the outbreak of the anti-Japanese War, the temple association had the tasks of collecting taxes and protecting property. As with the clan committee, there was a property qualification for membership on the temple association committee, which at one time was limited to those with forty mu of land or more. Later this amount had to be reduced, as there were not enough eligible villagers—an indication of the fragmentation of land-holdings. For the headship of the temple association there was a special roster of the ten wealthiest villagers, each of whom assumed the post in turn.

To carry out its various tasks the temple association was organized into a number of sub-groups or 'societies', including one for crop-protection, one for rain-making and one for opera.

This last was by far the most important, for it took charge of organizing the five main festivals of the year. These festivals and the operas performed for them necessitated the raising of funds. The first, held during the first month of the lunar calendar, was in honour of the God of Horses who was called on to protect the village's draught animals. Each family contributed according to the number and type of animal kept, and for many years only one family was eligible for the top rate, which was paid on the only horse in the village. About ten families paid the second rate, on mules, while fifty or so families paid the lowest rate, which was on donkeys. Those families owning draught cattle had to make other arrangements for supernatural protection of their animals.

In the second month came the festival of the Goddess of Medicine and in the third that of the Goddess of Children. On these occasions contributions were according to the number of people in the family, those with sick members or with a special

desire for children often making special additional contributions. During the festival of the God of Rain, on whom fertility depended, money was collected according to the area of each family's land. Finally, in the ninth moon came the festival of the God of War.

Payment on each of the above occasions was compulsory and the collection was made by the temple association committee members, who also had complete control of all expenditures. Details of these were posted up outside the temple gates, though it was quite beyond the ability of the villagers to make any sort of a check, for few could decipher the accounts.

The rain-making society was called upon only in times of drought, when special ceremonies were held in order to stir the Dragon or God of Rain into action. The Crop Protection Society, however, functioned regularly every harvest time. Then, under the direction of the temple association heads, squads of young men were organized to see that no theft or pilfering occurred and generally to maintain law and order.

This function as well as that of collecting taxes the Kuomintang handed over to the heads of 'pao' and 'chia' in the early thirties. The change to the paochia system was of little consequence as far as the villagers were concerned, for the same people held office in both organizations.

The paochia was an ancient method of controlling the people, which after the lapse of centuries was re-introduced to help prevent the spread of Communism. The chia consisted of a group of roughly ten families, and ten of these chia formed a pao; the pao, in turn, were grouped into hsiang.

The pao, chia and hsiang in some ways resembled the patriarchal family. Their essence was collective responsibility, the whole group, and particularly the group head, being responsible for the acts of any individual member. The paochia system thus organized the villagers into a complicated network of pressure groups and informers against their fellows, which made individual or collective action against the social system more difficult and dangerous than ever. Like the leadership of the clans and temple associations, the posts of hsiang, pao and chia heads were invariably held by landlords, rich peasants or their agents.

These posts were profitable, not so much because of the salary attached to them as because of the opportunities they allowed

for accepting bribes, for evading onerous tax payments, and for other types of corruption.

While the paochia machinery was used for imposing levies in money and kind on the peasant-agriculturists, a system of farmed taxes extracted wealth from commerce and industry. (This was another reason why rich peasants and landlords hesitated to invest in anything other than usury.)

Since the tax collectors' positions could be secured only through bribery or influence, they were open only to the landlords, rich peasants and their followers, who competed for them individually or in cliques. The successful applicants used their official positions to collect as much as possible from the people and to hand over as little as possible to their superiors. The system was both oppressive and inefficient. While the peasants were squeezed to the limits of endurance and beyond, the tax collectors themselves paid nothing. Thus many landlords, the very people who could have afforded to pay most, got off scot free.

This resulted in the government's gaining a maximum of unpopularity and a minimum of taxes. Those in authority, from the Central Government in Nanking all the way down the scale, understood very well the weakness of this system which alienated them from the people. Still they retained it in order to be sure of support from at least one part of the population—the landlords and rich peasants who benefited from it.

Profitable as village offices were, they also involved disadvantages and even danger, since the wealth which office guaranteed made its holders a prey to bandits and warlords. As a result, during times of unrest—which is to say, as a general rule—the pao-heads found even the specially constructed 'Fort' inadequate protection and used to live outside Ten Mile Inn in some larger and better-protected village. Meanwhile, the duties of their offices were discharged by bailiffs, though even they were not safe from molestation.

Closely connected with banditry and warlordism were the secret societies. These served sometimes to afford protection against banditry, sometimes to take part in it. Whichever the case, the village landlords and rich peasants held the leading positions in the village lodges. The most powerful secret society in the vicinity of Ten Mile Inn during the very unsettled period of the late twenties was that of the 'Heavenly Gate'.

THE EVE OF THE JAPANESE INVASION

In the thirties the chief secret society was the Green Circle Gang. As the Kuomintang, under Chiang Kai-shek, began to consolidate its hold over North China, the Ten Mile Inn lodge of the Gang was taken over lock, stock and barrel as the village branch of the Kuomintang.¹

Though membership in the Green Circle-Kuomintang branch was more restricted than that of the clan and temple association, it soon came to dominate political life in Ten Mile Inn. By the time of the outbreak of the war against Japan in 1937, it had become without question the organized political expression of the society very briefly described above.

¹ The notorious Green Circle Gang was drawn on by Chiang Kai-shek to play a leading role in smashing the Communist-led labour movement in Shanghai in 1927, when over ten thousand Communists, trade unionists and left-wing intellectuals were slaughtered in Shanghai alone.

II

PILLARS—AND PEDESTALS— OF THE OLD SOCIETY

Members of the Fu Clan

The most notable figure of all of the earlier celebrities of Ten Mile Inn was a wealthy merchant, who lived—or is reputed to have lived—some two thousand years ago, during the Han Dynasty. He has been immortalized in one of the local operas called *The Seventh Fairy Maid*, in which he is described as having sold satin of a lustre and design unequalled throughout the Empire. As was only fitting, this luxurious material was used for making the Emperor's clothes. The village was originally named, after the man who brought it fame, Fu Family Village. Though this name gave way in time to that of Ten Mile Inn, the Fu's remained one of the village's three most important clans.

In the period just before the outbreak of the anti-Japanese War, however, the Fu clan could no longer claim the honour of providing satin for the Emperor. The majority of its members were in fact poor peasants and labourers, with a smaller group of middle peasants. Only a handful were landlords and rich peasants—and of this handful the most prosperous, like his illustrious ancestor, was also a dealer in cloth. This was the widely respected—though not quite so widely loved—Fu Hsin.

As a young boy Fu Hsin had been sent to learn the cloth trade in the townlet of Yangyi, seven miles from Ten Mile Inn. Through his unusual acumen, by the time he was forty he had worked his way up to being manager of the store in which he had started off as apprentice. From then on his fortunes rapidly improved, for he regularly invested his share of the business proceeds in usury.

Fu Hsin's practice was to lend cloth to the peasants in the spring, when it was customary to make new clothes, and to

demand repayment, in raw cotton, in the autumn, when the new crop was in and the price of cotton was lowest. The interest, though to some extent concealed from the illiterate borrower by being expressed in a ratio of cotton to cloth, was exceptionally high. Besides this, if the borrower could not repay in the autumn as arranged, an extra burden of unconcealed interest was imposed.

By such means as these Fu Hsin, who eventually managed to become a partner of the firm, soon accumulated considerable capital in the form of ready cash.

About 1937 he pulled off his most ambitious deal. This was the buying up for a lump sum of the right to collect debts owing to a landlord of Stone Cave Village. The latter had long since written-off these old accounts and he let them go to Fu Hsin for a song.

His years in the cloth business and in usury had provided Fu Hsin with plenty of experience in debt-collection. Nevertheless, he did not rely merely upon himself; he secured the assistance of a young clansman named Fu Shou-liang who was employed in Ten Mile Inn as a pao-head's clerk. This arrangement allowed Fu Hsin to keep himself discreetly in the background, free from any of the unpleasantness which debt-collection involved. This all fell on the shoulders of young Fu Shou-liang, who was able to bring the authority of the pao-head's office into play in intimidating the debtors. The results were satisfactory for both of the collectors. Fu Shou-liang showed himself to possess both the astuteness and ruthlessness necessary for success at such a task. Thus, besides winning the approval of his employer, he attracted the attention of other figures powerful in the life of the village. As for Fu Hsin, he was able to increase his land-holdings in Ten Mile Inn from sixty to well over a hundred mu of fertile land.

Soon afterwards he built the most impressive home in the village, surrounding a great paved courtyard. At the northern end, up a short broad flight of steps—facing the southern sun—was the imposing main hall. This was intended to become with time the ancestral hall of the newly-prosperous scion of the ancient Fu clan. (Within ten years, however, the writers became familiar with it as the scene of meetings to carry out the redistribution of the land—including that belonging to Fu Hsin himself.)

After establishing his position as the wealthiest member of his

clan, Fu Hsin had himself appointed a pao-head. But he still preferred to devote most of his time and energy to his profitable business in Yangyi, returning only for occasional visits. He therefore arranged to have the now tried and trusted Fu Shou-liang to act as his secretary and to perform the duties of office.

One of Fu Hsin's fellow pao-heads was his clansman and fellow landlord, Fu P'ei-yin. He too was one of the wealthiest men in Ten Mile Inn, though his land-holding was relatively small. Land, however, was by no means the main source of his wealth, for Fu P'ei-yin was the manager and largest shareholder in Ten Mile Inn's biggest business enterprise, the Hsin Hsiung Shop.

Though the articles most conspicuously on display in the Hsin Hsiung Shop were salt, matches, oil and cloth, the most profitable trade was in heroin and money. The last item was borrowed by Fu P'ei-yin from wealthy landlords in a near-by village, for the express purpose of re-lending. At times the sale of heroin and the lending of money were closely combined, the drug addicts being encouraged to take goods on credit—provided they offered land as security. Foreclosures on security were frequent, for the customary rate of interest was 100 per cent every twenty days.

It was possible to obtain payment of this rate only by use of force or the threat of it. This was made possible by the fact that the main shareholders in the shop, in addition to Fu P'ei-yin himself, were village pao-heads. In the event of a customer's failing to settle his account, therefore, it was the shareholders themselves who brought all the authority of the law into play, to administer beatings or seize property as the situation demanded.

One of these shareholders acted as Fu P'ei-yin's assistant manager. This was the rich peasant Fu I-tze.

Fu I-tze was the second son in a declining family. He got along better at school than either of his brothers, and so his father had kept him at school while taking the other two boys out and putting them to work on the farm. Then, because he had superior education, it was considered unsuitable that he should do any rough jobs about the farm, and his father, being well-connected, arranged to apprentice him to a shop.

Like Fu Hsin, Fu I-tze got on well, making sizeable sums of money for himself by using the shop's name to carry on some private business on the side. This was a customary method of self-advancement for employees—and one which shop owners

were always on guard against. Only the shrewdest—like Fu I-tze—managed to avoid detection. Fu used the money thus earned to pay off some of the family's debts and to retrieve some of its land.

When his father died in 1928, he insisted on a family division. Because it was through his efforts that the family holding had been increased, he demanded—and received—one-half of the land, while his illiterate brothers, who cultivated it, had to content themselves with dividing the remaining half between them.

Soon after this Fu I-tze left the shop in the townlet of Yangyi, invested his money in the Hsin Hsiung Money-lending Shop, and became Fu P'ei-yin's assistant manager. He also became the latter's assistant pao-head.

Although Fu I-tze now lived at home, he had little time to spend on cultivating his holding; so he employed one of the sons of his elder brother as a labourer. This brother had four sons and very little land, so Fu I-tze liked to consider that the employment of his nephew was an act of charity which saved the young man from starvation.

The brother, on the other hand, regarded Fu I-tze with bitter hatred, the roots of which could be traced back to his boyhood, when Fu I-tze had been thought too good to engage in farmwork, because of his better schooling.

The ill-feeling had grown when Fu I-tze insisted on receiving a double share of the land. It became even more intense as Fu I-tze's wealth and the elder brother's poverty increased. (The extent of his poverty was indicated by the fact that he could not afford to procure even a home-raised daughter-in-law for a single one of his four sons.)

The hatred reached a new height when the brother was forced to seek a loan from the Hsin Hsiung Shop and was refused. It would have caused a scandal if, in the event of the borrower failing to pay, the lender had foreclosed on the security of his own brother.

Another leading member of the extensive Fu clan and an outstanding pillar of the old society was the petition-writer or lawyer Fu P'ei-chien.

The corruption of the courts and the lawyers was such a byword throughout the whole country that the illiterate peasants shunned the law courts. Only as a last resort would they initiate

a lawsuit. Often, however, they were hauled into the courts by some landlord or rich peasant. Then, in the helplessness of their own illiteracy, they almost without fail fell into the clutches of some unscrupulous petition-writers.

Fu P'ei-chien was the most successful of these lawyers in the whole of Ten Mile Inn, for he excelled in dragging out proceedings indefinitely and in subtly extracting bribes from both sides.

With such attributes Fu P'ei-chien naturally qualified for a leading position in the village. He was especially prominent in the Green Circle Gang, being keeper of its ceremonial equipment. This in turn paved the way for him to become a key member in the village branch of the Kuomintang.

His political power was still further increased when the Japanese invasion threatened Wu An County. The landlord Fu Hsin, fearing that acting as pao-head in Ten Mile Inn might involve certain complications, resigned from his post. Fu P'ei-chien, on the other hand, not being so comfortably off as Fu Hsin, was glad of any opportunity to make money—even if it did involve some risk. He therefore took over the office of pao-head which Fu Hsin vacated, at the same time retaining the services of the latter's assistant, Fu Shou-liang.

This cautious retirement from office was typical of Fu Hsin. Of the four most prominent members of the Fu clan in Ten Mile Inn, he was the most successful in keeping his exploitation of the people out of their sight and mind. While Fu Hsin remained discreetly in the background in Yangyi, his bailiff Fu Shou-liang earned the fear and hatred of the people by his ruthless collection of Fu Hsin's debts. The extortions of Fu P'ei-yin, too, were constantly kept in view because of his activity as manager of the Hsin Hsiung Shop. Fu P'ei-chien, by the very nature of his work as a petition-writer, had to be a prominent public figure. Thus all three were among the best-known and best-hated members not only of their own clan but of the entire village.

Fu Hsin, on the other hand, tall, spare and rather austere looking, was admired for his exemplary family life and for his success in building up his family's fortunes. He neither looked nor acted like the caricature of a landlord. He personally never resorted to direct violence against his debtors as did the shopkeeper Fu P'ei-yin; still less was he guilty of making free with poor peasant women, as the lawyer and pao-head Fu P'ei-

chien did more than once. His own hands remained, officially speaking, clean, while his agent Fu Shou-liang and other prominent clansmen earned the hatred of the people.

Members of the Li Clan

The wealthiest member of the Li clan was the rich peasant Li Feng. He might very well have been a landlord like his neighbour Fu Hsin had it not been for a personal characteristic. He was exceedingly thrifty. He did not allow himself to indulge in the landlord's disdain for manual labour, and during the summer he worked on the land himself, alongside his hired labourers. According to the peasants, this was in order to save the wages of an extra hand. So far as his relationship to the land was concerned, therefore, Li Feng was a rich peasant.

In the autumn, however, Li Feng had no time to help with the cultivation, for he and his eldest son were kept busy with their 'Mountain Products Depot'—a collection station for jujubes, walnuts, wild pepper and other products of the T'aihang Range. These were shipped to various cities, including even faraway Tientsin. Then in the winter and spring, when their fellow-villagers were running short of grain, Li Feng and his eldest son advanced them loans from the profits of their autumn trade. This usury was extremely profitable, even though the rates were far lower than those of the notorious lending establishment operated by the pao-heads. Li Feng's usual rates of interest were 30 to 40 per cent a month and occasionally ran as high as 50. At the same time his returns were satisfactory, for the initial capital was his own business profits and was not borrowed from a wealthier lender demanding a share of the profits.

At the outbreak of the war against Japan in 1937, however, Li Feng and his son were striving hard to recover from a serious setback. One of their largest trading expeditions had met with disaster and the firm was temporarily left without enough cash on hand to meet its immediate obligations.

Fearing that his creditors might seize his land, Li Feng sold his most fertile holdings to his wife's landlord relatives in Stone Cave Village and bought a somewhat larger area of poor land in their place. In doing so he calculated on his absentee creditors not being interested in taking over holdings which required a

maximum investment of labour for a minimum return of crop. Li Feng himself was certainly not interested in working such poor soil, so he let it out in small plots to land-hungry poor peasants who could not afford to be fastidious. Meanwhile, from his wife's wealthy relatives in Stone Cave he rented back the land he had sold them, cultivating it with the help of hired labour.

While even before this trading misadventure, Li Feng's name had been a byword for stinginess, after it he became more frugal than ever. He made his whole family go around in shabby old clothes. At meal-time he watched the millet like a hawk, as if counting the grains which each member of the family consumed. He gave up employing long-term labourers because he begrudged feeding them on those days when there was relatively little to do. He took, instead, to hiring labour by the day—and he picked the days so carefully that one day's work for Li Feng was reputed to be like a day and a half for anyone else.

Another prominent family of the Li clan which had its share of financial difficulties was that of the well-to-do middle peasant Li Fa-k'uei.

Li Fa-k'uei's father had been a prosperous rich peasant—until he took to smoking opium. Then, in order to satisfy his growing craving for the drug, little by little he sold his land. When the old man died the family's holdings had been reduced to seventeen mu, though all of it was exceptionally fertile and demanded relatively little labour to ensure a good yield.

Having influential connections, Li Fa-k'uei secured the post of pao-head. With the aid of his two energetic sons, and making full use of the power of his office, Li Fa-k'uei set about restoring the family fortunes which his father had so nearly shattered. By 1937 he already owned twenty-two mu. Besides this he had a mortgage on another fourteen mu of good land, the owner of which had sunk so deeply into debt that foreclosure was only a matter of time. Li Fa-k'uei was clearly on the way to regaining the status of rich peasant from which the family had sunk.

But in his desire to utilize his post of pao-head to the utmost in advancing his fortunes, Li Fa-k'uei was driven first to demand more and more in the form of bribes, then to keep for himself a bigger and bigger proportion of the taxes he collected and which should have been handed up to the county authorities. He soon far surpassed the conventional limits of this type of corruption.

Eventually the scandal became open and Li Fa-k'uei had to be relieved of his post for 'finding it difficult to keep his accounts in order'.

To make matters worse he suddenly found himself involved in another scandal. A fellow-villager's wife, with whom he was having an affair, committed suicide. Some months previously she had taunted her husband with her infidelity and had cursed him for being a penniless good-for-nothing. Afraid to attack the pao-head Li Fa-k'uei and ashamed to face the ridicule of his fellow villagers, the man had fled to Manchuria. Shortly afterwards he died there. Those who had previously laughed at his discomfiture, now murmured that his wife's conduct had driven him to his death, and that she was therefore to all intents and purposes his murderer. The accusation so preyed on the woman's mind that she finally killed herself, feeling that in so doing she redeemed her honour. Her action left Li Fa-k'uei indirectly responsible for two deaths instead of one. Instead of rivalling Li Feng as the most prominent member of his clan, therefore, Li Fa-k'uei found himself in disrepute, though his economic fortunes were still decidedly on the upgrade.

Members of the Wang Clan

The dominant clan of the village was named neither Fu nor Li, but Wang.

Fifty years previously Ten Mile Inn had been the home of a landlord surnamed Wang who owned between three and four hundred mu. The fortunes of his descendants illustrate the fact that even landlord families were subject to the strong destructive forces present in feudal¹ society, for in 1937 there was no landlord or rich peasant with a holding of more than one-third the size of the old landlord Wang's original three to four hundred mu. Most of his descendants in Ten Mile Inn were by then middle or poor peasants.

The real political dominance of Ten Mile Inn had passed to a member of another branch of the Wang clan—the village's second biggest landowner, the landlord Wang Pan-yen.

The typical caricature of the landlord, later to become current during the land reform, might well have been based on Wang

¹ For definition of 'feudal', see p. xvi.

Pan-yen. He was short, stout and heavy-jowled. More significant than this, he was the biggest hirer of labour in the village and had the reputation of squeezing the last drop of energy from the labourers he hired.

Besides this, Wang Pan-yen had another characteristic which earned him the especially intense hatred of the peasants. He forced his attentions on any peasant woman that took his fancy and openly kept as his mistress the wife of one middle peasant.

Wan Pan-yen was one of the ten landlords and rich peasants who took in rotation the headship of the temple association, a position which his father had held before him. In this capacity he had been the collector of the most onerous taxes from the peasants and had earned for himself all the hatred with which that function was associated. The temple association accounts which were kept in his house showed substantial contributions to the Green Circle-Kuomintang branch. As a result of this farsighted investment of temple association funds, Wang Pan-yen soon became the leader of the Kuomintang branch in the village. Then, when taxation was taken over by the paochia machine, he eased naturally into the position of pao-head. Like his fellow pao-heads he paid no taxes, but used his position to extort a maximum from others.

Though the three pao-heads were supposedly of equal status, each organized his own clique or pressure group and strove to gain the upper hand. In 1937 this had unquestionably been gained by the landlord Wang Pan-yen.

Another scion of the Wang clan was one of the richest peasants of Ten Mile Inn. This was Wang Feng-ch'i, who had over one hundred mu of land which was cultivated by hired labour. He also ran a grain store and money-lending establishment (in the battlemented building which was later to house the co-operative). This was a common combination through the countryside. As a usurer he would demand repayment immediately after each harvest, when the price of grain was at its lowest. At the same time his grain store would purchase grain from the debt-burdened peasants, who were forced to sell in order to pay at least the interest on their existing loans. Later on in the year, when the peasants had exhausted the scant remainder of their harvest, Wang Feng-ch'i lent them more money to buy back from his shop the grain that they had sold. But by now the price would be far higher than when the peasants had sold it, having risen steadily since

the harvest. In this way the peasants sank more deeply in debt each year.

But Wang Feng-ch'i flourished. He was an outstanding member of the rota of those serving as head of the temple association; later, when the pao-chia system took over the functions of tax collection, he became a pao-head for a period.

The office of pao-head was thus held, at one time or another, by members of all three main clans, Wang, Li and Fu. And each clan contributed its pillars to the old society of Ten Mile Inn.

But neither the lives of these prominent village figures, nor those of the mass of the peasants, were fully controlled by what went on within the limits of Ten Mile Inn.

Landlords outside the Village

Ten Mile Inn is located on the highway from Wu An County-town to Ch'angchih and other points farther west, just at the point where it crosses a fair-sized ravine known as Willow Spring Valley. The half-dozen or so villages in this little valley all have very close interrelations, both social and economic. A web of marriages, for instance, linked both the peasant and landlord families in every part of the ravine. And since all the landlords and rich peasants in Ten Mile Inn were relatively small and uninfluential, they were constantly renting land and borrowing money from their wealthier fellows in other villages—to sub-let and re-lend in their own.

The most powerful landlord in Willow Spring Valley was Chang 'Lao-wantze'¹ of West Harmony, while the landlord Tuan Shen of Stone Cave Village also exercised considerable influence in Ten Mile Inn.

Chang 'Lao-wantze' and Tuan Shen, in turn, had their connections with bigger and more powerful landlords farther afield. At the top of the pyramid in Wu An County was the landlord Chang Hsin-hai, who owned 40,000 out of the 1,000,000 mu of cultivated land of the entire county. His estate was roughly four hundred times as great as that of the biggest landowner in Ten Mile Inn. Instead of competing for power within one village, as did the petty landlords and rich peasants of Ten

¹ This was a nickname meaning 'Old Meat-ball'. None of the peasants we asked knew his real name.

Mile Inn, Chang Hsin-hai held complete domination over eighty villages in which the majority of the inhabitants were his own tenants.

Thus the overall picture was one of pyramids within pyramids, one of the smaller pyramids consisting of the smaller landlords themselves. Thus the big landlords used the lesser, and the lesser landlords used those still smaller—or they used rich peasants. These in turn used middle or even poor peasants as their agents. The money loaned out by the Hsin Hsiung Shop in Ten Mile Inn, for instance, at 100 per cent interest every twenty days was originally borrowed—by no means interest free—from the landlord Chang ‘Lao-wantze’ of West Harmony.

Arrangements such as this made it possible for the larger landlords, if they chose, to free themselves of the necessity of personally carrying out the brutal practices on which wealth was founded in a feudal economy. Those landlords who wished to could devote their time to cultural activities. The wealthier were able to take up their residence in the big cities, far removed from the scenes of their own exploitation. Some escaped even farther. The son of the wealthy landlord Fang, for example, of Peiyen townlet (nicknamed Little Tientsin because of its thriving commerce) in 1937 was attending a university in America.

Such dizzy heights as this, however, could not be aspired to by even the most outstanding pillars of Ten Mile Inn society. They were at the apex of the pyramid of their own village, but they were well down towards the base of the pyramid of the landlords of Wu An County. And down below even these petty pillars, bearing the full weight of the whole complex structure, were the pedestals on which these petty pillars stood—the peasants.

One of the Pedestals

One of these pedestals was Wang Wen-sheng (who in 1948 was elected vice-head of the village government). He himself told the writers his story.

‘My father offered to sell me for a bushel of millet during the famine of 1920,’ said Wang Wen-sheng.

‘Dad used to be a potter, travelling from village to village, and as a child I lived with my grandmother in a cave just outside the village. In the eighth year of the Republic [1919] when I was

nine years old the old woman was seventy-five. She and I used to go begging together for millet or corn cakes. And sometimes we'd go gleaning. We were so poor that once Grandma took a few ears of grain from one of the stocks when she was gleaning. But the overseer saw her and she was taken before the landlords who were the heads of the temple association and they fined her 200 cash. That was about enough to buy one of those buns that the peddlars sell. Of course she couldn't pay, so they took away our iron cooking pot and the door of our cave.' (Timber is treasured amid these bare, eroded hills.)

'Then next year the famine came. Dad had come home and the three of us went away as refugees. On the way we begged by day and slept in temples at night. If we went begging early in the day they often said, "The food's not ready yet". And if we went late they said it was all finished.

'Dad tried to get work at a pottery kiln at Hsia Village, but couldn't. Then we met a man with no son of his own and he offered to buy me for a bushel of millet. Dad asked me if I agreed. I said, "Yes". Then the man gave me a fine supper of noodles made with sorghum and wheat flour mixed with beans and elm bark. But when my dad started to leave me and told me to stay behind, I cried and wanted to go with him. So in the end the bargain was called off and Dad gave back the bushel of millet and I stayed with him.

'Then we heard that in another village about ten miles away there was a rich man called Wang who had three wives and used to collect about two hundred *tan*¹ of grain in rents from as much as twenty miles from his home. The villagers said he used to help refugees, but you had to be sure to kowtow to him, kneeling down and touching the ground with your forehead at least three times. So we went to his home and the family sent me in to see him and I kowtowed the way they told me to.'

The ten-year-old family ambassador apparently made a favourable impression. He himself was taken on as a cow-herd and his father as a labourer. Father and son worked for this landlord for two years, during which time they lived on two meals of millet gruel a day. The second year there was a fever epidemic and both of them and the old grandmother fell ill.

'People were dying every day. As we lay ill we couldn't move.

¹ One *tan* equals approximately 133 pounds.

I wondered what would happen to me if Dad died. After a few days I felt better and got up and borrowed a cup and knife and gave Dad the cup treatment' [similar to mediaeval bleeding]. 'Dad got better, but Grandma died, and I had to go to Mr. Wang's steward to beg a piece of reed-matting. We wrapped up the body in this, put it in a ditch and covered it with rocks.

'Next year we came back here to Ten Mile Inn. But, you know, we called this a "beggar village", and though it was our old home we couldn't make a living here, even though I was twelve years old and could haul water.'

So father and son went off to Yang Family Village, where both worked as labourers, eking out their own livelihood by renting small plots of land. Thus they continued for seventeen years.

For seventeen years they lived the life of the 'poor-and-hired'. Kuomintang corruption, Japanese invasion, harsh exploitation—such was their lot—until the Communists came.

III

THE KUOMINTANG RETREAT: THE COMMUNISTS RESIST

The Twenty-four Commanders

By the end of 1937 the Japanese had not only seized the Peking–Hankow Railway. They had penetrated deep into the plain through which it ran, with its rich trading centres and farmland.

Some of the bandits and warlords and Kuomintang forces who had depended for their livelihood on this area, immediately capitulated and became Japanese puppets.

Other armed forces, including part of the Kuomintang's Fifty-third Army, moved westwards to Wu An and adjacent counties of the T'aihang foothills, occupying the small area between the Japanese in the plain to the east and the Communist-led guerrillas in the T'aihang Mountains to the west. Here they batted on the people, eating their grain, seizing their animals, invading their homes, raping their women. They even demanded a steady supply of opium and heroin which the Japanese were systematically pouring into the region as a means of undermining its power of resistance.

For collecting their various extortions in cash and kind and for procuring women, the commanders needed local middlemen. They found them in the pao-heads and their assistants.

Commander Huang comes to Ten Mile Inn

The villagers referred to this period of occupation by troops who were supposed to be protecting them from the Japanese as the 'Time of the Twenty-four Commanders'.

One of these commanders, Huang Shih-liang,¹ set up his headquarters in Ten Mile Inn. When he arrived his eye was immediately caught by the best of the few two-storey buildings in the Fort. This belonged to the pao-head Li Fa-k'uei, and in it the Commander arranged to store the grain which his soldiers plundered from the people. Both the building and its owner soon became symbols of the oppression of the Kuomintang troops. When the latter organized a raid on a fair at Chao Village three miles away, it was Li Fa-k'uei who acted as local guide and adviser to the raiders. By this and other similar actions, Li Fa-k'uei won for himself the profitable post of Commander Huang's local middleman.

But one middleman was by no means enough for the Commander, who was an old hand at playing-off one village faction against another. Adroitly exploiting the rivalries between the Ten Mile Inn cliques, he took up his residence in the home of Li Fa-k'uei's greatest competitor for power—the landlord pao-head Wang Pan-yen. He planted his ensign before the latter's gate and made him his liaison officer for all official dealings with the villagers.

For unofficial purposes, however, Commander Huang found still other middlemen. One of these was a third pao-head, Fu P'ei-chien, who was especially entrusted with the task of procuring the more attractive young peasant women for the enjoyment of Huang and his officers.

Fu P'ei-chien in turn was helped by the ambitious and unscrupulous young middle peasant Fu Shou-liang. Others of the same type soon attached themselves to Fu P'ei-chien, until at last (in addition to Wang Pan-yen and Li Fa-k'uei) there were

¹ Huang Shih-liang was a subordinate of the Kuomintang general, Sun T'ien-yin, who had been assigned by Chiang Kai-shek to organize the defence of North Honan area against the Japanese. After scarcely a pretence at resistance, he 'followed the roundabout road to national salvation', becoming a puppet of the Japanese and assisting them against the Communists. He continued his anti-Communist operations even after VJ-Day, for he was once more officially confirmed in his old post by Chiang Kai-shek. He was eventually captured by the People's Liberation Army forces in an engagement in which the Ten Mile Inn Defence Corps participated as stretcher-bearers. His capture meant more to the villagers than that of any other Kuomintang general—partly because of their experience of his subordinate Huang; partly because, along with the general himself, there was liberated his dramatic troupe, famous throughout the county for its performances of the celebrated Wu An opera.

eight men altogether ready to do the Commander's most shady and unofficial business. These became known as the 'Eight Brothers'. The appearance of any one of them at the home of a peasant with an attractive wife or daughter immediately aroused the family's apprehensions.

Though Fu P'ei-chien was the formal head of this group, the real brains behind it was Fu Shou-liang, who, while he served Huang in order to advance his own fortunes, protested to the villagers that he was helplessly under the control of the Commander and the pao-head.

When the time came for the final settling of accounts, during the land reform, the record of the Commander's four chief middlemen was remembered by the peasants of Ten Mile Inn.

The troops of Huang and other Kuomintang officers were in Ten Mile Inn on and off until 1940. Then, as the Japanese approached, they fled without a fight. Before taking to his heels, Huang turned on his own collaborators, having no further need for them after leaving Ten Mile Inn. He charged Li Fa-k'uei, for instance, with having stolen some of the grain stored in his two-storey house and forced him to replace the amount supposedly missing.

The Japanese drove up from the plain right into the T'aihang foothills. They garrisoned the townlet of P'aihui seven miles down the valley from Ten Mile Inn and established an outpost at another townlet, Yeht'ao, less than three miles to the south-west. But they never occupied Ten Mile Inn itself.

They did pass through the village, however, on a mopping-up campaign. Though their stay was brief, it was long enough for them to burn a number of houses and to kill ten villagers, most of whom were running away to hide from the invaders. One elderly peasant was killed simply because he happened to be wearing clothes of a blue-grey colour similar to that worn by soldiers of the Eighth Route Army. Another was charged with having carried a message to the Communist forces. He was publicly beheaded.

In Yang Village Wang Wen-sheng's¹ father was shot by the Japanese. Lying on the verge of death for many days, he was saved by an Eighth Route Army medical team.

¹ See p. 28.

'The Sun Rises in the West'

In fact, the Eighth Route Army was not far away. It was operating within the boundaries of Wu An County only a short time after the Kuomintang had surrendered the county-town to the Japanese.

'That was the time,' said the villagers, 'when the sun rose in the west.' This, they explained, meant that the Eighth Route Army guerrillas were advancing out of the T'aihang Mountains. At the very time that the Japanese were pushing up the valleys and the motley remnants of the Kuomintang forces were vanishing over the hill-tops, the Communist-led guerrillas established an outpost at South Yangyi, three miles north-west of Ten Mile Inn.

The Communist forces in the area at this time were small and their operations were on a limited scale. But they were of a vital nature. They were laying the foundations for arousing the mass of the peasants to take part in the struggle against the Japanese invaders, who from their stronghold in the county-town made systematic and regular sorties into the villages to supply themselves with two of their most urgent needs—grain and women.

The greatest obstacle which the Communists encountered in organizing resistance was that the peasants' spirit had been almost completely shattered by the abuses and ruinous exactions of the Kuomintang troops. The latter's extortions had in the end become so great that the peasants thought bitterly that the Japanese could hardly be worse; and that perhaps they might even be better.

The Communists' first step in raising the morale of the peasants of Wu An County, after the fall of the county-town, was to lead them in a movement against the oppressive levies which were used, not to drive out the invaders, but merely to line the pockets of the Kuomintang officers. This movement reached the villages on the western edge of Wu An towards the end of 1937. During 1938 and 1939 it spread throughout every part of the county which was behind the lines and between the points controlled by the Japanese. By September of that year the time was ripe for setting up an 'Anti-Japanese County Government'.

From the headquarters which it established in Apricot Blossom Village, this new Communist-led local administration co-operated with the Eighth Route Army by waging economic as well as military warfare against the enemy.

It did this, in accordance with practices current in all Communist-led areas, by developing production in its own area, first to the point of self-sufficiency, later to that of having a surplus for export. It set up strict commercial control, allowing only the most vitally necessary goods—particularly those directly needed for war purposes—to enter its area from that controlled by the enemy. It also made the currency of the Communist-controlled Border Region the only legal tender.

So far as public finance was concerned, the new county administration's principle was: 'Those with wealth contribute wealth; those with labour contribute labour.' In accordance with this a new taxation and a rear-service system was established in the county.

Rear service was made the duty of all able-bodied men and women. For the men it consisted largely of helping with the transportation of grain and other supplies to the front and the conveying of wounded soldiers to the rear. (For this an efficient stretcher-bearing relay system was developed, by which wounded soldiers were rapidly carried over considerable distances.)

According to the principle 'those with wealth contribute wealth, and those with labour contribute labour', men were liable for rear service regardless of class. All those eligible were called upon to contribute to a pool and to perform their duty in turn. All duty actually performed was well paid for from the pool, but anyone who wished to might miss his turn—thereby forfeiting his pay. This meant in effect that at this early period of the war the landlords did no rear service and the rich peasants none to speak of. The poor peasants and farm labourers, on the other hand, were glad of the opportunity to earn the extra money which came from doing the landlords' and rich peasants' share.

For the women rear service consisted of making uniforms, cloth-shoes, socks and quilts. For all this the government provided the raw materials, the women the labour. In Ten Mile Inn, as in many villages which were on stretcher-bearing routes, they also ran a reception centre for wounded soldiers.

Taxes, which were payable in millet, were known as 'National Salvation Public Grain'. In time an elaborate progressive taxation system was worked out, but the system effective in the Shansi-Hopeh-Shantung-Honan Border Region Government in 1940 was very simple. Each village was assessed according to its total

wealth, but only the richest 30 per cent of its inhabitants were called upon to pay the whole assessment, the burden being distributed among them according to their relative wealth. This richest 30 per cent took in all of the landlords and rich peasants, who constituted roughly 10 per cent of the population; and as a rule it just about covered the middle peasants who comprised roughly 20 per cent. Thus all poor peasants and farm-labourers, and in some cases a handful of the less well-off middle peasants, were entirely exempt.

Like rear service, this tax system was much more than an economic reform. It was a political weapon against the enemy.

As the Japanese advanced upon a certain village not far from Ten Mile Inn, they sent instructions for a puppet village government to be established there. Though this was nominally for the 'maintaining of peace and order', its real purpose was the collection of taxes. If these were not forthcoming, it was threatened, the village would be burnt down and its people slaughtered.

Eighth Route Army mass-workers countered these threats by urging the villagers to bury their belongings and to hide themselves in caves in the hills. A number of the villagers, however, particularly the wealthier ones, were against taking this hazardous step, fearing that the Japanese would come anyway and burn down the village in their absence.

The Communists did not press the people to take a step for which they were not mentally prepared and which they were not yet convinced was correct. But they did pose very sharply the question of how the Japanese levy was to be paid. Was it to be according to the Japanese system of a flat rate of so much per mu? Or was it to be according to the Communist system, under which the brunt of the burden fell on the rich while the poor were exempt?

This question split the village wide open. The poor peasants and labourers, who formed the majority of the villagers, came out solidly for the Communist system. The landlords and rich peasants strongly protested that they could not possibly pay two sets of progressive tax—one to the Japanese and one to the Communists. The result was—deadlock.

Meanwhile, the Japanese deadline approached. If the tax were not paid, troops would be sent to collect it. The landlords and

rich peasants prepared to sit tight and wait, confident that once the Japanese arrived the flat-rate system was bound to be enforced. But the poor peasants, farm-labourers and many of the middle peasants also foresaw such a development. They began to prepare caves and to hide all their belongings.

Before long the richer villagers found themselves in a highly exposed position. They alone had not prepared any hiding-place. The Japanese, intent on getting grain at any cost, would have no choice but to take it from whoever was left in the village. Worse than that, unless the Japanese decided to leave a garrison in the place, the cave-digging villagers would return and with the backing of the Communists would accuse the wealthy of being collaborators. So no alternative was left to the rich but to follow the example of the village masses—to prepare caves in which to hide their possessions and themselves.

In this way the Communists' original suggestion was adopted. A bare and deserted village was left to the enemy.

It was tactics such as these, applied throughout the Liberated Areas, which led the Japanese to write that the Communists were 'talented... in creating an upsurge in the mood for combat through firm political work'.¹

The Eighth Route Army comes to Ten Mile Inn

At last a small Eighth Route Army detachment came to Ten Mile Inn itself. Its members belonged not only to the Communist Party but to the specially picked Sacrifice League.

They set to work in Ten Mile Inn in accordance with the Communist conviction that the great majority of Chinese—including the landlords and rich peasants—could be drawn into resisting the Japanese invaders provided they were properly led.

They did not expect the poor and middle peasants of Ten Mile Inn immediately to take their destinies entirely into their own hands. For centuries these peasants had been accustomed to regard themselves as ignorant and inferior. Now they had to learn from their own direct experience that they had the ability to govern. They had to learn, too, that skilful and able though the landlords and rich peasants might be in the technique of governing

¹ From 'Analysis of Internal Conditions of the Chinese Communist Army' by the newspaper *Mainichi Shinbun*, quoted in *The Chinese Communists*, by Stuart Gelder. Gollancz, London 1946.

on behalf of the Kuomintang, they could not be trusted with the leadership of resistance against the Japanese. Only when they had grasped these lessons would the peasants be prepared to take over the village government completely.

Meanwhile an appointed, compromise village government was considered an essential step towards the establishment of a democratically elected one in the future.

It was not surprising, therefore, that in Ten Mile Inn, landlords, rich peasants and their agents should be well-entrenched in the new village government which was set up at the prompting of the Sacrifice League detachment.

The middle peasant Fu Shou-liang, former pao-head's clerk and procurer of Commander Huang's women, became the village head, while the landlord Wang Pan-yen accepted the subordinate position of director of rear service.

When Commander Huang and his troops had hurriedly left Ten Mile Inn, pao-head Wang Pan-yen had taken it for granted that nothing could prevent the Japanese, with their outpost less than three miles away, from occupying the village. The Eighth Route Army outpost at South Yangyi lay at a similar distance, but Wang Pan-yen calculated that the small Sacrifice League detachment would be no match for the well-armed Japanese.

Furthermore, the Japanese had sent out orders that all village officials should remain in office. So instead of committing himself to a firm anti-Japanese stand at the outset, Wang Pan-yen waited, expecting to hold on to his authority in the village by serving as puppet pao-head.

He soon found he had miscalculated. Ten Mile Inn was indeed a half-way house—but the Communists had the initiative. With the setting up of the anti-Japanese village government, therefore, he found it expedient to accept a post in it after all.

Wang Pan-yen and Fu Shou-liang were not the only men who had held key positions in the old village administration and still continued to hold posts in the new.

But although the newly-appointed village government involved no thorough-going change of personnel, it did involve a change in structure.

The old, discredited, paochia system, with its mutual spying, could not be retained. In place of it there was set up a village government committee under the direction of the village head Fu

THE KUOMINTANG RETREAT

Shou-liang, who also directed the heads of the various streets and neighbourhoods. This government, the Sacrifice League detachment explained, was to mobilize the entire village against the Japanese. Each villager was now to be responsible for his own actions and was to be drawn into organized bodies for resisting the enemy militarily and economically as well as politically.

IV

TEN MILE INN TAKES ITS STAND ON THE ANTI-JAPANESE FRONT

The Militia

The villagers' desire to resist the invaders had already been developed at least one step by the Japanese themselves. Their slaughter of ten villagers had roused many of the people to the point of being ready for any action which would lessen the danger of another mopping-up campaign.

So there was considerable response when one of the villagers, inspired by the Sacrifice League members, put forward a constructive proposal. This was: to dig caves in the surrounding hills. Then, in the event of another mopping-up campaign, the village could be evacuated lock, stock and barrel. This would not only increase the villagers' safety; it would make the village itself an uninviting place to the enemy troops and thus would lessen the likelihood of future visits from them.

The villager who put forward this suggestion was a poor peasant named Wang Chen-chi.

Wang Chen-chi himself led the first squad of cave-diggers—hoes, picks and spades on shoulders—up the stony hillside behind the Fort. They were followed by a crowd of children and grown-ups—the latter with a mixture of scepticism and hope. Anything would be better than facing another mopping-up campaign like the last.

Wang Chen-chi was no ordinary cave-digger. He was full of ideas and had a natural flair for camouflage. After carefully concealing the entrance of the first cave with earth and brambles, he even covered the air-holes with birds' nests. Quite a number of the onlookers were impressed and at once started digging caves for themselves. Others, though hesitant at first, were soon swept

along by the growing enthusiasm of those who had caves to shelter in. Before long the hills about the village were honeycombed with caves, inside of which grain, crocks of water and other supplies were stored.

Next, following the instructions of the mass-workers, landmines were made to protect the caves' approaches. These mines, crude as they were at first, filled the young men with a new enthusiasm. With weapons like these, it was clearly possible not merely to hide from the Japanese but to resist them. So the plan was drawn up that when the enemy threatened, the old men, women and children would hide in the caves, but the young men would take more aggressive action. They would lay mines in the enemy's line of approach. A handful of them volunteered to cooperate with the guerrillas in harassing the enemy's rear by picking off stragglers or 'cutting off the Japanese tail'.

The men of Ten Mile Inn were also instructed in how to combine with those of other villages in the setting up of an efficient intelligence system by which news of the Japanese movements was signalled from one village to another. This ensured that neither Ten Mile Inn nor any place near it was ever again caught unprepared by the Japanese. According to the strength of the advancing enemy force, either the village was evacuated or resistance was offered. It was generally a matter of both.

After resistance along these various lines had been well prepared, the Sacrifice League put forward a new idea: that the young men would be able to act far more effectively as an organized force, operating in co-ordination with and under the guidance of the Eighth Route Army. Thus eventually, in 1941, the six young men—all of them middle peasants—who had shown themselves to be most active in military matters were formally constituted as the Ten Mile Inn People's Militia.

Their entire armament consisted at the beginning of three ancient rifles and a pistol. But to supplement this they had a genuine enthusiasm, which in some cases came from having had close friends or relatives killed in the mopping-up campaign.

The militiamen's effectiveness was soon increased considerably beyond the range of their meagre armament, however. This was achieved at a special militia training school organized by the county guerrilla administration. Here, besides learning how to use their few weapons most effectively, the new militiamen were

introduced to all the intricacies of grenade and land-mine warfare, which the Chinese Communists brought to a fine art.

At the county school the six militiamen studied not only military matters. They also advanced their political understanding. Finding themselves together with fellow-students from all over the county and with teachers some of whom came from the more distant Communist bases, they began to get a better idea of the scope and meaning of the war of resistance which the Communists were leading against the Japanese. They caught their first glimpse of an area of guerrilla operations far wider than the locality of Ten Mile Inn—which stretched for hundreds of miles all the way from Yen-an to the Yellow Sea.

In visualizing this larger picture the Ten Mile Inn militiamen were able to see their own village more clearly. When they returned to it a month later¹ they had a far stronger conviction than ever before that the ordinary village folk could stand up to the ‘East Ocean Devils’. And that they could do so far more effectively than the landlords and rich peasants. At the same time there was planted in them the seed of the idea that there might also be other things they could do better than the ‘Old Moneybags’—such as running their own village.

The Women’s Association

The county authorities also ran another type of training school. This was for leadership in the organizing of women.

From the time they first arrived in the village the Communist mass-workers had given attention to the special problem of the women. This involved on the one hand mobilizing the women for resistance against the Japanese; and on the other freeing them from the especially heavy oppression to which the old society subjected them. These two aspects of the women’s problem—emancipation and resistance against the Japanese—were linked together.

The first step which the Sacrifice League members took was to call a village meeting to launch the slogan: ‘Equal rights for women.’ The women recalled very clearly even eight years later the words of the speaker who warned the village men that the

¹ After a time, though the number of students at the county training school increased, the training period was reduced to a week, as the military educational system was streamlined.

new anti-Japanese government strongly condemned their age-old practice of taking off their cloth shoes to beat their wives and daughters. Mothers-in-law were similarly cautioned against continuing their traditional oppression of their daughters-in-law.

Immediately following the meeting steps were taken to organize the women into an association of their own—for both the protection of their rights and the increase of production, which was essential for successful resistance against the enemy. A committee of five was chosen to lead the work of the newly-formed Women's Association. Its chairman was fifty-five-year-old Wang Ch'ueh-te.

There were several reasons why Wang Ch'ueh-te was particularly well fitted for this post.

In the first place she had the advantage over most of the married women of Ten Mile Inn of being a native of the village. While it was customary for girls to marry outside of the village in which they had been born, Wang Ch'ueh-te herself had been born in the Lower Village and had married into the Fort. Later, her daughter had married a Lower Village man. Because of these family connections Wang Ch'ueh-te was more familiar with the affairs of Ten Mile Inn than were the majority of its women.

In the second place she was a skilful weaver. She had learnt the art as a young girl, her parents having been prosperous middle peasants, with the capital for household industry. (This was at the beginning of the century, before urban machine-woven cloth had driven rural handicraft weaving to ruin.)

Despite her skill, Wang Ch'ueh-te had experienced poverty and oppression.

At the time of her marriage her husband's family were well-to-do middle peasants. But her father-in-law took to smoking opium and they rapidly became poorer and poorer. Their plight became worse than ever during the famine of 1920. Finally, Wang Ch'ueh-te and her husband were driven from the family home. This was brought about by the husband's stepmother in an attempt to ensure that what little was left of the family property should be inherited by her own two sons.

The life of the disinherited couple was very bitter. After wandering over the countryside, they at last found employment in the prosperous townlet of Peiyen—'Little Tientsin'—Wang Ch'ueh-te as a weaver and her husband as a cook.

Underpaid though they were, they pinched and scraped together enough to send the husband out as an itinerant trader, which he had previously been during the lulls in the agricultural season. He had always had a special flair for salesmanship. Gradually the couple set aside enough to buy a little land in Ten Mile Inn.

While Wang Ch'ueh-te and her husband were on the upgrade, the father's family continued to decline. When he died the stepmother and her two sons were forced to sell their house in order to pay for the funeral. Wang Ch'ueh-te's husband, having been disowned, was not required to contribute anything. On the contrary, he bought the house which his stepbrothers sold and moved back into his boyhood home.

When the war against Japan broke out, Wang Ch'ueh-te and her husband with their son and daughter-in-law were once more living comfortably enough as middle peasants.

This period was short-lived and Wang Ch'ueh-te was soon to undergo an experience which, bitter as it was, added to her qualifications as a leader of the women of Ten Mile Inn.

On the very first Japanese mopping-up campaign her father was killed—for it was he who had been shot for wearing clothes of blue-grey cloth such as the Eighth Route Army men wore. Then some months later her husband, while out on one of his trading expeditions, was seized by the Japanese. He was never heard of again.

Wang Ch'ueh-te's oppression by her stepmother-in-law, her suffering during the famine, her exploitation in the landlord home, and finally her family losses at the hands of the enemy invaders—all this made her one of Ten Mile Inn's earliest and most ardent supporters of the Communists. It had made her exclaim, 'The Eighth Route Army opened heaven and earth'. At the same time her familiarity with the village and her skill in the almost lost art of weaving made her a suitable chairman of the newly-formed women's association.

But neither Wang Ch'ueh-te nor the other four association committee members had any experience in leadership. So they were sent on a fifteen-day course for training new women's leaders from villages throughout the county.

Wang Ch'ueh-te was particularly inspired by the course. Not only were the women encouraged to talk, to tell of their sufferings,

but they were encouraged to give their opinions and criticisms—‘even of the Eighth Route Army officials’ (who were in charge of the course).

Although she was over fifty, Wang Ch’ueh-te bobbed her hair short, unbound her feet, and returned to Ten Mile Inn a ‘new woman’. With tremendous zeal she threw herself into the task of organizing the women. The women’s association was expanded until its membership was over two hundred. All the members were organized into small groups of about ten each—and there were soon twenty-two such groups, each with its own leader. The group’s leader was supposed to help its members solve their personal problems. If she could not do so herself, she was to bring the matter to the association’s committee.

The major task was to teach the women to spin and weave. Money for the raw materials and equipment came from government loans (administered through the new village co-operative which was set up at this time). The skill came from Wang Ch’ueh-te and her few fellow villagers who had not forgotten the art of spinning and weaving.

The women’s association also took charge of women’s rear service. The government issued the cloth to the association, which distributed it amongst its members. Each group elected one woman to act as a supervisor whose duty it was to see that army shoes, uniforms and quilts conformed to standard. All the women from sixteen to fifty were eligible to do this service and received payment for it. For making a uniform jacket, for example, the rate was two chin¹ four liang (ounces) of millet; for a pair of trousers, one chin twelve liang.

Thus the women of Ten Mile Inn, who in the past had been forced into unemployment by lack of capital and by urban machine competition, were able to earn money. This improvement of their economic position was the most powerful factor in the beginning of the emancipation of the women of Ten Mile Inn.

Perhaps the chief characteristic of the women’s work at this period, however, was that it was in the nature of an offensive on all fronts at once. It called for equal rights for women, freedom of marriage, no beating by husbands or parents-in-law, increased

¹ One chin is about 1.1 pounds; there are 16 liang in a chin. A man would eat about a chin of grain a day.

production of all sorts (including farm work, but especially spinning and weaving), economic support for the front through rear service (making shoes, uniforms, etc.), and besides all this, literacy classes, bobbing of hair, unbinding of feet and opposition to face-saving.

Many-sided and vigorous though this activity was, it was not a thorough mass movement. Only a minority of women, like Wang Ch'ueh-te, were inspired, and it was only through their unceasing and tireless efforts that the majority of village women had organized themselves into groups, attended meetings, studied characters. Though all were enthusiastic about their new earning power, some found the women's association rather overpowering and longed for a little of the leisurely pace of their former lives.

This the leaders found discouraging. They themselves had advanced very rapidly, but they had failed to take the masses with them, so they began to feel somewhat disillusioned and believed that the women of Ten Mile Inn were exceptionally backward.

Although the many-sided women's movement of this period could not be said to have achieved the emancipation of the women of Ten Mile Inn, it was a significant step forward. It also made a very important contribution to anti-Japanese resistance. On the one hand, the women's production efforts brought increased prosperity, which boosted village morale. On the other, they helped make the area independent of cloth imported from the Japanese-occupied territory.

Taxation—'Inviting the Rich to Contribute'

Meanwhile, another development was taking place in the village which was strengthening the villagers' desire to resist the Japanese. This was the introduction of a new taxation system.

According to the new system the tax was shared proportionately amongst the richest 30 per cent of the families.

This principle of taxing only the wealthiest was described by the villagers in their politer moments as 'inviting the rich to contribute'. On other occasions it was expressed more simply as 'planing down the bumps'. In Ten Mile Inn the bumps were located by grading all families according to the number of mu

they owned per member of the family. The top 30 per cent were then called upon to pay.

For 70 per cent of the villagers to be free from taxation was a state of affairs never dreamt of before. Many villagers for the first time found that they had enough seed for sowing. Previously they had been forced to borrow it at seeding time when grain prices were highest and to repay at harvest-time when they were lowest. This process was one of the chief ways in which peasants sank more and more heavily into debt. By helping to end it, tax reform became the first step taken in Ten Mile Inn towards getting the peasantry out of debt. In doing so it increased their enthusiasm and efforts in production. The result was a general rise in morale.

This was accomplished despite the fact that the village head, Commander Huang's former middleman, Fu Shou-liang, was by no means a completely reformed character. In fact, he used his new position to carry on his former intrigues. One of his first accomplishments in this direction was to effect a re-shuffle in the village government which resulted in the ousting of his rival Wang Pan-yen from the post of director of rear service. This manoeuvre was primarily for the purpose of enabling Fu and his followers to monopolize the greatly restricted opportunities which office now offered for personal enrichment.

These opportunities now lay chiefly in the field of tax assessment, for there was considerable scope for the granting and receiving of favours in deciding just who belonged in the tax-paying 30 per cent, and what portion of the total village assessment each individual was to pay.

Fu P'ei-yin, for example, proprietor of the Hsin Hsiung money-lending establishment, in which Fu Shou-liang was one of the biggest investors, paid only one hundred chin of millet in taxes. Fu Wen, on the other hand, who had no such close relations with the village head, paid the top rate of fifteen hundred chin. This was despite the fact that Fu P'ei-yin's family averaged seven and a half mu per head, whereas Fu Wen's family had only six mu of similar quality land per head. The recently ousted director of rear service, Wang Pan-yen, was also called upon to pay fifteen hundred chin. He was certainly eligible for this top rate, but it was not only sentiments of justice which had caused him to be correctly assessed. Fu Shou-liang and his followers had not been

content with ousting Wang Pan-yen from office. They had been quick to force him into such a position that he either had to pay the top rate—or bribe his way out. One of Wang Pan-yen's henchman, the middle peasant Wang P'ei-cheng, was forced to pay his taxes twice. So were a number of other middle peasants, the village head protesting that there was no record of their ever having made a first payment.

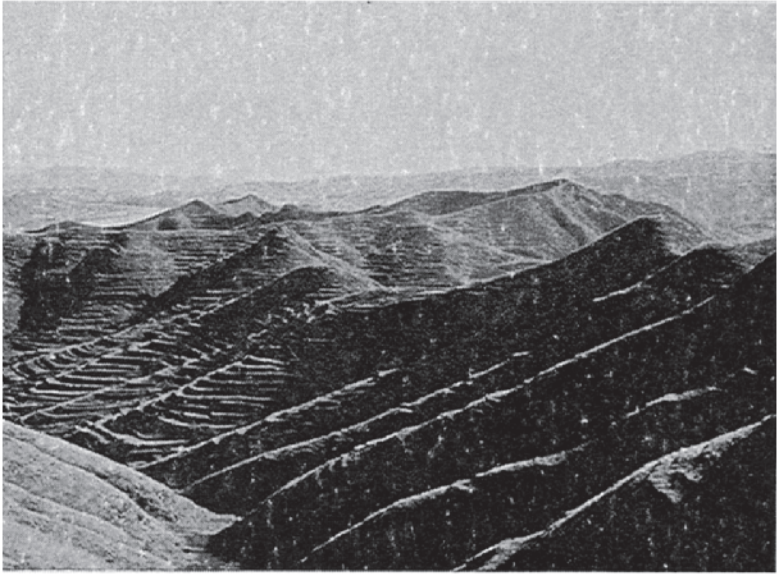
There were also other aspects of taxation which presented an unscrupulous village head with the chance of making something on the side. At this time the Border Region Government still permitted village governments to impose certain small additional levies to cover their running expenses. Such an old hand as Fu Shou-liang knew how to make the most of this.

In spite of any such shortcomings, however, the great overriding fact remained that 70 per cent of the villagers were freed from taxation and were spurred on to produce more than ever before and to support the anti-Japanese administration.

At the same time the 30 per cent who did pay taxes were also spurred into action. Wang Pan-yen chose from amongst his four sons the one he liked least and sent him off to join the Eighth Route Army—since soldiers' families were not only entitled to special consideration in the matter of taxation, but received special help in the cultivation of their land. Others sought other methods, if not of avoiding tax payment, at least of getting into the lower brackets.

Ten Mile Inn's richest peasant, Wang Feng-ch'i, for instance, who owned over a hundred mu and was the patriarchal head of a family of twenty-five members, took his own steps to deal with the progressive tax situation. Just before the new system was due to take effect, he divided his property among his five sons, arranging beforehand that he himself should go to live with each one in turn. With each son having only twenty-odd mu, the family land all came within the lower brackets of the sharply graded progressive tax. This family division was only the first of many which took place between 1940 and 1942.

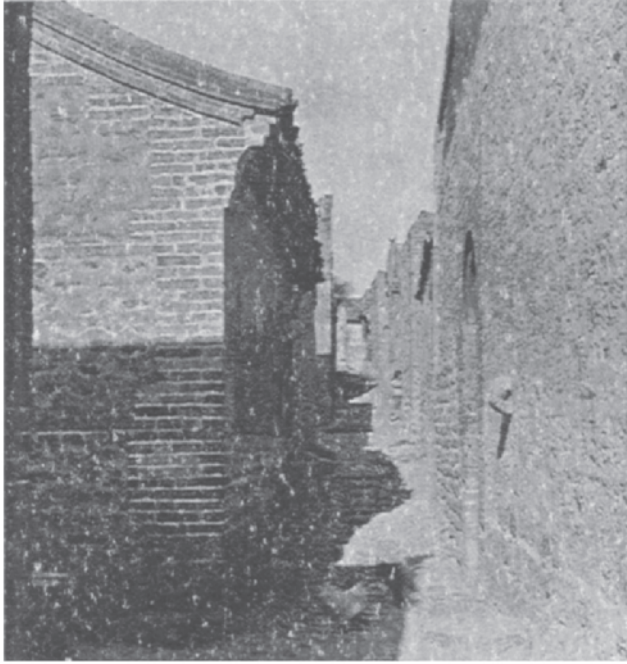
Another solution which was adopted by some landlords was the sale of land. Fu Hsin, the chief landlord of the Fu clan (the Yangyi cloth-dealer and former pao-head), was almost as quick in his response to the changing situation as Wang Feng-ch'i. But since his four sons were still only children, division of the family



1. The terraced hill fields of Ten Mile Inn—in the foothills of the Taihang mountains.



2. Village gates—Ten Mile Inn—leading to the main street of the village and part of a much-used highway.



3. The main street in the Fort.



4. Meals are sociable affairs. Neighbours bring their bowls out into the street and eat together.

was impractical. Fu Hsin's solution was to sell thirty mu of land. With the proceeds he sent his brother to do business in the Japanese-occupied city of Hantan.

For the wealthy to be selling land was something entirely new. In the past they had always fought bitterly amongst themselves to snatch whatever land was for sale. Now this type of calculated decrease of their holdings gave some middle peasants, who previously had little hope of doing so, a chance to buy more land.

But the landlords and rich peasants as a whole did not put much land on the market. Like Wang Feng-ch'i they sought other ways of avoiding the tax. Their ingenuity in doing this and the extent of their success was not revealed till some years later, when full control of the new administration had been gained by the masses.

The latter were even at this earlier date already responding, step by step, to the application of the 'mass-line'. They were gradually becoming aware of their own power. They were learning that by uniting they could protect themselves from the Japanese and lessen their oppression at the hands of the landlords and rich peasants. They were beginning to feel that they were neither the helpless victims of fate, being punished for their misdeeds in some previous incarnation—as the Buddhists maintained; nor that they must wait patiently for the upward curve of their ever-undulating fortunes—as the Taoists would have it.

Their fortunes were in fact steadily rising, not because of any mystic curves or incantations, but because the Communists combined their changes in taxation with other economic reforms. Without these the Anti-Japanese Village Government could never have survived, for its entire existence depended upon stemming the advance not only of Japanese arms but also of Japanese goods. It had to take part in economic as well as military warfare. This meant that village production had to be increased. And the main force in production as well as in direct resistance of the enemy was the mass of the peasantry.

The Village Co-operative

An important step in the economic mobilization of the village was

the establishing of the co-operative, the major task of which was to help increase production to the point of economic self-sufficiency at least in such necessities as food, fuel and clothing.

But the people of Ten Mile Inn were unaccustomed to any organized co-operatives, let alone one such as the Border Region Government was advocating. The mass-line principle 'that the masses understand a problem from what they have seen or experienced themselves' was therefore brought into play. This meant that the co-operative had first to be nursed along and supported with government funds. At the same time it had to satisfy certain immediate demands of the peasants in order to gain their voluntary support. Once this was done the institution would be able to stand on its own feet.

The co-operative's initial capital, therefore, was supplied by the Sub-region Government. Its first task was to help the people obtain, at cheaper prices than ever before, certain daily necessities such as salt, oil for cooking and lighting, matches, cloth, etc.—articles on which Fu P'ei-yin's shop, the Hsin Hsiung, had held a virtual monopoly for so many years.

The most important of all these items was cloth, and soon a drive was launched to make the village entirely self-sufficient in cotton goods. This action was co-ordinated with that of villages throughout the T'aihang Sub-region, which, following the lead of the Border Region Government, conducted a special cotton-growing drive. This made cotton exempt from taxation for the first two years from the beginning of the drive. In addition, the government guaranteed to buy the output at a satisfactory price. As a result a considerable proportion of the sown area was turned over to cotton.

At the same time the co-operative advanced raw cotton on a large scale to peasant families, taking it back from them in the form of yarn or cloth. The exchange rate between raw and processed cotton was so fixed as to be advantageous to the peasants.

Such policies as these soon won the support of the people.

But the Ten Mile Inn Co-operative was not destined to develop smoothly. Amongst its members were not only the rank-and-file of the peasantry, but also landlords and rich peasants. Fu P'ei-yin, senior partner of the Hsin Hsiung Shop, for example, lost no time in making an investment in the new concern. Salt, oil,

matches and cloth were by no means the major lines of his own business, which derived its greatest profits from usury, but Fu P'ei-yin did not intend to let the profits even from mere sidelines slip completely through his fingers. He soon became a major shareholder in the co-operative. Others who joined for similar reasons pressed for such policies as would convert the co-operative into a virtual joint stock company. And joint stock company principles were so much more in line with tradition that at this period even some of the poor peasant members could be persuaded that they were a perfectly satisfactory arrangement.

Another handicap in its development was that the co-operative needed personnel who could read and write and do fairly complicated accounts. Since the mass of the peasantry were illiterate, a number of landlords and rich peasants were elected to office. In fact, the landlord Fu Hsin, when he closed down his shop in the neighbouring townlet of Yangyi and returned to Ten Mile Inn to live, was chosen as the co-operative's first manager.

In spite of such handicaps, the co-operative, like the new progressive tax policy, soon contributed to improving the economic lot of the peasants and to arousing them politically.

The Peasant Union

But it was clear that to consolidate the gains already made, and to make still further advances, the peasants could effectively mobilize their strength only by having an organization of their own. This organization was to be the peasant union.

Before the peasant union was formed, the casual labourers used to assemble at daybreak in the main village street. There they offered themselves for hire. Having no organization of their own, they were at the mercy of the hirers. The whole social and political set-up had previously served to prevent any such action as the establishment of a union; the clans, secret societies, temple association all cut across class lines and blinded most of the labourers to the need for unity among themselves. The few who did appreciate its necessity had been held in check in the past by the paochia system of group informing.

The landlords and rich peasants, however, suffered from no such disadvantage. They had an employers' union of their own and every morning sent down one representative to the waiting

labour pool. This representative hired labour for all those who needed it—at a price previously determined by the hirers. The labourers could take it or leave it. For many of them, to leave it would have meant starvation.

By the beginning of 1942, however, almost two years of Communist influence and reforms had considerably improved the economic position of the labourers and tenants. This had greatly strengthened their bargaining position and had given them a new confidence in themselves.

The result was that some forty of the poorest families in the village, all of them either tenants or farm-labourers or both at the same time, organized a union. These were the people to whom the Communists' wartime policy of Reduction of Rent and Interest was a vital issue. Besides having little or no land of their own, they were all more or less heavily in debt. Double Reduction¹ could be put into effect only if these villagers were well organized and courageous enough to demand it.

Unlike the village government and the co-operative, the peasant union was one institution which the landlords and rich peasants could not dominate. Its chairman and the leader of each small group within it had to be chosen from among its own membership of tenants and farm-hands. More than this, the membership were specifically on guard against undermining activities by the 'Old Moneybags'. There was, in fact, a very rigid discipline on this point. The one delinquency for which a member could be expelled from the union was giving away information concerning the union and its membership to landlords and rich peasants. Thus for once, the landlords and rich peasants and their agents were unable to push themselves to the fore by exploiting their literacy or by making the most of the rank-and-file's inexperience of leadership.

The main purpose of the Communists, who set about organizing it in the first place, was to make the union a training-ground for the development of a capacity for leadership and for independent organized action on the part of the masses themselves. Little by little a dual power was to be established in the village. And though at the outset the peasant union was to be only the shadow or secondary organization, its objective was to produce leaders who would take over the village government itself.

The first chairman of the Ten Mile Inn peasant union was a

¹ See Appendix, p. 177 ff.

forty-two-year-old peasant called Wang K'e-pin. He was chosen, not because he was well loved or even highly respected by the union membership, but because not even the old paochia system had been able to subdue his fighting spirit.

All his life Wang K'e-pin had fought for survival, and he had not been too particular about whom he fought against. His unguarded tongue was liable to lash out against rich and poor alike. Now his fellow-members of the peasant union were willing to overlook any differences they had had with him in the past because they felt he had the energy and courage to lead them against their oppressors. And Wang K'e-pin, in turn, feeling the strength of an organized body of men behind him, became more daring than ever.

But he had only a rudimentary understanding of the mass-line and preferred to fight the landlords and rich peasants with one of their own weapons—an organized clique. Instead of painstakingly mobilizing all the membership, he would rely upon a handful of militants to carry out the aims of the union. Although he thus tended to depend on individual heroics, Wang K'e-pin's activities were not without value. They did inspire the rank-and-file of the union members with the belief that poor peasants and labourers could achieve power without being agents of the landlords or rich peasants.

Another early accomplishment of the peasant union was the cementing of unity amongst its members.

In the past, always on the brink of starvation, the tenants and farm-hands were liable to be led into disputes among themselves over trifling debts or the infringement of boundaries of adjoining plots of land. The amounts in such cases were minute, but they were magnified by poverty. While Wang K'e-pin did not mobilize all the members for action, he could at least see the importance of having a firm base. The newly-formed peasant union, therefore, aimed to arbitrate these disputes and to clear up any ill-feeling they had produced.

In this the union achieved successes. As a result it made noticeable progress in bringing about the unity which was absolutely essential if the tenants and labourers were to demand the rights they were entitled to under the terms of the Double Reduction—terms which the village government under Fu Shou-liang showed no signs of implementing.

The landlords and rich peasants felt far from happy at the turn events were taking and began to launch a campaign to terrorize the union members into inactivity. Wang Pan-yen, clearly pining for the days when the Green Circle-Kuomintang gang held power, openly threatened that if the Kuomintang ever returned, membership in the peasant union would be made punishable by death. And hoping to play upon any religious sentiments the members might possess, as well as to make sure that their own ardent desires came true, he and his fellow landlords held an elaborate religious ceremony in the temple—calling on the gods to bring about the return of the Kuomintang.

As if in immediate and tangible answers to this prayer, it suddenly became common for shots to be fired at night—‘black shots’ the peasants called them. It was never definitely established who fired them, but on more than one occasion the rich peasant Li Feng was discovered in highly suspicious circumstances— after which the firing temporarily ceased.

Despite all opposition, little by little the peasant union consolidated its position. Before it could become the foremost mass, organization of the village, however, it had to lead a village-wide mass movement. This still lay in the future. Meanwhile, it had at least proved the fighting qualities of its first chairman and his militants. It would soon be possible to replace the former middleman Fu Shou-liang with a village head who would take a more determined lead in resisting the enemy.

The Village Communist Party Branch

Establishment of the peasant union, the first steps in a whole series of political and economic reforms, the organization of village defences—all this had been accomplished under Communist leadership. This did not mean, however, that throughout the whole period leadership continued to come from the Sacrifice League detachment. The task assigned to the League detachment which came to Ten Mile Inn had been to draw the village into the orbit of the anti-Japanese county administration. Once the anti-Japanese village government had been established, therefore, the detachment had withdrawn to carry on similar work in other places. The political leadership of Ten Mile Inn had then been entrusted to the Sub-county Communist Party Committee.

Subsequently, in order to lead and co-ordinate the dangerous and difficult work of arousing the whole mass of the villagers to resist the enemy on its doorstep, a Communist Party branch had to be organized in the village itself. The Communist Party cadres of the sub-county, therefore, secretly recruited into the Communist Party a handful of villagers who, they believed, would prove in the long run the most courageous and resourceful as well as the most influential in arousing their fellow villagers.

The newly-formed village branch had to be an underground one, for the life of anyone known to be a Communist was in constant danger from the Japanese.

The Japanese were not the only source of danger, however. The Communists and the reforms they introduced had enemies inside the village itself, as evidenced by the firing of 'black shots'. And the 'black shots' were not the only secret weapons which the Communists' internal enemies used to undermine the reforms. Another was infiltration. Taking advantage of the difficulties under which the sub-county party operated under the nose of the Japanese, and exploiting to the full the secrecy which was a matter of life and death, both Wang Pan-yen and Fu Shou-liang patriotically professed a change of heart. This enabled them to succeed for a time in obtaining membership in the village Communist Party branch—and sabotaging its work. Eventually this difficulty, along with innumerable others which beset the path of anti-Japanese resistance, was overcome and the Ten Mile Inn Communist Party branch effectively shouldered its burden of leading village resistance. Meanwhile the brunt of this burden had to be borne by the sub-county party committee.

V

FAMINE AND COUNTER-FAMINE

In the year 1942, one-fifth of the entire T'aihang region, including Ten Mile Inn, was invaded by a new enemy—drought.

Ever since the dawn of Chinese history, four thousand years before, drought had always brought famine in its wake.

Though famine meant ruin, exile, often death itself for the peasant who lived his whole life from hand to mouth, it was a different matter for the landlord or rich peasant who had a surplus of grain in his bin. In fact, those with reserves which enabled them to ride out the storm were able to enrich themselves; for at such times the desperate poor and middle peasants would sell whatever they had—even, as a last resort, their precious land. And famine time was no seller's market. The buyer offered life itself.

The desolation of the villages and the misery of the people in Honan province (in the extreme north of which Ten Mile Inn was situated) was described by an eye-witness as follows:

'The smaller villages were even worse than the market towns. The silence was frightening. People fled the impersonal cruelty of hunger as if a barbarian army were upon them. The villages echoed with emptiness; streets were deserted, compost piles untended waiting for spring, doors and windows boarded up....

'There were corpses on the road. A girl no more than seventeen, slim and pretty, lay on the damp earth, her lips blue with death; her eyes were open, and rain fell on them. People chipped at bark, pounded it by the roadside for food; vendors sold leaves at a dollar a bundle. A dog digging at a mound was exposing a human body. Ghostlike men were skimming the stagnant pools to eat the green slime of the waters....

'... When a group of mother, baby and two older children became tired from the long hunt for food, the mother, sitting

down to nurse the infant, sent the older children on to look for food in the next village; when they returned, the baby was still sucking at the breast of the dead mother. In a fit of frenzy the parents of two little children had murdered them rather than hear them beg for something to eat. Some families sold all they had for one last big meal, then committed suicide. Armed assaults and robberies were epidemic all through the countryside.¹

'Disaster Relief and Spring Cultivation Movement'

Such was the famine of 1942–3. But this description applies to that part of the province which was under Kuomintang control.

In the Communist-led T'aihang Sub-region, the famine was different.

To cope with the situation, which was worsened by the influx of great numbers of refugees from the Japanese-occupied areas, the T'aihang Sub-region Government organized a great 'Disaster Relief and Spring Cultivation' movement, which combined relief with production. It issued a loan of between four and five million dollars on one work relief project alone—irrigation. This afforded a livelihood to many of the famine refugees, who were paid three chin of millet a day—enough to feed three people.

The government's entire personnel, civil and military, at all levels, threw itself into the production drive. The High Commissioner of the Sub-region, the magistrates, army commanders and political commissars personally engaged in cultivation alongside the peasants in a way which would have horrified and been impossible for the long-gowned, opium-smoking gentry officials of the past.

At the same time the government imported foodstuffs from the enemy-occupied areas and put them on the market at controlled prices in an effort to prevent hoarding, speculation and profiteering.²

¹ Theodore White and Annalee Jacoby: *Thunder Out of China*, New York. From Chapter II, 'The Honan Famine' (pp. 166–78).

² General facts about the T'aihang famine are drawn from the report by Teng Hsiao-ping, at that time Political Commissar of the 129th Division of the Eighth Route Army, now Vice-Premier of the Chinese People's Republic. This report is quoted in *The Chinese Communists*, by Stuart Gelder. Gollancz, London 1946.

'Digging out the Landlords' Hidden Grain'

It was in the course of combating this bitter disaster that the newly-formed peasant union established itself as the village's most powerful mass-organization. It achieved this by preventing hoarding, speculation and profiteering.

First the whole union membership of forty tenants and farmhands was mustered. Then, guided by the chairman and group leaders, they paid collective visits to the homes of the landlords and rich peasants who were known to be hoarding grain, to persuade them to put it on the market at a reasonable price. Soon the peasant union members were joined by the entire mass of the poor and middle peasants.

These reinforcements enabled the nature of the visits to be changed from one of persuasion to one of action, for the farmhands knew not only who was hoarding grain but exactly where it was hidden. With their help the union embarked upon its first big campaign—that of 'Digging out the Landlords' Hidden Grain'. This meant seizing the hoards of those who refused to sell their grain. The booty was distributed free to those in need. At times a great fire was lit in the hoarder's courtyard and large cauldrons full of millet were cooked on the spot and distributed to the hungry.

Even when these measures were combined with the work relief and food supplies provided by the sub-region Government, they could not prevent all hardship. But suffering was on a scale far smaller than in previous famines. For the first time in the history of Ten Mile Inn famine did not bring in its wake wholesale emigration, forfeiture of land and selling of children by the poor.

The successful action during the famine had been undertaken by the new peasant union. But it had been guided by the Sub-county Communist Party Committee, which used this new experience to drive home to the peasants the value of unity between the farm-hands, poor and middle peasants. The Communists repeatedly stressed the need to end the frictions which had so often kept the people disunited in the past. They showed how the peasant union, though composed of only forty-odd families of labourers and tenants, because they were united, had been able to lead the entire village in 'Digging out the Landlords' Hidden Grain'. As a result of these lessons, the new

peasant union was expanded and soon embraced the great majority of families other than those of the landlords and rich peasants.

One outcome of the greater strength and experience which the peasant union gained during the famine was a shift in the balance of class forces in the village; for the consolidation of the new mass-organization of the poor and middle peasants paved the way for their first attempts at wielding political power. This did not mean that the peasant union as such took over exclusive administration of the village, but it did mean a change in governmental personnel. Instead of being staffed by landlords and rich peasants or their followers, and headed by Fu Shou-liang, the village government was now taken over by members of the 'basic labouring masses' who had never held office before.

Most of the leading members of the new village government were graduates of the same political school—the peasant union, in which many of them had been group leaders. The new village head was the former union chairman, the ex-poor peasant Wang K'e-pin.

The peasant union and village government were not alone in making great strides forward as a direct result of action taken and experience gained during the famine. In fact, because of the leadership of the Communists, extended from the sub-county level and above, the bitter suffering of the years 1942–3 was not entirely in vain. It helped bring about a strengthening of all the democratic institutions already set up. This in turn made it possible to introduce still further reforms.

The 'Clearing-up Debts' Movement

The new village government, for instance, was soon strong enough to enforce the Shansi-Hopeh-Shantung-Honan Border Region's official exchange-rate between the old silver coins and the new paper currency issued by the Border Region's South Hopeh Bank. This was of tremendous benefit to the mass of the peasants.

The numerous currencies issued in the past by the various warlords, and later by the Kuomintang, had risen and fallen in value in pace with their issuer's fortunes. Because of this, rural usury had normally been calculated in terms of silver. Silver therefore was the form of the heavy burden of debt which still

weighed upon the peasantry. To lighten it the Border Region Government set an exchange rate of two dollars of its paper currency to one silver dollar. For great numbers of peasants this brought the paying off of their debts within the realm of possibility.

But the exchange-rate legislation alone could not guarantee such an outcome in every case. All it could do was to present the possibility. The peasants themselves had to stand up to the opposition of their landlord and rich peasant creditors, braving not only their anger and ridicule, but the very considerable power and influence which they still retained. This demanded courage.

The testing-ground was the winter school. This had originally been set up for purposes of adult education during the agricultural off-season. But now the study of written characters began more and more to give way to discussion of new directives concerning not only the new exchange-rate but the entire field of Reduction of Rent and Interest. Thus the winter school became a special rallying-ground for those in debt to the landlords and rich peasants as well as for the peasants in general.

The course of the winter school discussions, however, did not always run too smoothly. In the first place the meetings were open to all, and the landlords and rich peasants made a point of attending. They tended to be more talkative, more full of persuasive arguments against implementing the new reforms and more able to raise all sorts of unforeseen difficulties and complications than the peasants, so long accustomed to submissive silence.

In the second place, even a number of the middle peasants who had shown themselves staunch supporters of the other reforms, and of resistance against the Japanese, fought shy of the new exchange-rate. The reason for this was that they themselves had lent sums of money—generally paltry enough—to their poorer neighbours. Now, afraid that they themselves would suffer some loss, they tended to support the arguments of the landlords and rich peasants.

Confronted by such formidable opposition, a good number of the debt-burdened poor peasants and farm-labourers hesitated to stand up for their rights. But some of them had the courage to do so.

One of these was tall, bony, buck-toothed Chang Chi-cheng, who had become a farm-labourer at the age of eleven.

In 1933 Chang's father had raised a loan, totalling twelve silver dollars, from four of his fellow-villagers. He had put up three-tenths of a mu of land as security. Subsequently one of the four creditors had bought out the other three. Then, when Old Chang proved unable to pay by the appointed time, he had seized the plot of land. Shortly after this the old man died.

But to the landless labourer Chang Chi-cheng, three-tenths of a mu of land was not easily forgotten. When the Communists introduced their exchange regulations, he pinched and saved until he had accumulated twenty-four dollars local paper currency, equivalent to the twelve silver dollars his father had originally borrowed. But the rich peasant creditor refused to return the land, claiming that it had been sold to him. To back up his statement, he produced a 'contract of sale', hoping to bamboozle the illiterate farm-hand.

But though Chang Chi-cheng was illiterate, his memory was keen. When the contract was read out at the winter school, where the case was being discussed, he soon found something wrong.

Chinese land sale contracts not only describe the field which is changing hands, but also specify the owners of all those bordering on it. In this case the rich peasant creditor had slipped. He had named as a neighbour a man who had purchased an adjoining field only in 1939, while the 'sale' was dated 1936. The contract was thus exposed as false.

But still the creditor did not give up. He resorted to every conceivable trick in an effort to avoid giving up the land. Chang was determined, however, and took his case to the sub-county office close at hand. In fact he almost haunted the office. 'I went there every day—seven times a day,' he said. In the end, with the support of the sub-county government, Chang got back his three-tenths of a mu of land.

A similar case was that of Wang Fu-hsin, who was later to serve as village clerk.

Before the Communists came to Ten Mile Inn Wang Fu-hsin's father had been compelled by poverty to mortgage part of his land. For years he had been unable to redeem it and the landlord who had taken it over had long considered it his own. When the new exchange-rate was announced, Wang Fu-hsin in his turn went to redeem his now dead father's land. The landlord fought

tooth and nail to retain it, claiming with loud and repeated insistence that the transaction had not been a mortgage but an outright sale. He noisily threatened to call down the wrath of the gods on the spirit of the young man's father if the agreement were not honoured.

But Wang Fu-hsin was not to be intimidated by gods or landlords. His confidence was strengthened by the literacy he had acquired when apprenticed as a boy to a cloth dealer. With this and the peasant union behind him he demanded that the landlord produce the contract. The deal was proved to have been a mortgage, after all, and Wang Fu-hsin soon set to tilling the land which his father, years before, had given up as lost.

The landlord was not one to take his defeat lying down. He went out of his way, day in and day out, to heap scorn and abuse upon young Wang Fu-hsin.

Though young Wang himself stood up to this, both his case and that of Chang Chi-cheng afforded the landlords and rich peasants a partial, temporary success. They showed that standing up for one's rights, even under the new type of village government, was no easy and peaceful matter. The majority of peasants, especially the older ones, were still inclined to be cautious about incurring the landlords' anger and opposition. According to their lifelong experience and that of their fathers before them, new governments might come and go, but the landlords went on for ever. They feared to follow the two young men's example.

Their fears bore out the Chinese Communists' contention that the people do not constitute a solid, undifferentiated mass. Besides an active and advanced minority, they contain a relatively backward or merely average majority. Only when the latter have been aroused does the time come for mass action. The groundwork would have to be more fully prepared before the new exchange-rate, to say nothing of the Double Reduction, could be widely carried out in Ten Mile Inn.

Organizing Mutual Aid

A similar situation prevailed in the matter of organizing mutual aid.

A certain amount of mutual aid had long been practised in Chinese villages. At harvest-time neighbours or relatives might

come together to help each other, each family being supposed to contribute to the labour pool according to the extent of its own land. Thus a family with eight mu to be harvested might provide one labourer, while another with sixteen mu would provide two. The harvesters would work together, first on the fields of one family, then on those of another. This was the theory; but actual practice was at best haphazard and at worst decidedly unfair. Families with power in the village often prevailed on those over whom they exercised some control to join in what they called 'mutual aid'. But those so 'persuaded' invariably did the lion's share of the work—and of course received no pay, since they were supposed to be enjoying the benefits of 'mutual aid'.

This defective institution, like many others, the Communists 'took from the masses, raised to a higher level and returned to the masses'—in the form of genuine mutual-aid groups.

One of the Communist mass-workers stationed in the Ninth Sub-county came to Ten Mile Inn and called together a small interested group, consisting mainly of peasant union members, and spoke to them about the advantages to be gained from genuine mutual aid. He described how groups could be organized in which everyone would gain, vividly illustrating his points with concrete tales of what had been accomplished in other, older liberated areas like Yen-an.

Members of the little group were easily convinced that mutual aid might be very valuable, but they felt that there would be all sorts of difficulties in persuading their fellow-villagers to engage in it on any systematic, organized basis. However, the cave-digger Wang Chen-chi felt more confident than the others, and agreed to try to organize a mutual-aid group from amongst his neighbours and friends.

There was one family living in his own neighbourhood all of whose members were taken ill at harvest-time. But they had a donkey. Wang Chen-chi arranged for this animal to help carry back the grain from various families' scattered and distant fields. In return for this the sick family's fields were harvested for them free of charge. Everyone benefited, while the sick family had been saved from disaster.

The members of this family were Wang Chen-chi's first converts to the principle of mutual aid and became ardent propagandists for it. With their help and because of the prestige he himself had

gained in leading the cave-digging, Wang Chen-chi was soon able to persuade between twenty and thirty families to join a mutual-aid group under his leadership. This he carefully organized so that all received approximately equal advantages.

The family with whose donkey the principle had first been practised more than repaid Wang Chen-chi for his efforts. They had a young son, Wang Nan-fang, who had originally been trained as a carpenter, but who had fled to Manchuria to work as a water-carrier, to escape the oppression of the Twenty-four Commanders. After they left he returned to Ten Mile Inn. But at that early stage in its reforms the village still seemed an uninviting place to the young poor peasant, and he returned to the shop where he had done his carpentry apprenticeship—in the Japanese-occupied county-town. On a brief visit home about this time he heard nothing from his family but tales of mutual aid. Seeing that he was impressed, Wang Chen-chi urged the young man not to go back to work in the enemy-occupied town, but to stay at home to engage in mutual aid himself and to help spread it throughout the entire village. Wang Nan-fang agreed, and when, a year or two later, Wang Chen-chi left Ten Mile Inn to take up work as a sub-county cadre, Wang Nan-fang was elected to take his place as leader of the village's first mutual-aid group.

This first group had been set up in 1942. It was not until the following year that another one was formed. The second group was organized and headed by the buck-toothed farm-hand Chang Chi-cheng. Unlike Wang Chen-chi, the pioneer organizer of mutual aid who had had to seek to win members to form a group, Chang Chi-cheng found himself pushed into leadership by would-be members.

Chang Chi-cheng had become a well-known figure through his successful struggle for his father's land. The whole village talked about it. The poor peasants and labourers of his neighbourhood, though hesitant to follow his example, had begun going to him with their problems and looking to him for advice. He had soon become their recognized leader and spokesman. At first his relationship with his poor neighbours had been entirely informal, but now it took on a different form—he became the leader of a new mutual-aid group patterned on that which Wang Chen-chi had organized so successfully the previous year.

Later, telling the writers of the formation of his group, Chang



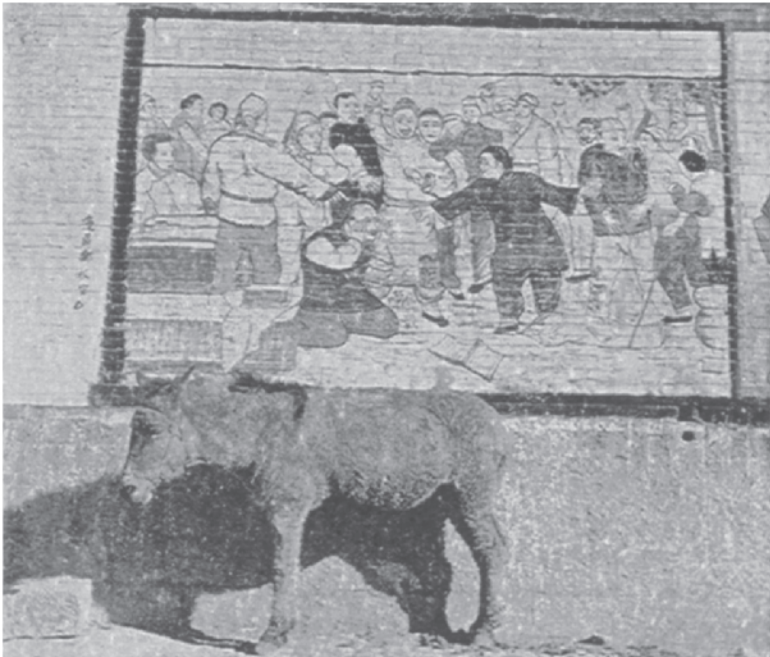
5. The stone causeway leading to the Fort. Picture shows a procession of visitors from “the Street” or lower village on New Year’s Day.



6. Chinese New Year, 1948. New Year’s festivities in Ten Mile Inn included matches in traditional wrestling. In the old days, when sharp clan rivalry existed, these matches often broke out into real fights.



7. *Left*—Wang Fu-hsin, Clerk of the village government. *Right*—Wang Hsi-t'ang, Village Head—an important character in the book (see page 95).



8. Mural on wall in the main street of Ten Mile Inn, showing peasants denouncing landlord in land reform campaign.

Chi-cheng recalled how when the idea of organized mutual aid had first been broached, he and the rest of the villagers had felt very suspicious of it. After a while his neighbours, though still not convinced of the necessity of having a formally organized group, could see very distinctly the benefits which the members of Wang Chen-chi's group derived. So they in turn became anxious to exchange labour on a fair and systematic basis. Chang Chi-cheng took on the job of arranging this. Those of his neighbours who wanted to exchange labour used to come to his home and he would fix up equitable exchanges. This was the tentative beginning of an organized mutual-aid group which under Cheng Chi-cheng's leadership and with Wang Chen-chi's advice soon expanded.

Within a short time mutual-aid groups began to spring up all over the village. By 1944 there were ten of them, eight on the Street and two in the Fort.

It was in the Fort, the traditional landlord citadel, that the obstacles to developing genuine mutual aid were greatest.

Li Fa-k'uei, who had suffered a considerable loss when his former patron Commander Huang had turned upon him, and Fu Shou-liang, who had recently been ousted from his post as village head, thought they saw in mutual aid a chance to recover something of their lost power and prestige. Though they could no longer hope to extend this over the entire village, they hoped that by organizing and leading a big mutual-aid group which embraced all the ninety-odd families in the Fort, they would at least be able to retrieve some of the ground they had lost.

Li Fa-k'uei and Fu Shou-liang had no concern with that 'skill in waiting for the masses' which the mass-line demands. They neither carefully demonstrated the advantages of mutual aid, as the pioneer Wang Chen-chi had done, nor responded to popular demand, like the buck-toothed Chang Chi-cheng. Instead, the two former middlemen used various tricks, from promises to threats. Soon they had recruited the whole of the Fort into one large mutual-aid group.

The two organizers naturally appointed themselves to take charge of keeping the accounts of man and animal labour-days exchanged among the various group members. Their accounts were as confused as they had been in the days of the temple association and of the paochia régime. On the one hand, the

accountants gained directly from this confusion. On the other hand, they felt their position would not be threatened as long as the families of the Fort were rent with discord. Since clear statements and explanations as to who owed whom how much, and why, were never forthcoming, there was never a time when someone in the group did not feel a grievance over having got the worst of some labour-exchange bargain. One peasant recalled distinctly, nearly five years later, that he had done six and a half days' mutual-aid work on Fu Shou-liang's land which Fu never settled up.

Li Fa-k'uei further sabotaged production efforts by arguing that it was unpatriotic to increase production with the Japanese so close at hand—and liable to seize the fruits of the peasants' toil. When the militiamen of the Fort, having been urged by members of the underground party branch to set an example, worked especially hard or put in overtime planting cotton, Li Fa-k'uei publicly taunted them with being 'Japanese empire-builders'. Some of the peasants became confused on this issue and slowed down. This caused additional friction amongst the mutual-aid group members—for those who worked hard began to nurse bitter feelings about those who worked slowly and consequently did not do a fair share of the work.

But Li Fa-k'uei overplayed his hand. The zealous young militiamen became so exasperated that they withdrew from the original Fort group and organized one of their own. It was not until a couple of years later, when Li Fa-k'uei and Fu Shou-liang had been exposed and expelled, that the two Fort groups reunited. And when they did so, like every other mutual-aid group in the village, they looked back to Wang Chen-chi's group as their model.

In fact, the entire village came in time to regard two experiences as vital in the growth of mutual aid in Ten Mile Inn. One was Wang Chen-chi's leadership of the cave-digging movement, which first demonstrated the possibilities of organized collective labour. The other was his arranging the use of the sick family's donkey, which demonstrated the benefits to be derived from co-operative labour-exchange.

Under mutual aid both those principles were systematically applied. At harvest-time each group would split itself into labour-exchange squads of several families each, to work first on one family's fields, then on another's. Animals were loaned to help

carry home the crops from outlying land, to carry fertilizer to it, to do ploughing and so on. Tools, too, were widely and systematically loaned and borrowed by group members. Households with few or no able-bodied men did spinning, weaving and sewing for those without any women. Accounts were kept in terms of man-and-animal-labour-days given or received, and payment for excess services rendered was made in cash or kind.

This system of labour-exchange enabled rush jobs on the land, like sowing and reaping, to be completed in record time and while the weather was just right. Mutual aid seemed even to increase the peasants' energy. As one mutual-aid group member remarked, 'At the end of the day someone always says, "Come on, if we work a little faster, we can finish this field by dark". And we do it, too. In the old days we'd have let it wait till the next day.' They began to work not only more energetically, but more cheerfully than before, and mutual aid came to be associated with many of the new songs of labour common all over the Liberated Areas.

Mutual aid had another important function. The co-operative was now providing cheap capital for any venture which promised to increase village production and prosperity. Taking advantage of this, men were frequently going off on 'trade-and-transport' expeditions (shih k'an).

Transportation has always been a problem in China, and during the war the inadequate railways or motor-roads were largely controlled by the Japanese. Their destruction, therefore, became the patriotic duty of the guerrillas. So the burden of transportation was thrown back where it had lain for so many centuries—on the shoulders of the peasants.

But once the Communists controlled an area, there was a difference. The high profits from transportation went to the man who actually carried the goods. In Ten Mile Inn trade-and-transport might mean buying pottery and other manufactured goods and carrying them from the place of production to market; or taking country produce—fruit, vegetables, oil-seeds, raw cotton, etc.—into the town; or just keeping an eye open for a cheap bargain in one place to be disposed of in another.

For example, in the spring of the year following his forming of

the first mutual-aid group, Wang Chen-chi organized fourteen or fifteen able-bodied men of his group into a squad of pole-carriers to transport oil to the city of Hantan—two days' journey away. There they bought cotton—which was then still desperately short in the Communist areas—carried it back and sold it in the market-town of Yangyi, seven miles from Ten Mile Inn. On each trip, each member made seven hundred yuan. Since at the time millet was only seven yuan a chin, this was a very profitable venture.

Another commodity which it was always profitable to buy and transport was salt. Because of the danger and difficulties involved, salt-buying expeditions were generally organized on quite a large scale. As a rule men from several villages would get together, sometimes as many as fifty of them, though they would split up into smaller groups to sneak past the enemy block-houses at night. Dangerous though this crossing and re-crossing of the enemy lines was, it had the result of making salt-buying and transporting exceptionally profitable.

For the great majority such profitable trade-and-transport undertakings had been impossible in the past because the capital necessary for them could have been obtained only from the landlords and rich peasants at ruinous rates of interest. In the past, too, men had in effect been tied to the land, which needed some sort of attention for at least eight months in the year. Now, while a man was away on trade-and-transport, members of his mutual-aid group took over necessary work on the land. This could be paid for at some later date, either in labour or with money earned on the expedition.

The increasing opportunities for trade-and-transport added to the prosperity of mutual-aid group members. Soon, instead of being dependent upon the co-operative for loans, 90 per cent of them were able to buy shares in it.

The Co-operative and Women's Production

A special drive to develop the co-operative movement had been launched throughout the whole of the T'aihang Sub-region as a means of combating the famine.

One project which the Ten Mile Inn co-operative sponsored in the course of this drive was the collecting of fuel—grass-roots, brushwood and so on—which the peasants gathered from the

fields and hillsides. This drive combined production with relief, for the co-operative paid a high rate for the fuel, but permitted the aged, widows, orphans and others in distress to buy fixed amounts for their own use at less than cost price. The drive also had its political significance, for it soon made the village practically independent of the coal-mines thirteen miles away, which were now controlled by the Japanese.

Of far greater importance, however, was the drive to increase the production of cotton yarn and cloth. Higher prices than ever were paid to the peasant women for spinning and weaving. Payment was in grain at the rate of two chin of millet for spinning one chin of yarn, one chin of millet for weaving one chin of cloth. Besides this, cheap credit was advanced for the purchase of spinning wheels, looms and other implements. With this help from the co-operative, the women of Ten Mile Inn were able to earn twelve thousand chin of millet for themselves in one year alone.

This close linking of the co-operative with the development of women's production was in accordance with a Communist Party directive regarding the new direction of women's work.¹

In Ten Mile Inn, from the time that women's work had first begun, attention had been paid to production. Following the Central Committee decision, however, it began to be more clearly recognized that production was not merely one of a number of objectives, such as achievement of equality, freedom of marriage, better treatment of daughters-in-law, attainment of literacy, abolition of foot-binding and so forth. It came to be understood that all these were actually dependent upon the development of women's role in production. Women's work no longer involved the launching of campaigns on many fronts simultaneously. Activity was concentrated upon production. Only where the other objectives could be tied in with production did they receive attention.

Each of the twenty-two small groups into which the women's association had been divided met regularly every day—and night. In the day-time group members would help each other in the elaborate process of laying out the yarn in preparation for setting it on the loom. And both day and night they would gather together

¹ 'Concerning the Present Policy of Women's Work in the Anti-Japanese Bases, February 26th, 1943', published (in English) in *Documents of the Women's Movement of China*. New China Women's Press, Peking 1949.

to spin, reel yarn or wind it on to bobbins. The group-working system made it possible, during the cold winter nights, to share the heating and lighting expenses.

It also had another advantage: it fortified the women's morale against opposition from conservative husbands or fathers-in-law, who complained that this gadding about outside the family courtyard, to attend meetings or to work in groups, was immoral—to say nothing of the fact that it interfered with cooking and other housework. But on the whole, by this time the profits which came from the women's spinning and weaving had convinced most families of the value of the women's groups, even if it had not convinced them of the need for women's emancipation. In many cases where there was an old man in the household he would volunteer, or be urged, to look after the children in order to free the women for greater production efforts. Those women who could not solve their problem quite so simply worked out a shift system amongst themselves, each woman, in turn, looking after several babies at once. In the time thus saved they were able still further to increase their output in spinning and weaving.

To step up production even more, the women's association organized a competition. Quotas were set for each day, and the spinners were ashamed to leave the group in the evening without having spun the assigned amount of cotton. Groups challenged each other, and the results were announced by megaphone over the village 'roof-top broadcast' system.

It was in this manner that the women of Ten Mile Inn won the county record for spinning and weaving.

The women's association also encouraged its members to take part in farm cultivation and to join with the menfolk of their families in mutual aid group labour exchange.

At first the men were sceptical of the women's efficiency in this field, and would not consent to their receiving more than seven points for a day's work as compared with the men's ten. It was true that the women's small feet—even after they had been unbound—handicapped them and made it difficult for them to carry loads of grain, water or manure, or to do certain other heavy jobs. But in such tasks as weeding and harvesting they soon showed they could equal the men.

But most of the village men did not find it easy to concede that women might equal them even in these branches of farm work.

One of those who did, however, was Wang Shao-yi, the village director of production. He not only worked enthusiastically to promote women's work, but encouraged his wife to do the same, and she became one of the leading women in the association. With her aid he organized a competition at harvest-time between a team of women from their mutual-aid group and one of men from another. The women won, and the men at last somewhat grudgingly agreed to raise their labour exchange-rate to eight points. In spite of this demonstration many men in the village persisted in their prejudice—dismissing this dramatic evidence as a freak. Nevertheless, the women had scored a victory and had raised their own confidence in themselves, as well as making some dent at least in male opinion. The long-term effect both of this competition and of the women's growing daily activity was a considerable increase in village production.

The Movement to Reclaim Wasteland

As director of production, Wang Shao-yi was concerned with the effort not only of the women but of the entire village. He did not allow the production drive to slacken when the famine came to an end. In 1944 he enthusiastically led Ten Mile Inn to take an active part in a new campaign—which was extended all over the Liberated Areas. This was the Reclamation of Wasteland.

Previously this had been regarded as an impractical if not entirely hopeless task, for the poor peasants' former winter idleness had not been wholly due to lack of working capital. It was, to a considerable extent, a means of burning up less energy—and food—and the reclamation of waste (which meant hillside) land demanded a degree of stamina which an empty stomach could not provide. Besides this, it was taken for granted that once a plot of wasteland had been so improved as to produce a decent crop, along would come some landlord or rich peasant to claim it as his property. The illiterate and unorganized peasants of the past stood no chance in any such dispute. Now with the energy produced by increased prosperity, and with the peasant union and an increasingly democratic village government to ensure that they reaped the fruits of their labour, the peasants started pushing the terraces higher and higher up the hillsides.

The next objectives were the ancient grave-mounds which took

up a sizeable proportion of the cultivable land. In the past, religious scruples, especially the fear of ghosts, had kept this graveland untilled, and some still hesitated to put it under the plough. But four years of Communist influence had produced men willing to resist more formidable enemies than ghosts. Wang Shaochen, soon to become secretary of the village Communist Party branch, said afterwards 'Those of us who first pushed aside our fears later took the lead, not only in hacking away at superstition, but in digging out the old roots of feudalism.' He also added that the fear of ghosts seemed to pale before the exceptionally good crops which grew on the land that so long had lain fallow. Within a year nearly everyone was cultivating grave-sites.

Ten Mile Inn's Labour Heroes

Not only was production stepped up, but the status of the labourer was improved. In reclaiming wasteland, cave-digger Wang Chen-chi had again played a very active part. It was this, combined with his promotion of mutual-aid groups, which was mainly responsible for the fact that he became at this time Ten Mile Inn's first labour hero.

In their continuous drive to increase production, the Communists had given the labour hero an important place in village life. In doing so they had completely reversed the standards of Chinese feudal society, the officials of which regarded manual work with disdain. The man they delighted to honour was the scholar of the Confucian classics, the writer of elegant verse and prose, not the man with the hoe. The villagers, however, accorded Wang Chen-chi the title of 'First Scholar', which under the old Empire had been reserved for the candidate with the highest marks in the imperial examinations. This was still the highest honour the villagers knew, and now they bestowed it on Wang Chen-chi at a mass meeting of the whole village—not for having written classical essays or dainty poems (he was scarcely literate), but for increasing the efficiency of manual labour.

After having been elected labour hero in Ten Mile Inn, Wang Chen-chi was sent on to reap further honours, first at the county headquarters, then at the seat of the Border Region Government itself. He was honoured, not for any especially heroic feats of

labour accomplished by himself as an individual: these could have won him the title of labour hero only in his own village. His achievements won such high recognition beyond it because he had promoted new, co-operative methods of work. In developing mutual aid he enabled not only himself but all his fellowvillagers to produce more and to set patterns of production which could be followed throughout the whole Border Region. It was this sort of thing, not individual heroics, which counted most in becoming a labour hero.

The women, too, produced their labour heroines.

The first of them was T'ien Ch'uan, a slender young woman in her early twenties who many years before had been sent from her own poverty-stricken village to Ten Mile Inn to become a homeraised daughter-in-law. From the time of her arrival at her new home her position was little better than that of a slave. Day in and day out she received beatings from some member of her husband's family who considered this the accepted method of getting her to work for her keep.

At last, after the women's association had been formed, T'ien Ch'uan plucked up courage to take her grievances to the leader of her neighbourhood women's group. This was the first case of its sort which the association had to deal with, but they took it up with such success that T'ien Ch'uan soon became one of its most active members.

After her years of humiliation at home, T'ien Ch'uan was particularly eager to win a position of self-respect among her fellow association members. She responded enthusiastically to the committee's urgings to increase production, and the following year, during the spinning and weaving competition, she set the record and was chosen labour heroine.

It was, of course, only exceptional individuals who became labour heroes. But the entire mass of the peasantry were affected by the various reforms. In fact, the combined effect of them all—progressive taxation, the new exchange-rate, mutual aid, the cooperative, the reclaiming of wasteland, etc.—produced an entirely new class. These were the men and women who had risen from the ranks of the once debt-burdened poor to become owners of land and a force in their village. They were known as 'new middle peasants'.

VI

INTRODUCING THE NEW MIDDLE PEASANTS

The new middle peasants¹ of Ten Mile Inn were the staunchest supporters of the reforms which the Communists introduced. The labour hero Wang Chen-chi, the buck-toothed ex-farm-hand Chang Chi-cheng, who had redeemed his father's land, the outspoken first chairman of the peasant union, Wang K'e-pin, the cultivator of grave-sites, Wang Shao-chen—all these were men of the new class. It included many others—among them: those who had dared to pay off old debts at the new exchange-rate; those who had joined the mutual-aid groups and been enabled to take part in trade-and-transport expeditions; those who had exerted great effort in reclaiming wasteland, as well as those women who had set the county record in spinning and weaving. The old middle peasants, who in the early days had played an active part in the resistance against the Japanese invader, were now greatly strengthened by this new accession to their numbers. The result was a stiffened resistance to the enemy.

Strengthening Organized Resistance

The militia expanded, not only in numbers, but in the scope of its operations. It now engaged in combined operations with the militia of neighbouring villages to tear up tracks from the Japanese-run railways. The railway line running past Horse Village, only two miles south of Ten Mile Inn, became the perpetual target of such operations. At other times the destruction of enemy blockhouses was the objective. One of these latter operations which was particularly successful came to be known as the 'Battle of Jade Fountain Forest',

¹ Those who rose from the ranks of poor peasants or labourers to the status of middle peasant as a result of the reforms introduced by the Communists.

after the village where it took place. On this occasion three Japanese blockhouses were destroyed, and the different militia units of the entire sub-county—which had all joined together for this attack—proudly carried home war-booty to add to their till then meagre armament. Ten Mile Inn's outstanding prize was a tommy-gun, which for years remained the pride of its arsenal.

The militia which had started in 1941 with only half a dozen men by 1944 reached a full strength of about seventy-five.

Supporting it there was a defence corps of all the men between the ages of thirty-five and fifty—the Ten Mile Inn militia only accepted men under thirty-five—and an old men's corps for those above fifty. Even boys and girls were organized into a youth corps for examining road passes, without which it was impossible to move from one village to another. These youngsters, sometimes armed with an ancient sword or a red-tasselled spear, sometimes with nothing but an overwhelming seriousness about the task on hand, would stop all strangers approaching the village gates. Grey-bearded old men, travelling tinkers, Eighth Route Army men, all would stop obediently when hailed in the high-pitched voice of the youthful sentries. If, in rare cases, they did not do so, the militia would soon be after them to find out why. Not a few spies and enemy agents were caught in this way.

It could now be said that in one way or another all sections of the villagers took part in military action against Japan, not a few of them within the ranks of the Eighth Route Army.

Service in the army was voluntary and anyone was free to join.¹ Most of the volunteers belonged to the militia. In fact, during one recruiting drive, forty militiamen, headed by a member of the village government, marched off in a body to join up. They were praised for their spirit, but the county authorities were opposed to such a weakening of the village's defences and half the volunteers were sent back home. The Eighth Route Army had made good the Sacrifice League mass-workers' claim that it was 'an army of the people'.

This was vividly shown as well by the way in which the people organized themselves to help the families of the men who joined up. All jobs on the farm and in the home which the soldier himself

¹ This was the case during the Anti-Japanese War. During the Liberation War, only members of the peasant union were acceptable, and thus landlords and rich peasants were debarred.

had formerly undertaken were now taken over by the village. This type of help, known as ‘substitute ploughing’, included besides ploughing, sowing and harvesting as well as carrying water from the well and fuel from the hills. Thus, not only was village production maintained despite the wartime decrease in manpower, but the soldier’s morale at the front was heightened by the knowledge that his family was not suffering economic hardship from his absence. The morale of the soldiers’ families back in the village was, of course, similarly maintained. So was that of all those who helped them, for in doing so the helpers gained a direct participation in the war effort.

This participation in the war effort by every age group in the village—whether in the militia, defence corps, old men’s corps, youth corps, rear service, substitute ploughing or in the Eighth Route Army itself—expressed more than hatred of the Japanese. It expressed the peasants’ support for the new society which was being born. And most ardent of all in their support for the reforms and in their fight against the enemy were the new middle peasants.

The New Middle Peasants in Office

Wang K’e-pin, the outspoken first chairman of the Ten Mile Inn peasant union, was the first of the new middle peasants to serve as village head. He was succeeded in office the following year by Fu Kao-lin, another new middle peasant, who had succeeded Wang K’e-pin as chairman of the peasant union. These two men had virtues which those who held office before them had never possessed. They were fighters who dared stand up to the landlords and rich peasants as well as to the Japanese. It was under their leadership that the village was able to emerge from two years of famine stronger than ever before.

But they had not shaken off all the faults of their predecessors in office. Wang K’e-pin and Fu Kao-lin had displayed courage, determination and intelligence in struggling to avail themselves to the full of the benefits of the Communist-sponsored reforms. As their struggle succeeded, they began to acquire tangible interests in the newly-emerging society—and they used their official positions to defend these interests. This meant that the village government, instead of benefiting the entire mass of the

villagers equally, tended primarily to serve the class of middle peasants— old and new.

This was in itself a great step forward, for though it was mainly one class which was being served, the number of people involved was relatively large. Instead of less than one-tenth of the village families belonging to the politically dominant classes, now over one-quarter did so.

Despite their basic differences, however, there was one point of similarity between the landlords and rich peasants on the one hand and the middle peasants on the other. Both groups felt strongly about their property. It was not surprising, therefore, that men like Wang K'e-pin and Fu Kao-lin, once in office, were zealous in the defence of the property of themselves and of their class.

Since both men were in office during the famine years of 1942 and 1943, this meant among other things that they were especially concerned with the protection of what meagre crops those terrible years produced. They were, in fact, zealous to the point of harshness, ordering the militia to arrest anyone caught or even suspected of pilfering.

The militia, which itself was predominantly middle peasant in composition, needed no urging to carry out this task. There was undoubtedly a certain amount of petty stealing at this time, by people suffering from hunger, but the situation was intentionally made worse by a number of landlord and rich peasant enemies of the reforms. Wishing to stir up trouble between the poor peasants (who still made up the majority of the villagers) and the middle peasant cadres, they spread rumours that the poor were engaged in pilfering. Accusation and counter-accusation spread throughout a considerable part of the village. The cadres decided the situation demanded resolute action. Those arrested for stealing were beaten.

From the experience of their own lives and from centurieslong tradition, beating was the accepted method of punishment and life had always been held cheap by the peasants.

Not many years before the Eighth Route Army came to the area, the landlord Chang 'Lao-wantze' of West Harmony, two miles from Ten Mile Inn, had an old man hung up by his pigtail to a tree. Then the half-starved old peasant was beaten till his writhing body was severed from his scalp—because he had stolen a pumpkin from his landlord's land.

The new peasant cadres were never guilty of cruelty such as this. But they did not make a clean break with the tradition of resorting to violence as a means of enforcing the law. The new cadres were also subject to another hangover from the past. This was the ancient principle that those in office should receive favours from the people.

The years 1942 and 1943 were certainly favourable for the continuance of this practice, but the changing political and economic conditions brought with them a new set of victims. In the old days the landlords had obtained 'gifts' from the peasants; now the peasant cadres were able to turn the tables. The landlords themselves were more than willing to spend something to obtain the goodwill of the new cadres, at first in the hope of reducing their payments of the progressive tax, later to avoid the enforcement of the new exchange-rate in debt repayment.

But though at this period the landlords and rich peasants were still prosperous enough to have something at stake, and though they were willing to pay quite well for the favours they expected, the cadres actually accepted little more than the loan of tools and animals or an advance of seed.

There were, however, certain advantages which leading cadres derived from office-holding. One of these was the opportunity to use their positions in the contest for wives which was always in progress in a village so short of women. Some of the new cadres, who in the past had remained single through poverty, now used their influence to secure legal wives for themselves and their friends—or for those who were willing to give them suitable remuneration. The cadres were not only invited to the wedding feasts, but usually received an agreed bonus as well.

The handling of the relief grain provided by the Border Region Government during the famine was also open to criticism. On one occasion, for example, seven hundred chin of wheat was allocated for relief purposes. After the distribution, a surplus of fiftyodd chin which remained in the village office was shared among the cadres. Only the youthful village clerk, militiaman Wang Ch'i, refused to take a share.

Under the landlord régime such a relatively efficient distribution of relief grain would have been pointed to as an outstanding example of official honesty. But as the case of village clerk showed,

a new standard of conduct had been introduced into the village. And the chief bearers of this new standard were the Party members and the militiamen, among whom the Party's influence was extremely strong.

Wang Ch'i and his young militiamen friends actually constituted the majority of the younger new middle peasants. This class was in fact now tending to become divided into two main groups. On the one side were the younger men who played the most active part in direct military opposition to the Japanese. These were the leading spirits of the militia, from among whom came the steady stream of volunteers to the Eighth Route Army.

On the other side were members of the older generation of new middle peasants, who were now attaining positions of authority in village affairs. It was they who served on the committees of the peasant union and the village government and who more and more were taking over political power in Ten Mile Inn.

The difference was not merely one of age. It was the younger men who had received their political training at the militia school and who had had the best opportunity to learn that it was not only in Ten Mile Inn, or even in their own sub-county, that changes were taking place. They had also learned to appreciate that more significant than the change of personnel was the change of standards in village government.

The older generation of new middle peasants, who were most strongly represented on the government committee, and had been more or less content to continue a number of the old practices, began to find the 'reformist' younger generation's attitude to the landlord-cadre relations too critical for comfort. This relationship, where it was genuinely open to criticism, was not as a rule one of bribery or extortion; it was rather the subtle currying of favour by the wealthy and the acceptance of interested generosity by those in office. In the minds of the peasants, this subtle relationship was expressed in the fact that 'the cadres used to eat meat dumplings in the homes of the Old Moneybags'.

These dumplings were regarded by the peasants as a luxury, because they were made with wheat flour instead of with the

coarser everyday millet or Indian corn, and because they were filled with that rarity in the peasant diet—meat. Most villagers could afford to eat them, if at all, only on such special occasions as the celebration of the lunar New Year. The handful of prosperous villagers therefore considered it a sound investment to offer them now and then to the cadres—especially when the time for paying taxes came round.

As the frequency of this practice increased, so did the zeal of the young militiamen-reformers. Finally, at the end of 1943 the situation came to a head in the dramatic 'Dumpling Case'.

One early winter morning a member of the militia saw the landlord Wang Pan-yen buying a lot of mutton. Such purchases were always the subject for interesting speculation in the village, and in this case it was immediately guessed that Wang Pan-yen would be entertaining cadres that night.

This guess proved to be correct. When the festivities were at their height the militiamen burst in and seized the dumplings. Next day the village was in an uproar and a public meeting was called. The cadres who had been invited to the feast naturally took care to remain in the background as much as possible; those who had not been present fell in with the demands of the antigraft campaigners to make an example of both host and guests.

This was done by organizing a procession, in which Wang Pan-yen, the host, was made to carry an enormous dish containing the spoils of the fray of the night before—a mountainous pile of dumplings. Behind the dumpling-bearing Wang Pan-yen marched his brother, beating a gong to draw attention to the guilty host and to the evidence of his misguided hospitality. Bringing up the rear and assailed by the taunts of the crowd came the crestfallen guests.

Although this incident did not, strictly speaking, bring about the fall of the village government, it did result in its reorganization.

The new village head was the new middle peasant Wang Shao-yu.

As a young boy Wang Shao-yu had enjoyed the comparatively comfortable life of a rich peasant, but his father had later been driven into bankruptcy. When the Eighth Route Army came to Ten Mile Inn, Wang Shao-yu was living the life of a poor peasant.

From this he was trying to escape by using his literacy in practising as an old-style doctor.

Though his poverty produced in him a sincere support for the Communists' reforms, Wang Shao-yu nursed no long-standing, burning hatred of the landlord class in general. He did, however, fiercely detest one landlord family in particular. This was the one which had forced his father into bankruptcy. Its most prominent living member was the host of the ill-fated dumpling party, Wang Pan-yen.

It was this hatred of Wang Pan-yen which had originally brought Wang Shao-yu actively into village politics—at the time that the village head was Fu Shou-liang. The latter, by playing upon Wang Shao-yu's hatred of Wang Pan-yen, had found him a useful ally in the campaign to oust their common enemy from his office as director of rear service.

It was only natural, therefore, that after the Dumpling Incident Fu Shou-liang should throw what influence he still retained into the successful movement to make Wang Shao-yu the new village head. In doing this Fu Shou-liang thought that, with his former ally in office, he might strengthen his own political position.

But Fu Shou-liang had miscalculated. In the old days when he was pao-head's clerk, if an exposure of graft were made it was simply as a manoeuvre by one political clique to drive another out of office. Now with the Communist-trained young new middle peasant reformers on the move, things were different. Their objective was genuinely to get rid of graft—not to get themselves into office.

The change of village head, therefore, did not put an end to the militiamen's zeal. Wang Shao-yu had been in office only a few weeks before he himself fell under suspicion. He was accused of having grafted five hundred dollars and was taken off to the subcounty office for questioning, while a sub-county cadre was sent to the village to gather further information about the case.

Not knowing to what extent, if any, other Ten Mile Inn cadres might be involved, the sub-county investigator went privately to the home of the village Communist Party branch secretary to gather his information in secret.

*The Case of the 'Secret Agents'*¹

The general atmosphere of the village had been tense and alert ever since the Japanese had first begun edging their way westward from the Peking-Hankow Railway. There had, however, been no more mopping-up campaigns which directly affected Ten Mile Inn ever since the villagers had dug their caves and organized their defences. But even though they never stopped in the village itself, enemy forces had at times passed along the highway. Besides this, they had supporters inside the village, as the firing of 'black shots' indicated—and more than one villager had been mysteriously killed. Whether this was the result of Japanese-inspired activity or whether it was done by landlords or rich peasants opposed to the reforms and anxious to frighten the new village cadres and demoralize the villagers in general, had not been found out.

There had been other incidents, too, which though perhaps not directly engineered by the enemy certainly benefited them. For example, an Eighth Route Army soldier, escorting three puppet prisoners to the rear, stopped at Ten Mile Inn for a meal. Suddenly someone raised the alarm that the Japanese were entering the village, and the soldier had to hide. During the excitement, the prisoners escaped. When the alarm proved to have been a false one, the majority of the villagers suspected that it had been raised deliberately.

Early in 1942 secret agent activity had been uncovered in a number of villages within the county. The landlord Tuan Sheng, of Stone Cave Village, only one mile from Ten Mile Inn, was among those proved to have been working for the Japanese.

Furthermore, material discovered in the Stone Cave Village landlord's possession implicated the Ten Mile Inn landlord Wang Pan-yen.

In some way Wang Pan-yen managed to get warning of what

¹ The account of this episode is pieced together from evidence which came to light in 1948 when a land reform work team investigated the case. As the whole purpose of the investigation was to clear the reputation of the innocent, rather than to convict the guilty, and since both Wang Pan-yen and Fu Shou-liang were dead, no real attempt was made to affix guilt. Consequently, a number of conflicting statements were allowed to pass without comment. The authors have therefore had to use their own judgement in deciding which statements to use in the present account.

was afoot. He at once sent a message to his immediate superior in the secret-agent network—a landlord in the village of West Harmony—to ask what he should say in the event of being arrested and interrogated.

Wang Pan-yen's messenger was an intelligent young clansman of his, named Wang Ch'u-ho, whom he had been grooming as a future henchman. While in West Harmony the young man learned for the first time that his clansman patron was actually engaged in negotiations with the Japanese for the restoration of the paochia system. This knowledge came as a shock to the young man who, when he got back home, brooded over the position he suddenly found himself in. For a short time he was in a state of indecision. But he soon concluded that he must take a stand—either in the camp of the Japanese or in that of the Communists. Deciding in favour of the latter, he went secretly to the subcounty office and told everything he knew.

As a result the house of the West Harmony landlord was raided and documents were seized which conclusively proved the guilt of both this landlord and Wang Pan-yen.

Wang Pan-yen might well have been executed for his treacherous activities, but because he had a son serving in the Eighth Route Army his life was spared. Ninety-seven of his hundred mu of land were confiscated, however, and he was debarred from leaving the village. From then on, until his death, he was kept under the watchful eye of the villagers.

Such incidents, big and small, made it clearer than ever that within Ten Mile Inn itself there were enemies of the anti-Japanese government. In fact, the majority of villagers were so apprehensive that when in the autumn of 1943 the pumpkins rotted in the fields, it had been concluded that agents had injected poison into them. Similarly, the sudden death of Wang K'e-pin's cow was considered a result of enemy activity.

Early in 1944 the Ten Mile Inn school-teacher was found to be in the employ of the enemy. He was a native of the near-by townlet of Yeh't'ao, and had been supplying the Japanese garrison there with information. This concerned both the guerrillas, who were growing increasingly active at this time, and those peasants who were most active in support of the reforms and in resisting the enemy and who were therefore suspected of being Communists. There was evidence to suggest that the

school-teacher had not been operating alone in Ten Mile Inn. Fu Shou-liang, who after losing his post as village head had managed to secure that of director of education (thus being the school-teacher's superior), also fell under suspicion.

The sub-county public security officer, wishing to clear up the whole situation in Ten Mile Inn, secretly consulted with Old Wen-t'ang,¹ the village's bluff, earnest, public security officer. The latter was instructed to conduct a systematic investigation of possible enemy activities in the village.

Two secret investigations, therefore, were taking place in Ten Mile Inn simultaneously: one into charges of graft against village head Wang Shao-yu; one into the activities of enemy agents.

By the time the latter started, the former was already well under way. The sub-county cadre and the village branch secretary, after some deliberation, had decided that whatever any other village cadre had done, at least Wang Ch'i, the village clerk, was not guilty of graft. And being literate and a militiaman, he was obviously a person to play an important part in the drawing up of the evidence against Wang Shao-yu. It was arranged that he should call together privately those who had any evidence of graft and should draw up a full report to be presented in the form of a petition.

Such a project naturally demanded the utmost secrecy, and even the public security officer, Old Wen-t'ang, knew nothing of it. One day as he was scouting around on his own anti-enemy agent investigation, he came suddenly upon twenty to thirty villagers in secret consultation. He naturally concluded that he had uncovered the sinister spy-ring of which he had been warned. This was made all the more plausible by the fact that none of the embarrassed anti-graft campaigners (whom Wang Ch'i had gathered together to draw up their petition) volunteered any explanation of his conduct. All tried to slip away inconspicuously with such lame excuses as, 'Excuse me a moment, I'm just going out to relieve myself', or 'I've just remembered my father wanted to see me'.

Most of the twenty-odd petition-writers were young militiamen with excellent records of anti-Japanese resistance and support

¹ His name was Wang Wen-tang, but he came to be called Old Wen-t'ang to distinguish him from another Wang Wen-t'ang, the young ex-farm-hand of the landlord Wang Pan-yen, who later became active in village affairs.

for the reforms. Had they all been so, clearing up this misunderstanding might have been a simple matter. But in addition to the reformist militiamen, the petitioners included such villagers as Wang P'ei-cheng, long known as one of the traitor Wang Panyen's chief aides. He and a few others had joined, not for reformist reasons, but for the purpose of carrying on their old-style political factionalism. Their aim was to pay off old scores against Fu Shou-liang by implicating him in the charge of graft which was pending against Wang Shao-yu. Such people as these were by no means above suspicion. Their presence cast a cloud over all those present. Old Wen-t'ang, who was honest, but not experienced in analysing intricate questions of motivation, was convinced that all the petition-writers were tarred with the same brush. The presence of Fu Shou-liang's enemies at the meeting thus turned out to be a boon to the very man it was meant to undermine.

Fu Shou-liang was undoubtedly the most adept of all the villagers in the type of intrigue which had been so essential to maintaining or improving one's position in the old days. Had he been born a generation sooner he would almost certainly have been one of that small fraction of the peasants who succeeded in climbing into a higher class than they were born in. He had already made some strides in that direction before the arrival of the Eighth Route Army.

Under the changing conditions following its arrival, he had proved quick in adjusting to the new situation and had outlasted the two former leaders of political intrigue—Li Fa-k'uei, who was rather at a loss once his son and right-hand man went off to join the army; and Wang Pan-yen, who had been exposed and discredited, first over the Dumpling Incident, then, more fully, when his treachery was discovered. Unlike these two, Fu Shou-liang fought with some success to remain a power in the village. Even after being ousted as village head, he had secured the post of director of education and later had tried to entrench himself in the Fort, as head of its mutual-aid group.

Wang Shao-yu's detention on the charge of graft had been a severe setback to Fu Shou-liang. Closely on its heels came the disturbing rumour that the school-teacher's confession had implicated Fu himself. The rumour was soon publicly confirmed. A large poster was put up in Yeht'ao townlet (from which the

Japanese had now been forced to withdraw because of the increasing guerrilla activities) warning the people that there were enemy agents active in the area. Fu Shou-liang's name was included in the appended list. It seemed that the game of Commander Huang's former middleman was nearly up.

But Fu Shou-liang was not only a man of cool and infinite resource. He had a flair for sensing what was afoot in the village. He was consequently the first person in Ten Mile Inn to get an inkling of the misunderstanding by which the group of anti-graft petition-writers had been mistaken by Old Wen-t'ang for enemy agents. At once he devised and started to put into effect a plan which was intended not only to rescue himself from possible punishment as an enemy agent, but at the same time to clear Wang Shao-yu of the charge of graft. The plan was calculated, in addition, to tarnish the reputations of many of the young men who were the most open and zealous supporters of the reforms in the village. In some measure it succeeded.

The policy of the Border Region Government was to deal sternly with die-hard enemy agents, but to try to win back any peasants who had been misled into helping them and who showed that they sincerely wished to reform. Such 'assistant secret agents' suffered the stigma of being known to have helped the enemy, for their confessions had to be made in public. According to the local idiom, they 'wore secret agent caps'. But they suffered no other punishment.

To save himself from really serious consequences, therefore, Fu Shou-liang decided he must make a good 'confession', showing himself to have been the innocent dupe of an enemy agent. The obvious candidate for this villainous role was the known traitor, his long-standing rival Wang Pan-yen. It promised to be a simple matter, too, to incriminate far more dangerous enemies of Fu Shou-liang—the young new middle peasant reformers whom the alarmed village public security officer already suspected. Their accusations of graft against Wang Shao-yu could then be interpreted as an enemy-inspired plot to discredit the village's anti-Japanese leadership.

Fu Shou-liang did not carry out his plans by simply writing a confession implicating the militiamen reformers. That device would have been too transparent. However, he knew that even bluff Old Wen-t'ang, like most of the other cadres, found the

upright, uncompromising village clerk, Wang Ch'i, a rather uncomfortable and uncongenial character. He therefore correctly calculated that the public security officer might be convinced of Wang Ch'i's guilt, even though the young man was his own clan grandson. Fu Shou-liang accordingly contented himself with implicating only Wang Ch'i and one or two others among the reformers. He also named some of the more 'backward elements', known to be half-hearted or even unfavourable towards the reforms. Thus his confession tied up the genuine reformers with Wang Pan-yen and other suspicious characters. Whether he included these names to make his own confession more convincing, whether it was to place Wang Pan-yen and his friends in as bad a light as possible, or whether Fu Shou-liang himself was genuinely afraid that the authorities had serious evidence against him and was intent upon saving his own skin by some truthful disclosures, it is now impossible to discover.

Whatever the case, Fu Shou-liang not only named half-a-dozen fellow-villagers, he paid each of them a private visit, eloquently urging him to make a good confession and warning him of the dire consequences of failure to do so. He succeeded in so frightening the innocent men that each decided it was better to 'confess' and be forgiven than risk being convicted as a die-hard agent.

For the innocent to make a plausible confession, however, was difficult. Since none of them knew who else had been named, each individually racked his brain and named as fellow agents those whom he personally suspected might have sympathies with the enemy, or those against whom he bore a grudge. The result was that the number of those implicated grew and a new crop of names was brought to the attention of the earnest public security officer. Calling upon the new suspects, Old Wen-t'ang warned them that they had been found out, and urged them in turn to make a clean breast of things. The confessions began to snowball. The ramifications of the ring spread wider and wider.

The confessions showed general agreement in the naming of the chief officers of the ring—for even the completely innocent felt it reasonable to name Wang Pan-yen and the landlord Tuan, of Stone Cave Village, as well as the village school-teacher, since all three of them had already been proved guilty. But beyond this the confessions did not tally.

It seemed to Old Wen-t'ang, therefore, that some of the upstart

younger men were trying to put one over on him. He was determined to put an end to this nonsense. To straighten things out he called together everyone who had been named by anyone else as a member of the spy ring. (When the suspects assembled, they were astonished to find that between sixty and seventy of their fellow-villagers 'belonged' to the ring.) Addressing them sharply, the public security officer exhorted them to be honest and not to try to deceive him with any unconvincing confessions, warning them that he would hold them under arrest until they decided to admit the truth.

Those of the suspects who were innocent were now in a quandary, for they did not know whom they should name as officers of the ring—apart from the two landlords and the teacher. Finally, one of the young men, imbued with the new democratic spirit, suggested that those assembled should elect the various officers. To Fu Shou-liang this seemed a dangerous idea, for greater evidence pointed to him than to the others present and he might easily have been elected to a major post. Taking charge of the meeting, therefore, in his most commanding manner he said, 'There's no need to have an election, since we all know who is the chief amongst those present.' He named no names, but his accusing gaze rested on the village clerk, Wang Ch'i.

Thus Fu Shou-liang insinuated that the very man who had acted as leader of the anti-graft reformers was the leading 'agent'. But a considerable proportion of those present were practically panic-stricken by the position they had been manoeuvred into. They were accordingly willing to clutch at any straw—even at a pinch to identify as a leading enemy agent the organizer of the anti-graft meeting which Old Wen-t'ang had mistaken for an enemy agent gathering.

This was all that was needed. The suspects all renewed their efforts to formulate their confessions. Fu Shou-liang, who was a good penman by local standards, secured a large sheet of paper, two feet long and a foot wide, and wrote his out in large clear characters. When Old Wen-t'ang came back to see how the suspects were getting along, his attention was attracted by Fu Shou-liang's conspicuous effort. Holding it up for all to see, he praised its author, saying, 'This is the confession of a man who has had a genuine change of heart. You should all follow his example.' The other suspects, all eager to prove that their hearts

too were in the right camp, quickly copied the model confession. And some particularly zealous young men elaborated on it.

According to the confessions the village leader of the enemy agents was Wang Pan-yen, while their organizer was Wang Panyen's follower, Fu P'ei-shan, an old man whom the villagers considered exceptionally superstitious. The evidence against these two, as well as against the school-teacher (who was named as secretary), was in fact genuinely conclusive. There was also a strong case against the man who was said to be the organization's propaganda officer—another of Wang Pan-yen's clique—to say nothing of Fu Shou-liang himself, who managed to remain a rank and file member. The upright village clerk, Wang Ch'i, on the other hand, who was without question entirely innocent, was branded 'Chief Underminer', because of the 'suspicious' circumstances in which he had been discovered—organizing the young reformers in drawing-up the petition about Wang Shao-yu's graft!

The investigation being thus completed, Old Wen-t'ang persuaded one of the village poets to compose a song to publicize its results. The verse about Wang Ch'i, for example, went:

The chief underminer is named Wang Ch'i
Clerk of the Government Committee.
With our anti-Jap millet he made quite free,
While he passed on information to the enemy.

The song was sung to a catchy folk-melody and soon became very popular. (In 1948, four years later, it was well-remembered and was sung to the authors on request.)

The confessions having been drawn up to the satisfaction of Old Wen-t'ang—and equally to that of Fu Shou-liang—a village mass-meeting was held to make them public, and to enable the agents openly to admit their errors and to pledge loyalty in the future.

The meeting went off as planned—except for one minor hitch. Wang Pan-yen's superstitious old follower, Fu P'ei-shan, who had been named as organizational secretary of the ring, instead of confessing denied everything. Fu Shou-liang thereupon flew into a rage, leapt to his feet and started beating the old man. It was some minutes before the villagers were able to separate the two of them and restore order.

There were no further hitches. The supposed enemy agents had 'caps' placed upon their heads and were then let off with a warning, on the understanding that they would mend their ways. The sub-county security officer, who was present at the meeting, commended Old Wen-t'ang for his zeal and gave him instructions about systematic political re-education of the cap-wearers. There, for the time being, the matter rested.

The case was significant, not simply as an ingenious plot through which Fu Shou-liang managed to extricate himself from a tight spot by framing-up a number of innocent fellow-villagers. Ingenious as he was, Fu Shou-liang could never have succeeded if there had not been some genuine secret agent activity.

The famine years of 1942 and 1943 had in fact been a period when the Communists were strained to the utmost. At such a time as this it was only natural that some of the faint-hearted should waver and even become the tools of those who were not only convinced of a Japanese victory but who were taking active steps to bring it about—in the hope that they would be rewarded for their pains. This was the situation which Fu Shou-liang had exploited to recover his own position.

But the fact that so large a number of villagers could be given secret agent caps without the entire village being thrown into chaos, in fact without a single life being taken and with even the most obviously guilty being treated with leniency, was a striking commentary on the stability of the Communist-led administration. It showed that the Communists' political, military and economic policies in Ten Mile Inn had won the support of the people.

Political and Economic Progress

Following the conclusion of the Secret Agents' Case, the case against Wang Shao-yu was no longer pursued, since the chief accusers had all been branded as enemy agents. To that extent, Fu Shou-liang's plan proved successful. But in another respect it was a failure—for Wang Shao-yu was not retained as village head. Though by no means thrown into chaos, the village suffered a shaking up as a result of the Secret Agents' Case which incriminated almost seventy of its inhabitants. To improve and strengthen the village government the sub-county administration

appointed Wang Tse-yin, secretary of the village Communist Party branch, to the office of village head.

Wang Tse-yin had gone through a striking political transformation since the time when, as a poor peasant, he had been forced by poverty to accept employment as a kitchen hand of the Kuomintang Commander Huang. His first job at that time had been to work the bellows of the kitchen fire. Later he had been promoted to the task of running errands for Huang and his officers. His efficiency in this direction soon secured him a more responsible—and distasteful—task: that of arranging the requisitioning of both man and animal-power for milling the flour for the unit. The Commander soon noted Wang Tse-yin's energy and intelligence and sought to use him on a number of questionable ventures. Some of these he grudgingly agreed to undertake, but when it came to procuring women or opium, he resolutely refused—for which he was beaten more than once.

But as time went on Wang Tse-yin found that his work involved him in a continuous and not always victorious battle with his conscience.

When the Kuomintang troops moved off from Ten Mile Inn, for instance, he had found himself involved in handling stolen goods. The column had requisitioned animals from the village for the move and had failed to return them. Wang Tse-yin was therefore sent by the pao-head to try to get them back. He arrived in the small town of Lungwu, to discover that the troops had looted the chief shops and were now seeking means of disposing of their spoils. His aid was sought, but with his ready wit he was able to make plausible excuses and so managed to avoid helping in this to any great extent. At the repeated insistence of one of the officers, however, he sold a long silk gown and kept a small amount for himself out of the transaction. The officer showed his gratitude by giving the young peasant a large hemp bag.

This money and the bag were the only proceeds which Wang Tse-yin received from the looting of Lungwu, but they weighed on his conscience.

The Communist reforms gave Wang Tse-yin his first vision of a means of escaping from poverty and at the same time keeping his conscience clear. He threw himself enthusiastically into one movement after another, taking part in mutual aid, reclaiming wasteland, joining the peasant union and soon becoming head

of one of its groups. In time he was recruited into the Communist Party and eventually, in 1943, became secretary of the village branch.

This meant that he became one of the leading cadres of the village at the same time as Wang K'e-pin and Fu Kao-lin. He shared their virtues and—to a lesser degree—their weaknesses. He, too, borrowed animals, implements and seed from the landlords, and occasionally ate their dumplings. Strictly speaking he should have taken part in the shameful 'dumpling procession', but when the militia burst in he had the good fortune to be out in the back yard relieving himself. Hearing the disturbance inside, he seized the opportunity to clamber over the wall and sneak home. (It was not until years later, when the land reform work team came to the village, that he confessed his presence.)

Wang Tse-yin's personal faults and virtues corresponded to some extent to the faults and virtues of the Communist Party branch of which at this time he was the secretary.

The original members had in general been those who had shown themselves most active in resisting the Japanese and in supporting the various reforms. Besides Wang Tse-yin himself, men like the cave-digger and mutual-aid pioneer, Wang Chen-chi, were among the earliest members recruited. At the same time, however, with men like Fu Shou-liang and Wang Pan-yen belonging to the then underground organization, the quality of the membership was decidedly mixed.

It was this mixed quality of its membership which accounted for the branch's mixed accomplishments. On the one hand it was Communist Party members who had taken the lead in organizing mutual-aid groups, the peasant union and the co-operative, in conducting militia operations and in volunteering for the Eighth Route Army. On the other hand, even when the Party branch had been in existence for three years, there was still no systematic carrying out of the Communists' policy of Reduction and Payment of Rent and Interest. Other villages within two or three miles of Ten Mile Inn had been practising it since 1942. On this issue of Double Reduction the membership was split. The resulting deadlock undermined the effectiveness of the branch.

This deadlock would have brought on a crisis had not the Secret Agents' Case intervened. With the exposure of Fu Shouliang following that of Wang Pan-yen, immediate and drastic action

was considered necessary. A sub-county Communist Party committee representative came to the village. On his recommendation the branch was dissolved—and a clean sweep was made.

But the action was by no means merely negative. While members like Fu Shou-liang were driven out, those like Wang Tse-yin, who were considered potentially good material, 'got their ideas straightened out'. Then a new branch was set up. In addition to those who were re-admitted, seven new members were recruited, all of them either poor or new middle peasants. Among them were two men who were to play an outstanding part in village life in the very near future—Wang Hsi-t'ang, soon to become village head, and Wang Shao-chen, who was soon to succeed Wang Tse-yin as Party branch secretary. (Though just teaching himself to read at this time, Wang Shao-chen was the most literate member of the branch—now that the representatives of the 'old gang' had had their membership annulled.)

This cleaning up of the Communist Party branch was considered essential for bringing about any basic change in the political life of the village. It very soon began to show results, and not long after the reorganization of the government, which followed the Secret Agents' Case, it was decided that Ten Mile Inn was ready for elections.

VII

TEN MILE INN UNDER ITS FIRST ELECTED GOVERNMENT

A short time after the cleaning up of the Ten Mile Inn Party branch, Wang Tse-yin, who had been appointed village head, was promoted to a post in the sub-county administration. To choose his successor, and at the same time to establish a new village government, Ten Mile Inn began to prepare for its first democratic elections.

The Bean Elections

To overcome the problem of illiteracy, the 'bean method' was used. The candidates sat in a row, each with a bowl behind him. Every voter, which meant every man and woman eighteen years of age and over, was given seven beans to place in the bowls of the seven candidates whom he or she wished to form the village government. This method had the advantage of enabling the illiterate voter to be sure he was voting for the man of his choice. The candidates themselves, on the other hand, could not see who was or was not voting for them and so could bear no grudges.

Even this device for securing a fair democratic vote had some weaknesses. When a few years later a better method was introduced, one peasant, in explaining the new improvements, said:

'With the bean method some people who didn't have any particular preference just dropped their seven beans in the bowls in order. So the first seven candidates in the row always had an advantage over the rest. On the other hand, some people who had very strong preferences, cheated by dropping several beans into the bowls of their favourite candidates.'

Despite such drawbacks as these, the 'bean elections' were, generally speaking, fair and democratic.

The result of the first of them was that a former brickmaker and new middle peasant named Wang Hsi-t'ang became village head of Ten Mile Inn.

One of the first tasks which the new village head was called upon to carry out was to shoulder the traditional responsibility of village government—that of collecting taxes. Under Wang Hsi-t'ang's guidance, despite the continuance of all sorts of evasion tactics by the wealthy, the new tax system continued to work out far more fairly than that of the past. The village officials, though lacking experience in the ways of high finance, proved quite capable of applying the tax-table issued by the Border Region Government. In one case at least they improved upon it. A certain exemption was officially granted to cover the cost of one bushel of fertilizer for every mu of land a family owned. The new cadres, thoroughly imbued with the principle of progressive taxation, decided that this allowance ought to be in accordance with the quality of the land; also that the distance of the fields from the village ought to be taken into account. These modifications were later adopted by the county authorities.

Perhaps as a result of adopting too many such suggestions, the 1944 table was 'a great thick volume in red and black print, so complicated that none of us could understand it!' In fact, it gave detailed expression to the main principles of Communist taxation, which at no time had been based simply on the principle of 'soak the rich', but were more accurately summed up in the official slogans: 'Convince the middle peasants; consider the rich peasants; and co-operate with the landlords.' Or: 'The rich pay more, the middle less, the poor nothing.' Exemption or reduction was granted to widows, the aged, families without labour-power or those with men in the Eighth Route Army. The quality and yield of land were taken into account as well as its area; so were the costs of hiring labour and maintaining animals. In short, care was taken to foster production while reducing the inequality of landholdings; and still to keep all classes in the national front of resistance against the Japanese.

By 1944 these aims were meeting with success. After four years of exemption from all taxation the poor had considerably improved their standard of living. The rich, on the other hand,

were being forced by progressive taxation to sell some of their land. They were further encouraged to do this by the fact that commerce and industry, in contrast to production on the land, were taxed lightly or not at all. Thus, either the rich were adapting themselves to a changing economy—or they were becoming poor. Rent and interest, the former bases of their wealth and power, had been noticeably reduced.¹

In 1947 progressive taxation was brought to an end in the whole of the T'aihang Sub-region. In eight years the economy of the area had been transformed. In place of the former contrasts between landlords and rich peasants on the one extreme and poor peasants and labourers on the other, the rural population was composed mainly of medium-sized freeholders. Upper and lower brackets had disappeared. Progressive taxation thus became impracticable and was abolished.

Reduction and Payment of Rent and Interest

Rent and interest had diminished while the general prosperity among the poor and middle peasants had increased. But the full programme of Reduction and Payment of Rent and Interest, which was the Communists' overall agrarian policy during the anti-Japanese war, had still to be carried out in Ten Mile Inn. Now that the village Party branch and government had been overhauled, the time was ripe for putting it into effect.

Ten Mile Inn was not the only village in the locality to which this applied. Since the anti-Japanese county government had first been set up in the autumn of 1939, the area of its administration had been growing all the time. Different villages, therefore, were at different stages of democratic development, but by 1944 a number of them were ready for the launching of a concerted Double Reduction Drive. To prepare for this a meeting of village representatives was held in the village seat of the county's anti-Japanese administration. Wang Hsi-t'ang, the newly-elected village head, and Wang Shao-chen, secretary of the newly-reorganized Communist Party branch, represented Ten Mile Inn.

¹ By 1945, the year the anti-Japanese war ended, general prosperity had increased so much that 90 per cent of the village families were called upon to pay taxes, in place of the 30 per cent who had done so when the Communists first started their reforms in the village.

At the meeting it was explained that the highest rent which a landlord could legally demand was fixed at 37.5 per cent and that the maximum legal interest on loans was to be 1.5 per cent a month. The peasants considered both these figures almost unbelievably low. Furthermore, whenever the total amount of interest paid added up to the amount of the original loan, the slate was to be wiped clean.

Men like Wang Shao-chen and Wang Hsi-t'ang (whose fathers had died in debt) were moved at the new prospect before them. Wang Hsi-t'ang, who had scarcely been able to muster up courage to mumble a few words in public at the time of his recent election as village head, nervously rose to his feet at the county meeting. He spoke of the justness of the new law and pledged that he would do his utmost to introduce it in Ten Mile Inn.

On returning to the village, Wang Hsi-t'ang and Wang Shaochen, together with other cadres, started to organize meetings between peasants and landlords. These sessions were known as 'sit and talk meetings'.

Even at this late date some peasants were still somewhat ill-at-ease in the presence of the landlords. At the first meeting some tenants squatting on a large stone at the front of the crowd humbly offered their makeshift seat to the landlord whose affairs were to be discussed. At the outset, too, the landlords' glibness and air of learning often carried the day, the peasants sometimes complaining after a sit-and-talk meeting that they had got nothing worthwhile out of it.

In some villages the greatest problem was the tenants' fear that if they failed to pay the traditional rates the landlords would refuse to renew their tenancy. This fear was produced by the age-old problem of the shortage of land. For generations land hunger had been so great amongst the peasants that the landlords had been able to demand and obtain half or more of the crop as rent. While this doomed the tenant and his family to a bare existence on what was left them, it was better than unemployment. In some villages of the T'aihang Sub-region, village and Party cadres, in their eagerness to free the peasants from this state of affairs, forced the pace. They pressed apprehensive peasants into making half-hearted or unwilling claims for reduction of rent and interest. The result of this over-zealousness of the cadres was that a number of cautious peasants secretly returned to the

landlord in the dead of night the gains which had been won for them during the day.

But Ten Mile Inn was entirely free from this. On the one hand, with the development of village industry under the mutual-aid groups and with working capital being made available by the co-operative, unemployment was no longer the dire threat it had been. On the other hand, the village Party branch, the peasant union and the village government did not exert heavy pressure to drive the peasants into premature action. Instead they used 'skill in waiting' and other mass-line methods.

They took steps to overcome the peasants' initial hesitation. A 'suggestion box' was put up for those afraid to take open action or speak up publicly, though its value was limited by the fact that most peasants—including the village head himself—could not write.

More important was the winter school. Here, under the guidance of Wang Hsi-t'ang, Wang Shao-chen and other members of the new Communist Party branch, the poor peasants and hired labourers exchanged accounts of their past treatment at the hands of the landlords. This was known as 'tracing down the roots of bitterness'. It led to the feeling, as one poor peasant said, that 'everything the landlords ever had come through squeezing the sweat and life-blood out of us peasants'.

The cadres themselves took the lead by bringing up their own cases. When the first harvest after the Double Reduction Movement came round, Wang Hsi-t'ang simply paid the legal 37.5 per cent of the crop as rent, instead of the former 50 per cent. The landlord, after unsuccessfully trying to browbeat him, took the matter up to the sub-county government, demanding that it uphold the law and order of untold generations past. Under its new administration, he protested, the village was falling into a state of chaos. But the sub-county upheld the newly elected village head.

Another outstanding case, which was very much talked about, was that of Fu Chang-so. Though he was a nephew of a rich peasant Fu I-tze, junior manager of the Hsin Hsiung moneylending shop—Fu Chang-so's own family was poor. They had tried to borrow money from their money-lending relative, but had been refused a loan—because public opinion would have condemned foreclosing on the security of so close a relative. So

Fu Chang-so's family went into debt, instead, to the big landlord, Tuan Sheng, of Stone Cave Village. And when the borrowers found themselves unable to maintain the interest payment, Tuan had shown no hesitation in seizing the three mu of land which had been given in security.

The interest which had been paid, however, greatly exceeded the sum of the original loan. So when the Double Reduction campaign was launched, young Fu Chang-so electrified not only Ten Mile Inn, but Stone Cave Village as well by demanding that the wealthy and powerful landlord give back his family's three mu. He not only got the land, but also a great reputation for his daring. Before long, Fu Chang-so was secretly recruited into the village Communist Party branch and was later elected vice-chairman of the peasant union.

Examples such as these were soon followed and a vigorous movement got under way.

More and more sit-and-talk meetings were held. Because of the people's new strength and spirit the landlords publicly agreed to obey the law; but many of them had 'change of weather thoughts', that is, they hoped that some day the Kuomintang would return. A few hoped that if the worst came to the worst, the Japanese themselves might come and restore the old rates of rent and interest.

The Japanese were, in fact, still not far away, and the cadres, fearing that the landlords might secretly invite them to come and smash the new movement, posted extra sentries and had the militia in readiness at all meetings. Despite these precautions there was some sabotage. There was another wave of 'black shot' firing. Wang Hsi-t'ang, the village head, himself dared not sleep at home and spent the nights in hillside caves.

While Double Reduction made important changes in the village, those who took advantage of it were for the most part not the very poorest of the poor. Men like the poor ex-beggar farmhand, Wang Wen-sheng,¹ who four years later was himself to become vice-village head, had still not been aroused. But the movement as a whole continued to gather strength until forty-odd families, of both poor and middle peasants (out of a possible two hundred and fifty or so), had gained reduction of rent and interest. This resulted at the same time in the further wiping out

¹ See p. 28.

of debts. Doors and bedding and iron cooking pots, which lenders had seized for unpaid debts, streamed back to the homes from which they had been taken.

Following new directives from the Border Region Government, the maximum legal rent was reduced still further, first to 30 per cent, then to 22·5 per cent of the total crop.

To ensure that these progressive reductions were actually put into effect, the people had to struggle and the Double Reduction Movement as a whole was characterized by an acute sharpening of class lines. Yet the struggle was waged within the limits of the anti-Japanese national united front. This accorded with the general principle of the Communist Party's co-operation with the Kuomintang. As Mao Tse-tung had stated, this co-operation had to combine, at one and the same time, the elements of both unity and struggle.

This was precisely the nature of the united front in Ten Mile Inn. The landlords observed it because, except for such rare traitors as Wang Pan-yen, they hated the Japanese more than they feared the peasants. But step by step the people gained the initiative because it was they who were the backbone of the anti-Japanese resistance.

The Women Advance—on One Sector

The existence of struggle as well as unity within the united front was reflected in the women's movement, for from the very beginning the women's association had sought to organize women of all classes.

The inferior status of their sex in the old society gave women of all classes a great stake in the new. This applied to even the landlord and rich peasant women (though their husbands or fathers regarded the reforms on the whole with hostility). It applied to an even greater extent to the old middle peasant women. But most of all, it was the poor peasant women who stood to gain. In spite of this, the great majority of the twenty-two group leaders as well as the committee members were not poor, but old middle peasants.

The main reason for this was that leadership of the women's work as a whole was naturally taken over by those qualified to lead its most important aspect—production. For women,

production meant first and foremost spinning and weaving. The poor peasant women, lacking capital in the past, had not learned these skills. They had therefore to be taught by women of old middle peasant families—the only ones amongst the labouring masses who in the past had had enough capital for the wheels, looms and other equipment and the raw materials. So while it was new middle peasants who were leaders of the men and of the village as a whole, it was old middle peasant women who became the leaders of their sex, in production and consequently in the whole democratic movement.

Because of this, and because the women's association included members of landlord and rich peasant class, women's work in the village came not only to be based mainly on production; it tended to limit itself to production alone. The wide range of social objectives—such as equal status with men, freedom from oppression by parents-in-law, in brief, complete social emancipation—which had been aimed at in the earliest phase of the women's movement, were now largely disregarded.

Though the old middle peasant women leaders had a great deal to gain by genuine emancipation, their grievances were nowhere nearly so great as those of the poor peasant women who formed the great majority. This applied to an even greater extent, of course, to the landlord and rich peasant women. If women of any of these three classes were exceptionally badly treated by their husbands' families, they could appeal to their own families for support. But with poor peasant women, the majority were homeraised daughters-in-law. They had been sold into their husbands' homes and their own families no longer had any legal relationship with them. In fact, in many cases they did not know who their parents were.¹

The old middle peasant women leaders could see the advantages of earning an income through spinning and weaving. But most of them had no vision of what their social emancipation could mean to them. Those few, like Wang Ch'ueh-te, who did, were keen to advance quickly and failed to develop the skill which

¹ Concubines of landlords and rich peasants had an insecure status. Those who kept their husbands' favour were well treated; those who lost favour became little more than servants. During the land reform, concubines were not classified together with the rest of the family, but each according to her status in the household.

was necessary to draw the mass of their fellows along with them. After some fruitless attempts to do so, they concluded that the other women were hopelessly 'backward'.

It was for these reasons that after correcting the first mistake of directing their efforts to every sector of the struggle for emancipation, they had swung to the opposite extreme of paying attention to little but production.

This one-sidedness was not in keeping with the Central Committee's directive of 1943. It had set forth prosperity and economic independence for women as the primary objective of women's work. But this was not to be an end in itself. It was to serve as the basis for 'improving the political status of women, for advancing their cultural level and for their complete emancipation'.

Despite their first failure to apply mass-line technique, the Ten Mile Inn women's leaders, by means of concentrated and tireless effort and because of widespread response in this field, did succeed in building up a mass movement for production among the women. But they failed to do so in the field of social problems. This was illustrated in one particular case of the traditional oppression by a mother-in-law of her young daughter-in-law.

Fu Ch'i-feng was a mother-in-law of the old school who beat her daughter-in-law mercilessly. The women's association did intercede on the girl's behalf, but because of its failure to mobilize popular sentiment it was unable to solve the case. The girl finally decided to solve it herself in the only way she knew—by jumping into the village reservoir.

But she was rescued. The mother-in-law, infuriated at the girl's action, beat her—half-drowned as she was—and broke her leg.

The case had now become so serious that the village government itself intervened. Wang Hsi-t'ang, who had only recently been elected village head, remonstrated with the older woman. But Fu Ch'i-feng could not see that the matter concerned the village government any more than it did the 'meddling' women's association. The bride had been bought and paid for, and to the mother-in-law it was an inner-family matter in which no village organization had any right to interfere.

Wang Hsi-t'ang then advised the young wife to seek a divorce, but she adamantly refused.

Not knowing what sort of action could be taken to restrain

the mother-in-law, and having tried to use mediation and persuasion without success, the village head finally decided to consult the sub-county authorities. The latter temporarily took the mother-in-law into custody and at the same time they, too, repeatedly urged the daughter-in-law to obtain a divorce. Still she refused. She had already planned a different solution. Dragging herself along on her broken leg she somehow managed to make her way to the reservoir once more. This time she succeeded in drowning herself.

The daughter-in-law had committed suicide. Technically she had not been murdered. Yet if nothing were done about the case the mother-in-law's stand would be upheld: the people's organizations would appear to be admitting that they had no right to act in such matters.

The problem was put to the county administration, which decided that the case should be tried. A court was appointed and evidence was obtained from numerous witnesses in the village. The verdict was that Fu Ch'i-feng was guilty of her daughter-in-law's death. She was sentenced to death.

As this case was not simply a matter of dispensing justice, but was part of the battle against the traditional tyranny of the mother-in-law, it was publicized and discussed far and wide.

In the village of Blue Smoke Temple, only a couple of miles from Ten Mile Inn, lived the most famous story-teller in Wu An County, Wang K'uei-chen.¹ The county authorities asked him to

¹ Wang K'uei-chen had originally been an old-style story-teller with a repertoire of stories drawn mainly from *Water Margin*—tales of heroic deeds against the people's oppressors by Robin Hood-like bandits in the Sung Dynasty a thousand years ago.

In 1942 he began to tell new stories. As he explained to the writers in 1948, 'I had to change because society changed. In the past people weren't organized and it was easy to gather a crowd. But after the Eighth Route Army came everything changed. Sometimes, just when I was in the middle of a story, the whole crowd would suddenly start to troop off to a meeting and I'd be left with no audience. So the cadres used to say to me, "Why don't you come along to the meeting too, and tell us a story?" But they asked for new stories, about the resistance against Japan....'

So gradually he added new tales to his repertoire. The first additions came from some books lent to him by some of the cadres at the county headquarters. But later he started composing rhymed stories himself. For this purpose he found a partner—an Eighth Route Army man who had lost his arm. The ex-soldier told of heroic exploits against the Japanese and Wang K'uei-chen put them into verse. He and his partner soon became famous for their stories.

During the land reform movement of 1948, when the writers met him, Wang

present the facts of the case in rhymed form and then recite them in all the villages around Ten Mile Inn. At the same time the people were urged to express their own views on the case. The people upheld the sentence. And Fu Ch'i-feng was taken to a threshing ground outside the village and shot.

Yet even such tragic examples as this could not of themselves afford a solution for the problem of the oppression of daughters-in-law or of women in general. For this, the strengthening of the women's organizations and the intensifying of their day-to-day work was necessary. This was especially the case if their political status was to be raised.

The Peasant Women's Association

As the anti-Japanese war came to an end, the class struggle in the T'aihang Sub-region grew sharper and sharper. Thus the women's association, with its members drawn from all classes, was not considered adequate for mobilizing the women to struggle for political rights and to take part in the Double Reduction (and the land reform which was to succeed it). Consequently it was decided to recruit all the poor peasant women of the women's association (roughly half the membership) and a few of the new middle peasant women into a 'peasant women's association'. This was to act as a core within the broader organization.

The head of the new peasant women's association was Wang Hsiang, or 'Blackie' as she had been nicknamed by her fellow villagers, because her skin had become so deeply tanned from working in the fields.

K'uei-chen was reciting a very popular melodrama entitled, 'The Land Goes Home', based on land reform in Wu An County. Great crowds turned out to the performance, for it was something quite new, being illustrated by large colour plates, painted by artists of the government cultural department. Wang K'uei-chen himself was touring under the auspices of this department.

Wang K'uei-chen was a very ardent supporter of the land reform, for like all rural story-tellers he came from a very poor family. When the Agrarian Law was carried out he received four mu of land, three sections of housing and ten persimmon trees. Never since he had become a story-teller's apprentice at the age of thirteen had he even dreamed of such wealth. And never at any time since then had it struck him as remotely possible that he might some day be able to marry. Now, although, he was forty, as he toured the countryside he had his eye open for a suitable match.

Wang Hsiang had been a fighter ever since her poverty-stricken parents had sold her as a tiny girl to be a home-raised daughter-in-law. She had been bought by a family in the Fort, which at one time had become prosperous through trading in silk but which had subsequently gone bankrupt.

It was a come-down for Wang Hsiang's once prosperous parents-in-law to acquire their future daughter-in-law in this undignified way, instead of being able to afford the expenses of a fine betrothal which would have brought both a dowry and useful family connections. They treated the young girl harshly, perhaps because she symbolized the decline in their family fortunes. Wang Hsiang's childhood was an endless battle.

In her teens she was finally married to her long-destined husband. But this did not bring her struggles to an end.

While Wang Hsiang's parents-in-law had striven to rebuild the family fortunes, their spoilt son was interested only in enjoying to the full what was left. He became known amongst his thrifty peasant neighbours as 'a man with all the four great vices'—wearing expensive clothes, eating rich food, smoking opium and gambling. To these he added a fifth vice, as Wang Hsiang found to her cost—that of wife-beating.

When his father died, Wang Hsiang's husband inherited a small amount of fertile land. This he sold and bought in its place some small and scattered plots of poor land on which Wang Hsiang and her son worked from dawn till dark. Even so, it was impossible for them to keep up with the husband's extravagances and little by little the poor land was sold as well.

When the Eighth Route Army came the family were living in acute poverty, and during the first year of the famine the husband died, his constitution weakened by tuberculosis and opium. Wang Hsiang made no hypocritical attempt to hide her joy. At last, at the age of thirty-six, she was free from the tyranny of her husband and his family.

She and her seventeen-year-old son, Li T'ien-t'ang, became enthusiastic supporters of the new anti-Japanese village government. The boy was one of the first in the village to join the Eighth Route Army.

After he did so Wang Hsiang lived alone. As the widowed mother of a soldier she had her fuel gathered and her water drawn

and her fields tended for her.¹ This left her free to learn to spin and weave.

But though she worked industriously enough, Wang Hsiang felt that having slaved all her life she now deserved some pleasure. She was a devoted fan of the traditional opera for which Wu An County was famous and she became the only woman member of the music club of the Fort. Very soon its entire membership began to look upon 'Blackie's place' as the club's headquarters; her home was continually full of peasant musicians, all male except herself. While thus flouting village decorum, Wang Hsiang assumed somewhat masculine mannerisms and smoked heavily.

Although she had been an active member of the women's association since its formation, she had not been one of its leaders. She had worked a great deal in the fields, but like the other poor peasant members, she had been a novice at spinning and weaving and had had to learn from the old middle peasant women.

When the peasant women's association was set up under the direction of the sub-county, Wang Hsiang found herself pushed to the fore by the rather shy and timid members of the new organization because she was one of the few poor peasant women who never feared to speak her mind. Her gruff manner and the sharp tongue which she had acquired in thirty years of family oppression became one of the weapons in the armoury of the peasant women's association.

The peasant women's association had plenty of problems. Its members were the poorest in the village. In the bitter past some had become prostitutes to keep from starving. Some had been forced to accept the advances of landlords or rich peasants because of the indebtedness of their husbands or fathers. Others had run away from unbearable oppression in the home of their husbands to live with other men. Still others had been abandoned without means of livelihood by husbands who in desperation had gone off to Manchuria or elsewhere in quest of work. These deserted wives had had to find temporary husbands.

The middle peasant men, with their relatively stable family life, took pride in the chastity of their womenfolk and looked down upon the 'disreputable' poorer women. And the old middle peasant women for the most part shared this view. Even the new

¹ During the land reform these fields, which were few, stony and scattered, were changed for some of the best land in the village.

middle peasant men, who had only recently risen from the ranks of the poor peasants, adopted a similar attitude. As they became able to marry, they became zealous about their wives' reputations. Some of the new middle peasant cadres even refused to allow their wives to attend meetings of the peasant women's association, calling them 'meetings of prostitutes'. One cadre, on one occasion, threatened his wife saying, 'If you insist on going to that prostitutes' meeting, then don't ever set foot inside my house again'.

This social condemnation did much to hold back the development of the new organization, for the newly politically active members found themselves somewhat isolated. They failed to receive support even from some of their own membership, for those women who had led relatively conventional lives shared the village-wide contempt for those who had not. The situation had been complicated by the fact that the Kuomintang systematically tried to set the people against the Communists by circulating rumours about the latter's attitude to women and the family. They succeeded in convincing large numbers of people that the Communists upheld promiscuity—'free love', 'nationalization of women', etc. The view of the Communists was that it was feudal society which broke up the homes of the poor and forced their women into promiscuity—and that the reforms would do away with this form of oppression. But it was a complicated task to attack the old social system without striking at the people who bore its imprint. In Ten Mile Inn the new middle peasant men cadres could not always clearly distinguish between feudalism and its victims.

Wang Hsiang's own attitude towards it was one of defiance. Despite her strong class loyalty, she did not clearly understand the class nature of the women's problem. She lacked political education. Though as head of the peasant women's association Wang Hsiang was a village cadre, she was not a member of the village Communist Party branch, where the most systematic political education was given.

When the village branch had been weakened by the inclusion of such people as the landlord Wang Pan-yen and his fellow Kuomintang middleman Fu Shou-liang, it had not considered the recruiting of women. Even after the reorganization of 1944, no women members had been drawn in.

As branch secretary Wang Shao-chen later explained:

'We felt that the militant women weren't virtuous and the virtuous women weren't militant. So though we knew we ought to recruit some women members into the branch, we couldn't find any who seemed suitable. But of course,' he added, 'if the branch had really paid enough attention to the problem of recruiting women members, we could have solved it.'

The situation when the war against Japan came to an end was that the women had an excellent record in production (as shown by their holding of the county record). Their economic position had been greatly improved and a foundation had been laid on which rapid cultural and political gains might be constructed. But further advances were being obstructed by what was later diagnosed as 'peasant narrow-mindedness'¹ and lack of a clear class standpoint.

By the time the war against Japan ended in August 1945, great advances in class standpoint had already been achieved by the villagers of Ten Mile Inn. On the whole, too, the position of the different classes reflected their effectiveness in the anti-Japanese struggle. The power of the rich was considerably decreased. That of the mass of people had grown far greater than it had ever been before. Rich and poor still existed, but the contrast between them was not so sharp as it had been. Land-holdings were still far from equal; so was the distribution of houses, animals and implements. But indebtedness and the worst hardships of the poor had been greatly diminished.

In short, as the Double Reduction demanded, the worst oppression of feudalism had been alleviated. But the system as a whole had still to be destroyed.

¹ See Liu Shao-chi, 'The Class Character of Man', included in *How to be a Good Communist*. Foreign Languages Press, Peking.

VIII

THE DESTRUCTION OF FEUDALISM¹: ACT ONE

Immediately upon the Japanese surrender in 1945, Chiang Kai-shek ordered that under no circumstances were the defeated enemy to surrender to the Communists. They were to hand themselves over only to Kuomintang armies. The great bulk of these armies, however, were over a thousand miles away in what was known as ‘the Great Rear’. Throughout the entire war they had never made contact with the Japanese, but had been carefully preserved for future use against the Communists. The Generalissimo’s armies were therefore quite unable to carry out his orders —until they had been brought into contact with the vanquished enemy with the aid of American ships and aircraft.

Meanwhile, in Wu An County, the Kuomintang took steps to make up for the absence of their troops. They sent agents to contact the commander of the local puppet troops, Yang Tze-an, asking him to shift his allegiance from the defeated Japanese to the ‘victorious’ Kuomintang.

‘Lion’ Yang, as he was locally known, had, during the chaotic days prior to the war, led his own private brigand army. After the Japanese occupation of his stamping grounds, he became a puppet and fought against the Communist-led resistance forces. He now found it easy to agree to the Kuomintang’s request to take over command of the area and to continue his attempt to exterminate the Communists.

Before the Communists, therefore, could complete their liberation of Wu An, they had one last military engagement on their hands. On December 1st, 1945, the combined militia forces of the county met and defeated ‘Lion’ Yang on the small plain of

¹ For a definition of ‘feudalism’, see p. xvi.

Ch'a Hu. Yang himself was killed¹ in battle and there were some three hundred casualties among his followers. Many of the latter were landlords, rich peasants and their followers, who had hoped that Yang Tze-an would be able to reimpose the régime of the Kuomintang.

The militancy of the peasants throughout the Liberated Areas had grown, together with the feeling of strength which arose from their years of successful united action to increase production and resist the Japanese. And with their militancy had grown the conviction that they should reap the whole harvest from the land they tilled; that the land belonged to them by rights.

'The Allied Struggle of the People of Town and Countryside'

Starting in 1943, the Wu An County administration had sponsored an 'Examination of Double Reduction' each winter after the autumn harvest. When the re-examination for 1945 started, following the victory over Japan, it became apparent that things would not strictly follow the pattern of the previous two years.

One new factor was the movement to 'Settle Accounts with the Traitors' which had begun in the county town. Many of the largest landlords of the county had homes in the town of Wu An and had lived there throughout the Japanese occupation—which lasted eight years, from September 1937 till VJ-Day. A survey made at the time of its liberation showed that there were about five hundred landlords big and small who had settled in the town. Most of them had made little attempt to disguise their collaboration with the enemy.

These town-dwelling landlords were the natural target of both the Examination of Double Reduction and of the Settling Accounts with the Traitors. Consequently the two movements merged, and in the middle of December the Allied Struggle of the People of Town and Countryside was launched. Thousands of peasants, organized by the Communist Party, swept into Wu An town, according to their own description, like a 'blast of the north wind'. But it was a discriminating blast which carefully distinguished between big landlords and small, for as the peasants said, 'Dates and walnuts can't be counted as the same'.

¹ His attractive twenty-year-old concubine subsequently married the young poor peasant Liberation Army man, Wang Tse-tsai, of Ten Mile Inn.

Twelve ‘devils of exploitation’, all of them landlords owning over 500 mu each, were objects of the peasants’ special attention. One of these, Chang Szu-chueh, was a big landlord, not only in the economic but also in the bodily sense. His bulk being as great in reality as that of all the villainous landlords of revolutionary melodrama, Chang could not hide himself for long. When at last his tenants caught up with him they cried out, ‘There you are, you devil of exploitation!’ and Chang, sensing their militancy, apologetically agreed that he was indeed a devil.

But such humility, though it helped safeguard the landlords’ persons, did not protect their possessions. The peasants had come to town carrying sacks, intent upon ‘digging out’ and carrying off the landlords’ wealth.

The biggest account of all was to be settled with the county’s largest landlord, Ch’ang Hsin-hai, whose town property alone consisted of over forty courtyards and the buildings around them. In the county Ch’ang owned 40,000 mu and dominated eighty villages inhabited largely by his tenants.

An army of the latter descended on his largest and most palatial town house, bent on business. The main body camped in the four outer courtyards, while a ‘People’s Court’ was set up in an inner one. Here the landlord’s crimes against the people were recited. One victim after another stood up to describe in all the vivid detail of personal experience expressed in earthy peasant terms, how Ch’ang Hsin-hai had oppressed him, robbing him of land, and making free with his womenfolk. In compensation for these crimes the bulk of Ch’ang’s wealth—much of it the proceeds of business interests in the town—was confiscated, and little by little practically every movable article in the enormous house disappeared into the peasants’ sacks.

The fuller the sacks became the higher the peasants’ spirits rose, until at last the enormous crowd, some of them with sacks on shoulders, formed into a great snake-like line, and singing and dancing the yanko (a conga-like folk dance) they wove their way in and out of the chain of interlocking courtyards. At last, in the largest of them, they started spontaneously to enact, with all the details they knew only too well, the life of the landlord Ch’ang Hsin-hai. They improvised as they went along, the actors performing as the playwrights shouted out the plot—or even acted it themselves: how Ch’ang Hsin-hai had exploited and oppressed

the people and abused their wives and daughters—the actor of the villain’s part all the time swaggering in the landlord’s own luxurious fur coat which had been seized among the fruits of struggle.

But this transference of rural methods of struggle to the town and the indiscriminate and wholesale appropriation of the landlords’ property was later strongly condemned.

The revolutionary movement, ever since its objectives had been precisely defined under the guidance of Mao Tse-tung, had never been indiscriminately directed against privately-owned commerce and industry. Its main target was the destruction of the feudal system, the driving out of the imperialists and the establishment of a New Democracy¹ which would better the people’s livelihood. This demanded the protection and development, not the destruction, of commerce and industry, whether owned by landlords or anyone else.

The root of the Wu An deviation lay in the fact that economically Ch’ang and the other landlords who were struggled against had dual personalities: in the countryside they were feudal landlords, in the town they were businessmen. By rights only those guilty of treachery should have been dealt with in the town; the rest should have been sent to the country, the scene of their feudal landlord relations. There their rack-renting and tyranny would have received short shrift; but their legitimate business enterprise and its proceeds should have been left intact in the town. Going against this principle was a serious setback to the county’s economy.

According to a directive of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, issued about this time²:

‘No shops, workshops or factories belonging to landlords and rich peasants are to be interfered with, except for those belonging to traitors whose crimes are exceedingly heinous, which must be confiscated. Otherwise the development of industry and commerce will be adversely affected. *The methods that are used to solve the land problem and to struggle against the feudal classes in rural areas should not be used to oppose the industrial and commercial bourgeoisie*’. [Our italics, I. & D. C.]

¹ See Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Works*. Vol. III.

² The May Fourth Directive—see Appendix, p. 179.



9. Village "cadre" making an announcement through the village loudspeaker (see page 70).



10. Poor peasant Wang K'e-pin, first chairman of the Ten Mile Inn peasant union. After the democratic reforms in which the old pao-heads were dislodged from office, he became the first village head (see page 52).



11. Rolling a field with mule-drawn stones after planting.



12. Peasant broadcasting some sesame seed among the millet. Sesame seeds are an important crop in the north, the oil being valuable and the seeds themselves being used in making cakes. (The farmer is the one in whose house the writers stayed. He was one of the “feudal tails”—a middle peasant who was wrongly struggled against.)



13. Ploughing—in preparation for sowing millet. (This is Fu Hsin, a former landlord, who changed his class to that of middle peasant. He was respected by the villagers and at one time was the head of the Co-operative) (see page 18).

Later on Mao Tse-tung denounced deviations from this directive in clear-cut terms, saying:

‘The target of agrarian reform is only and must be only the feudal system of exploitation on the part of the landlord and the old-type rich peasant classes, and neither the industry of the liberal bourgeoisie nor that of the landlords and old-type rich peasants can be infringed upon.... In the market towns, during the struggle to eliminate the feudal system, attention must be paid to exerting every effort to preserve to the greatest possible extent all usable means of production or of livelihood....’¹

Although deviating from this principle in the town, the Allied Struggle adhered to it in the countryside. It took place in two vigorous waves a month apart, one at the end of December, the other at the end of January. The momentum of these two waves carried the struggle right through to the spring, by the end of which there was hardly a plot of rented land to be found throughout the whole of Wu An County. The problem of tenancy had been wiped out and the careful provisions of Double Reduction had been swept aside on this narrow front at least. Soon they were to be brushed aside throughout almost the whole of the Liberated Areas.

The ‘Black Lands’ Campaign

They were brushed aside in Ten Mile Inn—but here the issue of collaboration with the Japanese was only a minor one. The landlords and rich peasants of Ten Mile Inn had in the main allied themselves, even though somewhat passively, with the peasants, against the Japanese. The landlord Wang Pan-yen and his handful of followers were the exception, not the rule.

The landlords and rich peasants of Ten Mile Inn as a whole, however, had lain themselves open to the charge of acting against the interests of the people in a different manner. This was by tax evasion, which even by VJ-Day had already become a burning issue. In the spring of 1946, stirred by the spirit of the Allied Struggle, the villagers transformed their annual re-examination of Double Reduction into a militant movement against tax evasion. This movement was called the ‘Campaign against the

¹ Speech to the Shansi-Suiyuan cadres, April 1st, 1948.

Black Lands’—the name given to any land on which no tax, or too little tax, was paid.

During the six preceding years evasion had taken a number of forms; the owner of a plot of land might allow someone else to use it in return for a monetary loan.¹ This type of arrangement was quite common and perfectly legitimate. But at this time it was not undertaken by poor men who were in desperate need of ready cash for some family emergency. Instead it was practised by the wealthiest members of the community, whose sole aim was to reduce their land-holdings below the point at which they became liable to progressive taxation. The same sort of thing was done in renting land.

Besides these two questionable methods of escaping from the upper brackets of the progressive tax, there were others which were unquestionably illegal. These involved the drawing up of fake contracts purporting to show that certain plots of land had been mortgaged-out, rented, sold or even given away.

In some cases the peasant involved in the transaction benefited to the extent of getting the use of the land. But often he received no substantial advantage.

The rich peasant Li Feng (who had rented out all of his land which it was unprofitable to cultivate with hired labour), as taxation became increasingly progressive, got all his tenants to sign false mortgage contracts—on the threat of withdrawing the land from them altogether. Since according to the *tien* type of mortgage the original owner temporarily surrendered all rights to his land, he had to pay no taxes on it. In actual practice, however, Li Feng continued to collect his rent as before—the only difference being that now it was entirely tax free.

Despite the continuous rise in the political awareness of the majority of the peasants, there were always some who feared that some day, somehow, the Kuomintang might return. It was this, combined with such economic pressure as the landlords and rich peasants were still able to exert, which had made poor peasant tenants enter into such arrangements—and keep quiet about them. Fu Shou-liang had industriously sought such people out and played upon their doubts and fears. Then he undertook

¹ Known as ‘tien’—a type of usufructory mortgage. In return for a loan the owner transferred the land to the lender for a fixed period of time. At the end of this time he paid the debt and reclaimed his land—if he could.

the profitable business of acting as a go-between in arranging false contracts for the various landowners.

According to the particular case, taxes might actually have been paid by the nominal owner, or the money might have secretly been handed to him by the real owner. But in either case, by the splitting up of the property the amount of taxation was reduced.

These manœuvres caused no loss to the Border Region Government, for the amount of tax paid by the village as a whole was assessed in advance and was always paid in full. But the tax burden which the landlords and rich peasants eased from their own shoulders was shifted on to those of middle peasants. With the realization of what was happening, anger and resentment had spread throughout the village, especially among the middle peasants.

Once the war against Japan had been successfully concluded, the village Communist Party branch was free to lead the peasants to a solution of this problem. Before striking at these newly developed types of tax evasion, however, the branch led an attack upon an age-old form of evasion which had persisted under the Kuomintang—failure to register land.

First the village government, aided by the peasant union, set about measuring the land of the entire village. This was a tricky job, as many of the plots were small and irregularly shaped. Even when most of the measurements had been made more or less to everyone's satisfaction, there still remained the complicated calculations of a triangular projection here or the making of allowances for a footpath there. This was often a major problem, for few of the new peasant officials, or the men they could trust, could use the abacus, the beaded calculating frame which is China's ancient adding machine.

In addition, the area around grave-mounds presented a special problem, for all cemetery land was traditionally free from taxation. This meant that before the Communists came to Ten Mile Inn the size of the poor families' graves was under-estimated while that of the wealthy families' was exaggerated. With the introduction of the Communists' reforms the poor were, of course, exempted from taxation, but the rich strove persistently to keep the old, exaggerated measurements of their grave areas in the village records—to gain the maximum exemption.

In the spring of 1946, despite all such attempts and despite all other difficulties, a considerable quantity of Black Land was discovered. On its owners the village government imposed heavy fines equivalent to the amount of taxes evaded since 1937, the year the anti-Japanese war broke out. In order to offset the rise in prices, the fines were calculated in terms of grain, but were payable in money at prevailing prices.

In the course of the measuring, some land was discovered never to have been registered at all; so far as earlier village records went, it simply did not exist. This was now taken over by the peasant union.

The next blow of the campaign was struck against the new type of tax evasion. It took the form of an inspection of land contracts. One type of action taken as a result of this inspection was that land which had been cultivated on a mortgage basis was made the actual property of the tiller. This was known as 'Mortgage Killing'. The same principle was applied to cases of false giving, renting and selling. Those who hitherto had been owners only in name, now became so in fact.

The poor peasant Fu Ch'in-yuan, for instance, for years had struggled along as a tenant and pedlar of sieves, with no great interest shown in him by the well-to-do members of his clan. Then came the period of progressive taxation. Suddenly his landlord uncle Fu P'ei-shan (the superstitious follower of Wang Pan-yen) began to take a surprisingly friendly interest in his tenant clansman. This new friendship blossomed so rapidly that in a short time Fu P'ei-shan let it be known that he had made an outright gift of the rented land to Fu Ch'in-yuan, who had such a hard time making both ends meet.

In fact, the land was not a gift; it was now secretly rented out on the understanding that Fu Ch'in-yuan would continue to hand over the traditional rent of 50 per cent of the crop to the owner—who meanwhile was saving a considerable sum on taxes. The latter also made a show of presenting his poor relative with a cow. Fu Ch'in-yuan enjoyed the use of this animal, though all through the famine he had a difficult time feeding it. Then, when the famine was over, his rich clansman demanded it back.

This action was typical of the whole relationship in which the poor pedlar was used as a mere convenience; for the giving of the land itself had been nothing but a means for the owner to

reduce his taxes without losing the title to his property. Fu Ch'in-yuan was fully aware of the double nature of this arrangement concerning the land, but thinking that the cow, at least, was a genuine gift, he had been a willing tool. Therefore, when the cow was taken back after he had struggled to feed it, he grew resentful.

One day, when the Black Lands Campaign was just beginning, and was insultingly refused. This was the last straw for Fu he happened to ask Fu P'ei-shan for the loan of a carrying pole Ch'in-yuan. He summoned up courage and reported to the peasant union the details of the false gifts which his clansman had made him. The peasant union then took the matter up with the village government, which thereupon officially recorded that both land and cow had been outright gifts. The pedlar-tenant Fu Ch'in-yuan thus became a freeholder.

But it was still too early for him to enjoy his newly-won position to the full. At this period the struggles were primarily economic and no serious attempt was made to restrain the landlords socially. Consequently, Fu P'ei-shan's elder son, an ex-Kuomintang army officer, was able to carry out such a campaign of vilification against his father's former tenant that the latter could no longer stand living in Ten Mile Inn. Arranging to have his land cultivated for him by his mutual-aid group, he returned to his former part-time occupation of peddling sieves, and went to live in a townlet in another part of the county. (His anger against his ex-Kuomintang officer cousin was directed, in time, against the Kuomintang as a whole, for later, when the civil war broke out, he joined the People's Liberation Army.)

Nevertheless, the landlords could not overlook the fact that even though Fu Ch'in-yuan had been forced to flee, it was he who now owned the land—not the landlord Fu P'ei-shan. Other landlords who had drawn up false contracts now fell into a panic. Fearing that they too might be reported by other peasants following Fu Ch'in-yuan's example, they rushed to sell the land outright to their 'false buyers' or 'false mortgagees'.

The parsimonious rich peasant, Li Feng, for example, through his agent Fu Shou-liang, tried to get the best price he could on all the land which he had 'disposed of under false contracts. Fu Ta-ch'ou, the false buyer of three mu, was prepared to oblige him until he heard the price demanded. This he considered so

monstrously high, under the circumstances, that he angrily reported the false sale—and was thereupon made the legal owner of the land. But he became more than that. He now became a militant supporter of the new society.

Indeed, the Black Lands Campaign as a whole carried one step farther a process begun during the Double Reduction period. This was the dividing of the village into two opposed camps, with the middle and poor peasants and the labourers on the one side, the landlords and rich peasants on the other. The campaign thus developed into a clear-cut ‘struggle’, and in connection with it two new terms came into common usage. These were ‘struggle fruits’ and ‘struggle objects’. In this case the ‘struggle fruits’ consisted of fines, property taken in lieu of fines, and the cash proceeds from selling what had been confiscated. As to the ‘struggle objects’, they were all those marked down as the chief exploiters of the people, against whom there was to be waged a struggle, usually culminating in a ‘struggle meeting’; in brief, they were those from whom the ‘struggle fruits’ were obtained.

The ‘struggle objects’ in this particular campaign were those found guilty of tax evasion. Naturally enough these included a good proportion of former pao-heads, ex-officials guilty of graft and corruption and other ‘tyrants and oppressors of the people’, amounting altogether to twenty-four families.

Particulars of all ‘struggle fruits’, whether money from cash payments of fines, or from sale of land and other property taken in default, were carefully recorded in special ‘struggle-fruit’ account-books. These show that property disposed of included land, houses, animals, mills and water-tanks as well as clothes, various types of tools and other farming equipment, household furniture and decorations, crockery, utensils, etc.

But the most important item of all was land. It is recorded, for instance, that to pay his fine the twenty-two-year-old landlord Wang Chia-liang sold part of East Stream Field and Water Channel Field. Parts of East Slope Field, In Front of the Cave Field, Where the Wolf Stood Field also changed hands. (Every field had its name—which in many cases gave a fair idea of its fertility.)

Prominent among the lists of landlords’ furniture were ‘Eight Fairies’ Tables’, ‘Lotus Chairs’, incense stands, safes, strong-boxes and grain-bins, wine-pots and cups and ornamental scrolls.

Sometimes the most prosaic articles were listed alongside others of an almost poetic nature. Wang Chia-liang's list, for instance, included a cassia tree, the fragrant blossoms of which are used for flavouring sweets. Below it was an item for the name of which the writers could find no concise English equivalent. It was a stick attached to the harness and passing under the tail of a male donkey to prevent the load from slipping forward when going downhill. Again on the list of property belonging to the rich peasant Li Feng of the Fort, the fourteenth item sold was 'a green bamboo screen'. Item 26, on the other hand, was 'a frame for making short noodles'. Number 68 was a 'fancy lantern, with wooden frame and painted cloth', number 73 'a pair of porcelain Kiangsi vases', and number 93 'an incense stand'. These had clearly been inherited from his landlord father, for the miserly Li Feng would never have spent money on such articles himself. Of a more utilitarian nature were articles number 190, a spade for catching manure from an animal engaged in rolling (threshing) grain, and number 207, a pick for digging up the roots of bushes for firewood. Number 232 was simply 'seven pieces of pine-wood for a coffin'.

All these goods were put up for public sale, the prices having been fixed by thirty appraisers who had been elected from among the members of the peasant union. Besides evaluating the goods, the appraisers decided how to distribute the proceeds. None of this money had to be passed up to any government body outside the village, since the correct total of tax payments had always been made in the past; evasion had only shifted the burden on to the wrong shoulders inside Ten Mile Inn. Now, with the distribution of 'struggle fruits', some amends could be made.

The recipients were divided into five grades totalling three hundred and thirty families—the overwhelming majority of the people in the village. The grades were decided partly according to the poverty of the various families, partly according to the degree of activity they had shown in the struggle. The four poorest families in the village received the highest amount, 4,000 yuan each; while the twenty-five families in the fifth grade received only 500 yuan. The remaining three hundred-odd families received between 1,800 yuan and 3,500 yuan each. Besides this, forty-five families with men in the army and seven ex-servicemen received grants, regardless of whether they had been included in

the five main grades or not. All of the grading, after being drawn up by the appraisers, was submitted to the entire membership of the peasant union at a general meeting. There it was discussed, and various families were moved from one grade to another before the list was ratified. Finally the distribution was made, altogether 860,000 yuan being handed out. The balance was devoted to buying arms for the militia, supplying the school-children with books and meeting certain general village expenses.

Despite all this detailed work, the Black Lands Campaign was subsequently considered to have had its shortcomings.

In the first place the land and other property was sold, not given away. As a result, the poorest villagers, could not compete for it. Instead it fell into the hands of those with some reserves of cash—the middle peasants. To them this sudden opportunity to buy land was a windfall; for in an economy where there was such competition for it, as there had been for centuries in Ten Mile Inn, land was rarely put on the open market at all. The buyers profited all the more from the fact that the appraisers had set artificially low prices.

The second shortcoming was that when the proceeds from the sales were distributed, activity displayed in the struggle was taken into account. As a result some relatively prosperous ‘militants’ received a bigger share than peasants who were poorer but had been passive.

Later, when the time came to examine and criticize past work, this sale of ‘struggle fruits’ was called the ‘Middle Peasant Line’. That this developed just in the course of the Black Lands Campaign was not surprising, since the burden which in the past had been shifted from the tax evaders’ shoulders had fallen naturally on to those of the middle peasants.

But, though the middle peasants were the most immediate gainers, in the long run it was the mass of the people who benefited—for the Black Lands Campaign was the greatest single blow so far struck against feudalism in Ten Mile Inn. And by and large the blow had been well aimed. The campaign, too, although generally stimulating class consciousness, was free from violence. In fact, in some cases the ‘struggle objects’ received special consideration. The ex-landlord traitor Wang Pan-yen, for instance, though himself a ‘struggle object’ and one of the most hated men in the village, received back a minute part of what he

had lost. This was because his sixth son, as a boy of eighteen, had joined the Eighth Route Army during the war against Japan; the father, therefore, was entitled to and received the grant of 2,000 yuan which was allotted to each soldier's family.

But the overall effect was to take land, housing, animals and other means of production away from the landlords and rich peasants and to advance Ten Mile Inn still farther in the direction of a community of independent middle peasants. The Black Lands Campaign, therefore, though it did not kill feudalism outright, certainly broke its back.

The Fugitives

It is not surprising that following this all-but-fatal blow upon their former way of life, members of three of the wealthier families should have seized the first opportunity to run away to cities under Kuomintang control.

One of the fugitives was Wang Chia-chi, second cousin of the wealthy young landlord Wang Chia-liang.

Wang Chia-chi's line of the family had not been quite so successful as his second cousin's in maintaining their former income. His grandfather had originally inherited ninety mu of land but had been forced to sell twenty mu. Then when the old man died, his two sons had sold another thirty mu in order to give their father a fitting funeral and to pay off certain outstanding debts. Thus of the family's original ninety mu only forty were left as the share of the old grandfather's two sons.

One of these two sons was frugal and industrious; the other, who was Wang Chia-chi's father, was a wastrel and heroin addict. It was he who had been largely responsible for the decline in the family's fortunes. The industrious brother, not wishing to be pulled down any further, insisted upon dividing the remaining forty mu.

Thus Wang Chia-chi was left to start life in a family owning only twenty mu instead of the ninety which his grandfather had enjoyed. In an attempt to recoup the family fortunes, he was apprenticed to a relative in the silk business.

The boy was bright and quick, and this, combined with his family connection, enabled him eventually to become manager of the shop. In this position he was able to conduct considerable

private business on the side, with the profits from which he engaged in usury. Gradually he was able to obtain land by purchase or foreclosure. In 1937 he acquired fifteen mu (for which he held the deeds personally, knowing his father's habits); in 1939 he added another twelve and a half mu; in 1940, five mu more. Then in 1942, the famine year, there was an opportunity to buy four and a half mu of really first-quality land, though at the same time, in order to keep his taxes down, he got rid of the ten leastfertile mu he owned.

Although little by little Wang Chia-chi was building up the once crumbling family fortunes, he found the new régime was hampering his development as a landlord. During the Double Reduction Campaign in 1944, for example, he had been forced to return to its original owner some land which he had previously seized for non-payment of debts. After 1944, usury no longer yielded the old rates; and even with the capital he had already accumulated he found it increasingly difficult to buy land, for with the democratic reforms the peasants were not so easily pried away from their holdings. The solution which the Communists consistently advanced for men of his class was to engage in industry. But Wang Chia-chi never thought of his trade in silk as anything but a means to acquire more land. As his land-holdings increased he split them up and disguised them to avoid progressive taxation, even giving some land to his ne'er-do-well father.

But in the Black Lands Campaign Wang Chia-chi's evasions were revealed and he was fined 592,000 yuan. As he was unable to pay this, 19,000 yuan worth of his personal possessions, twentyone mu of land and a house were seized. Then, realizing that his way of life was doomed in the Liberated Areas, he fled to Kuomintang China.

(His wife, however, whom he left behind, was quite well adjusted to the new society. She was a skilful and industrious weaver and supported not only herself, but her young daughter, her son, and her husband's old grandmother. Yet, despite hearing that Wang Chia-chi had married another wife in the Kuomintang area, she could not make up her mind to divorce him. To all her friends' urging she answered regretfully, 'He was the handsomest man in Ten Mile Inn.')

The second of the fugitives was the shrewd and mercenary Li Feng, at one time the richest man of the Fort (see p. 23).

With the arrival of the Eighth Route Army and the beginning of the democratic reforms, Li Feng had done his best to frighten the peasants. Together with his fellow members of the temple association committee he had with much ado petitioned the gods for the return of the Kuomintang. (This was before most of the peasants had started to give up their traditional religious practices.) He was even said to have fired the 'black shot' which had killed one early member of the peasant union, though this was never proved. When the progressive tax was introduced, he resorted to various ingenious tricks to disperse and hide his land (see p. 114).

But his tricks were not ingenious enough to save Li Feng from becoming one of the main 'struggle objects' in the Black Lands Campaign. When this came round he was fined 804,200 yuan for tax evasion. When he failed to pay, the peasants seized 55,500 yuan worth of personal possessions, more than twenty-five mu of land, two mills and a reservoir, two courtyards with their surrounding houses and two donkeys. The blow was a crushing one, and Li Feng began to feel the hopelessness of fighting this hated new régime. So he fled to Tientsin, where he had business connections. With him went his eldest son, who had been his partner in the mountain products trade and who had served for a short time as a pao-head under the Kuomintang régime.

A rather different case was that of the sons of the rich peasant Wang Feng-ch'i.

At the time of the arrival of the Eighth Route Army, Wang Feng-ch'i's family consisted of twenty-five people, all five sons having wives and children. Wang Feng-ch'i had heard that Communism meant the seizure of all big landholdings, so he had divided his estate of over one hundred mu among his five sons, he himself going to live with each one in turn. With each son having only twenty-odd mu, the family no longer appeared outstandingly rich; but they remained staunch supporters of the old régime and took what active steps they could to undermine the new.

The activities of Wang Ying-hsiang, the fourth son, for instance, gave an indication of the family's relations with the new democratic society that was growing up in the village.

Wang Ying-hsiang had been apprenticed to a silk merchant in the neighbouring townlet of Yeht'ao, but at the outbreak of the

war he was serving a prison sentence for manslaughter. His term was only five years as there had been extenuating circumstances. (The victim was the son of the murderer's employer and the action had been carried out at the latter's orders. The silk merchant had fallen into a rage with his good-for-nothing, heroin-smoking son and had ordered the apprentice to give him a beating—as a result of which he subsequently died.)

When the Japanese briefly occupied the town where Wang Ying-hsiang was imprisoned, they released him, though he had served only two of his five years. Whether or not they recruited him into their service is not certain. In any case, after returning home he took to peddling heroin (under cover of peddling secondhand clothes). This objectively served the Japanese, who were pouring the drug into the countryside with the aim of demoralizing the inhabitants and so undermining their resistance. At the same time his movements as a travelling heroin salesman put Wang Ying-hsiang into an excellent position for doing liaison work between all dissident landlord and rich peasant elements in the district. In fact, his occupation proved to be so generally satisfactory that he persuaded his youngest brother to follow in his footsteps.

By the time the Black Lands Campaign was launched old Wang Feng-ch'i had died. The families of his many sons were not accused of tax evasion, for although many villagers murmured that the family division which had taken place in 1940 was a false one, the death of the father strengthened the sons' position. The youngest son, Wang Ying-hua, however, was fined 60,000 yuan for 'illegal activity'—relations with the enemy.

With this record of opposition to the democratic government and a heritage of usury and exploitation behind them, the two brothers felt that liberated China was not the place for them. They ran away to the Kuomintang-held city of Anyang.

In September 1947, Wang Ying-hsiang was captured in suspicious circumstances by a Communist work team. A number of the Ten Mile Inn villagers maintained that he had joined the 'Landlords' Back Home Corps'—a Kuomintang-sponsored unit made up of runaway landlords and rich peasants pledged to free their villages from the Communists. Wang Ying-hsiang, however, protested that he was simply engaged in peddling heroin! Whatever the truth, he was taken back to Ten Mile Inn and kept there—under surveillance of the villagers.

*The May Fourth Directive*¹

The flight of these five men becomes more understandable than ever in the light of events which were taking place outside of Ten Mile Inn.

The May Fourth Directive was formulated by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in Yenan, far away from Ten Mile Inn; but it was based on a mass of reports sent in by local cadres from all over the Liberated Areas. Many of these reports came from the T'aihang Sub-region of the Shansi-Hopeh-Shantung-Honan Border Region, and it is quite likely that among them was one from Ten Mile Inn or its immediate neighbourhood.

Whatever the case, the directive applied very aptly to events which took place in the village both immediately before and for a long time after it was issued. Section 12, for example, starts: 'The masses have devised various methods for solving the agrarian problem, for example...: in settling accounts of rent and interest, for forcible occupation [i.e. foreclosure—D. & I. C.] of [evasion of] tax-burden and other forms of unjust exploitation, landlords sell their land to the peasants to get out of debt.'

This was precisely what had happened in Ten Mile Inn during the Black Lands Campaign. At least six of the land-owning families had to surrender land to pay their fines. The handsome fugitive, Wang Chia-chi, for instance, had been compelled to part with twenty-one mu towards the payment of his 592,000 yuan fine. The young landlord Wang Chia-liang parted with forty-five mu to help pay off the fine of 626,000 yuan; and the stingy rich peasant Li Feng, before his flight, had had to give up twenty-five mu towards the payment of his 804,200 yuan fine.

On the other hand, some were forced to part with land who were neither landlords nor rich peasants. These included, for instance, the ex-village head Fu Shou-liang. Though hatred against him had been growing steadily ever since the days when he had served as pao-head's clerk and middleman to the Kuomintang Commander Huang, the fact remained that Fu Shou-liang was a middle peasant. Treating him as a landlord or rich peasant was

¹ See Appendix, p. 179.

directly contrary to the May Fourth Directive, which stated in Section 6: ‘... Toward the running-dogs of traitors, despotic gentry and tyrannical persons, who come from middle peasant, poor peasant and poor families we must adopt a discriminating policy. We must not confiscate their lands, but must urge them to confess and repent their evil deeds. After their doing so we must give them the benefits that they are entitled to.’

Fu Shou-liang, instead of being ‘urged to repent his evil deeds’, was fined and forced to sell some of his land. All he sold, however, was four mu; and even this small area consisted of four separate fields, one of them of only one-fifth of a mu and another of only two-fifths. Some three or four other middle peasants amongst the twenty-four families struggled against during the Black Lands Campaign were also forced to sell land—though none of them got off so lightly as Fu Shou-liang.

Another departure from the principles which the directive subsequently laid down was the selling of the ‘struggle fruits’. According to the directive the distribution of the proceeds of the sales was not enough. The fruits themselves should have been ‘justly and equitably distributed’.

Despite such differences from the policy which was eventually formulated, it was the pioneering activities of such villages as Ten Mile Inn which provided the Central Committee with invaluable concrete experience. It was precisely these, subjected to scientific analysis and presented as strategy and tactics, which came back to the village in the form of the May Fourth Directive.

‘Looking for Spears among the Millet Stalks’

During the summer of 1946 the directive was thoroughly studied and discussed at innumerable meetings by the cadres of the various regions, sub-regions, counties and sub-counties of the Liberated Areas. By August Wu An County was ready to guide its five-hundred-odd villages in the new campaign and the village cadres were called to their respective sub-county headquarters for briefing.

The Ten Mile Inn cadres came back from the meeting of the Ninth Sub-county in September. They brought with them the slogan: ‘For every man land, a house and a horse!’ (The horse was strictly figurative—it stood for power, for horses in the past

had been owned only by the wealthiest.) The method for satisfying these demands was expressed in another slogan taken direct from farming language: 'Fill the holes and level the tops.' In other words, take from the rich and give to the poor.

The Fill the Holes and Level the Tops movement began, on the face of it, in much the same way as those which had preceded—with a series of meetings. But these meetings were very different indeed from those of the early Double Reduction days, when at 'sit-and-talk' sessions the glib and educated landlords had often managed to talk the tongue-tied peasants to a standstill. A great advance on this situation had already been registered during the Black Lands Campaign. Now, inspired by the May Fourth Directive, it was carried still further. The peasants were eager to 'dig out the very roots of feudalism'.

The difference was not solely a matter of quality. The numbers involved were also far greater than they had been before. During both the Double Reduction and the Black Lands Campaign the main activity had been among the most advanced section of the peasants; the 'average and backward sections' had held back. The struggles when they came were waged by individuals or small groups. Now according to the briefing given to the village cadres it was to be different and a new method was to be used. Instead of a minority of courageous and forceful individuals having their own problems settled and receiving the fruits of struggle, the whole people were to be mobilized for the struggle and the fruits were to be divided amongst them according to need. The goal which the Communist Party branch strove to attain was: 'All our poor brothers should *fanshen*.'

The word 'fanshen' literally means 'to turn the body over'. But in actual usage and feeling it is far more forceful and active. Its true meaning is rather: 'Get up on your feet, stand up for your rights.'

For 'all the poor brothers to fanshen' meant that the new struggle must be on a wider scale than in the past. At the same time, however, the fruits available for distribution were now far fewer. Despite the only partial mobilization of the attackers in the past and despite the skilful evasion tactics of the defenders, the latter had been pretty well cleaned out. There were not enough fruits to go round. Demand was up and supply down.

By now there were no longer any families in Ten Mile Inn

whose income was derived from exploiting labour or who had conspicuously large holdings of land. The poor peasants and former labourers, now that they had at last been set in motion, found themselves surrounded by a host of prosperous but hardworking middle peasants, living from the sweat of their own brows. Yet if more people were to be struggled against, these hard-working middle peasants would have to become 'struggle objects'. This would certainly be a mistake.

The Ten Mile Inn cadres found the solution of this problem completely beyond their power; so they consulted the sub-county cadres. The latter were at this time being bombarded with similar requests for advice on precisely the same problem from almost every village under their jurisdiction.

They soon realized that for Ten Mile Inn, and other villages as well, the root of the trouble lay in the Black Lands Campaign. At the beginning of the campaign, when the peasants were first beginning to express their demand for something more than Reduction of Rent and Interest, the wealth of the landlords and rich peasants, though diminished, was substantially intact. At the end of the campaign the 'struggle fruits' had been plentiful, but they had not been distributed to those who needed them most. Instead of the general run of poor peasants and labourers, it was the middle peasants who benefited most. It was they who were in a position to buy up the under-valued land, houses, animals and implements which were sold off when the 'struggle objects' failed to pay their fines. The poor peasants and farm-hands received only the cash proceeds of the sales.

These proceeds were less than they should have been for two reasons. The first was that artificially low prices had been fixed by the appraisers in evaluating the 'struggle fruits'. The second was that the takings had been spread too thin to make any appreciable change in the livelihood of the recipients. Instead of being concentrated on the neediest, they had been shared amongst fourfifths of the village families. A further disadvantage was that the money distributed could be put to use only after there were no land, animals or major farm implements left for sale.

But even though the problem could be clearly traced back to its source, this in itself did not provide a solution. The land which had been sold could not easily be taken back from those who now owned and worked it. Yet somehow, since the landlords



14. Village woman harvesting wheat just outside Ten Mile Inn.



15. Carrying home the seeder after planting millet on one of the terraced fields up the hillside. In the distance is the broad expanse of stony river bed, most of which had been good valley bottom land until a flood washed it away fifty years ago (see page 1).



16. Man carrying loads of wheat on pole, at harvest time.



17. A typical “trade-and-transport” cavalcade from Ten Mile Inn. Here oil cakes—a by-product of the oil press of Mutual Aid Group Nine—are being taken to market. These cakes can be used either as fertilizer or as fodder (see page 162).



18. The market in Chao Village, three miles from Ten Mile Inn, in 1948. This market was the scene of an armed raid by the troops of Kuomintang Commander Huang in 1937—with the help of pao head Li Fa-k’uei of Ten Mile Inn (page 32).

and rich peasants could not do it, the middle peasants must provide the 'filling' for the poor peasant 'holes'.

The sub-county government office was situated in a village close to Ten Mile Inn, and many of its cadres were peasants born and brought up in the area they now administered. Some of them, like the former Party branch secretary Wang Tse-yin, the cave-digger Wang Chen-chi and the bluff public security officer Old Went'ang, were originally from Ten Mile Inn itself. They knew all the surrounding villages like the backs of their own hands. And they knew that among the middle peasants there were some who did employ labour, sub-let land to tenants, or lend money at usurious rates. (In taking this into consideration, of course, the sub-county cadres were allowing a minor fact to obscure the general picture—for in spite of dabbling in exploitation, these middle peasants depended primarily on their own labour for a living.) Besides this, the sub-county cadres knew that amongst the poor and middle peasantry as a whole, but particularly amongst the latter, there were peasants who were sons or grandsons of landlords or rich peasants. Many of these owned homes, fields and animals which had been inherited from fathers or grandfathers who had prospered by grinding the faces of the poor.

In Ten Mile Inn, for instance, the middle peasant wastrel Wang Chi-hang, father of the handsome fugitive silk merchant, Wang Chia-chi, and his host of relatives, were direct descendants of the wealthy and powerful landlord who had held sway only fifty years before. His wealth and tyrannical conduct were still vivid in the memories of the oldest villagers.

Numerous cases of such middle peasant descendants of landlord and rich peasant ancestors could be found in every village. They were the natural products of an old system in which the mode and means of production remained at a given level, while the number of people, particularly in land-owning families, increased.

While these once prosperous victims of the declining feudal system had lost the material advantages of their fathers or grandfathers, many still retained certain cultural advantages. Having attended school, for instance, they were literate and able to keep accounts. This, together with the fact that they had close ties of kinship with landlords or rich peasants, made them particularly suitable to serve as the latter's 'running-dogs'.

These two types of middle peasant—which overlapped to a large extent—seemed to the harassed sub-county cadres to supply the answer to their problem. Both types, they reasoned, reaped benefit from exploitation: either from their fathers' or grandfathers' feudal exploitation in the past, or from their own exploitation in the present. True, neither type could be characterized as fully feudal, and so they were given the name of 'feudal tails'. It was they who were to provide the fruits for those poor peasants who had not yet 'fanshenned'. This reasoning led to the planning of a seriously mistaken campaign.

The Ten Mile Inn cadres returned from their consultation with the sub-county with the slogan 'Cut Off the Feudal Tails!'— a 'tail' being defined as anyone in possession of means of production which had not been earned by the sweat of his own brow or that of his father or grandfather. And if he himself, or his forebears of either of the two previous generations, had been a landlord or rich peasant; or if any of them had been 'tyrants or oppressors of the people' (which included 'running-dogs'), their land or other property was considered to have been stolen from the people—and to the people it must be returned.

The establishing of this new 'class', it was calculated, ought to bring 25 per cent of village families into the ranks of the 'struggle objects', whose number in Ten Mile Inn would, therefore, be raised from twenty-four to over a hundred.

To solve the problem of deciding exactly who were 'feudal tails', the Ten Mile Inn cadres adopted the democratic method of holding a mass discussion about every family in the village. The discussions were first carried out in each of the nine mutual-aid groups, from which the landlords and rich peasants were excluded. The oldest members of the groups played a prominent part, delving into their memories to recall the exact relationship between various families in the past, stating who had oppressed whom; who had been landlords and who tenants; who the lenders, who the borrowers of the usurious loans.

But the rigidly applied law of equal inheritance amongst sons and the fierce competition for land within the landlord class itself, had produced a fresh crop of bankrupt or impoverished landlords with every generation. These were soon absorbed by the peasantry. This made clarification more difficult than ever, for

each one who took part could claim with justice that he was a 'member of the basic labouring masses' and not divided from the others by the lines of class which ran between landlord and tenant, between rich peasant and hired hand.

Besides this, all members of a mutual-aid group had to live and work side by side throughout the year in the greatest possible peace and harmony. Plain speaking now might mean grudges borne for years to come. It would hardly make for future co-operation in production. In fact, the chances were that just those with draught animals and implements to lend would be the logical ones to brand as feudal tails. To complicate matters still further, there was a natural hesitation to speak up about cadres and even about some of the militants.

These various difficulties soon made it clear that this type of discussion would yield no satisfaction. As a result, a new grouping was made. The cadres and militants were all put in one group, totalling about twenty-eight; the remainder of the villagers were divided into five others, which cut across the lines of both mutualaid groups and close kinship.

These six new groups between them put forward the names of one hundred and twenty families. Then they all met together for joint discussion. Some of the one hundred and twenty were found to have been included on insufficient evidence, through misunderstandings or through attempts to pay off old scores. One by one these were eliminated and apologies made to them. Finally, seventy-eight families were fixed on as being 'genuine' feudal tails. Try as they would, the villagers could not find a hundred-odd families as the sub-county had directed. As it was, of course, the families chosen included the landlords and rich peasants who had already been struggled against. But the remaining sixty-odd families were, with six exceptions, middle peasants.¹

The tails once found had to be 'cut off'. Again a meeting of

¹ Of these sixty-two families, forty-eight were struggled against in the 'tracing back three generations', because the family head himself at an earlier period, or his father or grandfather, had been a landlord or rich peasant. Of these forty-eight families, at the time of the struggle, thirty-six were old middle peasants, one a new rich peasant, seven new middle peasants and four poor peasants.

The remaining fourteen families were struggled against for flagrant oppression or exploitation on their own account—eight as usurers, six as political agents of landlords or rich peasants. Eleven of them were old middle peasants, two were new middle peasants and one was a poor peasant.

the whole village was called with the tails themselves attending. One by one they were taken up and the source of their property examined. Land, houses, animals, implements, chaser-mills, doors, bedding, cooking-pots all came up for consideration. Some things had been obtained by illegal seizure for non-payment of rents or debts; others had been inherited from fathers or grandfathers who themselves had acquired them in just such a manner. All that was regarded as having been gained by exploitation was taken as legitimate fruits of the struggle. The actual confiscation of such property constituted the 'cutting off' of the feudal tails.

The tails were cut off to fill up the 'holes', as the peasants called the poorest families. Who were the holes? Carrying over the procedure of the Black Lands Campaign, this was first decided by a democratically elected committee of thirty appraisers, who also had the task of evaluating the fruits in terms of money. But there was no sale of goods. These were given away in exchange for counters which the appraisal committee issued to the families considered eligible. And so the fruits did not go merely to those who had money in their pockets or the courage to stand up for themselves.

To ensure the greatest possible fairness, the major recipients, who numbered two hundred and twenty-one families, were divided into nine grades, with each family's labour-power, quantity and quality of land and general circumstances taken into account. Those in the top grade were given counters equivalent to 22,000 yuan, those in the bottom 1,450 yuan. In addition, every member of the peasant union who had not already benefited received a token or consolation counter worth 500 yuan. (The 'struggle objects' themselves were automatically deprived of membership in the peasant union.¹)

All the movable property was assembled on the large beatenmud threshing floor towards the southern end of the village, in the space between the Fort and the Street. There those entitled to made a choice of goods or money on the spot or arranged to take over land, housing, etc., equivalent to their allotted shares. The total value of everything distributed amounted to something like two million yuan, including some

¹ Their membership was restored during a subsequent movement, when the mistakes of the Feudal Tails Campaign were set right.

250 mu of land—about one-twentieth of all the land of the village.

Besides the land and housing confiscated, a certain quantity of both were exchanged. This took place when the ‘struggle object’ was so little above the average in wealth that outright confiscation would have meant his ruin; to avoid this, he was allowed to exchange his better land or house for something rather worse. The account books for this campaign show, for instance, that Valley Bottom Land was changed for Stone Steps Field; a West River Bank plot for Gravel Gully Field; a plot of Downstream Land for North Hilltop. The names show clearly the contrasting qualities of the fields exchanged.

These exchanges were a concession to the general feeling that after all it was hardly right to ‘struggle feudal tails to the ground as if they had been landlords’. This feeling was further expressed in the fact that of the considerable quantity of housing earmarked for distribution, only a fraction was actually vacated by the ‘struggle objects’.

The Feudal Tails movement had—in its own erroneous way—succeeded in carrying out the original instructions which the Communist Party had issued for the Fill the Holes and Level the Tops Campaign: it had inspired large numbers of peasants to ‘fanshen’. It had not been conducted simply by a handful of militants; the fruits had been distributed free, with scrupulous honesty and with due regard for the economic needs of the recipients.

The careful application of these correct principles showed, in form at least, an advance on the Black Lands Campaign. Nevertheless, the Feudal Tails movement was, in some ways, all but disastrous. By wrongly widening the sphere of struggle to include middle peasants, it had split the village wide open. This was the case not merely as between rich and poor. The ‘basic labouring masses’ themselves had been thrown into ruinous disunity from which none but the former landlords and rich peasants could obtain any satisfaction. As one peasant characterized the mistake later: ‘We were looking for spears amongst the millet; so we took the longest stalks we could find.’ But however long the stalks were, they still were far from being spears!

One result of the movement was that everyone became suspicious of his neighbours and fearful for himself, for with tracing back three generations no one seemed wholly safe. As Wang Hsit’ang, the village head, later said, ‘How could any man

in our village claim that his family had been poor for three generations? If a man is poor, then his son can't afford to marry; and if his son can't marry, there can't be a third generation.' But he didn't say this openly until a whole year later, when the land reform work team came to Ten Mile Inn and things were straightened out.

Meanwhile, another harmful outcome was that women's work suffered a serious setback.

During the Feudal Tails Campaign, as in previous struggles, changes in status had been attained not by isolated individuals but by entire families as units, men and women together. Thus a woman who had married into a Feudal Tail family, even quite recently, was classified along with her husband and father-in-law. It so happened that the Ten Mile Inn Feudal Tail struggle embraced the families of every one of the old middle peasant committee members of the women's association.

Amongst those disenfranchised was Wang Ch'ueh-te, the first head of the association, who had so glowingly said of the Eighth Route Army that it had 'opened heaven and earth'. Years later, referring to this period, she lamented, 'My threshold, too, was crossed by the struggles. None of my property was taken, but I suffered by losing face.' Her successor in leading the association, Sun Shan-lan, was also the wife of a Feudal Tail. Even the women who had competed so successfully with the men in the reaping competition several years before lost their status. So did the organizers of the competition, production director Wang Shao-yi and his wife, both of whom had been amongst the staunchest champions in the village of the women's emancipation.

The women's movement thus ran into a new type of difficulty. Before this it had been held back by the narrow-minded prejudice which many villagers had against poor peasant women who had formerly been driven into prostitution or temporary liaisons. Now the hitherto respectable middle peasant leaders as well as some of the ordinary members were politically disenfranchised. Although new women were promoted to positions of responsibility, the women's association became a formal structure with very little driving force.

Spinning and weaving and rear service, of course, continued, but the women of Ten Mile Inn no longer set new records or led the county in women's production and support for the front.

The women's association's new production programme was that during a hundred-day period each member was to spin thirty-five chin of cotton. Not a single member failed to achieve this quota. But not a single member surpassed it—officially. It was, however, an open secret that many women were spinning and weaving as much as (perhaps more than) before; but they were failing to report their true production records for fear of becoming the target of future struggles. While formerly women had liked to boast of profits they had made, since the struggle against the middle peasants, even those who had not been 'objects' became apprehensive. Riches were now something to be ashamed of and hidden from the neighbours so far as possible.

The Feudal Tails Campaign clearly involved a serious mistake. This was not confined to Ten Mile Inn, but occurred in other parts of the T'aihang Sub-region. Its nature was analysed by Lai Jo-yu, then Secretary of the Sub-region Communist Party Committee (later Chairman of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions).

'The mistake is basically a form of extreme equalitarianism,' said Lai Jo-yu. 'This is typical of the ideology of the peasantry and reflects the character of their production—small-scale agriculture. It is the same thing as Agrarian Socialism. This is revolutionary when it is applied against the feudal power of the landlords and rich peasants. Both the May Fourth Directive and the Draft Agrarian Law support the peasants' urgent demand for confiscating and dividing the land of the landlords, and rich peasants. The critical point comes when the peasants go on to distribute the property of the middle peasants. Equalitarianism then becomes reactionary.'

'Many cadres of peasant origin did not clearly understand about the turning-point, so they made mistakes. It is just for this reason that *the peasants must be under proletarian leadership.*' [Our italics: I. & D. C.] 'Without proletarian ideas to guide them they make just this kind of mistake and harm the revolution. It has been our experience that whenever the peasants are mobilized to struggle, they push on toward extreme equalitarianism and the cadres are apt to be swept along with them. In this case, we

¹ In an interview given in the summer of 1948 to William Hinton, an American agriculturist who was studying land reform in the area to the west of the T'aihang Mountains at the same time that the writers were in Ten Mile Inn on the eastern side of the range.

senior cadres must take the blame for not having given the junior cadres full explanation and education on this point beforehand.¹

Proletarian guidance had in fact been given by the Central Committee in its May Fourth Directive, which stated:

‘The Party must resolutely and by every means draw the middle peasants into the movement and see that they benefit from it, while their land must not be encroached upon.’

And: ‘The whole struggle must be conducted with the genuine consent and to the satisfaction of all the peasant masses, well-to-do middle peasants included.’

The failure to carry out these explicit instructions stemmed from certain objective conditions which were later commented on in another Central Committee document¹—which was in the form of a foreword to a special reprint of the second chapter of Lenin’s *Left Wing Communism: an Infantile Disorder*. Both the foreword and the chapter were circulated to all Party cadres for study in order to draw attention to and overcome the weakness described.

‘Because of the prolonged guerrilla war,’ the foreword reads, ‘and because of the fact that the revolutionary bases were cut up into many independent scattered units, in the past we could not help developing a high degree of localism and territorial autonomy among the various independent units, since each had distinctive conditions as regards the enemy, terrain, political and economic situations. In this way we promoted a high degree of initiative and creativeness in the various localities, thus overcoming the extremely complex difficulties of that time and advancing China’s revolution towards victory on a nationwide scale. This policy was at that time entirely correct and necessary. But, because of it, various kinds of separatist and localist habits were built up among quite a few of our comrades and certain serious undisciplined and anarchistic trends developed within the Party. This has been erroneous and harmful.’

It was habits and trends of this sort which were responsible for the ingenious but completely misguided invention of the ‘class’ of feudal tails. That had been localism at its worst. Yet it was just that quality of ingenuity and initiative which had helped the sub-county democratic administration to function when the Japanese were actually within its confines.

¹ Issued by the Central Information Bureau of the Chinese Communist Party.

When, in time, the Central Committee had completed the methodical collection and examination of reports on the carrying out of the May Fourth Directive, such as it makes after every major movement, one of its leading members, Jen Pi-shih, made a report on 'Some Problems Regarding Land Reform'. In this he summarized and analysed mistakes in classification and explained how they could be avoided in future. Regarding the misguided struggle against middle peasants, he issued the strongest possible warning: '... Encroaching on the interests of the middle peasants necessarily causes them to vacillate and can even be utilized by the landlords and rich peasants, causing the poor peasants and farm-labourers to become isolated. Should this happen the revolution would fail!' And elsewhere: '... This is not isolating the enemy, but is self-isolation. What a serious mistake it is to send people from our ranks into the camp of the enemy!'

This sharp warning had its effect. Within a year the mistakes of the Feudal Tails Campaign were to be fully corrected.

Looking back on this period in the summer of 1948, Lai Jo-yu was able to put the mistakes which were made into the general perspective of the overall success of the land reform movement: 'Such mistakes,' he said, 'were nothing but ripples on the surface of the broad Yellow River. The most important thing is that feudalism has been thoroughly rooted out throughout the whole of the T'aihang.'

IX

THE DESTRUCTION OF FEUDALISM: ACT TWO

Some Landlord Leadership Lingers On

The back of feudalism in Ten Mile Inn was broken in the course of the campaigns—the Black Lands, the Fill the Holes and Level the Tops and the Feudal Tails. The land had been taken from the landlords and rich peasants and had been distributed to the poor and middle peasants. Nevertheless, some members of the classes which had been driven from power still held positions in the community from which they could carry on disruptive activities. In order to protect the reforms already effected, it was necessary to make the peasants clearly aware that even a landless landlord was still a man to be watched. This was the background of a new movement which took place in the summer of 1947—the campaign to Divide the Family.

One reason that the landlords and rich peasants had been able to retain certain strategic positions in the villages was that they had literacy and managerial experience. Most of the peasants lacked both. They had learnt the cultivation of the land well enough even when they did not own it; but business was something which they had conducted on only the most limited scale. The few who were literate and who sought employment in shops had for the most part carried out only the routine jobs of junior clerks. It was natural therefore that the landlords and rich peasants, even after they had been ‘struggled against’, should continue to exercise considerable influence on economic affairs in the villages.

This was the case in Ten Mile Inn, where the former landlord, Fu Hsin, became manager of the village co-operative.

Fu Hsin was appointed to this post with little or no opposition. On the one hand he had undoubted business acumen; on the other, the exploitation and harsh practices in which he had engaged had been carried out either indirectly by means of agents or outside Ten Mile Inn (see Chapter II, p. 18). Although in 1939 he was one of the three pao-heads of Ten Mile Inn, he had continued to remain away from the village during his term of office, leaving Fu Shou-liang, the pao-head's clerk, to discharge his duties.

Fu Hsin would probably have remained at a safe distance from home indefinitely if it had not been for an unexpected happening; his partner in the cloth business was an active opponent of the anti-Japanese government, and in 1940 was discovered to have been trying to undermine it. One of the Japanese methods of waging economic warfare against the Communists was flooding their area with Japanese currency in an attempt to drive that of the Communists out of circulation. When this was being attempted in Yangyi market-town, Fu Hsin's partner was found to be collaborating with the enemy, and among other things to be casting suspicion on the Communist currency by rumour-mongering and by refusing to accept it in his business. Eventually he was tried on other counts also, condemned as an enemy agent and shot.

His partner's fate caused Fu Hsin to reconsider his own position. He closed down the now disreputable firm, left Yangyi immediately, and for the first time since his boyhood returned to Ten Mile Inn to live. Here he hoped to ride out the storm of democratic reform.

All his life Fu Hsin's energies had been mainly devoted to business. He was not the man now to sink all he had into land in Ten Mile Inn, just when the Communists were beginning to control the area. He sold thirty mu and sent his brother with the proceeds to do business in Hantan City, forty miles to the east, which was already occupied by the Japanese. Fu Hsin adapted himself so well to the new situation that by 1944 he was using his commercial experience as manager of the village co-operative. Thus it was that at the same time as Reduction of Rent and Interest was beginning to raise the democratic movement in Ten Mile Inn to a higher level than ever before, a key post in the village's

economy was put into the hands of a former pao-head, businessman, usurer and landlord.

After the defeat of the Japanese, with the Double Reduction well under way and progressive taxation falling heavily upon him, Fu Hsin had followed up the selling of the thirty mu which had financed his brother's business in Hantan by mortgaging another eleven mu of land. Soon after this, however, any fleeting hopes that he may have had that there would be a 'change of weather'—that the Communists would one day be driven out—faded completely away. He came to the conclusion that since the Communists had not been driven out by the Japanese, it was even less likely that they would be displaced by the Kuomintang. Land had become a worse investment than ever, and Fu Hsin decided to redeem the plot he had mortgaged in order to sell it outright so as to invest the capital in something more dependable.

But the peasant to whom he had mortgaged it had also come to the conclusion that the Communists were in Ten Mile Inn to stay; and his reaction to this prospect was very different from that of the landlord. During the Mortgage Killing Campaign he denounced Fu Hsin to the village government as having mortgaged out the eleven mu to avoid progressive taxation—and the land was thereupon made the legal property of the man who had been tilling it. In the Black Lands Campaign, of which the Mortgage Killing was a part, Fu Hsin was fined another 15,000 yuan for the evasion of taxes. The smallness of this amount compared with the hundreds of thousands of yuan fines imposed on other landlords was probably a result of his position as manager of the co-operative, and of the respect in which he was generally held by the villagers.

Nevertheless, in subsequent struggles Fu Hsin lost more of his wealth, being forced to give up little by little part of his land, housing, animals and implements. In the Feudal Tails Campaign in the spring of 1947, for instance, the records show that he lost the houses on the east and west side of his spacious courtyard, a plot of 'Date Orchard Land', with chaser mill and stall, and a plot of 'Goddess of Mercy Land'. At the end of the list comes the item: 'One small black donkey.'

But Fu Hsin was a man not easily cast down. He had made good in the old society and he would make good in the new. In spite of all the struggles, he was retained as manager of the

co-operative, largely because no one else in the village was considered his equal in business ability. Thus, in spite of everything, he had a place in village life—and an important one at that. In an attempt to safeguard it during the Feudal Tails Campaign in the spring of 1947, he sent his eldest son to join the People's Liberation Army. By this he not only gained the prestige of being the father of a People's Liberation Army man, but from then on, as a 'soldier's dependent', he had part of his remaining land ploughed for him by fellow villagers. At the same time, with characteristic caution, he sent his second and third sons away to Kuomintang-held Peking to start learning the art of commerce.

This art he himself applied to the full in managing the cooperative. In its early days that institution had played its intended role of helping the mass of the people to produce, and while Fu Hsin was feeling his way at his new post, he continued to carry out this policy. But as the co-operative's capital increased, especially after the investment in it of a good part of the Feudal Tails 'struggle fruits', intentionally or otherwise he gradually introduced some of the practices of his Yangyi business. He was determined to make the co-operative a successful enterprise, and to him this meant profits. Within a short time the co-operative was regularly doubling its capital every six months.

This was achieved as a result of great expansion of the co-operative's activities under Fu Hsin's ambitious guidance. From concentrating on helping the women to spin and weave, by 1947 the co-operative had blossomed into a chain of miscellaneous enterprises, including two inns, a flour mill, a noodle shop and a cottoncarding workshop. Only the last of these was strictly in accordance with the purpose for which the co-operative had originally been set up. For the rest, encouraging production had given way to making profits.

The attitude of the villagers to this conversion of their cooperative into a joint-stock company was mixed. The more comfortably-off middle peasants viewed it very favourably. In the first place they had substantial shares in the concern and periodically received handsome dividends. In the second place they profited by receiving loans from it. As many of them owned pack animals, they were enabled to engage in profitable trade-and-transport ventures with the borrowed capital. Fu Hsin himself

was strongly in favour of lending money to these enterprising middle peasants, for they were a good business risk.

But with the poor peasants the case was different. If they wanted to buy and transport a load of coal or pottery, it had to be carried on their own shoulders. This limited the scale and therefore the profitability of their enterprise. Their lack of animals together with the small size of their holdings made them all in all a far poorer business risk than the middle peasants. The hardheaded businessman Fu Hsin turned a deaf ear to their pleas for loans. And of course their investments in the co-operative, and consequently their dividends, were very much smaller than those of the middle peasants.

Many poor peasants resented this. However, the middle peasants held posts of influence in the village and expressed their opinions freely, while the poor peasants were those who had not yet been aroused and were still fearful of speaking their minds in public. The dissatisfaction they felt was expressed in grumbling at home or amongst their intimate friends. A casual visitor to the village, therefore, would have noted nothing but enthusiasm for both the co-operative and its ex-landlord manager, Fu Hsin.

But the cadres and Party workers at higher levels believed that a basic principle was at stake—the need for working-class leadership of the newly expanding economy. With the villagers' co-operative under the management of men like Fu Hsin, an important sector of their economy would develop along capitalist instead of along socialist lines.

Realizing that a growing number of co-operatives in the T'aihang area were already gradually degenerating into virtual joint-stock companies, the sub-region authorities began to take special measures. In doing so they were guided by Lenin's strong warning to the effect that small producers 'by their ordinary, everyday... activity, achieve the very results which the bourgeoisie need'—a drift in the direction of capitalism.¹

Directives were accordingly issued to village co-operatives emphasizing that their foremost task was to promote production. In the summer of 1947, Fu Hsin, along with managers of co-operatives of other villages, was called to a special meeting in Wu An County-town. Here the extent to

¹ Lenin, *Leftwing Communism*, Chapter 5.

which village co-operatives were under the influence or outright control of former landlords was quite conspicuous. While it was clear that the main economic basis of the new democratic society—peasant ownership of the land—was firmly intact, an adjunct of it was evidently not in a healthy state. The co-operatives were being contaminated by the profit motive. And it was clear that the elimination of this motive demanded a change in co-operative management.

The co-operative was not the only vantage-point from which former landlords were harming the democratic movement. Another, less strategic but still threatening, was in the field of education.

A high proportion of rural teachers, even in areas where land reform had already taken place, were members of former landlord families. This was not surprising, for few others possessed the required standard of education. The unreliability of these teachers of landlord background had been exhibited in Ten Mile Inn as far back as 1943, when, just prior to the dramatic Secret Agents' Case, the current head of the village school had been found guilty of conniving with the enemy. Following the economic destruction of the feudal system, which had been more or less completed just the previous year, it was to be expected that the attitude of many of the former landlords and rich peasants would be very bitter.

During the spring of 1947, examination of security reports from all Liberated Areas was beginning to make it clear that the Kuomintang were systematically exploiting this situation. They were following a definite policy of recruiting secret agents from among the rural teachers. This was another factor contributing to the launching of the Divide the Family Campaign. Before it started, village cadres were instructed to send all teachers of landlord or rich peasant origin back to their native villages where their records could be most accurately checked.

One teacher was sent back to Ten Mile Inn. He was a gentlelooking, frail young man named Li Wei-shu, who was well fitted for his job in every respect but one. He was a son of the runaway rich peasant, Li Feng of the Fort.

It had been Li Wei-shu's lifelong ambition to become a teacher. His father had little confidence in the lad's aptitude for the mountain-products business or for making good at the collection

of rent or interest, for in his study of the Confucian classics, Li Wei-shu had absorbed the Master's contempt for business. He was anxious to attain a more honourable position in society than that of his mercenary father. By the age of twenty Li Wei-shu had realized his ambition, having become a teacher in a near-by town. Then the war against Japan broke out, the town was occupied and the school closed.

The young teacher returned to Ten Mile Inn and, despite his own inclinations, was persuaded by his father to go up to Manchuria and try his hand at business. But the only business ability he displayed was in learning to use the abacus. The climate, too, proved too rigorous for his delicate constitution and within a year he was back home again.

Here, after a few aimless months, he volunteered to give courses in adult education at the village school. He was soon called upon, too, to give special instruction to the cadres, teaching them how to make out the road-passes which were used for controlling wartime movements.

Soon after this Li Wei-shu again left Ten Mile Inn to take up regular teaching once more in Deep Well Village. At the same time his father, Li Feng, was, nominally at least, dividing up his family into three units. But the division was only a fictitious one, aimed at evading progressive taxation and at avoiding possible confiscation of the land. In fact, the school-teacher son was the only one who ever actually lived away from the family home.

Because he lived away from home and because of a lack of sympathy for his hard-headed father and elder brother, Li Wei-shu was able to regard the Double Reduction movement more or less philosophically.

His major interest was his teaching, which he continued to do wholeheartedly. He taught for several years at Deep Well Village, and was there when the Black Lands Campaign brought ruin to his father's family. This he could not swallow by any means so easily as he had the Reduction of Rent and Interest. Nevertheless, he found consolation in his work, of which he was genuinely fond, and which seemed to assure him continued security and respect even while the society he was familiar with was in process of destruction. When his father and older brother fled to Tientsin, Li Wei-shu stayed on at his job, sinking himself more deeply than

ever into his work, and trying to hide, even from himself, that he was of rich peasant origin.

He was soon to be reminded. So was Fu Hsin in the cooperative.

'Dividing the Family' Campaign

These two men who had come from exploiting classes held important positions in village life. The purpose of the Divide the Family Campaign was to examine all those of landlord and rich peasant origin to see what positions they held and whether they were abusing them. To do this it was necessary to draw the class lines sharply in a systematic classification¹ of the whole village.

The theory and practice of classification had been worked out by the Chinese Communist Party as far back as the period of the rural Soviets, during the civil war of 1927–36. At that time definitions of each class had been hammered out so that it could be clearly understood what made a man a landlord, a rich peasant, a middle or poor peasant or farm-labourer and so on.

Though minor modifications were made from time to time in accordance with changing conditions, the basic principles underlying these definitions remained the same. These were: that class is based upon ownership of the means of production and on the relations of labour: that is to say, whether a man depends for his livelihood upon his own labour, exploits that of others, or is himself exploited. These economic relations apply principally to the time that the classification is made, but changes in a person's condition, such as those brought about by the democratic reforms, must be taken into account.

Before the Divide the Family Campaign there had been a series of classifications in Ten Mile Inn, each being more detailed and precise than the last. With the introduction of the progressive tax after 1940, for example, it had been necessary to assess the village families. This had been done entirely on the basis of value (per head) of the family land-holding. A more precise classification was made during the time of the Double Reduction, when the relationship of landlord and tenant became one of vital importance. In a general way more and more light was thrown on class relations in each of the succeeding campaigns.

¹ For fuller treatment of classification see Appendix, p. 182 ff.

But in the summer of 1947 things were done with more elaborate definitions than ever before. Classification forms were drawn up and circulated to every family in the village through the leaders of the mutual-aid groups. There were columns for land-holding (including amounts self-cultivated, rented, let, mortgaged in or out); for animals; for housing; for debts or investments—as well as for the number of members of the family. Each column had to be filled in for three periods: 1939 (that is, before the establishment of the democratic government); 1945 (that is, after two years of Double Reduction and five of progressive taxation); and the summer of 1947, the date of issue (after the Black Lands, Fill the Holes and Level the Tops and the Feudal Tails Campaigns). The information for the first of the three periods was not too accurate, involving as it did the remembrance of things eight years past—and one in which land-holdings at any rate had been very inaccurately registered, as the subsequent Black Lands Campaign showed.

On the basis of these questionnaires the village families were classified. Two separate sets of classes were drawn up. The 'basic masses' were divided into five classes—poor, lower middle, new middle, old middle and upper middle peasants. The 'struggle objects' were divided into four classes, the names of which indicated both their present economic condition and the fact that it had been arrived at as a result of the popular struggle. These 'struggle-object' classes bore complicated names: 'reduced to poor peasant', 'reduced to lower middle', 'reduced to old middle' and 'reduced to upper middle peasant'. All the classes were based on the amount of land per head for every member of the family, but they included the idea not only of different standards of wealth and poverty, but that of time, as expressed in the 'old' and 'new' middle peasants.

But in spite of all the complicated definitions, the classification was still not entirely satisfactory. When it came to passing the final judgement it proved impossible for many of the peasants to banish from their minds certain irrelevant facts. One villager, for example, when classified as a middle peasant, was highly dissatisfied and said, 'Do you mean to say I haven't worked and suffered like a poor peasant? Why all last winter I peddled cakes to make ends meet.' A neighbour criticized him, saying, 'It's true

enough that you peddled cakes, but what determination did you ever show for the revolution?’

More common, however, than political considerations were those of standards of living. Such ideas kept cropping up as: ‘Well, even if Old Wang hasn’t so much land, he always manages to eat meat dumplings every full moon, and there’s no saying how many times a month he eats wheat-flour noodles.’ Or: ‘It’s true Old Li’s family is not exactly wealthy, and the old man did smoke away most of the land in his opium pipe, but they still inherited a fair amount of furniture. And the clothes they wear aren’t bad.’

Because of this emphasis upon miscellaneous possessions, there was no reliable standard of measurement and the difference between middle and poor peasants was decided mainly by comparison. For this reason the villagers found it necessary to subdivide the ‘middle’ into ‘upper middle’, ‘middle middle’ and ‘lower middle’ (in addition to the designations ‘old’ and ‘new’). Even then many were dissatisfied and suggested more and more subdivisions. This difficulty was unavoidable, for the essence of classification had not been grasped.

The heart of the problem really was the whole question of the relations of labour. Did a man work his own land exclusively or did he, to make both ends meet, have to sell his labour power to others? Or again, did he have so much land that he had to hire labour?

Though all of the elaborate form filling provided an interesting record of the economic changes resulting from the different campaigns, the actual Division of the Family was not in the end based on the classification. All families who had previously been classed as ‘struggle objects’ were automatically ‘divided’ from the ‘basic mass’. The result was that the fifty-odd middle peasants who had been classed as ‘feudal tails’ were now placed more deeply than ever in the camp of the enemy. Instead of being corrected, the old error was expressed in more definite social and political form than before.

But the main objective of the new campaign was to devise suitable ways and means for protecting the reforms from those not looked on as members of the village family. For this purpose it was agreed that all the ‘struggle objects’ should be divided into

three grades, according to the degree of their past exploitation and tyranny. Each grade was to have its special social, economic and political restrictions.

The 'third class struggle objects', those whose crimes were considered smallest, were merely to be barred from membership in the peasant union. This would formally deprive them of all political rights, for it was at the peasant union meetings that all decrees of the village government, all laws and directives from superior government bodies and all village affairs such as the arrangements for substitute ploughing, taxation, production, etc., were discussed. Besides this, exclusion from the peasant union made one not only a political but a social outcast, for with the disappearance of religious observance and clan ceremonials, the peasant union had become the centre of social life.

'Second class struggle objects' were to be excluded not only from the peasant union but also from the mutual-aid groups—a serious economic handicap. In addition, their children were not to attend the village school. This particular decision was partly a result of the fact that in the past literacy had been associated with the ruling power; now that this power had passed to the hands of the people, it was decided that they and they alone should have the advantage of education.

'First class struggle objects', besides having imposed upon them all the restrictions of the other two classes, were to be forced to wear a cloth patch bearing some such inscription as:

LANDLORD
FIRST CLASS STRUGGLE OBJECT

UNDERMINER OF THE DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT

This was to serve as a warning to people to be on their guard. (These patches had first to be worn on the arm, but when it became apparent that these could be easily concealed, they had to be sewn on to the back of the jacket.)

To see that all these regulations were observed, there was to be a special committee composed of one member from each mutualaid group and headed by a 'landlord control officer' for the entire village. This post was assigned to a former labourer, Wang Wentang, who had once been a farm-hand of the landlord Wang Pan-yen.

The various penalties having been fixed and the control

committee having been set up, the stage was set for deciding who belonged in each of the three grades. This was done at a series of 'accusation' and 'speaking bitterness' meetings.

Meetings along these lines had accompanied all of the main campaigns of the past. They had been held during the Double Reduction period, for example, to rouse the peasants to demand a lightening of their crushing burdens of rent and interest. The same procedure was followed during the Mortgage Killing Campaign, when those who had been imposed upon were inspired to expose the nature of the false contracts they had been induced to sign.

With the Fill the Holes and Level the Tops Campaigns 'speaking bitterness' was for the first time extended to the majority of the peasants, while with the Feudal Tails Campaign it became more widespread than ever.

Now with the Dividing of the Family it was not only equally widespread but became increasingly intense.

One of the first families to face the accusations of the masses was that of Li Feng, the rich peasant-businessman of the Fort. But at first the meeting was rather lacking in inspiration, for Li Feng himself and his eldest son had both fled from the village after the Black Lands Campaign. So the second son, the school teacher Li Wei-shu, was sent for to represent to the people the trickery and extortions of his father.

'Why did your father run away to the Kuomintang area?' the villagers demanded. 'He ought to be here to be "divided", the same as the rest of these feudal tyrants. You too are a feudal element.'

Despite his background, however, Li Wei-shu himself was found to have taken no active steps against the anti-feudal government. But in the absence of his father and elder brother, he was graded a 'first class struggle object', and from then on he was made to wear a patch proclaiming this fact. His career as a teacher was once more suspended. He was left to earn his place in the new society in the way which was left open to all former members of the exploiting class—by working the land.

Among others graded was the co-operative manager, Fu Hsin, who was put into the second class of 'struggle objects'. Besides this, although there was quite vigorous opposition on the part of some of the middle peasant shareholders, Fu Hsin was demoted

from the position of manager of the co-operative to that of cook for its staff. This in reality was a compromise—for it enabled the villagers to remove Fu Hsin from a position of authority while having him constantly available for consultation. As a result, in this case at least, the campaign was not entirely successful. Landlord influence was not rooted out of the co-operative. It was merely hidden in the kitchen. And it was hidden there by the peasants themselves, who were not yet ready to give it up.

Though in this instance the campaign fell short of its objectives, in a few cases it went beyond them.

One reason why some 'bitterness' meetings carried the struggle too far was that they afforded certain opportunities to those intent upon paying-off old scores and indulging in personal spites. Few people dared expose these grudge-bearers even when they knew the accusations to be false. They were afraid of provoking an attack upon themselves, for there was a general feeling of insecurity among the middle peasants and even among some of the poor. This was an inevitable outcome of the fact that members of the 'basic masses' had been struggled against during the Feudal Tails Campaign.

By far the most glaring example of this defect was the case of the village production director Wang Shao-yi (not to be confused with his cousin, the grafting ex-village head Wang Shao-yu), who was awarded the title of 'First Class Tyrant' and expelled from his mutual-aid group.

Though himself a middle peasant, Wang Shao-yi was the son of a former rich peasant. As such he had been struggled against as a 'feudal tail'. But as a 'feudal tail' he was still entitled to membership in his mutual-aid group. His expulsion from it and his title of 'First Class Tyrant' were engineered during the Divide the Family Campaign by the former village head Wang K'e-pin.

Just as in his position of village head Wang K'e-pin had been domineering, in his mutual-aid group he had earned the reputation of being a sharp customer when it came to exchanging labour; somehow he always managed to get the best of the bargain. At the same time he was slack about attending meetings from which he personally did not stand to gain anything. After a number of absences in a row, he was expelled from the group—on a resolution moved by Wang Shao-yi.

From that day Wang K'e-pin nursed a grievance. When feeling was mounting during the Divide the Family Campaign, he accused Wang Shao-yi of having been a spy for the Japanese, of having given them information about the village cadres and even of having tried to poison the village wells. Though this was patently untrue, no one wanted to take up the defence of the accused for fear of casting suspicion on himself. So Wang Shao-yi was regraded from the position of a mere 'feudal tail' to that of a 'first class struggle object', with a patch on his back—and he was consequently deprived of membership in his mutual-aid group just as Wang K'e-pin himself had been.

A second reason for carrying the struggle beyond the set bounds was the very intense and widespread hatred which certain 'struggle objects' evoked among the villagers.

There were four men who provoked such passion. With mounting fury the people recalled how these men had robbed and cheated them of their land, extorted the highest interest on usurious loans, abused their wives and daughters; how they had beaten to the point of death whoever dared oppose them. Though now the accusers had power within their grasp, the accusations went back step by step to very different days—to times when one of the accused had been a traitor to the Japanese; when another had been a corrupt lawyer, organizer of the Green Circle Gang and procurer of women; when the third had stirred up factional strife and undermined production; and when the fourth had branded patriotic militiamen as enemy agents.

As the past was vividly and angrily reviewed, all these remembered evils seemed to have reached their peak at the time of the Twenty-four Commanders. As one after another of the peasants recalled the bitter suffering of those days, their fury rose higher and higher.

In the minds of many peasants—with the civil war still raging—there lurked a fear that the old days might return; that all the gains they had worked and fought for, all the vision of a new life for themselves and their children, all the fruits of the years of struggle, might somehow be snatched out of their hands—so long as such men lived.

And so with a brutality which feudalism itself had bred in them, the villagers drove their four arch-enemies down to the boulder-strewn river-bed—and stoned them to death

These four men were: Commander Huang's liaison officer, the landlord, Wang Pan-yen; his chief procurer of women, Fu P'eichien; his guide and collaborator in the armed raid on the Chao Village fair, Li Fa-k'uei; and the subtle plotter of the Secret Agents Case, Fu Shou-liang.

During the previous ten years of bitter strife in Ten Mile Inn not a few men had lost their lives in the struggle for the reforms and against the Japanese invaders. These four were the only casualties on the side of those who upheld the feudal system, collaborated with the national enemy and held out to the last with whatever means were left them to fight against the democratic reforms.

Nevertheless, the Communist Party condemned such action on the part of the people. The May Fourth Directive had advocated in general a 'magnanimous policy, not killing anyone... although in the cases of traitors whose crimes are exceedingly heinous and of the public enemies of the people whose death is insistently demanded by the people, we must support the masses' demand and formally sentence them to death through court trials....'

Later, Central Committee member Jen Pi-shih stated:

'We adopt a policy of elimination towards the system of exploitation of the landlord class, but we do not adopt a policy of elimination towards the landlord as a person.... Indiscriminate beating and killing and corporal punishment are the products of feudal society. They are only practised by the feudal lord towards his serf and the warlord towards his soldiers.... We are opposed to indiscriminate killing of people, but this does not mean that there is to be no executions at all.... Elements whose crimes are really extremely great, and whom the people of the whole country say should be executed, after having been sentenced to death by the people's courts, and after their sentence has been approved by a definite government organ... should be executed and their crimes should be made public.... No one may be executed in secret. This is entirely necessary, otherwise revolutionary order cannot be established....

'It must be understood that the killing of many people cannot solve any problem at all. Our task is to solve problems, to solve the problem of how to wipe out the oppression and exploitation of imperialism, feudalism and bureaucratic capitalism, and to

build China into an independent, strong and prosperous people's democratic republic.¹

Later the villagers themselves realized clearly that this killing had solved no problems. But at the height of their fury they gave no thought to people's courts and approval by the government. They felt that they themselves were well fitted to act as judges of the middlemen of Commander Huang—and to carry out their sentence of death.

'Digging-out the Air-raid Shelters'

The primary aim of the Divide the Family Campaign had been to safeguard the land reform and democratic movement by taking social and political precautions against their enemies. At the same time it had focused attention on the fact that a number of these enemies still retained some of their former property.

Much of their land, animals, housing and implements had been 'struggled away', but it was an open secret that some of their possessions had been hidden—buried in the ground or secretly taken to the home of some friend or kinsman more socially secure than themselves in the new society.

This hidden property might consist of loans, or of the more valuable type of farming implements such as ploughs or seeders. But most of it was in the form of personal property: hoards of silver dollars or jewellery, family heirlooms, bolts of silk and cotton cloth; and considerable quantities of clothing—long silk gowns and other fine garments. Some of these things would have been directly valuable to the peasants; others were more in the nature of symbols of the way of life of the former ruling class. But almost all could be either used or sold to supply the peasants with working capital. It was in order to put this idle capital into the hands of those who could use it best that a movement was launched at almost the same time as the classification and grading in the summer of 1947.

This campaign was called 'Digging-out the Air-raid Shelters', and its objectives were set forth at a special meeting of the whole peasant union. Here the union chairman and other cadres

¹ In a speech to the North-west Front Field Armies Communist Party Committee, January 12th, 1948.

officially focused attention upon the existence of ‘air-raid shelters’— those with whom the former landlords’ and rich peasants’ possessions were hidden. The issues were stated clearly, the main emphasis being placed partly on the point which the Divide the Family Campaign was driving home—that the village was divided into two opposing camps of exploiters and exploited; partly on the need to put all idle capital into productive use in order to support the civil war and the democratic movement.

A good number of the poor and middle peasants had long felt guilty about the undercover service they were rendering to members of the enemy camp. But shame had prevented them from taking individual action to put their consciences at ease. Once the movement was launched, however, they responded to the appeal to ‘dig out the hidden wealth!’

A few of the ‘shelters’, however, remained closed. But it is hard to keep secrets in a village once aroused. Even in the old days people had been well enough aware of their neighbours’ misdemeanours, though wishing to maintain friendly relations with the close companions of their everyday lives they had turned a blind eye towards them—so far as the paochia system allowed them to. Now, with their newly developed class-consciousness, they were no longer willing to let things slide. Accordingly, each of the mutual-aid groups was called on to consider carefully each of its member families, as well as the families who were disqualified from membership but lived in the group’s immediate neighbourhood. After full discussion among the group’s membership, a delegation was sent to call on each family known to be acting as an ‘air-raid shelter’. Usually the discussion was entirely friendly and a word to the wise was sufficient.

There were exceptions to this rule, however. One mutual-aid group delegation called on the widow of Fu P’ei-yin (who in his lifetime had been manager and senior partner of the notorious Hsin Hsiung money-lending shop), thinking that the firm’s account books might throw some light on the problem of hidden wealth. The widow claimed, however, that the books were in the possession of Fu I-tze, who had been the assistant manager of the business. Fu I-tze in turn denied having the books and insisted that the widow had them herself.

This happened during the height of the campaign and the villagers were in no mood to be trifled with. They questioned

both the man and woman once more. Each still stuck to the same story. Nonplussed at first, the villagers finally fell back on the traditional notion that a man must be more dependable than a woman. So they beat the woman to make her hand over the books. It turned out that Fu I-tze had them after all. Tradition notwithstanding, the man it was who lied.

Though the woman was beaten by the people, who were furious at being obstructed and deceived, their feelings towards her were not to be compared with their hatred for her dead husband; the usurer Fu P'ei-yin, if he had been alive, might well have shared the fate of Commander Huang's four middlemen. The life of his widow, however, was at no time in danger. Nevertheless, she was thoroughly frightened and at the first opportunity ran away to her mother's house in a neighbouring village.

The use of violence in attempting to 'dig-out hidden wealth' was specifically dealt with by Jen Pi-shih in his report:

'... If,' he stated, 'hidden wealth can be acquired through appropriate methods, without costing lives, this is very beneficial in aiding the peasants to solve their problems of shortage of ploughing cattle, agricultural implements and seed. But they should not get wrapped up in getting at hidden wealth... hidden wealth alone cannot be relied on to overcome the peasants' difficulties. The government should issue agricultural loans to help the peasants solve their problems after the distribution of land. Eliminating the system of feudal exploitation is for the purpose of unshackling the rural productive forces, providing agricultural economy with an opportunity for great development.'¹

The case of Fu P'ei-yin's widow combined two related defects—violence and over-emphasis on hidden wealth. Both these defects were a consequence of the middle peasant line during the Black Lands Campaign when the 'fruits' had been put on sale instead of being distributed according to need. It was because this method of disposing of the 'fruits' had not solved the economic problems of the poorest that such desperate efforts were made to squeeze still more from the 'struggle objects' during the Air-raid Shelters Campaign. Little was forthcoming, however, for the very good reason that little remained hidden. The best of the fruits had already been acquired by the middle peasants. It was perhaps for

¹ Ibid.

this reason that the villagers, feeling frustrated and angry, resorted to violence.

This was, of course, the second harmful result of the middle peasant line. The first had been the widening of the sphere of struggle, during the Feudal Tails Campaign, to include a number of middle peasants.

When both of these misguided attempts to set right the wrongs of the middle peasant line ended in a failure, a third attempt was made. This was directed at the village cadres.

In the minds of the newly aroused poor peasants the attempt to obtain satisfaction from the current struggle against the landlords and rich peasants failed because the best of the fruits had already been acquired by the old and new middle peasants. Prominent in these last groups were the village cadres, against whom resentment was now beginning to grow.

The village head and many of the cadres in office at this time had first been elected by the villagers in the bean elections of 1944. They had been re-elected in the subsequent elections because they were fearless in opposing the landlords and rich peasants. The more passive section of the peasants were only too pleased to have others fight their battles for them. Thus perhaps the most serious failing of the cadres was their willingness to risk too many dangers and to shoulder too many responsibilities themselves, instead of 'mobilizing the masses'. Their substitute for this had been to mobilize a few militants with whom they shared the domination of the various struggles. It was this procedure which had been responsible for the emergence of the middle peasant line. If the poor peasants and labourers, and even the bulk of the less well-off middle peasants themselves, had been more fully set in motion, if they had felt perfectly free to speak their minds and stand up for their interests they would never have agreed to the selling of the fruits.

Yet the cadres did not see this failure to arouse and organize their fellow-villagers as their own shortcoming. They blamed the villagers for being apathetic and afraid to play their full part in the fight against their exploiters. Wang Wen-sheng was one of the timid ones who was criticized by the cadres for meekly presenting himself to receive a handout although he had been unwilling to take any part at all in the struggles. It seemed to the cadres reasonable that those who had borne the hard work and

danger of the struggle should get some preferential treatment. When the ‘struggle fruits’ of the Black Lands Campaign were put on sale, if there were competitors for the purchase of a certain item, the cadres tended to give priority to those who had struggled.

The village head Wang Hsi-t’ang, for example, for long periods had had to leave his home every night to sleep in hillside caves in order to avoid assassination by the enemies of the reforms. Now he did not feel it was unjust for him to buy a certain plot of exceptionally fertile land conveniently near an irrigation well, although a number of other villagers were also competing to buy it. Similarly, the Communist Party branch secretary, Wang Shaochen, when he himself had only half given up his religious beliefs, had braved the wrath of demons and spirits in destroying idols and cultivating grave-sites. Having taken such risks to show his fellow-villagers that this could be done with impunity, he later had no qualms of conscience about selling his former miserable home and buying a better one from the ‘struggle fruits’, although there were by no means enough good houses to go round.

Later, when the land reform work team came to Ten Mile Inn, these cases were discussed—and put right—along with other grievances of the villagers. But no question was ever raised of land or housing having been obtained for less than the assessed price, or of any of the fruits ‘disappearing’. The rewards the cadres took were modest enough, but the poverty of the village and the shortage of ‘struggle fruits’ made even this slight recompense impossible if all the poor in the village were to ‘fanshen’. It was the relative meagreness of the ‘struggle fruits’ yielded by the Airraid Shelter Campaign which focused the villagers’ attention on this fact and caused a growing undercurrent of dissatisfaction with the cadres.

‘Washing Faces and Rubbing Off Smudges’

Murmurings and grumblings against the village cadres were not confined to Ten Mile Inn. Developments had been similar throughout a considerable part of the T’aihang area. This problem had been foreseen in the May Fourth Directive which stated: ‘... We must educate the cadres in all areas so that they show the Communist’s

spirit of serving the people and do not abuse their positions of leadership to benefit themselves.’

The T'aihang Sub-region authorities, who had their ears well to the ground, decided that before the ‘fruits’ of the Air-raid Shelter movement were distributed, a campaign should be carried through to improve the working style of the cadres in the villages under their administration.

This campaign was known as ‘Washing Faces and Rubbing Off Smudges’. The name, besides being colourful, accurately expressed the purpose and the approach to be brought to the movement. It was not to be one of struggle, like those against the landlords and rich peasants. It was simply to afford the people a chance to point out their errors to the cadres, who would thus have an opportunity to mend their ways. The defects were not fundamental and could be corrected. The spirit was to be one of frank, comradely, constructive criticism. That was the theory. In practice things showed signs of turning out differently.

The experience of villages where the campaign began somewhat earlier than in Ten Mile Inn indicated to the sub-region authorities that ‘Washing Faces and Rubbing Off Smudges’ ran the risk of involving two serious dangers.

The first was that, accustomed as they now were to struggling against class enemies, the peasants might act in the same way towards the cadres as they had towards landlords and rich peasants.

The second possibility was that, behaving as they had done in Dividing the Family, a small number of grudge-bearing individuals might make fierce and unjustified attacks upon their private enemies, while the rest of the villagers remained silent, fearing to draw attention to themselves in case they should be marked down as the objects of the next struggle. Struggles had been going on for a number of years now, and to many, especially among the middle peasants, it seemed only a matter of time before their own turn would come.

The sub-region cadres soon realized that if these dangers materialized, throughout their entire area many of the most able, intelligent and forceful members of the newly-emancipated classes might be swept out of office instead of being reformed. This would leave only inexperienced leadership in the villages. Such a danger could not well be risked at a time when the new political and economic gains had hardly been consolidated.

As a result of these considerations the campaign was called off before it got fully under way.

So in Ten Mile Inn, just when murmurings about Wang Hsit'ang's 'Valley Bottom Land' and Wang Shao-chen's new house were beginning to make themselves heard, representatives of the sub-county government appeared in the village and called a meeting of the people.

They admitted that the village cadres had their shortcomings. But were they not superior to any officials that Ten Mile Inn had ever had in the past? Were their faults not heavily outweighed by their virtues? It was they who had been the driving force in carrying through every one of the reforms which the Communists had introduced. It was they who had first helped to transform the government from being a tool of the landlords into a servant of the people. They had led the village in distributing the land to the tillers. They had been the backbone of the continuous drive for production, serving as models in the new methods of co-operation. They had been the leaders in breaking down clannishness and overcoming superstition. Under their leadership village life had made more progress in the last seven years than in the preceding seven centuries. And above all it was the cadres who had led the movement to support the Eighth Route Army with rear service, organized the militia and taken direct part in fighting the Japanese. So the best thing to do was to let the whole campaign drop.

So argued the sub-county representatives.

This move achieved its immediate objective of calming the villagers down after their earlier midsummer outburst, and it left them free to concentrate on production and support for the civil war front.

Another effect of the abortive Face Washing movement was that cadres of the higher levels of both Party and government began to wonder whether the village cadres did not, in fact, have very grave, hitherto unsuspected, defects. Some believed that considerable numbers of village cadres might genuinely be guilty of serious corruption and oppression.

The answer to that important question lay several months ahead.

X

ACHIEVEMENTS OF EIGHT YEARS OF DEMOCRATIC REFORMS

Whatever defects the village cadres might have had, the general record of past achievements was impressive. For the overwhelming majority of villagers, life in Ten Mile Inn was far better allround by the end of 1947 than it had been seven years before.

New Land-ownership

As a result of the various reforms, roughly one-third of all the families in the village had moved from the ranks of the poor peasants and farm-labourers into those of the new middle peasants.

While there were still poor peasants, they constituted only about one-third (instead of two-thirds) of the total number of families in the village. And though they were still below the average in general prosperity, they all owned land, which they had not done in the past. In fact, their land-holdings were very little smaller than those of the middle peasants and were actually a trifle larger than those of the former landlords and rich peasants. The poor peasant now, though still handicapped by shortage of the means of production, was at least guaranteed subsistence. And he could live without constant dread of money-lenders or landlords or their bailiffs sweeping down on his home to beat him or seize his only quilt or cooking-pot.

The former landlords and rich peasants held only one-sixth the amount of land they had had in the past.¹ And there was not

¹ The total area of village land registered in 1937 amounted to 3,594.6 mu. After a partial re-measurement early in 1948, the total was calculated to have been 4,568.3 mu. The roughly one thousand mu discrepancy was largely unrecorded land in the hands of landlords and rich peasants. Their political power had enabled them to evade full registration of their holdings, which were actually about twice as big as reported.

a single person in Ten Mile Inn who lived by exploiting the labour of others.

Middle peasants, old and new, now formed about two-thirds of the village population. Landlords and rich peasants, tenants and long-term labourers, had practically disappeared.

The general picture of land ownership is clearly revealed in the following table based on a survey made during the Divide the Family Campaign in the summer of 1947:

<i>Class</i>	<i>Average holding per head (mu)</i>	<i>Average yield per head (tan)</i>
Middle peasants	3.12	2.93 ¹
Poor peasants and labourers . . .	2.9	2.67
Former landlords and rich peasants .	2.16	2.03

In 1937 the average holding of poor peasants and hired labourers was 0.93 mu per head; that is, less than half the holding which the former landlords and rich peasants had in 1947. From a village the great majority of whose families were formerly 'poor-and-hired', Ten Mile Inn had become a community of small owners with roughly equal holdings—a community of middle peasants, run by middle peasants—and mostly new middle peasants at that.

Winter Production and Mutual Aid

When the writers reached Ten Mile Inn towards the end of 1947, the whole economy was more efficient than it had ever been before.

The whole village was bustling with winter production. The millet and the Indian corn had been harvested, but everywhere fields had been sown to winter wheat, and from the hilltops the young shoots gave the distant terraces the look of winding staircases of landscaped lawns.

Winter wheat had always been considered a risky proposition in the past, for it was absolutely dependent on the weather. When taxes had been crushing and rents took 50 per cent or even more

¹ One tan equals approximately 133 lbs.

of the crop, few but the most prosperous could risk such a gamble. For the poor, who had to borrow seed, failure meant falling into the hands of the usurers; success meant that the greater part of the crop was lost in rent or taxes. But in 1947 things had changed. More winter wheat than ever before was sown in Ten Mile Inn.

Another greatly expanded crop was cotton.

The women were now in a position to spin and weave as never before, not only to clothe their own families, but to help supply the army with uniforms and shoes. They were no longer hampered by lack of wheels and looms. Increased capital and mutual aid had solved this problem along with many others.

Even the youngsters had organized themselves into junior mutual-aid groups—the girls for spinning, the boys for work in the fields. In this way they were able, not only to help their families, but to earn pocket-money for themselves.

Mutual aid, by making more efficient methods possible, both saved labour and made it available at just the right time. It released men, even at critical periods like harvest-time, to go off on profitable transport work or to aid soldiers' families which were short of labour. Mutual-aid groups financed secondary occupations and all types of group and individual enterprises which once had been stifled by the ruinous rates of interest on loans or working capital. The co-operatives did the same in supplying cheap credit as well as in providing raw materials for processing (particularly cotton) and guaranteeing a fair market for the finished product.

Now the village was bustling with 'winter production'. Smoke issuing from a newly-constructed building at the foot of the causeway leading to the Fort showed that the oil-press of Mutualaid Group Nine was in operation. The group's forty-odd draught animals were divided into four teams to transport and sell the oil, and to bring in oil-seeds from other villages.

The twenty-five animals belonging to Mutual-aid Group One, down in the Lower Village, had also been well organized. From the end of the harvest until November 25th—the date on which the village officially swung into its 'winter production' programme—they had carried 7,000 animal-loads of fertilizer to the fields, besides ploughing and sowing winter wheat. Now they were transporting coal from the mines at Ho Village to various markets.

Mutual-aid Group Two had organized a squad of carriers who had gone off to Pancheng, a well-known local pottery centre. From there they would make their way along the foothill roads with basket-loads of china bowls swinging from each end of their six-foot-long poles, peddling at country markets. Other group members had organized their draught animals into a convoy and gone off to buy grain in Yangyi, seven miles away. From there the loaded convoy was to proceed farther afield to sell the grain at a profit—which really amounted to a transportation fee.

Mutual-aid Group Three—the first mutual-aid group to be organized in Ten Mile Inn by the pioneer Wang Chen-chi in 1942—had just ventured into a field of industry new to the village. It had set up a dyeing plant to handle the locally woven cloth. Business was plentiful, but the management lacked experience. When the writers arrived in the village, the elected manager was still worrying about the poor quality of the indigo dye he had purchased, and was wondering how he could persuade the members to make an additional investment to replace it with something better.

Mutual-aid Group Four had come into possession of a lime kiln about half a mile outside the village which had fallen into disuse many years previously through lack of capital. But in the winter of 1946, on the suggestion of its current owner, the group used its capital to put the old kiln back in operation. By the end of the year they were congratulating themselves on their investment, for that year the Yangyi town government had decided to build a large water reservoir. The demand for lime soared, and Mutualaid Group Four's new enterprise was snowed under with orders right from the start.

The kiln ran full blast all winter, and by the spring of 1947, when the Yangyi reservoir was completed, there was a surplus of eight thousand chin of unsold lime. This the members divided amongst themselves and then initiated an enthusiastic drive to repair their houses. In a short period the west-central section of the village, where the members of Mutual-aid Group Four lived, became Ten Mile Inn's most prosperous-looking neighbourhood.

Besides this, traffic along the highway being greater than ever before, they had recently opened an inn in the main street. Part of the capital for this venture had been collected in kind—some

of the members investing several bushels of Indian corn, others supplying fodder for the patrons' draught animals.

Mutual-aid Group Five had gone into sheep-rearing. Being composed almost entirely of poor peasants, the group could not raise much capital on its own account, but the co-operative and the peasant union each came to its aid with a 100,000-yuan loan; a merchant from the townlet of Yeht'ao advanced 400,000 yuan (at a considerably higher rate of interest); and amongst themselves the group members raised still another 100,000 yuan to make a grand total of 700,000 yuan. With this they sent two of their members—who had previously been shepherds for landlords—into the mountains to buy fifty sheep. Their plan was to graze the flock during the winter, sell the sheep at the end of the lunar year and divide the profits—and the droppings—among the shareholders. But the flock had no sooner been brought back from the mountains than eager purchasers presented themselves. Delighted at the prospect of a quick profit, the group had sold the fifty sheep and sent their two shepherds back to the mountains to buy a hundred and thirty more. This flock, too, was soon disposed of, and was in turn replaced by another of a hundred animals. By this time the demand was falling off, so the group kept the flock as had been planned in the first place.

But they soon saw possibilities of doing profitable business selling mutton soup to the increasing flow of carters, carriers and traders travelling along the highway. So they opened a restaurant just outside the north gate of the village, in what had formerly been the temple of the God of War. Instead of the pungent scent of incense, a savoury aroma of steaming mutton pervaded the old temple.

When the winter production season came to an end in the spring of 1948 the remaining sheep were butchered. Since the lunar New Year's celebrations were on a larger scale than ever before, and dumplings were eaten in practically every house in the village, there was a ready market for the meat. To round things off, two hundred man-loads of droppings were distributed to the members as fertilizer. So the group's first ventures in sheep dealing were brought to a highly satisfactory close.

Mutual-aid Group Eight made a special point of using its animals as efficiently as possible. The best of them were used on long-distance transport jobs and were out on the road throughout

the whole winter transporting coal and grain—the six animals being handled by three drivers. The poorer animals were used for peddling oil in villages near Ten Mile Inn. Two of the group members set up mobile snack stands and sold fried oatmeal sausage to the crowds which flocked to the townlets of Yangyi and Yeht'ao on market-days. Apart from these ventures the group, which was quite small and owned no village industrial plant, concentrated on improving their fields. For this they organized two teams—one to level the land before the midwinter snow-falls; the other, consisting of the four strongest men in the group, to carry the night-soil and manure to the fields.

These were some of the group activities and enterprises of Ten Mile Inn in 1947. Gone was the stagnation and widespread unemployment, born of lack of capital, which used to be most acute in winter. Thanks largely to mutual aid and government credit, Ten Mile Inn was humming with trade, transport and village industry.

The capital and labour of the entire village were being used as never before. Production had gone up by leaps and bounds and its benefits were being more fairly shared than ever.

Social Changes

The social changes were as great as the economic.

The feudal ideal of a family ruled by the patriarchal head was being steadily displaced by that of the democratic family, in which meetings were held to discuss what expenditures should be made and what activities undertaken: how much of the family budget should be allocated to buying a donkey or a new seeder or plough; how much should be invested in cotton for spinning and weaving, or in buying an improved spinning wheel or loom; whether winter wheat should be planted this year and how much corn or cotton should be sown.

The sale of children disappeared. Owning their land, parents were no longer forced by poverty to sell their sons or to part with their tiny daughters as 'home-raised daughters-in-law'; even adoption was becoming a rarity. Old Widow Li, for example, had lost all three of her sons. Two of them had died of disease, and the third, whom she had adopted about 1930, had been killed by the Japanese. After this happened she tried to adopt

another, but met with no success—despite the inducement of land and a house to inherit. By 1947 the possession of such things was the rule, not the exception.

Though the attitude towards children had changed, marriage remained a problem. Despite the new prosperity of the hundred and twenty-five families who had changed their class from poor to new middle peasant, many of the new middle peasant bachelors were still unable to find themselves wives. Even with the loss of men in the war there was still a shortage of women. To offset it some of the desperate bachelors had urged that the wives of their former exploiters should be divorced so that they themselves might marry them! But village head Wang Hsi-t'ang soon put an end to this idea, explaining that the aim of the democratic government was to consolidate family life, not to break it up. Though the problem had not been solved and the disparity between the numbers of men and women would probably not be done away with for another ten or fifteen years, the root of the trouble had been hacked out. Infanticide had disappeared.

A great many other old institutions had either completely disappeared or very greatly changed. The temple association and the clans could now no longer make even a pretence of serving a useful function, for the village government collected taxes, the village school carried on education, and new social and economic relationships had been formed in the mutual-aid groups. Ancestral worship and care of old graves was no longer common village practice. But there were still traces of the age-old inter-clan rivalries. When the village cadres did something wrong, older men named Li or Fu might be heard to mumble that most of the cadres were Wangs—though this point was not especially emphasized when things were going well.

Nevertheless, the Communist Party members and other leading spirits of the village were constantly on the watch against a possible re-emergence of clan-factionalism which had once helped to keep the majority of peasants divided and to maintain the feudal landlords and rich peasants in power.

A similarly disruptive force had been that of mystical predictions and rumours spread by diviners (shen p'o). These women, who were mainly of poor peasant origin, now had land of their own. It was hoped, therefore, that they could be drawn back into farming or household industry. To speed up the process

a heavy tax was imposed on divining. There had also been a campaign against idol-worshipping.

In fact, mystical practices had very largely disappeared. The Yellow Incense Society, for instance, had now gone out of existence. With more money than they had ever had before, the former poor peasants were able to consult the old-style village doctors instead of having to rely upon the incantations of the Society head to rid them of disease.

The doctors themselves were being encouraged to make the most of those folk remedies which experience showed to be effective and to weed out the superstitious practices with which they were mixed up. Those doctors who did so received special licences from the government. They also got tax reductions in return for providing free consultation (though not free medicine) to the villagers. The three most respected doctors of Ten Mile Inn went in for this new type of practice.

The fact that these three doctors consented to adopt a discriminating approach to their ancient lore reflected a new attitude not only on their part but also on that of their patients. This was a result of several years' educational work by the democratic village government.

The winter school for years now had been a regular feature of village life. In 1945, it launched a special drive to teach all the women under thirty to read and write. Each morning the students would report to the teacher, who gave them a number of characters to study. These they would painstakingly copy on to their implements—spinning wheels, looms or yarn-winding frames—to gaze at and memorize as they worked; the men did the same with their farming tools. The village cadres received special instruction in the writing out of road-passes and the filling in of forms which the duties of their office involved. Because of the subsequent difficulties encountered in women's work, the literacy drive amongst the women lapsed and the early gains which they had achieved were not consolidated. The results amongst the men were much more successful.

For children education was practical. The new text-books dealt with the everyday life of the peasants. School hours were made flexible so as to suit the demands on the pupils' time. Classes began at daybreak and went on till breakfast, after which the children were free to help their parents. But those whose parents

were eager to have them educated could return to attend classes after their mid-morning meal. In the afternoon, too, they might study under the teachers' supervision, though no formal classes were held. School holidays coincided with busy times on the land, such as harvest-time, when the children helped their parents or organized themselves into groups to go gleaning.

But the low academic qualifications of the teachers remained a problem. After the Divide the Family Campaign, with its precautionary weeding-out from the schools of all 'landlord and rich peasant elements', villages all over the T'aihang Sub-region found themselves with teachers of 'reliable class origin', but, on the whole, with an unsatisfactory standard of education.

Ten Mile Inn, for instance, was left with two young men of middle peasant families who had been able to afford considerably less education than the rich peasant's son Li Wei-shu. Both of them had been brought up to a life of manual labour on the land and only through exceptional zeal for learning had they managed to squeeze in a few years of primary-school education. They themselves studied diligently each day and were making steady progress. But they still felt a certain lack of confidence because of their 'low cultural level'.

This lack of confidence was to some extent reflected in the peasants. In the past they had distrusted the landlord teachers but had respected their learning; now they felt drawn to the new teachers as men of their own class, but doubted that they could teach the children much. As a result the parents, able to use more labour than ever before, could not always be relied upon to urge their children to go to school.

After the Divide the Family Campaign had accomplished its purpose of weeding Kuomintang secret agents out of the schools, the county authorities called a conference to focus attention upon educational problems. The solutions proposed were the raising of the low academic level of the peasant-teachers through refresher courses and the drawing back into the profession of teachers of landlord and rich peasant origin who were not hostile to the democratic reforms. It was decided to set up a system of mutual aid between the two elements, the one side contributing the benefits of its superior education, the other its close kinship with and understanding of the pupils and their parents. Even before

the implementation of this new principle, the general standard of education in Ten Mile Inn was higher than ever before.

Political Changes

The peasant's feelings of solidarity with the new teachers and their former suspicion of the old were the expression of a new consciousness which the years of democratic reform had brought to Ten Mile Inn. This was the consciousness of class. In the old days the misery of the peasants and their hatred of their oppressors had expressed itself in a sterile sense of individual grievance and personal hatred, not along class lines. The institutions which served especially to obliterate these lines were the clan, with its stress on common ancestry and on joint participation in periodical celebrations; and the paochia system, with its dependence upon mutual spying and informing. Besides this, a characteristic of decaying feudal economy was that landlords and rich peasants were continually going bankrupt. Thus the ranks of the middle and poor peasants were continuously receiving ex-landlord and ex-rich peasant recruits who brought with them the outlook of the class they had left.

In spite of all this, class conflict not only existed; it underlay the whole of village life. The Communists did not introduce this conflict; they made the peasants conscious of it and directed it into constructive channels.

Before the establishment of the peasant union, for instance, those who lived by offering their labour for sale ineffectively cursed their employers, who conspired to keep wages down. But when the peasants' own union had been formed, during the famine of 1942-3, one of their first actions was to organize the people to seize the landlords' hoards of grain and to save the starving from death.

From that time on, every reform movement and campaign heightened class consciousness: progressive taxation, with its exemption of the poor; Double Reduction, with its clarification of the relations between landlord and tenant, lender and borrower; the war against Japan, which exposed the fact that both the waverers and the open traitors to the patriotic resistance were drawn mainly from the landlord class; the continuous production drives, with their extolling of the once despised

function of manual labour and their condemnation of those who lived on the toil of others; above all, the struggle movements themselves and the classifications which were an integral part of them—all these developed a stronger and stronger class consciousness.

When during the struggles the whole village assembled on the large threshing floor between the Fort and the Street, or crowded into the courtyard of the temple which now served as a school, each peasant had seen that his grievance and resentment at having been forced to surrender the fruits of his labour was not an isolated phenomenon. It was something he shared in common with hundreds of others of his class. Thus, feelings which in the past had been buried under an overwhelming weight of poverty and hopelessness were roused and expressed with a sharpness they had never had before.

Class-consciousness was not equally developed in every class in the village. It was strongest among the new middle peasant cadres who had led the whole series of reform movements, in the course of which they had bettered both their own conditions and those of their fellow-villagers, especially their fellow new middle peasants. Among the poor peasants, who had still not 'fanshenned', there were varying outlooks. Some were still apathetic, others had at last become eager to follow the example of their more advanced and energetic fellows. The old middle peasants had grown noticeably in class-consciousness during the various reforms until the Feudal Tail movement. That campaign, however, had warped the growth of their new consciousness. It had left them confused, feeling not entirely sure which class they belonged to and uncertain about their place as members of 'the basic masses'. As to the landlords, rich peasants and all 'struggle objects', they were only too acutely conscious of their class, for it was this which largely determined their status in the village and their relationship to its new institutions—the peasant union, the women's association, the mutual-aid group, the people's militia, the village government committee, and last but by no means least the village branch of the Communist Party.

The Communist Party branch had been the driving force of village life ever since its reorganization in 1944, though its membership remained secret. After its first rallying of the poor and middle peasants for carrying through the Reduction of Rent

and Interest, the branch had gone on to take the lead in every subsequent movement—the Black Lands Campaign, Filling the Holes and Levelling the Tops and Cutting Off the Feudal Tails, Digging Out the Air-raid Shelters, Dividing the Family. It led, too, in every move to develop production, advance education and abolish superstition. Above all, it led support for the war against Japan.

Besides this it was those twenty-eight individuals who were Party members who were pointed out as models in doing work for soldiers' families, in responding to calls for rear service, in carrying out the tasks of the militia. A far higher proportion of Party members than of other eligible men volunteered for the army.

But the branch and its members had defects as well as virtues.

Many of them preferred doing the difficult and dangerous jobs themselves to painstakingly convincing and arousing the rank and file of the poor and middle peasantry. And because of their activity in the struggles, Party members, though not known as such, had been elected to key posts in the village government. In 1947, for instance, the 'Five Big Cadres'—the village head, peasant union chairman, militia commander, the manager of the co-operative and the village political director—were all Party members. Thus the defect of 'mobilizing' mainly just the militants among the non-Party members, to support each succeeding campaign, was not simply a weakness of the cadres, as cadres; it was a defect of the village Party branch.

But these defects were over-shadowed by the Party members' accomplishments. By far the greater part of the smashing of the oppressive power of the landlords and rich peasants took place following and as a result of the re-formation of the Party branch in 1944. After this had taken place, the village branch was able to play its allotted role within the Chinese Communist Party. Between the village and the sub-county and county Party Committees there was established the characteristic two-way relationship which normally exists between all lower and higher Communist formations. The branch now carried out directives from above and at the same time took its part in the formation of those directives by passing on its own experiences and problems to the higher bodies. (As already pointed out, it was experience such as the Ten Mile Inn Party branch accumulated during the

Black Lands Campaign and passed on, upon which the Central Committee's May Fourth Directive was based.) Once the branch had been reformed, Central Committee directives were no longer delayed or distorted as that on Double Reduction had been. They were carried out to the best of the village Communists' ability. It was they who provided the tactical leadership in the village, served as its driving force and bore the brunt of the struggle. And in all these respects the branch's effectiveness increased as it recruited into its ranks the outstanding militants of each successive campaign.

Thus the new society which took the place of feudalism achieved its political expression in the Communist Party—just as the old society had achieved its political expression in the Kuomintang.

EPILOGUE

‘ONE STEP IN A TEN THOUSAND LEAGUE MARCH’¹

What is the significance of this ten years’ history of the building of one ‘backward village’ into a ‘revolutionary bastion’? How far are the events which occurred in Ten Mile Inn typical of what happened in the tens of thousands of China’s villages? What bearing have the steps described in this volume on the subsequent collectivization of agriculture, in fact, on the whole long and tortuous course of the whole Chinese revolution?

In so vast a country as China, local conditions were bound to vary; but the central task—the overthrowing of feudalism—remained the same.

So did the main steps of the process: the Reduction of Rent and Interest with its weakening of the economic power of the landlords and rich peasants; the land reform with its overthrowing of their political and economic power; and, more slowly of course, the changing of social customs and ideology.

And the ‘mass line’—whatever the time and place, whatever the degree of understanding and skill of those applying it—remained the guiding principle.

In these respects, what happened in Ten Mile Inn is typical of what happened in villages throughout the length and breadth of China.

A key factor in the course of revolutionary events in any one village was that of timing—in relation to the situation in the rest of the country. The first areas liberated existed in a very different political environment from the last. And this difference affected

¹ The phrase, ‘the first step in a ten thousand *li* march’, was used by Mao-Tse-tung in his speech, ‘On the People’s Democratic Dictatorship’, July 1st, 1949. in connection with the victory of the Chinese revolution.

above all the tempo of events. What it took Ten Mile Inn years to accomplish in the forties, other villages accomplished in a matter of months in the early fifties.

Ten Mile Inn was of special interest in another respect. In February 1948, a Communist work team arrived there to lead the village in a two-months' campaign for carrying out the Draft Agrarian Law (promulgated on October 10th, 1947). This team was part of a larger one under the direct leadership of the Central Bureau of the Communist Party of the Shansi-Hopeh-Shantung-Honan Border Region, which in turn was directly under the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. The large team had been formed to conduct an experimental campaign in the ninth sub-county of Wu An county—in which Ten Mile Inn is situated. The experiences of this experimental work team and of others like it went into the drafting of the Agrarian Law promulgated in 1950 by the Government of the People's Republic of China. It was in accordance with this law that land reform was carried out between 1950 and 1952 throughout all the newly liberated areas of mainland China (except for those inhabited by national minorities).

What bearing had the land reform in general on the whole Chinese revolution?

'We launched the movement for agricultural co-operation on the basis of a thoroughly completed land reform,' states Liu Shao-ch'i. 'In carrying out the land reform our Party did not take the simple and easy way of merely relying on administrative decrees and of "bestowing" land on the peasants. For three solid years after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, we applied ourselves to awakening the class consciousness of the peasants.... We consider the time spent was absolutely necessary. Because we had used such a method the peasant masses stood up on their own feet, got themselves organized, closely followed the lead of the Communist Party and the People's Government, and took the reins of government and the armed forces in the villages firmly into their hands.... The broad masses of the awakened peasants held that exploitation, whether by landlords or by rich peasants, was a shameful thing. Conditions were thus created which were favourable to the subsequent socialist transformation of agriculture and helped shorten to a great extent the time needed to bring about agricultural co-operation.'¹

EPILOGUE

The development of agriculture which this socialist transformation has brought about is the basis of socialist industrialization. The development of atomic power, automation and electronics, now going on in China, is possible, in a sense, only as a result of land reform.

The socialist transformation of agriculture and the building of industry are not, of course, merely technological processes. They are both technological and ideological. And the collective outlook on life and way of work associated with both agriculture and industry in China today have roots in the relations of mutual aid forged in the villages.

Neither socialist agriculture nor socialist industry, however, could have come into being without military victory in the civil war. And this victory received great impetus from land reform.

In November 1947, as the writers bumped and rattled along in a mule cart, on their first approach to Ten Mile Inn, over the crest of a hill there suddenly appeared a file of five hundred men. They were recruits to the People's Liberation Army. We had seen Chinese recruits before—in Kuomintang China—during the war against Japan. They were roped together and under guard. These Liberation Army recruits were neither roped nor guarded. They were volunteers, not conscripts. And they sang as they swung along.

This rivulet flowing from Ten Mile Inn and the near-by villages was part of a great stream from all over the Liberated Areas. This stream was released by land reform—and wherever it flowed, land reform followed.

Thus, in a sense, Ten Mile Inn is a microcosm, and these ten years of its history one step in the ten thousand league march of the Chinese revolution.

¹ In the Political Report of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China to the Eighth National Congress of the Party, September 15th, 1956.

APPENDICES

I. COMMUNIST POLICY: AN HISTORICAL SKETCH

The Communist Party of China was founded in 1921 and soon began organizing the poverty-stricken peasants around the revolutionary centre of Canton. Gradually it set in motion a well-organized peasant movement which spread over a considerable part of South China. This paved the way for the first practical steps towards realizing Sun Yat-sen's slogan, 'Land to the Tiller'. These were taken during the first period of Communist-Kuomintang united front, which lasted from 1924 to 1927.

In 1927 the Kuomintang, under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek, suddenly broke this united front and turned upon its erstwhile allies, slaughtering over ten thousand of them in Shanghai alone. The Communist Party then launched an armed struggle against their enemy. The first 'soviets' (local Communist-led governments) were established in south and south-east China, and the first widespread movement was begun to confiscate the land from the landlords and distribute it to the tillers.

The Soviet Period

At first the methods of confiscating and distributing the land varied from one part of the soviet areas to another. Then, in November 1931, the first All-China Soviet Congress was convened and drew up a Land Law which may be regarded as the 'grandfather' of the one passed in 1950 (and the 'father' of the Draft Agrarian Law of 1947).

The 1931 law ratified the confiscation of the land of the big landowners, which had already taken place, and called for further confiscation and distribution to poor and middle peasants, without compensation and without making any allocation to the former owners. Rich peasants¹ were also to have their land confiscated,

¹ See p. 181.

² The terms poor, middle and rich peasants and landlords are used in their technical sense defined below in the section on classification, p. 182 ff.

though they might be allotted a certain part of it on condition that they worked it themselves and did not engage in counter-revolutionary activity. The land of all counter-revolutionary individuals and organizations was to be confiscated.

According to Article 5 of this Land Law: ‘... Equitable distribution of all land is the most consistent method of destroying all feudal agrarian relations and the shackles of private ownership of land by the landlords. However, local soviet governments shall on no account carry out this measure by force, by an order issued by the higher authorities, but shall explain this principle to the peasantry from every angle. This measure may be put into operation only with the direct support and at the desire of the basic masses of the peasantry...’¹

Finally, the general principle was laid down that the local Soviets should, in conformity with the local conditions of every village, choose the method of land division most advantageous to the poor and middle peasants.

Just over two years after the proclamation of the Land Law at the first All-China Soviet Congress, the Second National Soviet Congress was held. On this occasion, as at the former congress, the report of the Central Executive Committee of the Chinese Soviet Republic was made by its chairman, Mao Tse-tung. In his report Mao dealt with the agrarian revolution, stating that millions of peasants had already confiscated land from landlords and rich peasants, that usury and onerous taxation had been abolished and that soviet land policy was to wipe out feudal and semi-feudal oppression and exploitation.

This in broad and general outline was the policy and practice of the Communist-led land reform movement from 1927 until 1937, when after years of effort, the Communists finally succeeded in establishing a united front with the Kuomintang for resisting Japanese aggression.

The War against Japan

An integral part of the united front which the Communists proposed was a united front agrarian policy.

To be successful such a policy had to offer advantages to both the landlord, whose traditional aim was to squeeze as much as he could out of the peasant, and to the peasant, for whom it was a

¹ This quotation, as well as a number of the factual statements regarding the content of the Land Law, is taken from the appendix to *The Chinese Soviets*, by Victor A. Yakhontoff. Coward Inc., New York, 1934.

matter of life and death to keep all he could of the fruits of his toil. These apparently conflicting advantages were in fact offered in the policy which the Communists put forward: the Reduction and Payment of Rent and Interest, or, for short, Double Reduction.

The reduction of rent and interest was actually part of the programme of the Kuomintang. It had been regarded by Sun Yat-sen, founder of the first Chinese Republic, as an essential step towards securing the 'Land for the Tiller'. In fact, it had been advocated by him, and other forerunners of the Kuomintang as early as 1906. Later it had been adopted as a slogan by the First National Congress of the Kuomintang in 1924.

When the Kuomintang government was set up in Nanking in 1927, the Reduction of Rent and Interest found its way on to the statute books. But so far as the Kuomintang areas were concerned, on the statute books it remained.

The Kuomintang statute called for the reduction of rent from the traditional 50 to 80 per cent of the crop to a maximum of 37 1/2 per cent; and for a reduction of interest to a maximum of 1 1/2 per cent per month. This statute, however, was never implemented until it was carried out by the Communists in 1937. The Communists added a new clause.

To draw the support of the landlords, they maintained it was necessary to guarantee that rent and interest, though reduced, should actually be paid.

Although Double Reduction meant calling a halt in the direct advance towards securing the land for the tiller, it was still a step forward not only economically but politically and socially. Under the Communists, besides guaranteeing property rights—of both landlords and rich peasants and of the peasant masses—it safeguarded the civil and political rights of all who opposed the Japanese.

The Double Reduction called on both the opposing rural classes to make sacrifices in the interests of consolidating a national united front. Its underlying spirit was—everyone and every class should be prepared to make sacrifices for the salvation of the nation.

It was during this period of the war against Japan that Ten Mile Inn first came under Communist leadership and took its first steps in reforming the age-old and oppressive agrarian system.

The Liberation War Period

The Communists led the peasants of the Liberated Areas in putting the Double Reduction policy into practice throughout the whole of

the war against Japan. They continued to do so even though, long before the end of the war, the arms of the Kuomintang were used more fiercely against Chinese Communists than against the Japanese.

In the course of armed resistance to the Japanese, a great change took place in class relations in the Communist-led regions. The poor and middle peasants and the farm labourers, who bore the brunt of the struggle against the enemy, grew in strength and confidence; the landlords and rich peasants, whose patriotism tended to wax and wane according to the enemy pressure, were weakened—by the Double Reduction, by progressive taxation and by a whole series of Communist-led reforms.

With the end of the war there was a widespread urge amongst the peasants to bring land ownership into line with the new balance of class forces.

The peasants—including those of Ten Mile Inn—devised their own methods of securing the land for those who tilled it. They confiscated and distributed the land of landlords who had collaborated with the Japanese and they bought the land of those landlords who felt that their day was over and that it was best to sell out while the selling was good. In some cases land was sold in default of fines imposed for previous evasion of taxes or for non-fulfilment of other obligations to the democratic government; in other cases landlords gave away part of their land to the peasants in the hope of retaining possession of the remainder. But the peasants saw through this and many of them said: 'If we settled with them properly, they'd have no land at all. Everything they have has been squeezed out of us.'

It was in this situation that the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China issued its May Fourth Directive (1946): 'Regarding Settling Accounts, Rent Reduction and Agrarian Problems.'

The Directive recorded: 'In the struggles of opposing traitors, settling accounts, reducing rent and interest, the peasants have been acquiring land directly from the hands of the landlords and have thus been carrying out the system of "Land to the Tiller"...

'Under these circumstances our Party must of necessity have a consistent policy: we must resolutely support the direct action adopted by the masses to carry out land reform and assume a planned leadership so that in every liberated area land reform may be quickly accomplished in accordance with the scale and intensity of the development of the mass movement.'

The Directive laid down certain clearly defined principles according to which the movement was to be conducted.

APPENDICES

The middle peasants were to be drawn into the movement by every means possible and in no case were their land or interests to be encroached upon. In general, the holdings of the rich peasants were not to be touched and emphasis was to remain on rent reduction except in exceptional cases where the demand of the masses was extraordinarily great. Even in such cases the rich peasants were not to be attacked too severely. This was because the rich peasant participates directly in production and has an important influence on it. Finally, even among the landlords, distinctions were to be made between 'tyrants', traitors and big landlords on the one hand and ordinary, small and medium landlords on the other. Where possible the latter were to be dealt with by negotiation. Even the former were to be left with means of livelihood. Commerce and industry, even that belonging to landlords, was to be protected, and in general a policy of magnanimity was to be pursued, with no physical violence and above all no taking of life except by formal legal procedure. All, including people of the landlord class, who had co-operated in the struggle against Japan were to be treated with consideration. Together with various non-peasant elements they were, so far as possible, to be drawn into a united front against feudalism and Kuomintang dictatorship and for peace, democracy and national unity.

The policy embodied in the May Fourth Directive was worked out during the months immediately following the end of the war against Japan. Officially this was a period of truce between the Communists and the Kuomintang. But the latter's breaches of the truce became increasingly flagrant, culminating in large-scale invasions of the Liberated Areas. Finally, as from July 7th, 1946, the Communists were forced to declare the existence of a state of war. Thus the May Fourth Directive was issued only two months before the beginning of the 'People's Liberation War'.

According to Liu Shao-ch'i¹:

'During the period between July 1946 and October 1947, the masses of peasants and our rural cadres in many areas of North China, Shantung and North-east China, in carrying out the agrarian reform, were unable to follow the directions issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on May 4th, 1946, to leave rich peasants' land and property untouched in the main.

¹ Report to the second meeting of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, June 14th, 1950, published in 'The Agrarian Reform Law' (pamphlet). Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1950.

‘They followed their own will and confiscated the land and property of rich peasants as well as that of the landlords. This is understandable. It is because this was a period of the most heated and bitter struggle between the Chinese people and the Kuomintang reactionaries. It was during this period that most of the deviations in agrarian reform occurred, in which the interests of part of the middle peasants were encroached on, industry and commerce in the rural areas were partly undermined and cases of indiscriminate beatings and killings occurred in some places.

These things happened mainly because of the serious political and military situation at that time, and because most of our rural cadres had no experience of carrying out agrarian reform, they did not know how to delineate classes correctly in the rural areas and in a number of cases mistakenly characterized rich peasants as landlords and middle peasants as rich peasants.’ (These were the very deviations which occurred in Ten Mile Inn.)

In September 1947, therefore, the Communist Party convened a National Agrarian Conference, which worked out a new Draft Agrarian Law. At this time the rich peasants still had no real faith in the victory of the revolution and were inclined to side with the landlords and Chiang Kai-shek. At the same time revolutionary victory demanded that the mass of the peasants should make great sacrifices in the form of fighting and contributing grain and labour. Under these circumstances the Draft Agrarian Law made it permissible for the surplus land and property of the rich peasants and all the property of the landlords to be requisitioned, to help satisfy the demands of the poverty-stricken peasants and to heighten their enthusiasm for the revolutionary war.

The Draft Agrarian Law was submitted to each of the Border Regions of the Liberated Areas for consideration. Each region actually passed the law, with or without modification, and put it into effect in its own area.

In accordance with the provisions of the Draft Agrarian Law, and with added guidance from statements on ‘The Present Situation and Our Tasks’ by Mao Tse-tung, on ‘Problems Concerning Land Reform’ by Central Committee member Jen Pi-shih, and on ‘Class Delineation’ by the Central Committee (all issued during the winter of 1947–8), land reform was completed throughout all the old Liberated Areas. The feudal land ownership system was abolished and that of peasant ownership was put into effect in an area with a population of 160 millions—or one-third of the population of China.

II. 'THE THOUGHT OF MAO TSE-TUNG'

The theoretical starting-point of the great agrarian movements which the Chinese Communists have led is the starting-point of the Communist Manifesto:

'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.'

The concepts of 'class' and 'class struggle' and the whole body of Marxist theory have been fused with the carrying out of the Chinese revolution in the Thought of Mao Tse-tung.

'What Comrade Mao Tse-tung has done as a disciple of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin,' writes Liu Shao-ch'i,¹ 'is precisely to unite the theories of Marxism with the actual practice of the Chinese revolution, thus giving rise to Chinese Communism—the Thought of Mao Tse-tung....'

'In the theoretical field, he was boldly creative, discarding certain specific Marxist principles and conclusions that were obsolete and incompatible with China's new historical conditions. This is the reason why he has been able to carry out successfully the difficult and gigantic work of applying Marxism to China.'

Classification

In 'The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party' Mao Tse-tung explains that an understanding of class structure is essential for solving the problem of who will carry out the revolution and against whom it will be directed. He goes on to define the main classes of Chinese society—the landlord class, the bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie, the peasantry and the proletariat.

A detailed document on classification was issued by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party in 1933. This was brought up to date at the end of 1947 to serve as a guide in carrying out the Draft Agrarian Law which had been issued in October that year. Some problems which arose regarding classification during the carrying out of this law were dealt with

¹ In *On the Party*, by Liu Shao-ch'i. Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1950, pp. 33 ff.

by Central Committee member Jen Pi-shih in his report: 'Some Problems concerning Land Reform'.¹

'There is just one criterion for determining class,' said Jen Pi-shih. 'It is based upon people's different relationships to the means of production. This determines every kind of class difference. The possession or lack of means of production, the quantity and type of means of production owned and how they are utilized—all the various kinds of different productive relationships between exploiter and exploited constitute the only criterion for determining class.

'What are the means of production? In industry the means of production are factories, machinery, raw materials and other forms of capital. In agriculture the means of production are land, draught-animals, farm implements, buildings, etc. It is the possession or lack of these and other means of production, the quantity and type of those which are owned, the way they are used (whether the owner uses them himself in cultivating the land, hires labourers to use them or rents them out)—all the various kinds of production relationships—which are the sole criterion for determining class.

'On the basis of the above criterion, it is very easy to differentiate between the various classes in the rural areas. The principal class lines which can be drawn there are in general as follows:

'(1) Those who possess a large amount of land, who do not labour themselves but depend entirely upon exploiting the peasants through rent and usury, who maintain themselves without labouring—these are landlords.

'(2) Those who own large amounts of land, draught animals and farm implements, who themselves take part in the main labour but at the same time exploit hired peasant labour—these are rich peasants.

'China's old-type rich peasants are strongly feudal in nature. Most of them engage in usury or rent out part of their land. On the one hand they themselves labour like peasants, on the other hand they engage in feudal or semi-feudal exploitation like landlords.

'(3) Those who have land, draught animals and farm implements themselves, and who labour themselves but do not exploit others, or who do so to only a very slight extent—these are middle peasants.

'(4) Those who have only a small amount of land, farm implements, etc., who labour themselves but at the same time sell part of their own labour power—these are poor peasants.

¹ Delivered on January 12th, 1948, to an enlarged meeting of the North-West Front Field Armies' Frontline Committee.

‘(5) Those who have no land, draught animals or farm implements and who sell their own labour power—these are hired labourers.

‘This is the way the principal rural classes should in general be determined....

‘Besides these there are other complicated cases which need to be worked out in detail. Those which have been discussed above are the most typical conditions.’

Jen Pi-shih goes on to take up some of the more complicated cases in detail; then he deals with how an individual may change his class.

‘In the new [liberated] areas,’ says Jen Pi-shih, ‘landlords and rich peasants who had gone bankrupt and become middle or poor peasants at least a year before the establishment of the democratic regime should be accepted as members of the middle or poor peasant class. This is because they were forced into their decline by the exactions of the Kuomintang. But peasants who through long years of toil and saving climb up from poverty to become rich peasants or landlords are to be considered as members of these classes only after having belonged to them for three years....

‘In the old areas, as regards landlords and rich peasants who have declined because of the just allocation of burden (i.e. taxation, etc.) under the democratic administration, reduction of rent and interest, settling of accounts’ struggles and other similar reasons: all landlords who personally labour in the fields for five consecutive years and who do not again exploit others should have their class changed to that of peasant (middle peasant, poor peasant or labourer) in accordance with the actual conditions; rich peasants who have ceased to exploit others for three consecutive years should also similarly change their class....

‘Is there any danger in changing the class of landlords who have laboured for five years and of rich peasants who have not exploited anyone for three years? I think not, if their land and property have been equally distributed. Furthermore, many years of labour can reform a man....”

In statements by Mao Tse-tung and others, the Chinese Communist Party has pointed out that the triple target against which the Chinese revolution was aimed was: feudalism, imperialism and bureaucratic capitalism. This target and the different classes comprising Chinese society having been defined, it can be decided who will carry out the revolution and against whom it will be directed.

But a crucial question remains. How will revolutionary forces be mobilized?

The answer to this question involves another basic Communist concept—the mass line.

The Mass Line

‘... The mass line is the fundamental political and organizational line of our Party,’ say Liu Shao-ch’i.¹ He goes on to stress that four concepts must be firmly established in the mind of every Party member for the thorough carrying out of this line.

‘Firstly, there is the standpoint that everything is for the masses and for serving the masses wholeheartedly... our Party members and those who have joined the revolutionary ranks are serving the people, regardless of whether or not they are aware of it, whether they occupy important, leading positions or are merely privates, cooks or grooms. They are all of them directly or indirectly in the service of the people at different posts, and are therefore equal and honourable....

‘Secondly, there is the standpoint of assuming full responsibility to the masses of the people....

‘It is also necessary to understand the unity between responsibility to the people and responsibility to the leading bodies of our Party... the interests of the Party are identical with the interests of the people.... The interests of the people are the very interests of the Party. The Party has no particular interest of its own other than the people’s interest.

‘Thirdly, there is the standpoint of having faith in the people’s selfemancipation... that the people alone are the real makers of history... that only through their own struggles and efforts can their emancipation be achieved, maintained and consolidated....

‘... Merely through the efforts of the vanguard and without the people’s own genuine consciousness and mobilization, emancipation of the people is impossible, history will not move forward and nothing can be accomplished....

‘... Therefore, when the masses are not fully conscious, the duty of Communists—the vanguard of the masses of the people—in carrying out any kind of work is to develop their consciousness by every effective and suitable means. This is

¹ ‘Regarding the Mass Line of the Party’, *On the Party*, by Liu Shao-ch’i. (Verbatim report on the Revision of the Party Constitution, delivered by Liu Shao-ch’i on May 14th, 1945, to the Seventh National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party. Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1950.)

the first step in our work which must be well done no matter how difficult it is or how much time it will take.

‘Only when the first step has been taken can we enter upon the second step. In other words, when the masses have reached the necessary level of consciousness, it is then our responsibility to guide them in their action—to guide them to organize and to fight. When this is brought about, we may further develop their consciousness through their actions. This is how we lead the masses step by step to fight for the basic slogans of the people as put forward by our Party....

‘Fourthly, there is the standpoint of learning from the masses of the people.... We must have adequate knowledge and must be sufficiently experienced and vigilant before we can successfully raise the people’s consciousness, lead their actions and serve them well. Learning is indispensable, if we are to acquire knowledge, experience and foresight.

‘We may enrich our knowledge by studying Marxist-Leninist theories and by studying history and lessons of the people’s struggles in foreign lands. We can also learn from our enemies. But what is most important is to learn from the masses of the people, since their knowledge and experience are the most abundant and most practical and their creative power is the greatest. This is why Comrade Mao Tse-tung has time and again told us to learn from the masses before we can educate them.... It will certainly be futile, if instead we should conceitedly devise a set of schemes out of our own imagination or mechanically introduce a set of schemes from historical or foreign experiences in order to develop the consciousness of the masses and to guide them. In order to learn unceasingly from the masses, we must not stand isolated from the people for a single moment. If we do so our knowledge will be greatly limited and certainly we cannot be intelligent, informed, capable, or competent to give them leadership....

‘In all sections of the masses there are generally to be found relatively active elements, intermediate elements and backward elements. In the initial stages the active elements are usually in the minority, while the intermediate and the backward elements make up the broad masses. In accordance with the mass line attention must be paid to the majority, that is, the intermediate and the backward elements, otherwise the advanced sections will become isolated and nothing can be done satisfactorily. The slogans of action and the form of struggle and of organization we put forward before

the masses must be acceptable to the intermediate and the backward elements. The development of the consciousness and the self-activity of the masses concerns chiefly these people. A mass movement is possible only when these people are awakened and inspired to action.

‘We must pay particular attention to educating, uniting and organizing the active elements so that they may become the nucleus of leadership among the masses. However, it must be clearly understood that we are not organizing the active elements merely for their own sake and that it is absolutely unpermissible to isolate these elements from the intermediate and backward masses. Our sole intention is to attract and set in motion the intermediate and backward elements through the active elements. In other words, it is for rallying the broadest possible masses that the active elements are to be organized. If the intermediate and backward elements are not yet awakened, we must know how to enlighten them as well as how to wait for them. If we are unwilling to wait, but recklessly rush forward with a small number of the active elements following us, we will isolate ourselves from the masses and end in failure.

‘In our work, the rather low cultural level of the masses of the Chinese peasantry and other sections of the people, except for the intelligentsia, make it all the more necessary to combine individual guidance with general directives and to set a whole campaign in motion by breaking through at one point. General directives will never succeed with masses of a low cultural level. This is due to the fact that the masses, especially the peasantry, usually consider problems on the basis of their personal experiences instead of on the basis of our general propaganda and slogans. In our work we should break through at one point to give an example to the masses and let them see and understand things for themselves. Only by giving examples to the masses can we encourage them, particularly the intermediate and backward elements, by affording them the opportunities and facilities to understand the problems, thereby instilling in them confidence and courage to act under our Party’s slogans and to culminate in an upsurge of mass enthusiasm.’

INDEX

- Accusation meetings, 149–50
‘Adjustment of Landholdings and the Purification and Reorganization of the Party’ Campaign (*see* Campaigns)
Administration, xv, 39
Agrarian Policy
 Soviet Period, 176–7
 Anti-Japanese War Period, 176–8
 Liberation War Period, 176–81
Agrarian Reform Law (1950), 180
 (Draft, 1947), vii, 181
Agrarian Socialism, 135
‘Allied Struggle of the People of Town and Countryside’ Campaign (*see* Campaigns)
Anti-Japanese County Government, 34, 5
- Banditry, 16
Bethrothal, 9, 10
‘Blacklands’ Campaign (*see* Campaigns)
Border Regions, vii, (footnote), xv
Border Region Agrarian Conference, viii
Border Region Government,
- Campaigns
 ‘Adjustment of Landholdings and Purification and Rectification of the Communist Party’ (1948), ix
 ‘Allied Struggle of the People of Town and Countryside’ (Dec. 1945), 110–13
 ‘Black Lands Campaign’ (spring, 1946), 113–21, 125, 127–8
 ‘Clearing-up Debts Campaign’ (1942–3), 59–62
 ‘Digging-out the Air-raid Shelters’ (1947), 153–7
 ‘Digging out the Landlords’ Hidden Grain’ (1942–3), 59–9
 ‘Disaster Relief and Spring Cultivation’ (1942–3), 57
 ‘Dividing the Family’ (summer, 1947), 138, 143, 145–53
 ‘Double Reduction’ (*see* ‘Reduction and Payment of Rent and Interest’)
 ‘Feudal Tails Campaign’ (1946), 130–7, 138
 ‘Filling the Holes and Levelling the Tops’ (1946), 127–30, 138
 ‘Mortgage-killing Campaign’ (1946), 116, 140
 ‘Purification and Reorganization of the Party’ (1948) (Part of the Campaign for the Adjustment of Landholdings), ix.
 ‘Reclamation of Wasteland Campaign’ (1944), 72–2
 ‘Reduction and Payment of Rent and Interest’ (1944), 52, 60, 96–100, 122, 127, 128, 178
 ‘Settling Accounts with Traitors’ (in Wu An County town, 1945), 100
 ‘Washing Faces and Rubbing off Smudges’ (1947), 157–9
- Capital punishment, 152
Chiang Kai-shek, 16–17, 10, 9, 176
Chinese Communists, The, Stuart Gelder, 57
Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party, The, Mao Tse-tung, Clan (*chia tsu*), 12, 13, 166
Class Character of Man, The, Liu Shaochi, 108
Classification, 130–1, 145–7, 182–4
‘Clearing-up Debts Campaign’ (*see* Campaigns)
Commerce, xv, xix, 2, 3, 35, 46, 49–50, 112
Communist Party Village Branch, 54–5, 92–3, 107–8, 170–2
Concubines, 8, 101
Co-operative, xviii, 49–51, 67, 68–71, 143–3, 162, 164
Corporal punishment, 152
Corruption, 47–8, 65–6, 78–9, 80–1
Courts (People’s), 103, 152

- Crafts, xv, 4, 5
 Currency, 59
 Debt, 19, 59–62
 Defence Corps, 75
 ‘Digging-out Air-raid Shelters’ (see Campaigns)
 ‘Digging out the Landlords’ Hidden Grain’ (see Campaigns)
 ‘Disaster Relief and Spring Cultivation’ (see Campaigns)
 ‘Dividing the Family’ (see Campaigns)
 Diviners (*shen p’o*), 166–7
 ‘Double Reduction Campaign’ (see Campaigns)
 Draft Agrarian Law (1947), 174, 181
 Drugs, 20, 21, 31, 124
- Education, 13, 83–4, 143–5
 Eighth Route Army, 34, 37
 Elections, 94
 Equalitarianism, 135
 Family, 2, 5–12, 165
 Famine, 28–9, 56–9
 Festivals, 12, 14–15
 ‘Feudal Tails Campaign’ (see Campaigns)
 Feudalism (definition), xvi
 ‘Filling the Holes and Levelling the Tops’ (see Campaigns)
- Green Circle Gang, 16, 17, 22
- Handicrafts (see Crafts)
 Heavenly Gate Society, 16
 Hiring of labour, 3, 24, 51
 Home-raised daughters-in-law, 10–11
How to be a Good Communist, Liu Shaochi, 108
- Infanticide, 11, 166
 Inheritance system, 5, 25
- Japanese invasion, 31, 33–4, 110, 139, 177–8
 Jen Pi-shih (policy statements), 137, 181, 183–4, 152, 155
- Kuomintang, 17, 22, 26, 31–3, 100, 109–10, 176, 177, 178
- Lai Jo-yu, 135, 137
 Labour Heroes and Heroines, 72–3
 Land ownership, 3, 160–1, 181
- Land tenure, 3, 13
 Landlord association, 3
 Landlords’ Back Home Corps, 124
 Lawsuits, 21–2
 Lenin, 136, 142
 ‘Left wing’ *Communism, an Infantile Disorder*, Lenin, 136, 142
 Liberated Areas, vii
 Literacy, 46, 144, 167
 Liu Shao-chi
 The Class Character of Man, 108
 Report to the Second Meeting of the National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, 180
 On the Party, 182, 185
- Mao Tse-tung
 The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party, v
 On New Democracy, 112
 Speech to the Shansi-Suiyuan Cadres, 113
 On People’s Democratic Dictatorship, 173
 Statement made at the Second National Congress of the Soviet Republic of China, 177
 The Present Situation and Our Tasks, 181
 ‘The Thought of Mao Tse-tung’, 182–7
- Marriage, 7, 8, 9, 10, 166
 Mass Line, 50, 185–7
 May Fourth Directive (1946), 125–6, 179–80
 Medicine, 13, 14, 167
 ‘Middle Peasant Line’, 120, 156
 Military action (see Militia), 75
 Military service, 75
 Militia, 40–2, 74–6, 99
 ‘Mortgage-killing Campaign’ (see Campaigns)
 Mother-in-law tyranny, 7, 8, 43, 102–4
 Movements (see Campaigns)
 Mutual aid, 62–8, 130, 146, 148, 154, 162–5
- National Agrarian Conference, 181
 Nationalist Party (see Kuomintang)
- Old Men’s Corps, 75
 On the Party, Report to the Seventh

INDEX

- National Party Congress*, Liu Shaochi, 182, 185
- On People's Democratic Dictatorship*, Mao Tse-tung, 173
- Paochia System*, 6, 15, 27, 38
- Peasant Union, 51–4, 58–9, 148, 153, 164
- Peasant Women's Association, 104–8
- People's Daily* (newspaper), xviii
- People's Liberation Army, xviii, 175
- Present Situation and Our Tasks*, *The*, Mao Tse-tung, 181
- 'Purification and Reorganization of the Party' (*see* Campaigns)
- 'Reclamation of Wasteland' (*see* Campaigns)
- 'Reduction and Payment of Rent and Interest' (*see* Campaigns)
- Rent, 1
- Report to the Second Meeting of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference*, Liu Shao-chi, 180
- Sacrifice League, 37–8, 54
- Sale of Children, 6, 10, 11, 28, 29
- Schools, 13, 83–4, 143, 148, 167–9
- Secret agents, 82–90, 143
- Secret societies, 16, 17
- 'Settling Accounts with Traitors' (*see* Campaigns)
- Soldiers' dependants (support for), 76
- Some Problems Regarding Land Reform*, Jen Pi-shih, 137, 181, 183–4
- Soviets, 176–7
- Speech to the Shansi-Suiyuan Cadres*, Mao Tse-tung, 113
- Status of women, 7, 13
- 'Struggle Fruits', 118–20
- 'Struggle Objects', 118, 128, 130, 146
- Sun Yat-sen, founder of the first Chinese Republic, 176, 178
- Taxation, 14, 16, 24, 35–7, 46–9, 50, 95–6
- Tax evasion, 48–9, 113ff.
- Temple Association, 14, 15, 26, 29, 123, 166
- Teng Hsiao-ping (report on the famine in the T'aihang Mountains), 57
- Tenure (*see* Land tenure)
- Trade-and-transport (*shihk'an*), xix, 67, 162
- Treatment of disease, 13
- United Front
- Anti-warlord, 176
- Anti-Japanese, 100, 177–8
- Usury, 1, 3, 5, 19, 20, 23, 26, 28, 121
- Village government, 38–9, 59
- Village industries, xv, 2, 162ff.
- 'Washing Faces and Rubbing Off Smudges' (*see* Campaigns)
- Winter school, 60, 98, 167
- Women's association, 42–6, 69–71, 73, 100–4, 134–5
- Work teams, viii
- Yellow Incense Society, 13, 167
- Youth Corps, 75