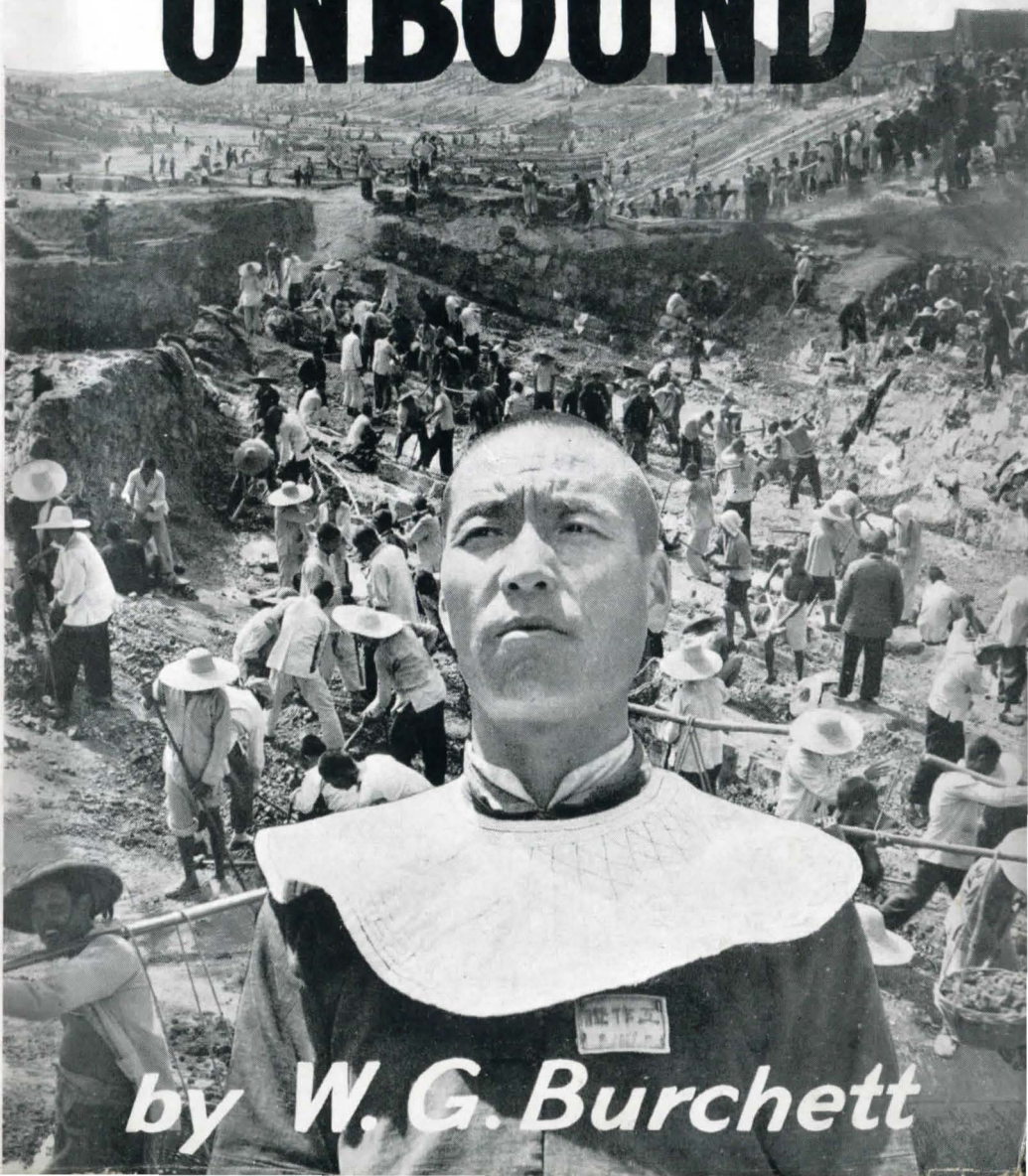


# CHINA'S FEET UNBOUND



*by W. G. Burchett*

## THE AUTHOR AND HIS BOOK

Wilfred Burchett is one of a few Australian journalists with an international reputation. After returning from Europe in 1939, he covered the overthrow of the Vichyites in New Caledonia in 1941, the story of which is told in his first book, **Pacific Treasure Island**. He was then assigned by a group of Australian newspapers to report on war preparations in South-East Asia and the Far East. While in Chungking he joined the staff of the London "Daily Express" and remained with that paper as a war correspondent until the end of the war in the Pacific in 1945. During these years he covered operations in China, Burma, India, and was attached to the United States Fleet in the Pacific under Admiral Nimitz. Severely wounded in Burma in 1943, Burchett spent several months in hospital in India, and while there collected and arranged the material for his outstanding book, **Wingate's Adventure**, the story of the late Brigadier Orde Wingate's campaign in Burma.



**CHINA'S FEET UNBOUND**

**Wilfred G. Burchett**

1952  
**LAWRENCE AND WISHART,  
LONDON**

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Registered for transmission by post as a book, at  
the G.P.O., Melbourne.

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Printed by  
CORONATION PRESS PTY. LTD.,

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THE CHANGING TIDE (A Play in Five Acts)

## INTRODUCTION

"China's Feet Unbound" is an account of the remarkable changes which have occurred in the lives of a quarter of humanity, of almost half a billion people, since the foundation of the Chinese People's Republic on October 1, 1949. The whole of humanity cannot but be affected by these changes. Its impact is immeasurable and as yet but dimly realised in the outside world. Accent in the book is on what has taken place, not on how it has taken place. It is based on travels over wide areas of People's China, discussions with hundreds of peasants, workers, intellectuals, and high government cadres, superimposed on impressions from two war-time visits to Kuomintang China.

The author makes no apologies for having produced a book after only six months' stay in People's China, although deficiencies and omissions as well as the reluctance to touch on the "how" of the Chinese revolution are due to the impossibility of doing justice to such a subject after such a short stay. The book has been written because there is as yet no other available record of contemporary developments. It is intended to answer the questions of people in the western world who are being conditioned for war against People's China. It is written as a weapon for those who fight for peace and as confirmation for those who refuse to accept the idea that their living standards must be lowered; their civil rights abolished; their late enemies re-armed because China menaces world peace. It was written against the background of American bombs landing on Chinese soil, American tanks rumbling towards China's frontier, American germ warfare launched against China's neighbor.

The book is an attempt to present a picture of the swiftly changing economic and social scene in People's China with some glances into the past and some into the foreseeable future. It is intended that "China's Feet Unbound" will be followed by another book dealing with aspects of the Chinese revolution not touched on in the present work.

WILFRED G. BURCHETT.

Peking, July 15, 1951.

## CHAPTER I

### OUTPOSTS OF IMPERIALISM

THE first two gateways through which the Western world forced its attentions on China were Macao and Hong Kong. Portuguese and English fortresses, they face each other across the forty miles wide estuary of the Pearl River which cuts into the south coast of China and leads to the great commercial port of Canton. These fortress cities now remain the last two outposts of foreign imperialism in People's China. Hong Kong is a rocky, mountainous island with a magnificent natural harbor, Macao rests at the tip of a long peninsula. It was from Macao that the British East India Company conducted its opium smuggling trade into China with opium grown by the East India Company in India. It was forbidden to sell the drug in India itself because of the harmful effects on the peasants and workers who were the Company's source of prosperity. (The proceeds from opium smuggling made up 20 per cent. of the entire revenue of the Government of India.) The main traders in opium were a pair of enterprising Britishers, Messrs. Jardine & Matheson. Their first go-between and interpreter in the shady business was a Chinese-speaking Lutheran missionary from Macao, a Dr. Charles Gutzlaff. It is recorded that he struggled with his conscience for several days before he violated his pledges as a doctor of medicine and a man of God to help smuggle a health-destroying, demoralising drug to the people he had come to convert to a Christian way of life. He comforted himself with the thought that the opium trade would open the way for Western penetration and the sale of Bibles.

The firm of Jardine & Matheson became extremely prosperous and powerful as the result of the opium trade. To-day their ships share with those of Butterfield & Swire almost a monopoly of Far Eastern trade. Their buildings dominate the Hong Kong skyline. Jardine & Matheson have built a great economic

empire on the foundations of opium smuggling. The Manchu Emperor, Tao Kuang (Glorious Rectitude) at Peking took energetic measures in the 1830's to stamp out the opium trade. Canton was the only port of entry for foreign traders into China. Rigid controls were established there, but Jardine & Matheson sent their clippers along the South China coast, anchored in the hundreds of quiet bays, and with the missionary as chief negotiator, dumped the chests of opium on to waiting sampans.

The Emperor was probably less concerned about the effects of the drug on his subjects than with the loss of revenue from the opium trade. Instead of getting good silver for the silks and spices which filled the East India Company clippers to the hatch-covers, the British were paying in opium. The local mandarin at Canton was urged to take stronger and stronger measures and finally to close down the British trading post. At the time large quantities of opium were stored there, and at the island of Lantau, in the middle of the Pearl River estuary. Many incidents were provoked. In one of these a foolish British negotiator, Lord Napier (addressed by the Mandarin as "Laboriously Vile") sent for British frigates to blast their way up the Pearl River to Canton. The Chinese sank barges filled with stones behind the frigates and neatly blocked a retreat. Lord Napier retired in such a fit of tantrums and cholera that he died of a high fever shortly after reaching Macao. His successor, after several more incidents, agreed to stop the opium trade and to dump all opium stocks into the sea. Twenty thousand chests were dumped in at Lantau, valued at about 6,000,000 U.S. dollars. An outraged Mr. Jardine went post-haste to London to protest at such high-handed and outrageous interference with "legitimate" business. He found a sympathetic hearing with Lord Palmerston, and a British fleet was despatched to teach Emperors and mandarins that rights of British traders could not be so lightly trampled on, that British trade must be carried on whether it was welcome or unwelcome. And so began the Opium War which resulted in Western Imperialism getting its first real foothold in China. As a result of the victory of British men-of-war over the Emperor's junks, Britain got Hong Kong, exclusive trading-rights in Canton, 6,000,000 U.S. dollars

compensation for the costs of all opium which had been dumped into the sea, 15,000,000 U.S. dollars compensation for the costs of all the armed forays and clashes in the Pearl River estuary and elsewhere, Jardine & Matheson were confirmed as the leading traders, the missionaries were able to sell their Bibles. Traders pushed their illegitimate opium smuggling further and further up the Eastern coast; missionaries pushed their Bibles and doctrines inland. Between the two they provided ever more excuses for imperialism to send its men-of-war and gunboats into Chinese ports and along her rivers. The Opium War opened up the whole miserable century of foreign imperialism in China which brought nothing but misery, wars, massacres, famines, in its wake. Britain, and the other imperialist powers which soon followed her lead, secured special treaty rights in all the main ports, extra-territorial rights for their subjects, and control of China's Customs. British, French, Tsarist Russian, American, German, and finally Japanese imperialists, bit deep into the living body of China and tried to reduce her people to the status of slaves. In parks in the International Settlement, an imperialist concession carved out of Shanghai, notices at the entrances to parks and gardens read "Chinese and Dogs not admitted."

In the old days Macao existed first as a port of call for Portuguese traders with Japan, then as a centre of missionary and smuggling activity. Cathedrals, churches, convents and headquarters of many Catholic missions still exist in a community of about 20,000 Portuguese, most of them born in the colony. To-day it is a centre for gambling, opium-smoking, sing-song girls and dwindling missionary activity. It depends on the tolerance of People's China for its existence. It is a picturesque old place with its tightly cobbled, narrow winding streets and gaily tinted baroque buildings along the waterfront—and a favorite haunt for "trippers" from Hong Kong where opium dens, gambling casinos and sing-song houses are officially frowned upon.

One can take a bus to the ancient archway which marks the border between Macao and People's China. A few coal-black Moroccan soldiers loll around idly watching the mass of traffic pass each way through the archway. There are few formalities for Chinese passing back and forth from People's

China into Portuguese Macao. From China, they stream through on foot, jogging along with bundles of vegetables on one end, a dozen ducks swaying on the other end of a bamboo carrying pole slung across the shoulder. Bicycle rickshas fly past laden with empty boxes for Macao's match industry, or papier-mache cartons for Macao's main industry—supplying the world market with fireworks. Red and yellow buses flying the five-starred red flag of People's China pass through every thirty minutes. They pause under the archway for a moment while a Portuguese customs officer examines the drivers' papers. Soldiers and officials look bored and listless sitting around in the sun and dust. In the evening they will spend their time in the special soldiers' brothels in "Street of Happiness," or try their luck at the casinos. It is a demoralising life and troops are never stationed there more than one year and usually only six months. Officials, including the governor, stay a maximum of three years.

The wharves are bustling with activity. Squealing pigs encased in woven reed baskets are being unloaded from square-sailed junks; smaller sampans disgorge bags of rice and mountains of vegetables, ferry boats ply across a couple of hundred yards of water which divide the Macao Peninsula from a town in People's China. Hundreds of fishing boats ride at anchor in the calm river, drawn up in lines and rows like troops on parade, their oiled masts glinting in the sunlight like bayonets. A Portuguese sloop squats greyly on the water, its guns pointed at the fishing smacks—a shabby reminder of the hey-day of Portuguese naval power. Bald-pated friars in brown robes, beads and crosses dangling between their legs, prowl along the cobbled streets about their mysterious business. The hospital still stands where "Laboriously Vile" expired in high dudgeon and high fever; a British cemetery hides the tombs of many scions of noble families killed in pushing opium and Bibles into China. Amongst the tombstones is that of Lord John Spencer Churchill, fourth son of the fifth Earl of Marlborough, who died gallantly aboard the frigate *Druid* protecting the opium smugglers.

Macao's industries and her population are fed from People's China; apart from rice, vegetables and pork for the masses, the

food delicatessen shops which alternate with the sing-song houses in "Street of Happiness," display owls, civet cats, snakes and monkeys, considered as great delicacies by wealthy Chinese who have sought refuge in Macao from Canton and other cities in Kwantung province. Soup with a whole baby monkey in it is considered particularly appetising.

Every street, church and fort in Macao has played its part in the sordid history of western penetration of China. It was the gateway through which the West arrogantly forced its way into China at the point of a gun; it is now a gateway through which remnants of an era which is past, slink back from China. Discredited missionaries, Kuomintang traitors come through to plot awhile, to dream of a counter-action and finally to filter back to Europe or flee to South America. Whatever the final status of Macao, part of it will probably be preserved as a museum piece of Western imperialism.

Hong Kong was originally an infant granddaughter of Macao. It was ceded to the British as a result of the marriage of British and Portuguese interests in the Opium Wars 500 years after the Portuguese got Macao. To-day it is also something of a museum piece of British Imperialism, but perhaps a working model would be a better way of describing this last British outpost in China. Life goes on there exactly as if no world-shaking changes had occurred across the water. Chinese are kept in their "place," white supremacy is the keynote of the administration, the clubs are filled with whisky-swilling red-faced "taipans," abusing at the tops of their voices Chiang Kai-shek for letting them down, Mao Tse-tung for being alive, the Chinese club jarmen for being stupid. To-day their abuse extends to the Americans for having spoiled their trade. Undaunted by having been pushed out of Hong Kong within 24 hours by the Japanese, they boast of being able to hold the colony indefinitely in the event of an attack by the "Reds."

The colony is full of customs officers, businessmen, police officers and missionaries, "refugees" complaining of their fate in being stripped of the privileges which had been theirs so long by virtue of their white skins and which they have now lost in Shanghai, Tientsin, Tsingtao, Nanking and a dozen other places. Some blamed Chiang, some the Communists,



some their own government, and many the Americans. Some had been prepared to stay on in People's China even without the special privileges as long as there was business to be done, souls to be saved and Bibles to be sold. The American blockade had ruined trade, American arrogance had ruined relations, American pressure was ruining British chances. So the arguments went.

The year 1950 had been the best year in the history of Hong Kong. Trade reached half a billion pounds, half as much again as 1949, three times as much as 1947. British commerce was cashing in on American mistakes in China. Trade could reach a billion, two or three billion pounds if it were allowed to develop naturally. China's needs for machinery, railway and coalmining equipment could keep British industry and shipping busy for decades, but America insisted on the blockade, insisted on Britain drastically reducing her trade. Raw materials to Hong Kong itself were cut off. Factories were closing down in early 1951. By February there were 50,000 unemployed and Chinese technicians were streaming back across the border to put their skills at the disposal of People's China. The lucrative coastal trade with Tientsin and Shanghai continued but dwindled in volume. American insistence on rail-roading through the United Nations a resolution branding China as an aggressor outraged the British business community in Hong Kong as much as it outraged progressive world opinion. For other reasons, of course.

The firm of Jardine & Matheson was still flourishing, however. It had always moved ahead with the times. Opium clippers were replaced by ocean liners, and now the firm was competing with Butterfield & Swire to control the air-line services which radiated out of Hong Kong's Kai Tak airport to Indo-China, Malaya, Borneo, Thailand, Burma and the Philippines. Smugglers had moved with the times too. Even if the air-lines themselves were not officially in the smuggling business, pilots were constantly being arrested for smuggling opium and gold between India and Hong Kong. Arrests were usually a mistake, I was assured. The wrong official had been paid off or had not been paid sufficient. One crew of a Catalina flying boat flew too close to Chinese waters, dropping opium near

Macao, and the flying boat was forced to land. The Australian crew was arrested by Chinese authorities, the Catalina confiscated. Small airline operators made fortunes flying out wealthy Kuomintang supporters for fabulous sums from last-ditch hide-outs, Shanghai and Canton and Hainan Island. They were looking forward to excellent business again as soon as the invasion of Taiwan (Formosa) started. Some who swallowed American propaganda were even speculating how much could be cleaned up from the evacuation of Hong Kong. Chiang Kai-shek's rapid defeats in the coastal cities made millionaires (in U.S. dollars) of some of the smaller air-line operators.

On Hong Kong's Kai Tak airport were 70 twin-engined and four-engined Douglas passenger planes which belong to People's China. They had belonged to the government-controlled China National Airways Corporation, and were flown to Kai Tak in the last days of Kuomintang operations on the mainland. They automatically became the property of the People's Government. A British court in Hong Kong confirmed this claim. While the complicated legal proceedings were going on Kuomintang agents were busy removing as many parts from the planes as possible and shipping them away under the noses of British police. The court awarded People's China the planes. Kuomintang saboteurs put explosive charges in several of the planes and blew off part of the tails. Chiang Kai-shek's agent, the American Air Force General Chenault, claimed them as his property, and appealed against the court decision. The appeal had not been heard at the time I passed through Hong Kong, but valuable property of the People's Government was rusting away, the tyres perishing while Britain once again bowed to American orders, this time the orders of an American individual.

Chiang Kai-shek agents swarm all over the colony, run newspapers there and ironically enough provide much of what passes for news about Hong Kong itself in the British-owned Hong Kong newspapers from the Kuomintang newsagency in Taiwan. One could read every day of Communist plots to sabotage industry in the colony (when this was being effectively sabotaged by the Americans), of plots to seize power, and of the infiltration of Communist "agents." The British had closed down something like 100 Chinese organisations suspected of having sym-

pathy with People's China and deported trade union leaders like Chen Hsiung, chairman of the Naval Dockyard Workers' Union, and many other dockers' and seamen's leaders. Taiwan reported Kuomintang guerilla landings on the mainland, millions dying of famine in China, massacres of thousands of peasants, and scores of similar fantastic stories which the British editors printed, knowing full well they were lies.

Hong Kong having opened its doors to the Kuomintang remnants, had developed into a crime centre which rivalled Chicago at its worst. Hardly a day passed without gun battles and assassinations. Every store in the main shopping streets which sold valuables, and all the money-changers' booths, had private guards with repeating rifles stationed outside, usually bearded Sikhs. In one gun battle shortly before I arrived three British policemen were killed, including an inspector. At the table in a restaurant where I took my lunch one day a man was shot dead half an hour after I left. The posters advertising American films with lurid pictures of gang battles, lynchings, cowboys, and sex, provided a rich inspiration for Hong Kong's imported gangsters. The example was set by the up-to-date air smugglers, whose activities were known to all, was also not lost on the Hong Kong criminals. One gang heard of a gold smuggling deal, booked passages in the planes transferring the gold, shot the pilot and co-pilot, and started to take over the plane. A gun-battle developed with some of the passengers, the plane crashed with one gang member the sole survivor. The traditions of the nineteenth century opium smugglers were spectacularly preserved by the Kuomintang racketeers who swarmed into Hong Kong from every part of China after their forces had been swept into the sea by the armies of Chairman Mao.

The Kuomintang and free-lancing airmen did not have a monopoly on racketeering in Hong Kong, however. On April 12, 1951, the British Government carried out an act of piracy which is unprecedented since the days of the Barbary Corsairs. One would have to go back to the period of the opium smugglers and "Laboriously Vile" to find similar examples of British high-handedness to that of the armed seizure of the Chinese tanker "Yung Hao" in Hong Kong harbor. It is a sordid story of imperialism at its worst and did much to destroy hopes in

China that the British Government really wanted friendly relations with People's China. The fact that the action followed by one day a speech in the House of Commons by Foreign Secretary Morrison proclaiming British friendship for New China, lent an added note of perfidy to the piracy.

The "Yung Hao" is a modern 15,000 tons tanker, belonging to the state-owned China Tanker Company of Shanghai. It had been under repair at the Hong Kong and Whampoa Dock Company Ltd., in Kowloon. The price for the repairs had been agreed and paid in advance, amounting to almost half a million pounds. The Whampoa Dock Company is a privately owned British concern, but it is known that in its subsidiary companies financial interests are held by one of the chief Kuomintang racketeers, T. V. Soong, who cleaned up millions of dollars when he was Chiang Kai-shek's Finance Minister and Foreign Minister. When the repairs on the "Yung Hao" were almost finished, work was slowed down considerably. A group of Hong Kong business men unsuccessfully approached the captain of the tanker and the China Tanker Company's representative in Hong Kong and tried to bribe them into selling the vessel. Kuomintang agents swarmed around, trying by bribes and, when they failed, by threats to force officers and men to abandon the ship. Repair work stopped altogether and there were attempts at sabotage. The tanker crew, loyal to a man to People's China, organised their own guards to protect the ship, and started to complete the main repairs themselves. When these were finished, it was decided to get the ship away to a Chinese port and complete the remaining work there.

Towards the end of March Captain Tso Wen-yuen—as he later told correspondents in Peking—applied for clearance to take the ship across to Canton. The necessary documents and many unnecessary ones demanded by the port authorities were obtained, but Mr. J. Jolly, British Director of Marine in Hong Kong, kept digging up new reasons why the departure must be delayed. Captain Tso took up the matter with the Deputy Colonial Secretary, Mr. K. M. A. Barnett, who assured him that Jolly was exceeding his instructions and that the ship could sail on April 3. April 3 came but the clearance was still not granted.

Meanwhile the Kuomintang propaganda machine went into action. Fabricated news stories and articles flooded the Hong Kong press hinting at "red plots" and imminent uprisings in the colony, or an invasion from People's China. British officials contributed to the general scare atmosphere by issuing "re-assuring" statements that Hong Kong would defend itself against any internal or external threats. Chiang's agents with their willing accomplices in the British-owned press did their work so well that on April 6, emergency regulations were enacted and leave for troops and police was stopped.

On April 7 an order requisitioning the tanker was served on Captain Tso, who, of course, protested at this unprecedented act, and demanded that the Hong Kong authorities take the matter up with the People's Government. Five days later the Hong Kong Government committed what could only be regarded as an act of war against People's China. Over two hundred British police in full battle equipment, complete with steel helmets, tommy-guns, tear-gas guns and rifles, were brought out in launches and swarmed over the tanker's sides with scaling ladders brought with them. They took up firing positions along the deck, pointing their guns at the unarmed crew men, and hauled down the five-starred red flag of the People's Republic. A requisition order was handed to the Captain with a paragraph that he had yielded to force; the crew were bundled aboard waiting launches and taken ashore. The tanker was "requisitioned" by armed force as the British Colonial Secretary, James Griffiths, later told the House of Commons, "in order to safeguard Britain's national security and in the public interest." It was towed away to Singapore for use by the Royal Navy.

Officers and crew members of the "Yung Hao" were again offered bribes to denounce their government and stay on in Hong Kong. They refused these bribes as indignantly as they turned down British offers of money for sustenance during their enforced stay in the Crown Colony. They all left for People's China burning with anger at the crass example of brute force and imperialist piracy, carried out without the slightest justification. The incident, however, was speedily revenged with interest.

Three weeks after the seizure, the Foreign Office of People's China announced that "in order to safeguard China's national security and the public interest," it had been decided to "requisition" the British-owned Shell Oil Company of China and to "requisition by purchase" all the existing stocks of petroleum.

It will be noted that the language used in each case was identical except that the Chinese offered to pay compensation for the British property, while no similar offer was made by the British for the seized tanker.

As one approaches Hong Kong Island by ferry from Kowloon (Britain's mainland concession held on a 99-year lease) one building dominates all others along the water-front. It is the Bank of China, a symbol that People's China believes peace will be preserved and that Hong Kong will still play its part as a great trading port. It was still being built when I passed through Hong Kong, sixteen stories of it had been framed to make it easily the most imposing building in the city. British business people used it as one of their favorite arguments with the Americans to prove the People's Government had no intention of pushing them out of the colony and that they were looking forward to an era of peaceful trade. The British have shown their faith in future trade and prosperity by putting up numerous fine buildings of ten and twelve-storied blocks of flats, built of white sandstone, on prominent heights all over the island.

The more serious-minded of British businessmen saw much better prospects for trade with China than ever before. The manager of Butterfield & Swire's shipping department for instance, was full of praise for the way People's China had wiped out "squeeze" and corruption. "In the old days," he said, "when one of our ships pulled in to Shanghai or Tientsin we had to receive and entertain about 30 officials, each of whom had to be bribed; from the chief port official who arranged docking to the gang master who arranged unloading. They brought their wives and concubines aboard and expected to be wined and dined. Half the goods we shipped were stolen. We had to charge enormously high insurance rates if we wanted our ships turned round quickly. To-day one official comes aboard. There's no question of bribes or entertainment. He looks at the ship's papers and weighbills, and the formalities

are finished in half an hour. The ship is unloaded and loaded and on its way again in half the time it took under the Kuo-mintang. And we know just where we stand with costs. There is no pilfering. The Communists, as far as we are concerned, have wiped out graft, corruption, and inefficiency." Amazing words to hear from a big business "taipan."

Hong Kong's magnificent harbor was crammed with the shipping of all nations, from the spectacular Chinese junks with violet-colored sails, to a French transport taking troops to Korea. The water was fairly alive with hundreds of small craft bustling to and fro between the wharves and the ships they were loading or unloading. Junks and sampans brought food supplies from the mainland, loaded up kerosene, medicines, and other necessities for People's China. Like Macao, much of Hong Kong's fresh foods come from the mainland. The miles of wharves are ant-heaps of activity, the small boat-people are traditionally cheerful; wisecracks and accompanying laughter ripple along the wharves as they unload chickens and eggs, pigs and fish, cabbage and oranges, and haul aboard their sturdy craft cases and bales, barrels and boxes of goods for the mainland cities. Every Chinese city seems to be bursting at the seams with activity, and once one gets away from the British business headquarters and clubs Hong Kong is also a Chinese city, but nowhere does one get a more vivid impression of Chinese life than among the boat-people and dockers along the wharves.

The British Police Force in Hong Kong is mainly comprised of police who served in Palestine, experienced, as I was told, in "handling natives." That is, they have been indoctrinated with the racial theory that Jews and Chinese are inferior beings who must always be made to feel conscious of their status and made to respect white skins. The police-chief is famous for his ability while being driven along at 40 miles an hour to bring a Chinese cyclist to the ground with one smack of his hand, for any real or imagined infringement of traffic rules. An assistant jumps out, lets down the cyclist's tyres, and takes his pump, which can be regained only by appearing personally at the police station and paying a fine. The former heroes of the Palestine Police Force by the very way they strut about,

seem to be conscious of their historical role of teaching 475,000,000 Chinese to continue to respect white-skins.

One cause more than any other that might upset the era of peaceful relations which I believe both People's China and the British traders look forward to in Hong Kong, is the indignities which the Chinese people continually suffer at the hands of British officials and police. The slightest offence by a Chinese in the eyes of British justice as expressed in the Hong Kong courts, is punished by whipping and caning. On the other hand, a British business man who admitted he was driving his car while drunk, when he knocked down and killed a Chinese, was punished by having his driving licence cancelled. For a hundred years the Chinese have suffered insults and indignities in silence. They had no government at home which could inspire in them self-respect, but times have changed. The Hong Kong Chinese know that times have changed. Their relatives write and tell them so, many slip over the border to Canton to have a look. Some British businessmen, worst offenders in the past, realise that times have changed, but British officialdom from the lowest police official to the British Foreign Office act and talk as if 1951 was 1840, the year of the Opium War, or 1900, the year of the Boxer Rebellion, when British fleets could bombard Chinese ports. British gunboats could sail up Chinese rivers at will to impose Foreign Office policy on a demoralised government at gunpoint. People's China could brush the British away from Hong Kong with a flick of a finger-nail, in half the time it took the Japanese to do the job. If the British were wise they would realise this, and the Foreign Office and Colonial Office might instruct its officials accordingly. At least they should ensure that the Chinese people do not continue to learn British policy through the fists and clubs of the former Palestine Police Force.

## CHAPTER II

## RAILWAYS AND RAILWAY WORKERS

I LEFT Hong Kong with the machine-gun clatter of exploding fireworks in my ears. Streets were littered with the red paper and burst tubes of millions of fire-crackers; the air was thick with acrid smoke, narrow streets echoed with their sharp, explosive poppings. The evil spirits were being cleared away to make way for a fine New Year. A fat businessman in the house next to where I stayed periodically waddled out into the garden holding a fat cracker in his hand, carefully lighting it and waiting with an expression of anxiety which changed to ineffable joy when it went off with a satisfying pop. From business houses, strings of crackers hung down like enormous concertinas from balconies to the ground, and rippling explosions thundered through the streets as someone fired the bottom-most cracker. The Year of the Tiger had just given way to the Year of the Hare as I boarded the train for People's China. As the train pulled out I read in a Hong Kong newspaper that Kuomintang soothsayers hopelully announced that the signs showed the Year of the Hare would produce a Third World War.

The excited police officer who "captured" me at the Kowloon-Kwantung border, reluctantly let me pass through to the barrier on the People's side of China—and there were smiling Chinese friends who had seen the incident on the British side and at first thought I was being permanently detained.

There is no through train from Hong Kong to Canton. The British train stops at the border. Passengers pile out with their baggage and walk across to the Chinese station at Shamchun. There were exceptionally many passengers the day I went through, because people had been visiting their relatives on both sides of the frontier over the New Year.

Remembering the chaos and filth of China's railways in the past, I was not prepared for the smoothness of the journey from

Shamchun to Canton. All seats in the trains of People's China are reserved. Every ticket sold has a seat number printed on it, so there is no crush and standing. In the old days, people threw their bags and baggage in through the windows and clambered in after them. Seats were farmed out among the conductors, who sold them at prices according to the demand and let the favored ones in ahead of ordinary ticket holders. Kuomintang soldiers could throw any person out of a seat, even one bought from the conductor. If you were lucky enough to secure a seat, you were soon piled high with baggage and probably somebody's child thrown in on your lap at the last moment. Trains were infrequent and rarely pre-announced, so that people waited sometimes for days. Compartments were thick with coal dust, floors littered with filth, lavatories never worked, there was no water for washing. The Shamchun-Canton train was spotlessly clean. The conductors instead of looking for bribes looked for aged people or women with children who needed help. If a passenger threw peanut shells or papers on the floor, he was gently reproached by a conductor who pointed to a large notice telling passengers not to spit or litter the floor. The passengers usually looked shame-faced, either because they couldn't read or because they had been untidy, and they hurried to clear up the litter. Loud-speakers tendered advice as the train approached each station. "Have you your ticket ready, Comrade? Are you sure you have left nothing in the train?"

At the end of each compartment were placards hailing the world peace movement, and cartoons reminding the public of what China had suffered under Japanese aggression.

At villages along the route and in Canton itself, fireworks were exploding as noisily and plentifully as in Hong Kong. Everybody from children to staid old gentlemen with round silk caps and wispy grey beards was lighting crackers and flinging them joyously into the air. (A week later I was to read Western press reports that the New Year had been celebrated in Hong Kong but not in People's China, because no one had money for fireworks.)

The train service from Canton to Peking was so good and the signs of railway construction so spectacular that the railways became my first subject for investigation on arrival in

People's China. The Canton-Peking railway had not been in use for 15 years when the People's Government opened the service on New Year's Day, 1950, just four months after Chiang Kai-shek's troops surrendered at Canton. Hundreds of miles of the line had been pulled up, the rails taken by the Japanese, sleepers burned for firewood by the peasants. Every bridge along the 1,500 miles between Canton and Peking was destroyed, signalling equipment removed and hidden by guerrillas who had long since disappeared from the area. The rail bed over which the train now moved so smoothly had been ploughed up for hundreds of miles at a stretch and sown under crops.

It was difficult to realise all this in a spotlessly clean compartment dusted once an hour by an attendant, with corridors swabbed down every two hours; tea, coffee, hot milk or cocoa served in the compartment and excellent meals in a dining coach which even when speeding towards Peking at fifty miles an hour never ruffled the beer in one's glass. But one only had to gaze out at the freshly-built up embankments, the newly-built bridges and neat new station buildings to know that this smooth service was accomplished by tremendous human effort. The People's Liberation Army chased Chiang Kai-shek south along the route of the Peking-Canton railway and Chairman Mao Tse-tung coined the slogan, "Where the P.L.A. goes the trains must go." The P.L.A. set up its own Railways Corps which worked under the direction of the Ministry of Railways together with the civilian railway construction units. In the past, during the anti-Japanese war, they had specialised in the destruction of railways, the sabotage of rail services, the blowing up of bridges and removal of equipment. As the People's Army swept the country clean of the Kuomintang armies, the railway workers had to reverse the process. They had to restore what the Japanese, the Kuomintang and they themselves had destroyed over the previous thirteen years.

Since my trip along the Canton-Pekin railway, I have seen a documentary film which partly explains the miracle of its restoration. As the P.L.A. swept south it won the immediate support of the peasants. For a start it reduced rent and taxes. Soldiers treated peasants politely, paid for food and breakages of anything borrowed, explained the policy of Chair-

man Mao's party. They won the confidence of the peasants who had never heard of such soldiers as long as they could remember or as far back as the oldest legends related.

They were used to soldiers of war lords, Japanese and Kuomintang who stole their food, raped their wives and daughters, press-ganged their sons and husbands into military service, and shot those who resisted. The peasants eagerly co-operated with this new People's Army, led the railway workers to the hills and valleys where rails and signalling equipment were hidden away, helped them level road-beds, cut trees, split sleepers, carry stones and wood tens of miles through ankle-deep mud. In district after district as the People's Army moved rapidly south the peasants, men and women alike, helped them. Strafed by Kuomintang planes by day, working by flares held by mile-long lines of troops by night, they jog-trotted along with their wicker baskets of earth and stones. Pairs hauled sleepers, teams of them rails from caves and jungle long hidden from Japanese and Kuomintang. The co-operation and heroism of the Chinese peasants, the tenacity of the Railway Corps, the militancy of the old-time railwaymen who have a long revolutionary tradition in China, was something Chiang Kai-shek never allowed for. For over four years his engineers and American experts had been toying with the idea of restoring the great Hsiang River bridge near Hengyang. With the help of Soviet experts the P.L.A. threw a bridge across in 55 days—and it stood to carry the train on which I travelled to Peking. Chiang's armies were constantly overtaken by the speed with which Chairman Mao's men poured down the railway line, they were surrounded and ground piecemeal out of existence. Within two months 650 miles of railway, roadbed, sleepers, rails and all, were completed throughout China. On the Peking-Canton stretch, up to nine miles of track were laid in a day. Two months after the Soviet Union and People's China signed a commercial agreement hundreds of miles of Soviet rails were delivered, rails which now rest on beds which in Chiang Kai-shek's era were paddy fields. On New Year's Day, 1950, for the first time, one could travel by rail from Canton in the far south of China through to London—(if one took the Paris-Dunkirk rail ferry service) via the Canton-Manchouli and Trans-Siberian Railway.

Despite the enormous destruction of the war years China's railway service was functioning at a higher degree of efficiency than ever before, and within six months of Chiang Kai-shek being pushed into the sea. There are no complete figures for the extent of the destruction, but in North-East China (Manchuria) 80 per cent. of the locomotives, 40 per cent. of passenger coaches, 25 per cent. of freight cars, and 40 per cent. of sleepers had been destroyed. By 1950 in the North-East the railways were hauling 64 per cent. more freight than ever before; for the first time in China, the railways balanced their budget and were able to invest 13 per cent. of their income in new construction. But figures do not express progress in the minds of the travelling public. Progress for them means they can buy a ticket and know that not only will they be able to travel and not be thrown off the train by a non-ticket holding Kuomintang official, but that they are entitled to a seat on a train which will arrive punctually at the time printed on the schedule. For the peasants who played such a notable part in restoring the tracks, progress means that when, as in 1950, there were serious floods and food shortages in East China, for the first time in Chinese history grain could be rushed to the spot in tens of thousands of tons by rail. Progress for a housewife in Peking means that she can buy rail-transported bananas from Kwantung at the street fruit-stalls, and the housewife in Canton can buy apples from North Shantung. For industry, progress means that China at last, due to the restoration of the railways, is an organic whole with coal and iron ore moving towards each other by rail to be married into steel; with wheat and millet from the north moving south; rice moving north; hundreds of thousands of tons of fertiliser moving across the country for the spring sowing.

One had only an impression of all this during the four nights and three days of the trip from Canton to China's ancient capital. We passed over scores of new bridges, including huge major structures over the Hsiang and the Yellow River; freight trains lumbered past with thousands of tons of dressed stone for lining river embankments; with fertiliser for the fields from which the snow was just beginning to disappear; with coal for the newly revived steel plants; mixed trains passed by filled with cheerful singing peasants, in padded cotton clothes,

and asses and mules on their way to one of the huge flood prevention projects. At the stations there was a feeling of tremendous vitality, new storehouses being built, workmen attacking with oxy-welding and riveting outfits remains of locomotives and freight cars left by Japanese or Kuomintang bombing; freight trains half a mile long disgorging their sacks and bales into myriads of ox-carts; brightly painted Soviet agricultural machinery piled up on the platforms; hustle and bustle everywhere that made one wonder how life had gone on during the thirteen years of silence along the Canton-Peking railway.

At Hankow, where the Yangtse is well over a mile wide, one has to change trains and cross the river by ferry. Preparatory work by Chinese and Soviet engineers has started already here on a bridge which will be over two miles long, built with girders made in China. In the past bridge-building equipment was imported mostly from America and Canada at enormous cost; American engineers supervised the construction. Chinese engineers give the highest praise to their Soviet colleagues who brought with them completely new techniques in bridge-building based on their own experiences of throwing bridges across the series of major rivers they had to cross in chasing the German Wehrmacht back to Berlin. Wreckage and materials which would have been discarded by American engineers were utilised to the last section and rivet; millions of dollars were saved in material and labor. The wreckage of one major bridge which had partly collapsed into the Huai river was used as it lay for supports for a new one; in one case where piers had been knocked out of plumb by demolitions and experts said the bridge must be completely rebuilt, Soviet engineers working with divers, straightened and strengthened them as they stood.

Chiang Kai-shek's American advisers in 1946 estimated it would take three years and thirty million dollars to put China's railways in order again. That was not allowing for a further four years of civil war and further enormous destruction and deterioration. It was also not allowing for the revolutionary enthusiasm of the Chinese people. The railways were restored, despite the efforts of American bomber and fighter planes and Kuomintang saboteurs, in less than one year without spending

any American dollars. In addition new construction was started. In early 1951 the first 75 miles section of a railway from Chungking to Chengtu was opened for traffic. The whole 350 mile section is expected to be finished by 1952. Chiang Kai-shek played with the idea of building such a railway from his capital to the rich west for many years but with all his American advisers and American dollars, it remained no more than a dream. The railways have become a symbol of China's reconstruction as a whole. A railway worker wears his badge as proudly as does a veteran guerrilla, and with good reason. The long revolutionary traditions of the Chinese railway workers bore good fruit when the signal was given to switch from the defensive to the offensive, from destruction to construction. They were splendid saboteurs under the Japanese, and naturally became heroes of labor under their own People's Government.

In my compartment from Hankow to Peking, there was a good cross-section of the sort of people who travel on the railways to-day. There was a Red Army girl with thick black bobbed hair and padded greenish khaki uniform. The "bob" is as much a symbol of women's emancipation in China to-day as it was of emancipation for women in the West after the First World War. She was friendly and cheerful and insisted on giving me oranges and handfuls of small, brown nutty-looking objects which when opened had a fruit-like raisins inside. There were some government cadres in their winter uniform of blue serge, with buttons right up to the throat, leaving no space for collar and tie. Cadres are the life-blood of the administration. In other lands they would be called government officials, but this is a misnomer in China. They are partisans in civil life, the vanguard of the revolution. Officially they are the government representatives, trained political and technical workers. For the time being most of them receive no salaries, only food, clothing and housing. They are expected to, and do work harder than anybody else. They take the most dangerous and difficult jobs, accept responsibility, represent the policy and aims of the government on all occasions. Only a small proportion of them are Communists, but they are all ardent supporters of the revolution. They are the cheerful, hard-working ambassadors of the government in factory and village, explaining policy and sorting out difficult situations.

One of the cadres on the train was a member of the Cotton Trust and was going to Peking for a conference to discuss the 1951 sowing programme. He had been a Shanghai merchant before, spoke excellent English, and acted as my interpreter on the train. There were four Soviet technicians, returning to Peking from preparatory work on the Huai River flood prevention project. Quiet-spoken, shy men, keen on finishing their job and returning home. There was a Japanese with moustache and thick-lensed glasses who looked like a caricature of Hirohito. He was a textile engineer on his way to Tientsin via Peking. Each of the Russians had Chinese interpreters and some cadres travelling with them. I was regarded by the Chinese at first as an "elder brother" which is the synonym for Soviet technician. (Westerners are usually known as "Big Noses," Japanese as "Japanese Devils.") But I was treated just as amicably when it was known I came from Au Ta Lia. A group soon crowded into my compartment and posed intelligent and searching questions. I was surprised at the scientific way they went about things. They wanted to know the social composition of the country, how many workers, how many peasants, how many trade unionists. Why, when there were so many workers and trade unionists, was there a reactionary government. Why if the Australians liked the Chinese did Mr. Menzies even oppose Britain about recognition of China. Good, sharp questions which demanded careful answers. Everybody wanted to tell me about the changes that had taken place in China, asked me what I thought of the trains. The cotton cadre insisted I must come and visit the cotton areas and see how the peasants' lives had changed. The cadres with the Russians said I must on no account miss seeing the Huai River project. The bobbed-haired Red Army girl said I must see some of the People's Army entertainment groups.

A fascinating conversation went on between the Red Army girl and the Japanese. Although the latter had been in China for ten years, he spoke no Chinese, but each could understand the other's writing. Pens and paper were produced, she wrote out questions and he replied. The massive cadre from the cotton trust interpreted for me. "Do you know what the Japanese did in China?"—"Yes, I think it was not right. I am very sorry." "My village my father, mother and little brother



were bayoneted to death by Japanese soldiers!"—"I am very sorry. Such things were not right." "Do the Japanese people know about these things?"—"I think probably not, but I have been away for ten years." "Why did you come to China?"—"To work in a Japanese-owned textile mill." "Why did you remain?" (and at this point the crowd who had gathered round to watch this strange duel, expected something really interesting; perhaps he would say that he liked the Chinese people, that he remained to help put back some of the damage done.)—"I have a good house, I get better wages than Chinese engineers because I'm more expert. Why shouldn't I stay?" (There was surprise but no anger at this rather arrogant reply, and some shaking of heads, but more scraps of paper were produced from backs of envelopes and parcel wrappings, and the probe continued.) "What do Japanese workers and peasants think about China?"—"I don't know. I'm not a worker. I'm an engineer. Probably they don't think at all." "What do you think about Chinese workers?"—"They work very well." And so it went on.

After the place was littered with scraps of paper covered with characters, the Red Army girl gave up. It was impossible to produce one human sort of answer from the man. No answer that he gave indicated that he thought of anything but his house, good food and the better wages he got than the Chinese, all of which he considered were his due because he was a good textile engineer. The surprising thing was there was not a trace of hostility from any of the group that gathered, and that the Japanese took it as a matter of course that there would be no hostility. He seemed relieved, however, when the questioning was over, and he could bury his face in an engineering text-book. The cotton cadre shrugged his shoulders when I expressed surprise at the attitude of the girl and the tolerance shown by the other passengers. "Our government lays great stress on internationalism," he said. "Even during the war one of the cardinal instructions for our troops was that they must not ill-treat prisoners of war. We tried to win them to our side by kindness and correct behaviour. This chap seems a hopeless case, but he's probably a good engineer and we need engineers. He must be harmless from a security point of view,

else he wouldn't be travelling around like this. Some of the Japanese upper class engineers and intellectuals seem to be sub-human as far as ordinary feelings are concerned, but their workers and peasants are warm people who think and talk just like our own do, once they realise they are being treated as human beings. If this chap were one of our own engineers with such an attitude, he would probably do a course in one of the reforming institutes and would come back with a completely changed outlook towards his fellow man."

Apart from the Japanese, the rest of the passengers in our coach behaved like one large family on a picnic. We visited each other's compartments, tasted each other's foods and drinks, sang many songs and had lengthy and involved discussions about international affairs. Those outside the core of our group gathered round to listen, as many as possible pushing their way into the compartment, the rest overflowing into the corridor. It was the merriest and most interesting train trip I have taken anywhere in the world, and I was almost sorry when the loud-speaker announced early one morning that we were nearing Peking, repeating the usual advice about not forgetting baggage, holding tickets and passes in the hands, not leaving the train until it had stopped, hoping everybody had enjoyed their journey, and asking those who had suggestions or criticism to make to write them out and drop them in a specially provided box at the end of each coach. After I had expressed my full-some praise for the train, its friendly spick and span service and punctuality, the Red Army girl said: "Don't write anything about our trains until you have seen the women's train which runs down to Tientsin from Peking." To keep a promise I gave on the spot I made a trip shortly afterwards on the Peking-Tientsin express, a train staffed exclusively with women except for the locomotive crew.

The women's train service team on this train—and now on others in China—has become a symbol that Chinese women have freed themselves from feudal bondage and that they can do jobs as well, and in some fields better, than men can. The first woman train crew staffed a train from Dairen to Port Arthur on International Women's Day, 1950. They included drivers, firemen, stokers and guards trained by Soviet specialists. The train created a sensation. The two girls, Tien Kuei-ying

and Wang Po-hung, who drove locomotive Number 58 as qualified engine-drivers, became famous throughout China, the locomotive was renamed "International Women's Day" in honor of the event. In pre-liberation China, the ideal of womanhood was a submissive creature who never moved out of doors until the matchmaker came and arranged her marriage to a boy or man she had never seen and would not see until the day of marriage. From that day she would live as a slave to husband and mother-in-law to be thrashed at will by both. That was the best fate that could be imagined. If she came from a poor family in the cities, she could slave 12 hours a day in the textile mills, or if she were pretty enough be accepted as a prostitute or concubine. Some menial clerical jobs were open to women and they could work as telephone operators, but that was about the limit of their possibilities.

The Port Arthur-Dairen woman train crew fired the imagination of girls all over China. Clerks, telephone operators and waitresses in the railway administration begged to be trained for more active work. Hundreds of them were accepted and given a thorough training in schools run by the Railways Trade Union. Many of them had first to be taught to read and write, for China as a whole is over 80 per cent. illiterate, and the proportion of illiteracy is higher among women than men. They had to understand the policies of the new government, the changed attitude towards people. They had to understand completely what the "People's" added to the name of China really meant. To travel on the Peking-Tientsin express is to appreciate these new aims put into practice. The girls are on the look-out to help the aged and children up the train steps, to find them their seats, pack their baggage away and make them feel comfortable. The slightest speck of dust is whisked away almost before it has a chance to settle. Corridors are washed down the minute the train starts to move. Innovations introduced by the girls include a free supply of current magazines including some in English and Russian. Entertainment, including songs by some of the staff, skits on current political events, news items, short explanatory talks on some of the new government laws, proceeds through the loud speakers in every coach once the train gets under way. As most Chinese are

illiterate, the talks are invaluable, explaining to peasants their exact rights under the land reform and tax reduction laws, to women their rights under the marriage reform laws, to workers their rights under the new labor insurance laws. Sometimes the conductresses bring in huge gaily colored political cartoons, set them up at the head of the coach, and deliver a short broadside against American aggression in Korea, or American plans to re-arm Japan. This sort of entertainment might bore or irritate passengers in the West, but not so in China, where with such a high rate of illiteracy most learning and entertainment is through the spoken (or sung) word.

Girls in spotlessly white starched coats, serve refreshments in the coaches and bring special foods and drinks for babies. (In the long-distance trains there are special compartments for mothers with children where trained nurses are in attendance and where there is plenty of space for children to lie down.) Anyone eating peanuts when one of the trim conductresses is about, hurriedly slips the husks into his pocket. Girl security guards, complete with pistols, wander through from time to time as Kuomintang agents still occasionally try acts of sabotage. One hurled a packet of explosives from a train window while the train was passing over a bridge. It did no damage but windows must now be closed when passing bridges. There is plenty of American money available for Kuomintang saboteurs.

The woman train service crews, just because they are right in the public eye, are the best advertisement for the new equality of the sexes. Their cheerful and energetic bearing is an inspiration to women among the travelling public to take advantage themselves of their new status. As the girls graduate through the various phases of train service work, they also attend courses in the theoretical side of railway administration. They learn the whole business of running trains from the bottom up, including ticket-punching, restaurant work, checking brakes and switches, acting as guards, cleaners, conductors, announcers and security guards. Gradually they will be passed out as station masters, executives in the Railway Administration or Ministry of Communications.

Sen Yi-chih is a good example of the type of girl who is graduating through the train service course. She is a stocky, 21-year-old girl, with bobbed hair, a strong and beautiful face

which shines like polished rosewood, flashing teeth and seemingly inexhaustible cheerful energy. I talked with her in the train and in the office of the railway administration. Her father was a school teacher in Tientsin and the family was half-starved when she grew up. She went to work at 14 as a waitress in the railway refreshment rooms. As she grew older she saw all her friends at the age of 16 or 17 drift into prostitution or become concubines for wealthy old men. None earned enough as waitresses to eat properly let alone contribute to the family or save enough for a dowry without which no girl could hope to get married. Sen Yi-chih avoided the temptations of concubinage and changed her work to selling tickets at the railway station. Then came Liberation. She was immediately sent to a trade union training school, free of charge, with board and lodging provided. When the news of the Port Arthur train crew reached her she volunteered for similar work, and after a short training course she started work. From a semi-illiterate without a political idea in her head she has developed into an expert railway guard and an excellent organiser and speaker. She was elected into a leading position in the Peking Branch of the Railways Union and sent as the Union delegate to the All-Circles Conference which elected the City Council for Peking. She has already passed through the various phases of train service work and will without doubt become a top-flight administrator.

I asked her what her parents thought about her new life. She smiled richly and said: "My mother had progressive ideas. When I told her I would work on a train she cried a little at first, but then said, 'You will be one of the first women in China to do such work, so you must work well. You must take great care of the train; of the lives of the passengers and the property of the State.' My father was rather backward, but he liked to discuss the new ideas. My mother used to listen to the radio I bought with my wages, and she used to write down things she didn't understand. Every Sunday when I went home we used to discuss all the things she had noted down. When the volunteer movement for Korea started, I volunteered straight away, but on my way home the next Sunday I thought my parents would be so upset. I decided

not to say anything. My father came in just after me and said, 'Think of it! They asked for volunteers for Korea and I was the first in our school to offer.' My mother said, 'If they'll take women my age I'll go too.' And my little sister, who's only nine, said, 'I can bandage wounded soldiers and carry rice.'"

Sen Yi-chih was so earnest and proud of her family's political progress that it moved my interpreter to tears. In the end neither she nor her father nor her elder brother, who it turned out also volunteered, were allowed to go to Korea. I dropped in on the family at lunch-time one Sunday. The mother was a vital woman like Sen Yi-chih. She had also bobbed her hair and taken up school-teaching. There was the eldest boy who worked on the railways, little brother with the red scarf of the Pioneers around his neck, and little sister who wanted to carry rice in Korea. They squatted around on the "kang," the large stone bed with a fireplace underneath, which takes up half the space in most Chinese homes. Above the bed were huge portraits of Stalin and Mao Tse-tung. They were enjoying a simple meal of noodles and vegetables from a low table set on the bed when I dropped in. Father, a slim, sprightly intellectual, was reading the newspaper aloud while the others ate. Neighbours crowded in the doorway, Sen Yi-chih, rosy and embarrassed, still with her railway guard's badge on her arm, introduced me to her family. It only required a few minutes' conversation to feel how this family had quickly found its place in People's China. Each of the adults had an interesting job with boundless opportunities for advancement. The children were receiving an education that their parents and elder brother and sister had not been able to have. Father was expecting soon to start training other teachers of which there is an enormous dearth. Mother was happy with a job and income of her own, and very proud of Sen Yi-chih. They are still poor people by Western standards; they are overcrowded, shabbily but adequately clad, meat is still something of a rarity. But they are rich in their hopes for the future, their life is incomparably better than when they had to let Sen Yi-chih go to work at 14 as a railway waitress. And it was largely due to Sen Yi-chih's initiative in immediately grabbing with both hands the chances which People's China offered her

by the establishment of equality of the sexes that the whole family had accepted the new life so quickly.

"In the old days," Sen Yi-chih's mother said shyly, after I had congratulated her on her daughter, "women only suffered oppression. They had no chance to do vocational work. Now we not only have equal treatment but even special privileges. Look at Sen Yi-chih. She was trained free of cost. Now at 21 she even takes part in the administration of China. At the Peking conference, although she's only a girl and only a railway worker, she discussed affairs of State on an equal footing with men and with some of our great revolutionary names. Such a thing could not have been dreamed of, even two years ago." And she clasped Sen Yi-chih to her and smoothed the shiny black hair back from Sen's strong, honest face. She was right. Such a life as Sen Yi-chih is leading and such a future as is opening up for her and the rest of China's 450,000 railway workers, male and female alike, could not have been dreamed of before Liberation.

In the old days they worked twelve hours a day for starvation wages. They had no trade union rights, no social benefits, no chance of promotion unless they bought it, no help if they fell sick, no compensation for accidents, no chance of educating their children or improving themselves.

To-day, the railway workers work an eight hour shift for wages many times higher than those under Japanese or Kuomintang. Their powerful trade union is their protector, friend and educator; their clubs are homes away from home. In the North-East (Manchuria) alone, the Railway Workers' Union has 1871 clubs, 180 well-stocked libraries, 36 theatrical groups, and hundreds of choirs and smaller entertainment units, 103 schools for railway workers' children, 55 spare-time schools for the workers themselves, in addition to technical training institutes, 26 rest homes, two sanatoria and hundreds of sports fields. Sen Yi-chih is part of a vast organisation which looks after its members and their families free of charge when they are sick, educates them and their children, provides pensions at retirement age (ranges from 45 to 60 according to sex and type of work) and is always on the look out to push ahead and train those with special talents.

The story has gone too far, however. It should have stopped as the Canton-Peking express curved round the great grey wall which encircles the ancient capital, dipped in under a massive archway, and sighed its way into the Peking station in mid-February, 1951. There I left my friendly and interesting travel companions and started on my work to try and find out what had happened during the nine years since I had been in China and more particularly what was going on in the China of Mao Tse-tung.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE NEW LOOK OF CHINA

**M**ORE than eighty per cent. of China's 475,000,000 people are peasants, and the peasants were the mainstay of the guerrillas and the People's Army. The Japanese and the Kuomintang held the main cities, the People's Army lived and operated in the countryside until the final phases of the war of Liberation. The Communists could not have existed for more than a few months without the support of the peasants who were their eyes and ears reporting on enemy movements; their stretcher bearers and supply troops in time of battle; their source of shelter for wounded comrades in case of evacuation. The peasants were the vast sea in which the revolutionary armies swam, submerging and surfacing as conditions demanded. It was natural that they should be the first to benefit from final victory. One of my first visits after arriving at Peking was to the small village of Ya Men Ko, about seven miles to the west of the capital, to see how victory affected the peasants' lives.

Ya Men Ko is a typical village of the north, with crumbling yellow mudbrick walls topped by blue-grey, unglazed tiles. The villagers were vague as to its age, but the school teacher said there were monuments which dated back to the era of the Five Dynasties, which made Ya Men Ko at least a thousand years old.

There was no motor road to the village, only a narrow track which connected it with a main road about one and a half miles distant. Shaggy brown camels laden with coal padded through the ancient streets as we bumped over the rocky cart track in a jeep, and turned into the village through a gap in the crumbling walls. The jeep was one of those tens of thousands unwittingly supplied to People's China by the Americans. It was captured from Chiang Kai-shek. There were still traces of snow and ice on the bare yellow soil which surrounded the

village, but within a few weeks the fields would be green with wheat, millet and rice.

Women with babies sucking at their breasts and fat children in padded clothes came out of doorways to enjoy the unusual sight of a jeep dodging around camels in the main street of Ya Men Ko.

My guide took me to the house of Wang Shih-yi, the village school-mistress, the best home in the village apart from those belonging to the landlords. It even had glass in the windows instead of the rice paper that usually serves village homes for lighting. Like most homes it was built around three sides of a square with all rooms opening on to the courtyard. Wang Shih-yi, a good-looking woman, was dressed in a long cotton gown buttoned up at the neck. Slits at the legs displayed a warm woollen lining. While she passed around dishes of hot tea, and stoked the fire under the "kang," the guide went looking for the various people I wanted to meet. First to come was Wang Ping-hsieh, the village headman, a strong stern-looking man with a white towel wrapped around his head. He was soon followed by villagers who crowded into the room, as many as possible sitting on the bed, others jammed into the doorway and around the window. Wang Ping-hsieh, with his hands thrust deep into the sleeves of his gown, was shaking with fever, but nothing would induce him to go home until he had told me the details of life in Ya Men Ko.

He came from a long line of peasants, but his grandfather had got into debt to one of the local landlords, who had seized his land and home in payment. Wang's father had to work for the landlord without pay to help repay the debt. Wang himself worked on the same estate from the age of 10 for a few handfuls of grain husks a day. When he grew up, he demanded wages and was tied to a tree by the landlord and beaten half to death. He ran away to Tientsin and worked as a docker. If he could steal enough from the supplies he unloaded he lived well; otherwise he starved. In one good period he returned to Ya Men Ko and married a village girl. When he could, he came back to the village and brought her food and money. Once, after a very bitter period on the wharves, he returned and found both his wife and infant son had died of starvation. Back at the docks Wang Ping-hsieh

joined with some other workers in the struggle against the gang system (of which more later). He joined the Communist Party and in 1946 returned to Ya Men Ko to work as an illegal cadre to explain the policies of the Communist Party and prepare the peasants for the arrival of the People's Army. After Liberation, he was given land and at a mass meeting, the villagers elected him headman. (In the old days the Japanese or the Kuomintang, in collaboration with the landlords, appointed the headmen. To-day they are all elected at mass meetings.) Wang Ping-hsieh never went to school, but since he joined the Communist Party he learned to read and write. He is now one of the few literate men in the village. He produced a sheaf of statistics and prepared to answer my questions.

There were 700 families in the village, altogether 3,000 people. The land amounted to 10,770 mow (six mow equal an acre) of which exactly half was owned by 45 landlords. Three hundred and fourteen peasant families owned no land at all. Under the agrarian reform laws 551 peasants received land. Houses, animals, implements and 20,000 pounds of grain seized over the years by the landlords were returned to the peasants. Also returned were a number of daughters and even wives of peasants taken by the landlords in settlement of debt. The government divided peasants into various categories, rich, medium, poor and landless. At the time land reform was carried out in Ya Men Ko, some of the land of rich peasants was also divided up, but later the system was changed and only landlord's property was confiscated. Taxes were immediately reduced in Ya Men Ko by one-half to two-thirds, so even the rich peasants benefited immediately. Poor peasants were relieved of tax payments altogether.

Until Liberation, Ya Men Ko lived in a state of feudalism in the classic sense, except that the landlords did not have to put themselves at the head of troops when wars come or finance their equipment. But when the Kuomintang wanted troops, a quota was set for each village and it was left to the landlords through their appointed headman to raise the number—who were, of course, taken from the poor peasants. It cost the rich or medium peasants much grain and even perhaps a daughter to buy freedom from the draft for their

sons. Wang organised an accusation meeting after land reform had been carried out, at which the peasants spoke up against the landlords and listed their oppressions and crimes.

One of the next to tell her story was Mrs. Chang, who did not want to give her full name because of modesty. She was very beautiful, with serenity and purity in her glistening black eyes, her smooth forehead and sensitive month. She was very shy at first, and the school mistress had to put her arms round her and coax her to talk. Some years previously her husband was knocked over on the road by a car and died. No worse misfortune could befall a woman in Old China. She could not remarry, she could not return to her parents, she could not work. She must spend the rest of her days as an unpaid slave of her mother-in-law if she had one, worshipping the memory of a husband someone else had chosen for her.

Mrs. Chang gradually sold everything she possessed to buy at first a few bowls of rice, then maize, and finally grain husks, until she was literally starving. Finally came salvation in the form of a "rich" merchant (he owned three camels) who had repeatedly offered to accept her as his concubine. It would have to be a secret arrangement, because a widow had no right even to become a concubine.

In the end she accepted and visits were arranged with the greatest stealth, for this was a crime for both of them. No respectable man would have relations with a widow. In time she became pregnant, and her greatest terror started. She reached the state where she knew she could not hide her condition any longer from the villagers. She decided to commit suicide. But whispers of her disgrace had already gone the rounds of the village and reached the ears of the government cadre. It was a few months after Liberation by this time, and the cadre called on her and explained the new marriage laws, which made it legal for widows to marry and for women to lead a normal life. There was no disgrace in being a widow, no disgrace in having a child. Women could even divorce the husbands to whom they had been sold. Mrs. Chang could not believe all this at first. She was even horrified that old traditions should have been swept away, but gradually she realised what it all meant. She had her child and she married again. Both she and her husband were given land, and they

both attend the village literacy classes. And as she shyly slipped away through the crowd at the school teacher's, she said, "Chairman Mao gave me the chance of a new life"

Kao Tze-heng did not come to the school teacher's room, but he seemed to be there just the same. His name kept cropping up. He was one of the richest landlords in Ya Men Ko, with one hand in the pockets of the peasants, the other under the skirts of their daughters. Woe betide the girl who would not go to him, woe betide the peasant who refused to allow her. A beating for the one and probably a land seizure for the other. Once, when a 15-year-old girl was particularly resistant, he sent the match-maker to ask for her hand in marriage to his 13-year-old son. No peasant could refuse such an offer. The marriage deal was made, but it was Kao Tze-heng who took the girl bride to bed, not his son.

Chang Pao-han, a little brown shrimp of a man, whose eyes were tiny knife slits in his face, is now head of the village co-operative, of which one representative of every Ya Men Ko family is a member. He related how he had worked for Kao Tze-heng for eight years and never received a pound of grain for wages. Each time he asked for payment he was given a thorough beating with clubs by Kao or his henchmen. People like Chang Pao-han and peasants whose daughters had been raped by old Kao, spoke up at the accusation meeting, and Kao's land was cut down from 120 mow to only eight, which was about half the average acreage left to the landlords. Even after the land reform Kao did not accept defeat. One evening as headman Wang Ping-hsieh was returning from a meeting, Kao and some of his men were waiting for him with sticks. They started to beat him up, but the village militia came along. Kao was locked up for 45 days of re-education. In the old days gendarmes in the villages were sent by the Kuomintang or were Japanese puppets who protected the landlords. To-day they are appointed by the villagers from their own sons and husbands, to protect themselves from the landlords.

Kao Tze-heng's holding of 120 mow may seem ridiculously small for Kao to be classed as a wealthy landlord in Western terms, but not so in China. In the class structure of China that 120 mow could make Kao the most brutal oppressor and exploiter of the peasant with three or four mow, which was

the average holding of a poor peasant who had any land at all. The 120 mow gave Kao the possibility of gradually squeezing all the small men out of existence and that process was greatly speeded up during the Kuomintang regime when tax collection and man-power requisitioning was left in the hands of the landlords. The two-way squeeze of lack of man-power plus crippling taxes which took even the last of the peasants' seed grain, forced them to borrow from the landlord to buy seed for the spring growing. Interest rates of seventy to one hundred per cent. were charged. Often if the peasant had a good harvest and wanted to pay back his debts the landlord would refuse to accept the grain. He would wait until the end of winter, when everything had been eaten or gone in taxes, and suddenly demand both interest and principal, flourishing papers to which the illiterate peasants had put their thumb marks without understanding in the least what it was about. Land, house and personal belongings would then be seized in lieu of payment, which was why in 1949 in Ya Men Ko there were 514 peasants with no land.

The policy towards the landlords in view of their crimes has been extremely liberal. Many of the charges against Kao Tze-heng and other Ya Men Ko landlords would carry heavy jail sentences in Western courts. It was left to the peasants themselves to decide how they should be punished, as there were no capital crimes against them. (In many cases landlords were charged with several murders, the villagers demanded the death penalty, and they were taken off to the courts for proper trials.) At Ya Men Ko the 45 landlords were still living in their old houses, their properties had been greatly reduced, but Kao was the only one who had spent any time in detention because of his assault against Wang Ping-hsieh. The government encourages them to invest their money and abilities in industry and business enterprises where they are guaranteed protection and help if they behave honestly.

At lunch-time, while Wang Shih-yi served us with bowls of fried bean-curd and rich omelettes, she told us of the way superstitions had been shattered in the village. Formerly, 1,700 of the 5,000 population were members of the I-Kwang-Tao society, a sect which played the same role in China as clerical reaction plays in Europe. Poor people gave their last grain of rice, sold their last possessions to give money to the I-Kwang-Tao priests

to cure a child of sickness, to have a boy instead of a girl child. They came to I-Kwang-Tao with all these troubles, sought their guidance for the right day to sow grain or start harvesting. The priests invariably told them the things the Japanese or the Kuomintang wanted the peasants to believe. I-Kwang-Tao was a powerful force fighting against all reforms introduced by the People's Government. The spirit messages were usually conveyed to the people by a girl medium who went into a "trance" and with closed eyes stood over a sandpit with a stick in her hand, which moved convulsively to describe characters in the sand. The characters were interpreted by the priests as mystic messages of advice, and the poor peasants, after much kow-towing, went back to their miserable huts certain that the gods had spoken.

A few months previously there had been a mass meeting at Ya Men Ko where the local priests and the girl medium demonstrated before all the villagers how they worked. The girl told of how she had been sold from childhood to the priests and after months and years of beatings and being locked up in cellars without food, she had painfully learned to write characters in the sand in the complicated way demanded by the priests. Her eyes were never really closed and the priests always indicated to her which characters should be written. Villagers were furious and accused the priests of having taken their last grain and possessions. The government cadre explained the crimes of espionage and treason; of how the I-Kwang-Tao priests collaborated with the Japanese, the Kuomintang and the landlords. At that one meeting I-Kwang-Taoism was finished in Ya Men Ko. The people now turn to the cadres, the technicians, nurses and school teachers for help. (Throughout the whole country exhibitions and living demonstrations by former I-Kwang-Tao priests and mediums exposed the trickery which for so long fooled the illiterate, superstitious peasantry. I saw one such exhibition at the Imperial Palace in Peking, where the girl medium told a most moving story of her life as a temple slave from childhood.)

All day long people filed through Wang Shih-yi's room to tell their stories. Volumes could be written about liberation as it affected just this one small village. There was a little girl, Hu Yu-chieh, with fat pig-tails, small for 18 years. Her father died when she was 10, and she was sent to her "husband's"

family. He was 12 and they had been betrothed for years. As was the custom, she became a slave, was mercilessly beaten by all and sundry. Only a few months previously she had found her way to the Women's Federation and heard about her new rights, that beatings were forbidden, that she could leave her husband if he or her mother-in-law persisted in ill-treating her. With such a high rate of illiteracy and no electricity or radio in the villages, it was difficult for many people to learn of their new rights, especially women who are never supposed to move out of doors and are expected to disappear if a visitor comes. Hu Yu-chieh did not know how she could demand her new rights, so a delegation went home with her that first day and explained the position to her husband and the "in-laws." The beatings have stopped. Hu Yu-chieh loosened the tight, scrawny bun into which her hair was pulled, had it bobbed and plaited into fat short pigtails. She is now the star pupil at the literacy classes and plays an active part in the village theatre. She had been given a piece of land, in her own name, as every other man, woman and child in the village was given land. But she knew nothing about it until she timidly visited the Women's Federation. She can be economically dependent on the day she demands it, and it seemed to me by the determined look on her chubby face that it won't be long before she is demanding freedom from her child marriage and the right to live her own life and seek her own mate.

Chao Te-tai, a peasant with a face like a wrinkled walnut, formerly without one square foot of land, now has 15 mow. He grinned when I asked him what the Liberation meant to him, apart from the land he got, and said: "I used to think it was bad luck that I had two daughters and no sons. It was always my worry how I would get enough money to marry them off. Now I see they have rights just like men. They can work and I don't have to worry about a dowry. If they want to get married they'll pick up with someone and just marry him. We never ate meat at home in the old days. Not even once in a year or two years. This New Year, I killed a pig of my own. We eat meat sometimes even twice a week now. Now that we eat meat I am stronger, I can work harder, I own a donkey, too."

The head-man interrupted: "He was unhappy he wasn't the first to pay taxes last year. He got up at 5 o'clock and brought his grain, but there were six ahead of him. The whole taxes



were paid in four hours." Chao Te-tai's wrinkled face wrinkled up even more into a broad grin and he said: "Before, those that had land gave half the harvest to the landlord and half of what was left in taxes. They had to buy grain in a bad year even to pay the taxes. Now we pay nothing to a landlord and only 15 to 20 per cent. to the government. And we know what we pay our taxes for. The government puts up a list for everybody to see, showing what the grain goes for. For a new road, the school, paying the cadres and our army. Why shouldn't we show Chairman Mao how glad we are and pay our taxes early." (I have since known of cases where even the peasants exempted from tax brought in grain and offered it. When they were told it would not be accepted they told the officials to take it in case some could not pay enough because they were old and sick or had no mules to bring it to the tax collection centres. Such a thing was unthinkable in the Kuomintang days, when peasants did everything possible to avoid paying the unjust levies wrung out of their very sweat and blood.)

Most of the people of Ya Men Ko have never seen a train. There are old people who had not even seen a big town until Liberation, although it is only seven miles from Peking. In the old days there were always bandits waiting to swoop down on wayfarers outside Peking's city walls or Ya Men Ko's village walls after dark. There were brutal Manchu warlords, Japanese or Kuomintang gendarmes in the city itself, likely to beat up poor peasants or grab them for military service. Most of the villagers never moved outside the yellow walls of their village except to cultivate their crops on the fields which surrounded them, and to return to the safety of the walls at night.

A miracle occurred on October 1, 1949. Trucks rumbled along the deep ruts of the cart track and halted outside the walls, and loaded up the old folk, wispy-bearded old men, balding old women who could hardly hobble along on the stumps to which their bound feet had been reduced. The younger ones were told to make their way as best and quickest they could to the Gate of Heavenly Peace, the Tien an Men square in the centre of Peking. They went to see and hear Chairman Mao Tse-tung proclaim the establishment of the People's Republic of China. When I asked them what impressed them most, they did not speak about the wonderful buildings, the fairyland

parks and lakes, or trams, trains and dazzling shop windows which many of them were seeing for the first time. "Chairman Mao saluted us peasants," said one trembling-voiced old man, "Chairman Mao spoke up for the peasants. He honored us." That was the most important event on the most important day of their lives. It was the most important event in the thousand-odd years of Ya Men Ko's history.

After dark, we went to the village school where our hostess Wang Shih-yi was already at work. In two classes of about 50 each, old and young, bearded old peasant men and wrinkled old women down to teenagers, were bending over tiny candles stuck into the desks, painfully copying the characters which Wang Shih-yi wrote on the blackboard. Two hanging kerosene lamps reinforced the flickering candles. In the centre of each classroom was a square stone stove filled to the brim with glowing coals. Its plastered top served as writing tables for the fortunate ones who had squeezed there first. At the doorways were some rather timid newcomers in sheepskin coats, who Wang Shih-yi explained, came along to watch for a while before joining in. They wanted to be sure nobody would make fun of grown-ups learning alongside youngsters.

"Almost everybody in the village is studying," she explained. "I teach the more advanced ones, those that already know 500 characters teach those that know only 100. Those that know 100 teach those that only have 50. Day and night groups of women meet in each other's houses and study. Grandmothers look after grandchildren so that the mothers can attend our night classes, but often the grandmothers get together themselves during the daytime and study what their daughters have learned. School children teach groups of less advanced pupils and even grown-ups, after school. The enthusiasm for learning is terrific."

The scholars turned out, reinforced by most of the village children, who were standing around in the snow outside the school, to give us a rousing send-off on the way back to Peking. They sang some revolutionary songs and let loose some lusty cheers for international friendship and for Chairman Mao.

The class composition of Ya Men Ko was fairly representative of other villages I have visited since. Slightly over 5 per cent. of the total population landlords, about another 5 per cent. "rich" peasants, the rest medium, poor and landless pea-

sants with a few artisans and shopkeepers. Four-fifths of the population had benefited enormously under the land reform laws, all the women, including those of the landlords' households, had benefited by the laws establishing the equality of the sexes. The only ones who had lost out were the 45 individual landlords, a tiny fraction of the 5,000 inhabitants. It is no exaggeration to state that in Ya Men Ko between 90 and 95 per cent. of the people were enthusiastic and conscious supporters of People's China. They had never had a chance nor the dream of a chance before in history. Small wonder that scores of them volunteered to defend Ya Men Ko's chance for a continued bright future on the battlefields of Korea. Many of them had volunteered I found, but up to the time I was there, none had been taken.

As the changes in Ya Men Ko have been brought about or are being brought about throughout China, and the land problem is one of the basic questions affecting hundreds of millions of peasants throughout Asia and Europe, it is worth studying the Agrarian Reform Law which was adopted by the People's Republic on June 30, 1950. It is an amazing human document which reflects the political maturity of the Chinese leaders. The law and the basic instructions for its implementation show the extraordinary care with which they ensure that no injustice shall be done any section of the community, even those who have bitterly opposed progress in the past. The basic aim of the law is stated in the first item of general principles that "the land ownership system of feudal exploitation by the landlord class shall be abolished and the system of peasant land ownership shall be introduced." All the landlord's property except his house and personal effects are to be confiscated, but the landlord may then receive land on the same basis as the peasants in the general distribution. A total of up to one per cent. of the land in each area is even set aside for landlords and other guilty people who fled or worked with the enemy. If they have not committed serious war crimes they will also get land when they return to the village. In the meantime the land reserved for them will be rented out to peasants so that production will not be lost. Lands belonging to churches, temples, ancestral shrines, monasteries, etc., will be confiscated, but the shrines and any buildings of historical value must be carefully preserved. Priests, monks and nuns will be given land

on the same basis as other members of the community if they have no other source of income. In general, land will be taken over if it is used as capital, rented out and not worked by the owners, but, in the case of land bought with the earnings of the owners' own labor, or belonging to old people living alone, helpless widows or widowers who depend on the income from the rent for their livelihood, the owners may retain their property.

The most detailed instructions are given in the law setting out how to analyse the class status of an area. The gradations between landlords, rich peasants, well-to-do middle peasants, middle peasants, poor peasants and laborers is clearly described and the correct procedures in each case laid down. For instance the section dealing with the middle peasant states: "The middle peasants depend wholly or mainly upon their own labor for a living. In general they do not exploit others. Many of them are themselves exploited on a small scale by others in the form of land rent and loan interest. . . . Some practice a small degree of exploitation but . . . not of a constant character, and the income therefrom does not constitute their main means of livelihood." Article 7 of the basic law states: "Land and other properties of middle peasants (including well-to-do middle peasants) shall be protected from infringement." The description of middle peasants corresponds exactly to the status of most independent farmers in advanced capitalist countries who farm their land with the help of their own family and perhaps one hired hand, but who are often in debt to bank or mortgage companies.

The poor peasants are described as those who "have to rent land for cultivation and are exploited by others in the form of land rent, loan interest or hired labor in a limited degree." Laborers are those "with neither land nor farm implements . . . who depend wholly or mainly on the sale of their labor power for a living."

When the land is divided out (and the land distribution was not carried out by the issuance of decrees but by careful preparatory work over a period of two to three years after the acceptance of the Agrarian Reform Law) each man, woman and child receives a title deed to the land, covered with impressive red seals. In theory they may sell the land next day, as it is theirs to do with what they like, but in practice there have been

virtually no sales. The hunger for land is felt in the very blood of the people and the aims of the government are to banish the causes that made them sell or mortgage their lands in the past. Each village elects its village committee in which it is laid down in the instructions that at least one-third of the members must be from the middle peasants. The peasants elect at mass meetings delegates to the "hsiang" (administrative unit which includes several villages) peasants' association which supervises the land distribution. Membership fees to the peasants' association are one pound of rice per year. Any disputes go to the "chu" or county administration for settlement. The land which the peasants are cultivating at the time of the distribution is taken as the basis for their new holdings as far as possible. All contracts made before the Reform Law are no longer valid.

Provision is even made to help impoverished landlords who are landlords in name only. "If someone who, though nominally a landlord, has in fact had his landholdings transferred to somebody else, practises only slight exploitation, engages in supplementary labor himself, and has led a life even worse than a peasant, such a man should be treated as a peasant." But bankrupt landlords who engage in no labor still retain their landlord status. There are infinite variations of the main categories into which the rural population is divided. Some of them seem comical at first but they have been prepared on the basis of the rich experience the Chinese Communist Party has had in 25 years of living and fighting almost exclusively in the rural areas of China. The laws are designed to weld the greatest unity between all sections of the countryside and to avoid the faintest possibility of injustice. Category No. 13 for instance is: "The landlord, rich peasant or capitalist, after marriage with worker, peasant or poor odd-jobber and vice versa." This category is again split up into various sub-categories according to their original class status, their living conditions after marriage, whether the marriage took place before or after Liberation with careful instructions as to how each sub-category is to be regarded.

The landlords are encouraged to invest their wealth in industry. In the past the landlords and rich peasants amounting to only 10 per cent. of the population, owned 70 to 80 per cent. of the entire land and exploited the peasants who owned the

other 20 to 30 per cent. This has been radically abolished for all time. But commercial and industrial enterprises belonging to the landlords are exempt from confiscation and most of them own such properties. Liu Shao-chih, who ranks next to Chairman Mao as the leading Communist theoretician, shrewdly remarked in introducing the Reform Bill: "According to past experience, if these properties of the landlords are to be confiscated and distributed, the landlords will hide and disperse them, while the peasants will search for them. Thus chaotic conditions will easily arise, and wastage and destruction of great social wealth will also occur. It is therefore better to allow the landlords to keep these properties. Thus they can earn a living from these properties or they can invest them in production. This is also beneficial to society. This way of dealing with landlords in the future agrarian reform is far more lenient than it was in the past."

The government cadres who went as advance teams to the villages before the land reform was carried out, were required to make themselves thoroughly familiar with every aspect of the bill. They spend many weeks, even months, in an area, explaining carefully, giving the peasants confidence and building up to the point where the peasants themselves are prepared to elect their associations and carry the reform through. All change must come from below. Nothing is done by the issuing of decrees in the villages. The majority of the peasants themselves must be convinced that a thing is correct and must themselves carry it out. The cadres are there to take the place of newspapers and radio, to patiently explain what the policy is and how it is to be applied. The rest is left to peasants and the final act is usually the accusation meeting where the rapacious landlords are lined up and denounced for their past crimes. Personal violence or corporal punishment is rigidly prohibited. If the crimes are great enough the landlords must be handed over to special people's tribunals for trial and punishment.

The changes which have been introduced to Ya Men Ko will soon be completed over an area embracing almost 400,000,000 people, about one-fifth of the world's population. Increased food production is in direct proportion to the extent to which land reform has been carried out and the new life organized. In the old liberated areas, for instance, in 1950 there was a good surplus; the new liberated areas where land reform had

already been carried out were self-sufficient and only in the new liberated areas where land reform had not been carried out was there a deficit. Better technique, greater enthusiasm, Mutual Aid teams, of which more will be written later, all play their part in stepping up production as soon as land reform is completed.

The Chinese have found a humane way of solving a problem which presses heavily on a large part of the world's population, especially in India, the Middle East, and South Asia.

They solved it without causing any disruption in production and with the least possible hardship to any section of the community. The Agrarian Reform Act of People's China could well serve as a model not only for Asiatic countries but also for places like Italy where the peasantry, and therefore the country as a whole, suffer from the brutal oppression and the wasteful methods of landlord cultivation. Peasant cultivation is certainly not the final answer to China's agrarian problem but it is an advance on landlordism and the Mutual Aid teams are already showing the way to the next stage of development in the Chinese countryside.

## CHAPTER IV

### MINERS, DOCKERS AND THE GANG SYSTEM

THE change in the lives of the peasants of Ya Men Ko was striking enough but even more dramatic is the changed status of China's industrial workers. They are only a tiny proportion of the population but trade union membership is just short of five and a half million and growing rapidly as newly-established industries absorb the surplus labor from the countryside. The workers were the ones who felt the full weight of Japanese and Kuomintang oppression. From 1927 when Chiang Kai-shek turned traitor, and massacred thousands of Communists and workers in Shanghai, the mass of China's workers were alternately oppressed by Kuomintang, Japanese and Kuomintang again until their final liberation. Japanese and Kuomintang held towns and cities, while the Communist armies and guerrilla units operated with the peasants in the country.

Some day a rich literature will arise based on the heroic struggle of the Chinese industrial workers against an oppression which has few parallels in history. It is impossible in a book of this sort to more than sketch a few typical examples of what went on in the not so far distant "old" days and of how life has changed. One such example is that of the Feng Feng coal mines which nestle in the foothills of the Tai Han mountains along the Hopei-Honan-Shansi-Shantung border area. These mountains provided one of the most famous bases for the guerrilla fighters of the Eighth Route Army. From the foothills there is a clear view of the poppet heads of the mines, the smoking chimney stacks of the power house, the piles of pit props for timbering the underground galleries, and—in 1951—row after row of newly-built brick houses. The latter are built well above the level of the pitheads, where the air is clear of smoke and coal dust. On closer inspection one finds neat little cottages where the miners and their families live rent free with coal for heating and cooking, and electricity also provided free of charge. At the time I visited the mines, finishing touches were just being given to a fine, new hospital.

On the way down from the cottages to the pithead one had to step carefully to avoid numerous holes in the ground. There are hundreds of them, riddling every slight rise or ridge. Under the Japanese that is where the miners used to live. Frozen in winter, flooded out in summer, they lived and died in these holes scooped out of any piece of ground that was unfit for cultivation.

Surrounding the pithead are many abandoned shafts where small-time individual miners used to dig for coal. One peers down such a shaft and finds it half filled with whitened bones and skulls. There are scores of such shafts into which were thrown fifteen or twenty bodies *every day* under Japanese occupation. They were the miners who collapsed on their way to work or at the coal-face through starvation. The ones who died at home were wrapped in grass mats and buried underground. No miner's family could afford a coffin and to be buried without a coffin in China is counted a greater misfortune than death itself.

In Mine No. 1, the coal is dug at about three hundred feet below the surface. There is no lift, so I walked down the steeply sloping ramp the miners use, down even steeper steps hewn from the rock and more ramps where moisture drips from the slaty roof and little streamlets criss-cross the path. After a kilometre or two of alternating ramps and steps, the rumble of coal skips is suddenly frighteningly close, as one nears the scene of operations. There are grimy-faced men dragging timber, others furiously shovelling coal into an endless conveyor, and one key man, his face black and gleaming like the coal itself, attacking the seam with a pneumatic drill. The coal came crashing down in jagged lumps, the timberers, agile as cats, forced the pit-props into position to stop the roof caving in as the coal melted away under the prodding of the man with the drill. He had no time to talk to a journalist; he was busy driving coffin nails into American imperialist aggression. That's the way he put it.

Sweating back up the steps and slopes, we paused for rest and a cup of green Chinese tea at a safety station. "This used to be the temple of Lao Ching-ye," the guide explained. "This was the god of the mine. If the miners weren't producing enough he would get angry and speak through an explosion

which might kill half a dozen. At least, that's what the Japs said and most of the illiterate miners believed them. Before going on shift, the Japs lined them up and made them repeat some Buddhist mumbo-jumbo which was supposed to protect them if they worked well. They drank the gas-filled water that runs through the galleries because Lao Ching-ye had provided it. In case Lao Ching-ye roared and flames came out of his mouth they were to prostrate themselves on the ground. These were the only safety measures the Japs introduced."

After Liberation Lao Ching-ye was moved to a smaller place in the gallery. Safety measures were introduced for the first time. Sixty-six safety officers were elected by the miners and given special training. Electric lighting in the galleries, Edison safety lamps for every miner, ventilation and air conditioning, tests made for gas before miners were allowed to enter any shaft, lectures and demonstrations gradually convinced the miners that Lao Ching-ye was a sham. They threw him out.

At the pit-top, after he had bathed in the newly-established bath-house set up at all four pits in Feng Feng, Lo Yung-chin found time to talk with me. A week previously he had smashed all records in China by hewing 253.4 tons of coal in a shift of 7 hours 20 mins. He is a massive man and looked doubly massive in the thick, padded cotton black uniform worn by the miners. Why did he want to break records? It soon became clear.

Lo Young-chin comes from a family of miners. His grandfather started work in the Feng Feng pits at the age of 13. His father and his two elder brothers also worked there. Lo himself started work as a wheeler at the age of 12. Neither he nor his brothers had any education. When he was 18, he had just started to work as a hewer when the Japanese came. They beat him almost to death because he protested when they made him push the coal trucks again instead of letting him continue as a hewer. For food, he got a few handfuls of soya bean-cake fertiliser a day; for wages, enough to buy one and a half pounds of rice every two weeks. He was beaten by the Japanese, by the puppet foremen, and by the brutal gang masters who were the Jap agents in recruiting labor and who took a high proportion of even the miserable wage Lo got. The miners began to eat handfuls of coal dust to try and stop the hunger pains. Then they began to die, and the gang masters threw their bodies

into the pits. "One day," said Lo, "a neighbor of mine fell down from weakness. He struggled to his feet but fell down again. The gang master picked him up and threw him alive down a shaft on to the bodies of those already dead." Lo's own father dropped dead from hunger. He was only 50 years of age, but was worn out by years of slavery on starvation diet.

Lo knew nothing about political theory. He knew little about the Communists except that sometimes guerrilla bands would sweep down on the mines, from the Tai Han mountains and kidnap or frighten the more brutal of the gang bosses and foremen. "And I knew they were against workers being beaten up," he added. Now and again miners used to disappear and join the guerrillas. Once some miners led in a group of guerrillas with their hands bound behind their backs. They told the Japanese guard at the gate they had captured them. A few minutes later the guerrillas were free with guns in their hands, and had rounded up the eight Jap guards in charge of the administration. Guerrillas, Jap prisoners and the miners who had planned the coup all disappeared back into the mountains.

After eight years of indescribable misery for the miners, the Japs left and the People's Army came down to take over Feng Feng. The officers knew a lot about fighting Japs and working with peasants, but little about running mines or factories. They started to learn from the workers, introduced decent hours and food. But not long afterwards the Kuomintang attacked the area. The workers moved every bit of machinery that could be dismantled, including generators, on their backs and in hand trucks, up into the mountains. The pits were flooded, the Kuomintang did not succeed in getting one ton of coal from the mines. Later they were driven away and the miners came back.

Chairman Mao's three principles of dealing with industrial development were carried out. They were: (1) Set up democratic trade unions and establish the closest unity between the Communist Party, trade unions and youth leagues; (2) To promote the maximum number of cadres from the rank and file workers, and (3) After stepping up production improve the living standards of the workers. These are the three general principles for managing factories and mines. They were carried out to the letter at Feng Feng.

The gang system was smashed, the gang bosses appeared before "accusation" meetings and were dealt with according to the gravity of their offences. Trade union elections were held and the miners were able to elect not only their own union officials but new foremen to replace the Jap puppets. Worker-management committees were set up in which the workers themselves had a dominant voice in all questions relating to conditions and production methods. Executives were nominated from amongst the workers and sent off to trade union schools for brief study courses. Underground miners and pushers returned after a few months to become directors and vice-directors of the pits. A brother of Lo Yung-chin, was elected as a foreman, a mate who had worked alongside Lo as a wheeler became vice-director of the mine in which Lo worked. Soviet "elder brothers" came and demonstrated their methods of cutting coal. The emulation movement started. Production began to soar. With soaring production started the real improvement in working conditions. Of course, basic improvements had been carried out immediately after Liberation; decent food, reduced working hours and provision of warm winter clothing were among the first measures introduced.

When production started to go up attention was paid to housing. In 1950 new homes were built for 4,000 of Feng Feng's 7,500 miners. Bath houses, co-operative stores, clubs and schools were built. More than half the miners started attending literacy courses.

Wages were based on every worker earning enough to support himself and two other persons, in addition to free rent, heating and lighting. Three free meals a day were provided at the pit canteens, hewers began to eat meat, many of them for the first time in their lives. Lo Yung-chin had only eaten meat a few times at the New Year Festival—at most once in a year. Now he gets half a kilo of pork a day.

"When I saw everything our government was doing for us, when I understood the Americans were killing our brothers in Korea and trying to invade China; that they wanted to bring back the Japanese, I swore I'd break all records," Lo said with great earnestness. "We had the Japs on our backs, the Kuomintang on our backs, and now the Americans are trying to crawl on our backs. I said I'd break every record set by others. At first it was 47 tons, then 70, then 102, 200 and finally my

mate who used to work alongside me as a pusher, put up 245 tons. He showed me his methods, and I beat him a few days later with 253.4. I am showing my mates how I use my drill, how I use the seams in the coal face, how our team of leaders and timberers organise the work with me. Others will break my records and I'll overtake them again. We pledged that we would support our comrades in Korea to our utmost and the Americans will learn what our utmost means."

That in brief is the story of the Feng Feng mines. Liberation from slavery, workers' management, 300 workers promoted to executives, 60 sent for training as engineers, 4,000 new homes and others being built, free housing and food, maximum of safety for miners, free medical attention and sickness benefits. And the results were a high degree of political consciousness and an unbounded enthusiasm to produce to halt potential invaders who were prepared to bring back the Kuomintang or even the Japanese.

A feature of the administration at Feng Feng and other enterprises is the worker-management committee to which the workers elected half the members, and the director appoints the other half from the executives—themselves mostly former workers. This committee at Feng Feng meets fortnightly and decides all questions of hiring and firing, production schedules and methods, bonuses, wages and food. It is in effect the real management of the mine. Its decisions must be approved by the director, and once approved, he is solely responsible for carrying them out. A permanent committee, including the director, the chairman of the trade union committee, and a delegate nominated by the miners (usually, but not necessarily, the Communist Party secretary), meets daily, and the whole management of the mines is continually under their control. In the rare case of disputes with the director, the management committee can appeal to the Ministry concerned, but until a decision is handed down they must continue to operate under the director. In every plant and factory I have visited the managers say that the real jump in production figures dated from the time the worker-management committees were set up and the workers really felt they were in control.

The gang system was an infamous institution in China which continued to operate for several months after Liberation. The gang boss was a stooge of the capitalist masters, the Kuo-

mintang or Japanese. He was a direct offshoot of the feudal system. As the landlords' headman in the village was responsible for supplying quotas of troops, so the gang boss made himself responsible for supplying workers, to the Japanese or Kuomintang operated enterprises. He made the contracts, collected the pay at the end of the month, and gave the workers what he thought fit. At Feng Feng, for instance, most of the workers had no idea what they were entitled to get. In some areas the gang bosses actually press-ganged workers into service for the mines, herded them off like cattle. In the cities it was the constant dread of the unemployed to be rounded up by the gang bosses. Doped alcohol and lures to brothels were used as a means of roping in workers and satisfying the insatiable demand for labor in industries and especially in the mines where the men were dying faster than replacements could be found. The gang bosses received a premium per head for every worker delivered.

The gang system in the transport industry was particularly pernicious and among the wharfies of Tientsin there are still bitter memories of a situation which seems unbelievable until one has talked with the people who suffered under it, and with those who smashed it up. Until a few months after Liberation, the Tientsin wharves (and the same was true in all China's coastal cities) were split up into various "concessions." Each concession was the private stamping ground of a feudal-capitalist who employed a gang boss to work it for him. Only gangs of that particular boss could load or unload ships in the concession. If other gangs entered the area there would be fights just as furious and bloody as in the old days when serfs were forced to fight when one feudal landlord encroached on the lands of a rival. If workers from one gang had to cross another's territory in order to deliver goods, then transit "taxes" had to be paid. Workers who rebelled against the system were speedily disposed of, beaten up with the brutal clubs the gang bosses always carried, or knifed and thrown into the water.

Tsang Wei-hsieh, who played a large part in smashing the system throughout China, gave me a graphic account of how the system worked and how it was stopped. He is now the dockers' representative on the Tientsin Waterfront Administration, and he received me in the luxurious new International Seamen's Club, which had just been opened a month pre-

viously on the Tientsin wharves. (Dockers who work from ship to wharf are now members of the Seamen's Union.)

Tsang Wei-hsieh is a very handsome, determined-looking man, with the brown leathery face of a man who has worked out of doors all his life. He is husky, square-shouldered and strong, and looks intelligent and honest. His father died of starvation when he was 12, and Tsang tried to support his younger brothers and sisters by peddling cigarettes. Eventually he was recommended to a gang boss, and took the job rather than be rounded up for the Jap-managed mines. He was told that he would be paid the equivalent of 150 pounds of maize flour a month, but that 95 per cent. of it had to be turned back to the gang boss. And this was the normal rate along the wharves throughout China. The amount left to Tsang was equal to one packet of cigarettes a month. But he was given to understand that he could make up his wages by stealing; that nobody minded how much was stolen as long as the gang bosses and the police got a cut out of any big hauls. At first Tsang Wei-hsieh was very bad at stealing. He was a new hand and the older men did not immediately "trust" him. In addition he did not like the idea of becoming a thief.

He had a family to support, however. His younger sister had found work at a textile factory, but, as an apprentice, got no pay and only two miserable buns daily for food. Tsang soon learned to steal. Small items like cakes of soap he could keep for himself. More valuable things he had to turn over to the gang boss who paid part as a bribe to the police, kept the larger part himself, and gave Tsang Wei-hsieh the rest. On one occasion, on orders from Choh Chiao-hsiang, the gang boss, Tsang's band stole 3,600 bags of rice. They emptied the bags and filled them up again with old rice and sand. (Small wonder that British business men in Hong Kong were full of praise for the way the Communists had cleaned things up in Shanghai and Tientsin.) For a time, as Tsang was a rare exception who could read and write, he got a job as tally clerk with top wages—40 pounds of wheat flour monthly that he could keep for himself—but with no chance to steal. But on that wage he married.

For ten years Tsang Wei-hsieh worked on the docks. When the Japs were defeated, he and the other wharfies looked forward to a new life. The Japs had forbidden trade unions and

the first thing the workers demanded of the Kuomintang was the right to form unions. The Kuomintang agreed. Unions were formed—with the gang bosses appointed to all the leading positions. The system went on just the same. Tsang's own position got worse. Kuomintang officials sold most of the machinery in the factory where his sister worked, and it was closed down. His brother lost his job, and Tsang once again had to try and support the whole family. Kuomintang corruption was worse than anything the Japs had allowed. Soaring prices ate into his tiny income. His wife died of tuberculosis brought on by starvation.

It was difficult to credit all this, sitting in the comfortable club room, sipping a glass of beer, watching the ships glide along, waiting to drop anchor at the wharves opposite, but Tsang's deadly earnestness, the grim nods and terse interjections of the men who had gathered around our table testified to the reality of the story.

The Americans came and for one month the dockers thought things were going to be better. Americans handed around canned food as tips, and carried on propaganda about a new "Way of Life." But the corruption and brutality of the gang masters continued as before. Tsang was disillusioned with the Americans when he transported goods to a restaurant one night and saw American soldiers line up all the dancing girls, force them to undress, and after a minute inspection, proceed to rape them. Apart from being able to steal better quality food when unloading American ships, things went from bad to worse. The gang bosses in their dual capacity of robber chiefs and trade union leaders, were more arrogant even than before. They invested the money robbed from the workers in property abandoned by the Japanese. They acted as secret agents for the Kuomintang as they had done for the Japanese, reporting any workers who showed militant tendencies.

Then came the Communists. The wharfies had no illusions of better treatment. Tientsin was a long way from where the guerrillas were operating. Few of the men had experience of Communists and if they did they kept their mouths closed for fear of the gang bosses. For several weeks there were no changes. But the gang bosses began to get a little nervous. Of their own accord they offered to let the wharfies keep half their earnings. This was accepted by the men as being quite reason-



able. After all, half a loaf was better than a miserable bite out of a loaf. Then a cadre appeared on the scene, Tsen Shao-lun, now chairman of the Seamen's Union of North China. He started to organise a Seamen's Union. The dockers began to join it, and the gang bosses tried again to get into the leading positions. But Tsen, who is a quiet-spoken, shrewd old Communist Party organiser, would have none of it. Tsang Wei-hsieh was elected a dockers' delegate to the new union. He was approached by the gang boss, Chen Chao-hsiang, who said in effect: "Now look here. We gang masters weren't allowed to join the unions. That was quite right. I have read the new government's programme, and it says that it intends to protect capitalists. We gang masters are the capitalists, you dockers are the workers. After all, who will look after you if we are not there to sign contracts with the shippers. We'll let the dockers keep even more than half the earnings. How about it?"

Tsang thought this was a reasonable argument, but went and talked it over with Tsen Shao-lun, who carefully explained that the gang masters were not capitalists because they had invested no money in productive enterprises. They were vampires who lived exclusively on the blood and sweat of the workers. Tsang was convinced and told the dockers not to be tricked by this argument. Che Chao-hsiang invited Tsang to his home and offered him twenty million Chinese dollars (about 1,000 U.S. dollars), and guaranteed financial support for the rest of his life, if he would arrange matters so that the gang system could continue. Tsang pretended to agree and went back and reported the matter to Tsen Shao-lun. Then began a period of several weeks of political education for Tsang Wei-hsieh. He was still suspicious of the new government. Nobody had cared for the workers in the past. The gang bosses were in touch with Kuomintang secret agents and spread rumors that the Kuomintang would soon be back. The dockers who joined the unions, according to the gang bosses, would never get a job on the wharves again. Those who took a leading part in upsetting the system would be executed. Tsang was not prepared to lead the workers into something they would regret afterwards, and he had to be completely sure that the People's Government really cared for the workers and was there to stay. It is typical of the mature methods of the Chinese Communists that they did not rush matters. It would have been a simple

matter to issue a decree abolishing the gang system, but this would have caused suspicions, disruption, loss of labor from the wharves, and also a golden opportunity of political education for the workers would have been missed. It is a cardinal rule in every phase of life in People's China that change must come from below, when the masses are ready for it and demand it.

There were long, earnest discussions between Tsang Wei-hsieh and Tsen Shao-lun. Tsang was sent to Peking to talk with trade union and political leaders there, with veteran organisers who had followed the revolution through for twenty years. He saw how simply people lived from the cadres to the leading officials, how self-sacrificingly they worked. Nobody hurried him to make a decision, he was given every chance to see and hear as much as he wanted. He returned to Tientsin completely convinced that there was now a government of the working people which would stand by the working people. He went down to the docks and explained matters to the dockers. It took several more weeks of individual discussions and group meetings with the men on the concession where he used to work to break down their suspicions. Tsen Shao-lun came down and helped to persuade the men that the time was ripe to smash the gang system. Eventually they were convinced and they helped Tsang to compile a dossier about Che Chao-hsiang. They listed all his brutalities, including the raping of the wives of a number of dockers who had come to the wharves for food; knifings and beatings, and the years of exploitation and robbery. They computed that in the few months between Liberation and the time they drew up the lists, Che had netted 262,000,000 Chinese dollars (14,000 U.S.) plus a house and two shops. The dossier was turned over to public safety officials, and a few days later Che Chao-hsiang was arrested, to the great relief of all the dockers and the surprise of many. In the past gang bosses could always buy their way out of any trouble.

Shortly afterwards there was a mass accusation rally held on the wharves at which Che appeared under armed guard. Word spread like wildfire along the wharves; dockers from other concessions left their work to attend the meeting. At first hesitantly, and then with rising passion, the workers spoke up to denounce their former oppressor. Che could not but admit many of the charges and he was led off for trial. Within a few days similar meetings had been organised on the entire

China waterfront. The gang system was wiped out by the workers themselves, once they were convinced the government would really back them up and protect them from the brutalities which in the past swiftly followed any moves to improve their lot. Most of the gang bosses "abdicated" voluntarily, but those against whom serious charges were made were arrested. Not a few were sentenced to death for murder.

The wharves were cleaned up, dockers put on a decent wage with a minimum based on the purchase price of 800 pounds of millet flour a month. (In New China, due to the legacies of Kuomintang inflation and wildly fluctuating prices, wages are either based on so many hundred pounds of flour in a month or on a point system based on the prices of five basic commodities: millet flour, cloth, coal, salt and vegetable cooking oil. Prices are calculated on actual market prices on the day wages are paid, so the workers are not affected by fluctuating prices. Now that China has a stable currency and inflation has completely disappeared, some enterprises are getting back to a regular money wage, but in general workers and peasants prefer to calculate everything from income to taxes in terms of basic commodities. The government still often quotes budget and investment items in terms of so many millions of pounds of millet flour or rice.)

Doubts by the wharfies as to whether they could organise their work properly without the gang bosses were soon dispelled when the first ship arrived after Che was arrested. It was unloaded and loaded in just half the normal time by working an eight hour day instead of the twelve to fourteen hours as previously. Pilfering stopped almost overnight with the introduction of decent working conditions.

As Tsang Wei-hsieh came to the end of his story, he said: "And now my own family troubles are over, too. My sister is a 'model' worker in a textile factory. My brother got a good job in a factory but volunteered for Korea and was accepted. The children from my first wife are going to school. I have re-married and was even able to hire a nurse when my wife had a baby a few weeks ago." One husky young chap from the crowd of dockers and seamen, who had gathered round our table said: "If it hadn't been for Tsang and old Tsen Shao-lun, we'd still be slaves for those bandits." Tsang was quick to answer: "It's Chairman Mao and the Communist Party you've

got to thank, not us."

Tsang and Tsen escorted me around the beautiful club with its theatre and cinema, beautiful bar and parquet dance floor, which was just being finished as we were there, recreation room, reading room, library, restaurant and special service department where sailors and dockers could buy everything from cigarettes to rail and theatre tickets. It seemed quite a fitting end to Tsang's story when he said, "Quite a bit of the money used to fit this place out came from the money Che Chao-shiang and the rest had been taking out of our pockets over the years."

A sequel to the breaking up of the gang system was an excellent play, Gate No. 6 which became popular throughout China. Two young Tientsin writers worked on the wharves during the final stages of the war against the gang bosses. After the victory was won, together with the dockers they wrote a play which graphically portrayed the system and how it was defeated. The dockers themselves wrote most of the dialogue and the production I saw in the Peking People's Art Theatre was acted almost entirely by dockers with a few of the leading roles played by professionals. It was a most moving and realistic performance, and seeing it only a few weeks after I had spoken with Tsang Wei-hsieh, it brought every one of his words to life. The theatre had been reserved for building workers, many of them seeing a stage production for the first time in their lives. They leaned forward, gripping the seats in front of them, drinking in every word and gesture, their grim faces reflecting every emotion expressed on the stage. It was their own lives being portrayed in front of them.

In the final act of the play, the gang bosses plot to murder the cadre who is organising the workers. At the last minute the plot is discovered, the gang bosses arrested and hauled before an accusation meeting. There is a strongly emotional scene, as, with rising passion, the dockers tear tragedies out of their own lives and hurl their accusations at the cowering gang bosses. At one point the dockers rush to beat up the gang bosses, but the militia step in to protect them. There was pandemonium in the theatre. Workers were on their feet shouting angrily for the militia to get out of the way. They wanted justice done there and then on the stage. Fortunately for the actors the curtain rang down with the gang bosses being dragged off by the militia.

## CHAPTER V

## A NEW DEAL FOR THE WORKERS

AT the entrance to the Number 2 Textile Mill at Tientsin, a wall newspaper was on display on the day of my visit. It was typical of many I have seen since in other factories, as the Chinese workers protest against plans to remilitarise Japan. There was a series of posters vividly portraying the suffering of workers from that factory at the hands of the Japanese. There were half-naked workers being whipped by Japanese guards, others tied to trees being attacked by half-starved police dogs with grinning Japanese looking on as their flesh is torn from their limbs. These were not the fantastic imaginings of sadistic artists but the portrayal of real events and real people, many of them still working in the textile mill.

When I asked the first worker I met what was the main difference in working conditions under Japanese and Kuomintang administration, the reply was: "The difference in torture methods. The Japs used dogs and whips, the Kuomintang used the American way of clubs and electric torture. Living and working conditions were the same."

Under the Japanese, trade unions were forbidden; under Kuomintang, bogus trade unions existed under which the only rights the workers had were to pay their fees. No elections were held, union officials were appointed by the Kuomintang. A worker who dared present demands of any sort to the bogus union officials was almost certain to be arrested. All the union officials were agents of the Kuomintang secret police, and their main duties were to spy on militant workers and suspected Communists.

One-sixth of all China's industrial workers are employed in textile factories, and developments in the State-owned Tientsin No. 2 mill are typical of those throughout China. In the Kuomintang days it employed 4,800 workers for 60,000 spindles and 2,100 looms. Working hours were at first twelve hours, later reduced to ten hours daily. The raw cotton was imported from

America at great expense. Wages under the Kuomintang nominally averaged two hundred pounds of millet flour monthly, but due to the fierce inflation and the habit of managers delaying payment of wages for two or three weeks while they speculated with the workers' pay packets, the latter got only forty to fifty pounds. Absenteeism for even one day meant the loss of the whole month's wages. Strikes and protests were frequent but always ended in the arrest and torture of the leaders, often their disappearance and always to their being fired and black-listed from other textile mills. Workers were clubbed and beaten to keep production up, women workers frequently fainted at their looms. The story of the inhuman conditions under which children and women particularly, were exploited in this and other mills belong to another chapter of this book. In general, they were the conditions in the early days of England's industrial revolution with up-to-date American refinements of repression.

Three months before Liberation, production was at the rate of 3.9 yards of cloth per loom per hour. As the Kuomintang began to sense the approach of their zero hour, supplies of American cotton dwindled until the mill closed down altogether, with the workers still living in the factory compound. During the last six weeks Kuomintang agents began sabotaging the works and stealing the machinery. A 600-strength workers' guard unit was formed, including 40 women. As the People's Army approached Tientsin itself, Kuomintang troops occupied the factory and set up artillery posts. The workers' guards sent delegates crawling across the battlefield to lead the Red Army troop into the compound and force Chiang Kai-shek's troops to surrender. The night of the surrender the generators were started up, the following day the factory went into production again.

When I visited the mill it had been liberated just over two years. It had been enlarged to accommodate 2,700 looms, 100,000 spindles, and employed 7,200 workers, of whom 3,500 were women. Production per loom is 4.7 yards per hour. The working day is divided into three shifts of eight hours each with a twenty minutes' break for lunch. All the cotton used to-day is grown in China—to the great disgust of the American Government, which hoped by slamming down a blockade and cutting off China's imports, to halt her textile industry.

Figures and dry facts, however, are a cold means of painting the revolutionary changes which have occurred in Textile Mill No. 2, and every other textile mill throughout China. The enthusiasm with which veteran workers, many of them still youngsters in age, tell of the changes in their life is difficult to recapture in print. At first, like the dockers, the mass of the workers were hesitant to believe that People's China would really stand by the toilers. Most of the old foremen remained on the job for the first weeks. They spread the rumors that the Kuomintang would soon be back with the usual punishments for militant workers. Gradually the workers were convinced that the old times had gone for good. They were able to elect their own trade union officials. Before long they had organised mass rallies and accusation meetings at which the crimes of the foremen were listed. One had raped no less than sixteen women workers, and probably many more who kept silent at the meeting; another had specialised in denouncing suspected Communists to the Kuomintang or Japanese, others were experts with clubs or pocketed the workers' wages. By the time the accusation meetings had taken place in every department few of the old foremen were left on the job. Some were arrested, others sent for courses in the re-education schools or the People's Revolutionary University in Peking. New foremen and forewomen were elected. Women were given the same rights and salaries as men, with all branches in the technical and administrative departments open to them. Management committees were set up similar to those already described at the Feng Feng mines. They are responsible for hiring and firing, promotions and demotions, praise and criticism, readjustment of hours and conditions. Wages were formally increased four-fold, but in actual fact ten-fold.

Ninety per cent. of the workers were illiterate, now over 5,000 attend literacy classes, where, in addition to learning to read and write, they receive a good foundation in political theory and the policies of the People's Government. Just to stroll through the factory and speak to a few workers at random was to get an impression of talking to people who have suddenly emerged to the light of day after having been chained in underground cellars. There was Liu Liu-shih, soft, shy and feminine, who set down a great pile of laden spindles from her shoulders to speak to me for a moment. Her workmates had to prod her

to speak at all, her placid madonna-like face and large eyes still expressed pain as she recalled the birth of her baby in the factory latrine, and herself toiling at the loom till the very minute almost of childbirth, back at the loom again the same afternoon. Daughter of a poor peasant, married at fifteen, she was sent to the mill by her mother-in-law so that her husband need not work. She had to conceal her pregnancy for fear of being sacked and hide the child afterwards. She kept him in a tiny box at the loom, and when the foreman came round stuffed his mouth with cotton wool in case he cried. She was kept in an agony of suspense in case the foreman stayed too long and the baby suffocated. She had to try and find time secretly to let him suck at her breasts. Part of the miserable food she should have eaten for her lunch she had to take home to her worthless husband. To-day the child played happily in the factory kindergarten, and would soon be starting school.

Busily dismantling a loom, her vivacious ivory-tinted face and hands covered with grease, we found Pei Hwei-chan. Clad in long blue trousers tied tightly round her ankles, and a short white blouse, with her sparkling humorous eyes, Pei Hwei-chan made an impression of great energy and intelligence. It was no great surprise to find she had been a militant worker in and out of jail under the Japanese and Kuomintang, changing her name, beaten and tortured. She was one of the factory guards who had protected the machinery and arranged the surrender of the Kuomintang regiment. One of her first acts after Liberation was to divorce the worthless husband of an arranged marriage, and to join a trade union school for technicians. While at the school she joined the Communist Party. She is just completing her apprenticeship as an engineer now and is one of the model workers of the mill. A number of girls I spoke to had been in the mill from the age of nine years, had worked for 12 hours a day for years without pay.

I talked to Wang Te-sen, a slight man with a shaven bullet head and holder of the national record in textile production. He had worked in the mill for ten years. "Under the Japs and the Kuomintang," he said, "we weren't men and women. We were animals. We had to bow to the Japs every time one came near. If they came from behind and we hadn't seen them they beat us over the heads. We were lined up and forced to beat each other with the Japs beating those who didn't hit hard

enough. Now everybody treats us as equals. We run the factory. Everything we produce is for our own people. In the past we were imprisoned if we complained, beaten if we made suggestions. Now people listen if we have complaints and make use of our suggestions." As a National Hero of Labor Wang had been sent to Peking and was entertained at a dinner party with other labor heroes by Chairman Mao. "How could I have ever dreamed," he said, "that a poor worker would sit down to dinner at the Peking Hotel with Chairman Mao, Comrades Liu Shao-chih and Chu Teh? Now we workers are really people."

At the end of the visit to Textile Mill No. 2 I sat in the workers' own theatre, which seats 3,000, and saw a first class play written by Lao Sheh, one of China's best authors and playwrights. It dealt with the lives of theatrical people in the old days and how they had been changed since Liberation. The most interesting thing was that it was performed by a high grade cast of professional actors and actresses, who had come down to Tientsin from Peking to live and work alongside the textile workers for two or three months to study their lives, so they could better interpret the lives of workers in future stage productions. They would spend four hours daily in the mill, the rest of the time in discussions and rehearsals for productions in the workers' theatre. "Intellectuals must learn from the workers," said Mao Tse-tung, and this is taken very seriously by both intellectuals and workers.

The textile mill, like all other large enterprises, has its own club, theatre and recreation facilities. It is planned that every enterprise employing over 500 workers shall have its own club but apart from these there is a huge Working Peoples' Palace of Culture in the centre of Tientsin, which accommodates 11,000 workers. Admission is by showing a trade union membership card. I visited it one Saturday night, and it seemed to me that most of the 11,000 were there. Cinema and theatre (where an old-style classical opera was showing to about 5,000 people) were jammed full. Young people were playing ping-pong and a type of billiards in the spacious recreation rooms, dozens of tables were occupied with chess players and the fans who gather round them; library, reading and study rooms were all full of people quietly reading and studying. This enormous building used to be a playground and gambling hall for wealthy

merchants in the old days. Now it is really a workers' palace of culture. There are dozens of classrooms where one can study anything from ballroom dancing to engineering, under expert tuition. Literacy classes are held there nightly. (70,000 of the city's 400,000 workers were enrolled in literacy classes.) On the third floor couples were dancing on a beautifully polished, enormous dance floor; textile workers, army men, dockers, seamen, cross section of the ordinary working men and women of the community. In the old days such pleasures were completely unknown to them. The sordid, filthy gin-halls and brothels provided the only doubtful pleasures for the men; for the women there was nothing at all but to stay home and sew or be beaten and abused by husband and mother-in-law.

Another example of what Liberation meant to China's industrial workers and to production even within the first two years of People's China was to be seen at the "Dragon's Eyes" iron and steel mill, ten miles from Peking. "Dragon's Eyes" had been sleeping for some years before it was stirred into life by Chairman Mao's men at the end of 1949. The sight of the molten, golden-red iron gushing from its furnaces, the yellow, sulphurous smoke belching from its coke ovens to-day suggests that "Dragon's Mouth" would be a better name, but "Dragon's Eyes" was the name given it by an ambitious warlord who started to build the plant in 1919. Its story since then is typical of industrial development in China.

Through the years of civil war and the corrupt Kuomintang administration the first 250-ton furnace started by the warlord was not completed. Valuable equipment imported from England lay rusting in open sheds. Rich iron and coal deposits in the area were shipped hundreds of miles to the south, to plants at Hankow. When the Japanese invaded in 1937 they quickly set about completing the plant. The first furnace was finished in December, 1938, and as the Japs speeded their preparations for war in the Pacific they added another 200-ton furnace and 11 small 20-tonners. They made frequent forays into Communist-held territory to capture manpower to be used as virtual slaves at the furnaces.

They built up production to a peak of between seven and eight thousand tons a year. Workers were given just enough food to keep them alive, but not enough clothes to keep them warm. They worked a 12-hour day until the death rate

exceeded the replacement rate, then the hours were reduced to 10 daily. In winter, they huddled around the furnaces at night to sleep in warmth. An average of three died nightly of carbon monoxide poisoning from coke gases, but it was a pleasanter death than freezing in their unheated huts. Once when some workers had had diarrhoea the Japs said it was cholera and threw them alive into the furnaces. Now and again Jap guards would prowl around at night and select a few of those sleeping in the warmth and throw them in alive, too, as a lesson to the others. The usual sadistic punishments were used for the slightest imaginable offences, forcing the workers to club and whip each other, setting the dogs on them.

After 1945, the Kuomintang took over again in Peking. For two years "Dragon's Eyes" were closed in sleep. Chiang Kai-shek was too busy preparing for civil war, and then actually pursuing the civil war with American equipment. But the Kuomintang war machine needed steel, and in 1948 the fires were lighted again in No. 1 furnace which for about four months continued to produce at about 70 per cent. of its capacity. No. 2 furnace was abandoned as useless; the Japanese had let the fires go out without running the metal off. It had congealed inside the furnace, a two hundred-ton blob of solid metal. On December 17, 1948, the plant was liberated by the People's Army. The next day Peking was surrendered. It was decided to stir old "Dragon's Eyes" into life as soon as possible. The plant was in terrible condition. Kuomintang officials had sold off as much of the equipment as was removable for ready cash. Some experts decided it would be impossible to do anything with it, but Soviet technicians arrived, and after a thorough survey, proclaimed that the plant could be salvaged with careful repair work.

By June 24, 1949, No. 1 furnace was working again. Workers started to dismantle No. 2 and attack the vast blob of solid iron inside with drills and dynamite, and with cranes swinging enormous sledge hammers. At first production was low. Most of the old managers and foremen from the Kuomintang days were retained for want of skilled replacements. But trade unions were formed, democratic elections held. Some workers were picked to go to Peking and do short-term study courses at the People's University. By the beginning of 1950 changes were carried out in the management. The worst of the Kuomintang managers

were dismissed or sent to the Revolutionary University to do courses which would change their outlook. A new director was appointed, the workers elected foremen and a management committee. From that time on production began to soar.

Up to the end of 1949, No. 1 furnace was producing 60 per cent. of its capacity. On May 1, 1950, as a special effort to celebrate international workers' day, it produced 51 per cent. above capacity with 376 tons. "Dragon's Eyes" began to produce with one furnace 26 per cent. more iron than it had produced with all thirteen furnaces under the Japanese. In 20 months, from June 1949, to February 1951, "Dragon's Eyes" poured out 56 per cent. more iron than it had done in just twice the time during the Japanese occupation. Soviet experts brought new methods of building and drying out furnaces. It used to take six months to rebuild a furnace, the management committee planned to cut the time by half. With Soviet advice they completed the job in 35 days by starting to lay the bricks from several levels at the one time. The ten to fifteen days usually needed for drying out the furnace by blowing in gas from burning soft coal was cut to three days by burning hard coal inside the furnace, and to one day by burning gas inside.

In early 1951 the task of chipping out the two hundred ton slug of iron was completed and No. 2 furnace came into operation. Gradually all the other furnaces will be repaired and old "Dragon's Eyes" will be working at full blast, three shifts a day every day of the year. Decent food and pay, newly-built living quarters, labor insurance—and above all, workers' participation in management, have created an élan there which must make old "Dragon's Eyes" blink with astonishment after the years of corruption and inefficiency under the Kuomintang; the misery and hopelessness under the Japanese. Of the 5,000 workers, 2,000 are attending literacy classes. They have a splendid club, their own hospital, training institute, co-operative store, and school for their children.

Nothing can take place without the active participation of the workers, from the question of hiring and firing labor to setting the year's production plan. The management is the expression of the mass ideas and wishes of the rank and file workers in relation to the needs of the State. And this is the way Chairman Mao wanted it to be. That is why "Dragon's Eyes" produced more iron under 20 months of People's China

than it produced in the previous 30 years of its existence.

The Feng Feng mines, Tientsin Textile Mills and "Dragon's Eyes" are all State concerns where it is easier to ensure proper conditions than in private capitalist concerns. The latter play and will continue to play for some time an important part in China's industrial production, but a glance at the Trade Union Law which came into force on June 29, 1950, shows that if the workers take advantage of their rights under this law, they can have equally good conditions in the capitalist enterprises. In the Kuomintang bogus unions, the workers had no rights of any sort, but the 5,400,000 (in May, 1951) trade union members of People's China have rights which are written down in black and white and are enforceable by law.

Article 1 of the Trade Union law defines trade unions as "mass organisations of the workers on a voluntary basis." All manual and non-manual workers whose wages constitute their sole or chief means of livelihood have the right to join trade unions. Compulsory union membership or the "closed shop" principle is against the government's policy of encouraging progress by pressure from below. The government encourages every worker to join a union, but does not force them. Workers in People's China are in an entirely different position from those in capitalist countries with long trade union tradition, where the workers rightly fear the bosses will use non-union labor to attack their living standards. Capitalists in China can never become a dominant political power; political power is firmly in the hands of the workers and peasants, who form the majority of the population. The use of scab labor to lower conditions generally is impossible; there is no danger to living standards by workers outside the unions; there is everything to gain by educating them and letting them come into the trade unions when they are convinced of its benefits. About 85 per cent. of workers are already organised—six times as many as in 1946.

Article 2 contains an important provision which could well be applied to unions in many western countries, that is, that "members . . . shall have the right . . . to dismiss and replace at any time any representative or committee member whom they have elected. Trade unions at all levels shall submit reports on their work to the rank and file membership. . ." There is no

chance, as so often happens in the West, of union bureaucrats installing themselves for life.

Article 6 provides for the counterpart of the labor management committees in State concerns to be set up in capitalist enterprises. They are known as "labor-capital consultative councils."

Article 7 states the duty of the unions is to "protect the interests of workers and staff members, to ensure that managements or capitalists effectively carry out the regulations and directives concerning labor protection, labor insurance, wage standards, factory sanitation, safety measures and . . . to take measures for improving the material and cultural life of the workers and staff members." This article is taken very seriously and the union officials in enterprises I visited were most active on the question of safety measures and sanitation. In Textile Factory No. 2 work was almost completed on a modern air-conditioning system. Water sprays had already been installed to keep down the dust, workers at the looms were all equipped with masks. At the Feng Feng mines, the baths at pit-tops, the air ventilation and adequate lighting underground, special protective clothing, the setting up of safety stations and training of safety officers, were all the work of the trade union officials. And they were certainly as zealous in forcing private capitalist owners to install safety and sanitation devices as they were in the State enterprises.

In Article 8 union members are told they have the right to ask the management of all State and co-operative concerns "to submit reports on their work to the trade union committees, to general membership meetings or representative conferences." This is an excellent check on bureaucracy and an effective way of letting the workers air their grievances and check up corruption and mismanagement. One could imagine the results in western capitalist countries if the management of State or municipal owned utilities had to bare their brains and souls to the rank and file workers—and produce their books on demand to workers' delegates.

Articles 15 to 17 deal with the question of union officials and the number permitted according to the size of the units from one where there are 200 employees to five where there are between 2,500 and 4,000. An important provision is that when union officials have finished their term of office, "manage-

ment or owner shall ensure they return to their original jobs or be given other jobs at the same rate of wages as formerly."

Article 20 provides that the owners or managements of enterprises employing one hundred or more workers "shall provide free of charge the necessary buildings and other facilities (water, electricity and furniture, etc.) for office use and other facilities by the basic trade union committees. . . ." Where there are less than one hundred persons employed the employers should try and provide office space, otherwise at least a trade union desk in a room which should be available for meetings.

Articles 21 and 22 deal with the question of hiring and firing of labor, and state that this cannot be done without the advice of union committees.

Article 24 deals with finance and lays down that the managements and owners of factories, mines and business establishments, etc., "shall allocate each month to their respective trade union funds a sum equal to two per cent. of the total amount of the real wages (including those paid in currency, in kind and in meals) of all workers and staff members employed. Of this sum 1.5 per cent. of the total . . . shall be used for the purpose of promoting cultural and educational activities for the workers and staff members."

Other articles deal with the carrying out of democratic elections, the right of union officials to inspect at any time workshops and dormitories of employees of their respective unions, the obligation of the State to place adequate buildings at the disposal of the All-China Federation of Labor, the rights of trade unions to conclude collective agreements on hours, wages and production methods with owners and management.

The Trade Union Law marks an enormous step in China's social progress and it is a staggering achievement that order and system could have been injected so soon in the legacy of confusion, corruption and demoralisation left by the Kuomintang.

The faces of the well-fed, well-clad, eager people I have seen in the clubs and palaces of culture are evidence of the results already achieved in the application of this charter of rights for Chinese workers. The Trade Union Law was later supplemented by a comprehensive labor insurance system which will be dealt with in another section of this book.

## CHAPTER VI

### CULTURE OF THE PEOPLE FOR THE PEOPLE

ONE of the most striking visual changes one notices in passing from the capitalist world into that of the people's democracies is the difference in film advertisements. I noticed it in going from Budapest in People's Hungary to Vienna. It struck me particularly in coming from the West into People's China. In Hong Kong it was impossible not to notice the enormous hoardings where gangsters with smoking revolvers and daggers dripping with blood, hooded men with lynching ropes, half-naked women with bulging breasts being pawed by well-tailored spivs, towered above one and leered at one from every direction. They fought for space in the elite positions with huge placards and neon signs advertising coca-cola. The usual American cultural fare of rape, murder and gangsterism has pushed a once-thriving Hong Kong film industry out of business, as it has done film industries throughout the western world.

The Marshallisation of culture has however received a rude shock in People's China. Film and theatre advertisements there are to be sure, many of them huge, beautifully hand-painted hoardings in prominent positions in the main streets. But they portray ordinary persons and events; People's Army soldiers, workers and peasants in everyday clothes. They promise reality instead of horrific illusion, uplift instead of debasement, decent human emotions instead of brazen sex. People's China has hit on an effective method of halting American cultural aggression which forces its films, comic strips and cultural pills in digest form on the peoples of Europe and Asia. People's China is producing better films, better theatre and better literature, and getting them to the people. There has been a great upsurge of Chinese culture since Liberation, the results of which will make their mark on world culture when contemporary productions of Chinese creative artists, writers and musicians break their way through the present American-inspired iron curtain.

The difference in the film posters symbolises the attitudes of



two worlds; the one frightened to face reality and seeking escape in mirroring the antics of a decadent upper class, of criminals and "supermen," exciting the lowest emotions or at best offering an opiate for the escapists; the other painting the lives of ordinary people in colors and language that the people understand, exposing the evil and appraising the good in society with a view to changing it for the better. Such posters and the cultural fare they advertise can only be produced in a society such as is being built in China, where the Government, writers and dramatists are at one with the people themselves in striving forward for the better life.

May Fourth, 1919, marked the beginning of the Chinese cultural renaissance. In what has now become known as the May Fourth Movement, Chinese intellectuals and students called a halt to the influence of feudalism and to the century-long retreat from imperialism. The immediate cause of this ideological revolt was the intrigues at the Paris Peace Conference when Britain and America connived at handing over to Japan the rights and concessions the Germans had formerly enjoyed in China's Shantung province. The revolt was touched off by great students' demonstrations in Peking, which rapidly spread throughout China. Intellectuals and progressives were disgusted both at the decadence of their own government and the perfidy of the Western powers. The Chinese Government was pricked into action and refused to accept the treaty. Japan was kept out of Shantung, but more important still, out of this revolt came the first stirrings of a modern progressive culture. China's intellectuals were profoundly stirred by the Soviet revolution and the revolutionary outbreaks elsewhere in Europe. Students began to demand translations of the works of western political philosophers from John Stuart Mill to Marx and Lenin. They revolted against the musty feudalist attitude that the Chinese classics of Confucius and Mencius were the sole repositories of world philosophy and culture and that nothing written during the two thousand-odd years since the death of these sages was worth reading. At that time, the Chinese upper class regarded fiction of any description as vulgar, the novel was considered the lowest form of literary expression. Poems which dealt with anything more substantial than autumn leaves fluttering to the snow-covered earth at the approach of winter, were abhorred. The written language bore as much resemblance

to the spoken language of the people as the language of Chaucer bears to modern English, or Greek and Latin to the languages spoken to-day in Greece and Italy. A few novels written earlier in colloquial language, like "The Dream of the Red Chamber" and "The Heroes of Three Hu" were virtually banned by the ruling classes. The Manchu rulers had exercised a merciless censorship during the three hundred years of their rule, banning complete books if even one phrase offended the censor's eye.

Writers came forward during the May Fourth movement and started writing in the colloquial language of the people. They wanted to write for a new reader and to a certain extent they established a new style of writing. Their works became as popular among the masses as was possible in a country where over 80 per cent. of the population was illiterate. But, at least, for the first time, the masses could understand what was read to them in the language used by the new writers. Translations of Marx, Engels and Lenin and the new Soviet writers began to reach progressive intellectuals. Many of the writers and dramatists who were caught up in the new movement joined the Sun Yat-sen revolution and after the latter was betrayed by Chiang Kai-shek in 1927, many of them eventually drifted through to the headquarters of the Eighth Route Army at Yen-an. They made an honest attempt to climb down from the ivory towers in which Chinese intellectuals had traditionally lived, and began to study the lives of the people and eventually to take an active part in propaganda work in the front line areas. From the garrets and ateliers of Shanghai and the coastal cities they graduated via the caves of Yen-an to the mountain hide-outs of the guerrillas. As Ting Ling, one of China's most famous contemporary writers, expressed it: "We were forced to have the closest contact with workers and peasants. Otherwise we couldn't even preserve our own lives, let alone our art."

The real role of Chinese literature and art in the new society which was being planned was laid down in an historic conference in Yen-an in May, 1942, just 23 years after the May Fourth Movement. For three weeks, while critical battles were being waged by the guerrillas and the Eighth Route Army behind the Japanese lines, at a time when Japanese troops had mopped up the remnants of the British troops in Burma and were poised

on the threshold of India, when Nazi troops were battling at the gates of Moscow, the cream of China's revolutionary writers and artists met daily under the chairmanship of Mao Tse-tung, to thrash out their attitude towards their work, their relations with the public during the anti-Japanese war, and in the new society which, even in those grimmest days of the war, they were certain they were going to build. Nothing better exemplifies the calm way in which the Chinese Communists worked; their complete assurance of final victory; the importance attached to hammering out a correct theoretical line.

The opening speech of Chairman Mao and his brilliant summing up of the work of the conference, published since under the title of "On Literature and Art," is to-day the standard work for all creative writers and artists in People's China. It is a remarkable document which reflects the broad humanism of the Chinese revolution. It is a valuable contribution to the theory of literary and artistic criticism and must have an influence on writers and artists of the Western world, when translations are available. The main thesis is that the people provide the inspiration and the raw material for all works of art and literature; that the people are the public and final critics; that writers and artists must get down among the people, learn from them and in turn produce works which are for the people, presented in images and languages which the masses can understand. Who are the people? Chairman Mao gives a precise definition.

"The broad basis of the masses, constituting more than 90 per cent. of our population, is made up of workers, peasants, soldiers and the lower middle class. Therefore our literature and art must serve first the workers, the class which guides the revolution; second the peasants, a strong and resolute ally of the revolution; third, the armed workers and peasants—the Eighth Route and New Fourth armies and other popular units comprising the main force of our revolution; and fourth, the lower middle class, ally of the revolution who can co-operate with us in long-range terms." Art and literature in the past had as its following in China, not this 90 per cent. but the 10 per cent. of the leisured upper classes. Writers and artists themselves came from this upper 10 per cent. Children of the 90 per cent had no chance to study.

"Art for Art's sake" had no place at Yen-an. It was quickly knocked on the head at the conference. Even the dullest of the ivory tower brand of writer and artist saw clearly at Yen-an that in a situation where the people were fighting for their very existence artists and writers had to mobilise their talents, otherwise they would suffer physical extinction. From the outset the conference was clear that its task was to find a way of integrating art, drama, music and literature into the revolutionary movement. Once the question of "audience" was settled in favor of the masses of the people, the matter of approach was tackled. Chairman Mao found strong words to condemn intellectuals who pretended to show affection for workers and peasants, but in fact despised "their emotions, their gestures or primitive styles of literature and art, that is wall newspapers, wall paintings, folk songs, folk stories and colloquial speech. Perhaps," he continued, "sometimes these intellectuals show fondness for these things, but this stems from curiosity, from a desire to utilise them in decorating their creations or from fascination in their backward aspects."

He urges such people to get down into the life of the people, live in villages, work in factories, fight with the army, share the emotions of the people, absorb their speech and forms of art; above all, to learn from the people. Chairman Mao warned against the patronising attitude of intellectuals considering themselves the teachers, aiming at best at raising the cultural level of the people to their own level. "We are not trying to raise these people to the high cultural level of the feudal class," he explained, "the middle class, or the lower middle class. We want instead to elevate them in the direction in which they are already travelling. The solution must be founded on their present cultural level and their primitive forms of literature and art. . . The life of the people contains mines and deposits from which the raw material of literature and art are extracted. These materials are found among the people in their most plentiful, vigorous and fundamental source, although in their embedded state they are primitive and crude. Here is the fountain-head from which artists and writers can draw material from an inexhaustible source."

I am quoting extensively from this work of Mao Tse-tung, not only because it is an interesting expression of his outlook, but because of its universal importance. It is impossible to

grasp the astonishing developments in every field of the arts within the last few years in People's China, without understanding the background of the cultural programme mapped out with such foresight and care, years before the victory over the Japanese and counter-revolution. From the earth itself, but from firm roots which had been neglected throughout the centuries, something entirely new has been built in art and literature in post-Liberation China. Chairman Mao knew that writers and artists could not change and develop new outlooks and styles overnight. He planned that the flowering of the new culture should take place parallel with, and integrated with, the building of a new society after the victory of the revolution.

"We will need a long time to overcome our drawbacks—eight or ten years," he said, "but no matter how long it takes, we must settle the issue and settle it thoroughly. This is the task of artists and writers. They must penetrate deeply among the workers, peasants and soldiers, into the processes of their actual struggle. This is the only way to establish a real literature and art of the workers, peasants and soldiers." Just nine years after Chairman Mao made this speech it was possible to enjoy its fruits in theatres and cinemas throughout China, the first fruits of the flowering of a great new people's culture.

Discussing the cultural needs of the people, Mao Tse-tung stressed they must be related to concrete situations. "Our first task is not one of embroidering flowers on silk but of sending fuel to snowbound people. The most urgent issue facing workers, peasants and soldiers is their fierce battle against the enemy. Due to the long rule of the feudal and upper classes, the common people do not read and write. They are primitive and uncivilised. Their most urgent need is for an educational movement bringing them the knowledge they can most quickly digest, the literature and art that will heighten their enthusiasm for struggle and confidence in victory." And so the artists and writers did go to the people. Famous painters drew cartoons and caricatures of the enemy to paste up on village walls or to illustrate army wall-newspapers. Musicians and dancers organised the famous "yangko" dance troupes based on folk music and village harvest dances, which later enchanted the villagers and townspeople as, with banging drums and tinkling tambourines, they danced their way through village and town

with the liberating People's Army. Writers went to the front, wrote plays and fiery verses in the soldiers' language to inspire them to still greater efforts against the enemy. Many of them had to lay aside great projects for novels and masterpieces, many more laid down their lives to serve the people. But they played their part in ensuring victory and making it possible for the people to live a decent life, and for other writers and artists to live and create. There were few great literary works produced in Yen-an during the anti-Japanese and the Liberation wars. Writers were too busy fighting the battle for survival of the revolution.

While Chairman Mao constantly emphasised that only by becoming a pupil of the masses could a writer or artist become their teacher, he stressed at the same time the need for a high artistic level in all works created; he demanded that "the revolutionary political content should be united with the highest possible level of artistic style." He warned that creations which lacked artistic value, no matter how progressive politically, would remain without effect. He condemned equally "artistic products with reactionary content and creations with merely the style of placards and slogans which have only content and no form."

The Yen-an conference established that creative artists must go to the people, learn from the people, produce for the people and must co-ordinate their efforts with the leading political tasks of the day. After Liberation the Yen-an veterans were reinforced by writers and artists from Shanghai, Canton and other big cities, and by returning exiles from Hong Kong, France and America. The overwhelming majority accepted the line laid down at Yen-an and are to-day playing their part accordingly. At present there is a three-way development in the creative arts. The established writers and artists, who are almost exclusively drawn from the upper classes, go to the people, live with the peasants, work in factories, serve with the army. Writers from the masses who developed during the revolution but who had no chance to study are now called in from village, factory and army and sent to study. At the same time the government seeks out new talents from the ranks of the peasants and workers themselves, educates them to be the new writers and artists. A new intelligentsia is being created from the people. Culture

"of the people for the people" also becomes "by the people" as these new artists and writers start to create.

A typical example of the new raw material which is being developed, and a wonderful illustration of how everything worthwhile in People's China really springs up from the earth itself, is the story of Wu Chang-ying, a 22-year-old student at the Central Literary Institute, founded in Peking in October, 1950. Wu Chang-ying is a pretty, plumpish girl and with her close-cropped boyish hair-cut, she looks much younger than her actual years. She has an infectious and resounding laugh which her fellow students complain can be heard half a dozen rooms away from Wu's own study. But she believes the new life has given her plenty to laugh about. She came from a peasant family and when she was 9, she was sold to a rich peasant as a child "bride." When she could no longer stand the cruel beatings of her mother-in-law, she ran away and became a beggar girl. After the most astounding adventures, described elsewhere in this book, Wu Chang-ying found her way to the New Fourth Army at the age of 17. She worked in a military supply factory in Anhwei province. There she met real human beings for the first time in her life, friends who helped her instead of beating her when she made mistakes, comrades who told her of the new life that would be when the People's Army was victorious.

"I was so moved by the people I met, the labor heroes in the factory and their self-sacrificing attitude," she said, when I talked to her at the Literary Institute, "that I wanted to express my feelings somehow. But I was too shy to tell the workers how I felt about them. I wanted to keep a record and then let everybody know about it. But I couldn't write. I had never been to school. I made up my mind to study. We worked very long hours in the factory in order to defeat the Japanese, but I started to study. I pledged myself to learn two characters every day and learned them at first by looking at them in any spare minutes during the day. Our living conditions were very difficult. We only had enough oil for our lamps to get undressed and jump into bed, before they burned out. I used to trace with my finger the characters I had looked at during the day on the skin of my stomach at night. I wouldn't let myself go to sleep until I could trace them properly. When our comrades were able to give us some

wages, I spent mine on a pen and notebook, afterwards I bought some extra lamp oil. After some months, when I had mastered a few score characters, I bought some textbooks. By the time the Japanese surrendered, I knew several hundred characters.

"Then the Kuomintang troops attacked us. We had to pack up our factory on our backs again and keep moving. We marched for days on end, then set up our machines and produced for a while, packed up, marched and fought again. But I had my notebooks and textbooks in my haversack and I used to repeat what I had learned in a low voice as I marched with my comrades. Whenever we rested, I pulled out my notebook and practised writing. Once we set up our machines in a village where we lived eight people in a room. It was summer and very hot. In the evenings I didn't want to disturb my sleeping comrades, but I wanted to study. Out of doors, it was usually raining at night, so I took a stool and my lamp and went into the cowshed and studied there. The cows slept but the mosquitos were terrible, and my lamp attracted them. I used the fan with one hand to keep the mosquitos away, and practised writing with my other hand. The sweat used to pour down my body, my legs were covered with mosquito bites. I usually studied till midnight and pledged myself to master one lesson from my text-book each night.

"After one year's study I could write each day in a diary about the exploits of our heroes, and I was very happy, although I knew my language was terribly scanty. Once the manager praised me at a meeting for the way I studied and this encouraged me to work still harder. Then, one day, he discovered my diary and read it. He selected a few pieces and helped me to correct the mistakes. He said I should send them to a newspaper. The very day they arrived in the newspaper office, the editor wrote back to encourage me and asked me to send reports regularly. From that time on, I wrote articles and stories. Sometimes they were not good enough and the press cadre would send an article back and patiently explain how I should correct it, where I should lay emphasis, how I could improve my work. One day he sent me a short story from the liberated areas and asked me to learn from this style and write something similar myself. This encouraged me and I studied all the harder and began my approach to real literature.

"I was able to read a translation of Ostrovsky's 'How the Steel is Forged.' It was a revelation to me. A new world. After Liberation I was transferred to another factory in Shantung and here it seemed to me that the manager was very corrupt. I despised him and once criticised him at a meeting. But he continued on with his old ways, so I wrote an article about him. It was published and it had very good results. The corrupt manager was dismissed and our cadres were encouraged. This gave more meaning to my writing. I really saw my pen as a weapon, but I knew I lacked technique and culture. I wanted to study literature more and more deeply.

"Then on October 4, 1950, while I was at work in the factory, I got a letter from Peking, inviting me to study at the Central Literary Institute. I couldn't believe it at first. With the letter in my hand, I wept, and then thought it must be a dream. I couldn't say one single word to my comrades who asked why I was crying. But you see, it wasn't a dream. I am here. I study and hear reports, join in group discussions with other experienced writers. I feel that my very heart blossoms out here. Some people wonder why I laugh so often and so heartily. It bursts out from my very heart."

Such a story, from such a young, bobbed-haired girl! From tracing two characters a night on her stomach under the blankets, to placing those characters so painfully learned, side by side to make reports, then articles and finally fiction in a few years, is something that makes one ashamed of having had an easily-gained education and done nothing much with it. Wu Chang-ying has now written her own biography and this is being polished into shape while she studies at the Literary Institute. Her short stories are already published in the daily press. The pain and suffering and bitter knowledge of life she has gathered in her few years, and the iron determination she has shown will be reflected in her written works. One can have no doubt that with a will to write like hers, she has a successful literary career ahead of her and one can have no doubt that she is qualified to write of the people, for the people. She does not see the laboring people from a height, looking down, but from their midst. Only her strong desire to mirror their heroism inspired her own heroism in study.

The institute where Wu Chang-ying studies is directed by Ting Ling, herself a veteran revolutionary writer. She pro-

duced one of the few notable novels during the Yenan period, "The Sun Shines Over the Shan Kan River," which has been translated into many European languages and sold over a million copies. China's most famous writers, Kuo Mo-jo, Mao Tun, Lao Sheh, and others, give regular lectures there. Most of the 51 students are of worker-peasant background and all but nine of them joined the revolution during the anti-Japanese war. Six, including Wu Chang-ying, have come straight from factory and village, recommended by cadres in the local administration. It is a unique centre of learning, where writers just feeling their way can have expert guidance from experienced writers and professors of literature. They study in groups of seven or eight and problems which arise from their writing are discussed in these groups. If a solution cannot be found, the matter is discussed by the whole group and the professors. If some points are still not cleared up, these are put up to the visiting lecturers as a special subject for a lecture. Most of the time, however, is spent in self-study from the extensive research library, and in actual creative writing. Ideas produced from group discussions can be immediately translated into articles or short stories. Newcomers straight from village or factory, take a special course based on Mao Tse-tung's "On Literature and Art," in addition to regular courses on the history of New China, contemporary world literature and political courses based on Marxism-Leninism. Study, board and lodging are free and the entire course is planned for two years.

Some of the students, Ma Fung for instance, who wrote a notable work on which a successful film was based, "The Heroes of the Lu Liang Mountains," and Li Ha, the author of much-praised short stories, are enrolled at the Institute because they feel their lack of theoretical knowledge. They know small facets of the life of their own people, and come to the Institute to study life as reflected in the world literature as well as to improve their technique.

So the work of producing creative writers goes on. Those who were fortunate enough to have a good education go back to village and factory to live the life of the people. Those from factory and village who represent the life of the people, and who have potential talent, are taken out of their jobs and given the highest form of literary education. And while the needs of the writers are paid the most careful attention—what is

happening to their readers? One might well ask why go to such trouble to produce writers when the overwhelming mass of the people cannot read anyway. The answer to that is another story which deserves a book in itself instead of the few paragraphs that can be allowed here.

In the winter of 1950-51, there were no less than twenty million peasants attending "winter schools," learning to read and write. The previous year there had been half that number, the following year there will probably be twice that number. The government started a mass drive against illiteracy, and in tiny stone schoolrooms in the remote mountains of Yunnan and Szechwan, and in felt yurts on the Mongolian plains, by the feeble light of kerosene lamps and candles, Chinese peasants of all ages and both sexes are laboriously learning to draw and understand the complicated characters that make up the Chinese language. The village schoolroom has become the cultural centre. As peasants learn to recognise the characters, they also imbibe some knowledge of local government and gradually of world affairs. Painfully and gradually the golden door of learning is prised open for them. They are the people for whom Wu Chang-ying and the others are learning to write.

There were many prejudices to be overcome to get people to school. Husbands, and particularly mothers-in-laws and grandmothers, tried to stop the peasant wives from learning. Whoever heard of a woman wanting to do anything but sew, spin and keep the house clean? Of what use was learning to a woman. But usually after the cadres or village committee-members had paid a visit and explained matters, prejudices were overcome—and as I saw in the village of Ya Men Ko—mother-in-law often minded the babies while daughter went to school, and often enough handed the babies over to grandma and went to school herself.

Despite the proud tradition of thousands of years of a high culture with civil service posts awarded on the basis of knowledge of the Chinese classics; despite the universal respect for learning in China, it was only the sons of wealthy merchants, top officials and landlords that went to school in pre-Liberation China. At most a peasant or worker could send his son to school for two years, and usually not at all. The people suffered enormously from the disadvantage of illiteracy, apart from the fact that the door to culture was closed to them. Every

village can recount cases where peasants signed with their finger-prints documents they did not understand, but which mortgaged their farms for interest rates of up to a hundred per cent.; of signing their very farms and houses away; of mothers handing their daughters over to brothels when they thought they were finger-printing a labor or marriage contract. The illiteracy of the peasants was exploited as ruthlessly as was their labor. The illiterates were easy prey, too, for the unscrupulous professional letter-writers, whose stands were familiar sights near post offices and in the main streets of every town and village. They sold their talents for fees as high as they could extort and often made personal use of information from letters brought to them to read and from documents dictated by the illiterates.

Any visitor to town or village post offices in the old days would see bewildered-looking illiterates, letters clutched in their hands seeking some kind-hearted, educated person who could read them the contents. (This was particularly so with parents and relatives of those who had joined the Red Army. Red Army soldiers were soon taught to read and write, but their first literary creations were almost invariably sent back to parents and wives who could not understand them. To-day most large post offices provide a free letter-reading and writing service.)

The winter schools aim at teaching the peasants a basic thousand characters with which they can understand specially-printed newspapers and express themselves in simple, written sentences. Naturally when one starts to teach tens of millions of grown-ups, and provide schooling for the children of nearly five hundred million people, there is a great dearth of teachers. Usually the village school teacher helps with the night literacy classes, reinforced by other literates in the village and the star pupils. Wherever one goes in People's China one sees people studying. Women spinning wool in village doorways hear each other's lessons as they twirl the woollen fluff into threads. In many offices and enterprises, groups come along an hour or so early to work and study together. One sees couples standing together in the evenings, each holding a piece of paper, softly hearing each other's lessons, or guiding one another's hand to form characters.

The people are eager to grasp the chances that have been made available to them, just as the writers are eager to produce for them. In a few years all but the very old and the very young will be literate in China, and writers will be hard pressed to fulfil the demands made on them for creative literature. By that time, the new generation of writers will be in full production.

## CHAPTER VII

### FIRST FRUITS OF A PEOPLE'S CULTURE

**I**N Chairman Mao's dissertation on literature and art, he made it clear that in creating a new people's culture, that which was good in the old culture would be preserved. "We do not refuse," he said, "to use the old cultural forms of the feudal and upper classes, but once these forms are taken into our hands, they are re-shaped and assume new meaning. They become revolutionary and serve the people." A practical application of this policy of creating something new from the old is to be seen in the way in which the classical theatre has been reformed.

The Chinese are a theatre-loving people. In one or another of its varied forms the traditional theatre has been tremendously popular for centuries. In the past however, it served the interests of the feudal ruling classes. Although the form and technique of drama and opera came from the people, the content was provided by their masters, often through the medium of the censor. It is typical of the feudal structure that although the theatre itself was so popular—among landlords and mandarins as well as the people—those that provided the entertainment were at the bottom of the social order. Actors, dancers and musicians were inferior to servants, and together with shoemakers, barbers and prostitutes constituted China's "untouchables," so low in the social stratum that they were not even eligible to sit for the imperial civil service examinations.

The Chinese opera, with its gorgeous costumes and masks, its intricate symbolism, clanging gongs, screeching fiddles, and wailing songs, extolled the virtues of patience; submission to despots, filial piety, abject female humility—all those attributes which would make the people patiently bear the yoke of feudal suppression. As women could not put their face out of doors in Chinese society, all female roles were played and sung by men. To Western ears and eyes, much that takes place on the stage is incomprehensible, even with the most skilled interpreter.

The absence of backgrounds or stage props is in contrast to the rich, gorgeous costumes. Changes of the few bits of scenery which are used, take place in front of the audience while a scene is still in progress. The music is often an improvisation with the "accompaniment" actually following the singer by a beat or two and, to Western ears, having little relationship to the tune being sung. The symbolism is impossible for an outsider to grasp but is perfectly understood by the audience. A few wisps of long black hair carried across the stage by an attendant is recognised by the audience as a horse's tail, indicating that the hero has taken a journey on horseback.

The repertoire of opera still in vogue is over two hundred pieces, the stories of which are known to most theatre fans. It is estimated that an average of 5,000,000 theatregoers see some form of Chinese theatre or opera every day—a massive audience for which to cater. There are at least a quarter of a million performers in the classical theatre alone.

To-day there is a two-way reform being carried out. The classical theatre is being revised; a new type theatre is being developed. The form of the traditional theatre is being retained but given a new, progressive content. Most of the old opera are being overhauled and scenes which laud servility, submission and long-suffering eliminated, those that depict courage, patriotism and struggle against oppressive despots, retained and strengthened. A highly skilled panel of writers and dramatists is entrusted with this delicate piece of theatrical surgery. Often with a few deft strokes of their scalpels, they can change the entire ideology of an opera. The form of the classical opera will be used for presenting new historical dramas, so that in addition to the old favorites being revised, new dramas can be written presenting epics in Chinese history in the form which is still treasured by the Chinese people.

For the rich themes dealing with contemporary history, however, the anti-Japanese and Liberation wars, the day-to-day problems and strivings of Chinese life, the classical theatre is unsuitable. A modern theatre of the socialist-realist school, conforming to the Yen-an decisions, is being developed with resounding successes to its credit already. The new plays serve the true interests of a society building socialism, and the writers, producers, actors and actresses go to the villages and factories, live and work there for three or four months to

get a real feeling for the lives of the people. The government provides guidance and financial help, the creative and productive side is left to the dramatic workers themselves. Most dramatists and actors from both old and new-type theatre are organised in the All-China Federation of Dramatic Workers. Forty thousand of the old actors by mid-1951 had been through short classes organised by the Federation to give them a chance to orient themselves to the new conception of the role of art in a socialist society. Dramatic workers were raised to the status of honored members of society immediately after Liberation, women began to play female roles, all the old feudal nonsense was swept away. Writers and actors were represented in the highest places in the Government. The famous writer, Kuo Mo-jo, became Vice-Premier, another equally well-known writer, Mao Tun, was made Minister of Culture.

As the dramatic workers were supported financially by the people through the government, they enthusiastically gave their best back to the people. A changing society changed even those who had no contact with the revolutionary movement until after Liberation.

The case of Lao Sheh (sometimes spelt Lao Shaw) and his play, "Dragon's Beard Ditch," provide an example of how things work for dramatists in People's China. Lao Sheh is well-known abroad as the author of the best-selling novel, "Ricksha Boy." He studied and lived in England for many years, and was known in China as a good writer with a humanistic but not a revolutionary outlook. In the early 1940's he went from China to the United States, at the invitation—and expense—of the American State Department, and he remained there until after Liberation. (Hollywood was going to film "Ricksha Boy," and Lao Sheh was invited there at a fabulous salary as an adviser. He fled in horror when he found the vulgar distortions written into his story by a slick scenario writer.) After Liberation, a group of writers, including Kuo Mo-jo and Mao Tun, wrote to Lao Sheh, telling him that an honored place awaited him in People's China. He came back, as he now relates, with many misgivings, after Peking was liberated. (The financial temptations were great to remain and become a sentimental publicist of Chinese food and eccentricities of the Lin Yutang school.) He was immediately made a member of the Committee for Education and Cultural Affairs, and, like



other writers, was given a house, paid a good salary by the government, attended committee meetings, and gave a few lectures, but mainly he stayed home and wrote.

The Peking People's Art Theatre wanted a play written about an open drain which for centuries had plagued the lives of residents in a poor suburb of Peking. In the spring it overflowed and flooded people's houses, walls crumbled away and when the waters receded, the houses and beds were filled with worms. There were periodic outbreaks of typhus; in summer months mosquitos bred and brought malaria; all the year round it was an eyesore and a danger. Toddlers occasionally wandered into it and were drowned. Successive governments in the past had promised to do something about it. Taxes were collected from the "ditch-people" specifically to deal with the drain, but nothing was ever done to it. The attitude a government adopted towards the ditch became a sort of yardstick as to the amount of confidence one could have in it. There was speculation and mostly scepticism among the locals as to whether the new People's City government would do anything to the ditch. Sure enough, within a few months of liberation, thousands of workmen appeared one morning, pipes were laid, the hateful drain was filled in with trees planted on top of it. The "ditch-people" were won over. At last they had a government which did something for the common folk.

Lao Sheh was delighted with the story. The City government made municipal records available to him; he spent weeks roaming around the area, script and dialogue began to take shape. The actors who were to take part in the production were picked beforehand, and went to live with the "ditch-people" to pick up their accent and local atmosphere. Lao Sheh himself is the acknowledged supreme master of Peking idiom and the "ditch-people" provided him with authentic background material.

The play which resulted has been a tremendous success, and would be a success on any world stage. When the curtain goes up, it is as if the wall has been pushed out from the back of the stage to make a window on Peking life. Even without grasping what is hailed as superb Peking dialogue, a Westerner can appreciate this splendid piece of realist drama which could

only be produced and presented through the new approach to culture by the People's Government.

Another production of very high merit is the opera, "Bai Ma Nu" (The White-Haired Girl), the first of the new productions to be played abroad. It is based on one of those stories which only China can produce, a real story of a girl who is to-day living in a Chinese village with the People's Army soldier she married after Liberation. Seen on the stage it seems unearthly and unbelievable to an outsider, but to the Chinese it is only a slight variation of an all too familiar story. Her father was a poor peasant in debt to the local landlord. At the end of harvest, he goes to the landlord with every silver dollar he has been able to collect, more than enough to pay the interest on his debt. The landlord, who had already unsuccessfully tried to seduce the daughter, demands full payment of the debt immediately or else the daughter as a slave-girl. On the very eve of the girl's marriage to a village lad, the landlord forces the old peasant to finger-print a document, selling the girl.

The father goes home broken-hearted, cannot bear to tell his wife and daughter what has happened. While the girl is finishing her wedding preparations, the father swallows poison and dies. The mother, daughter and neighbors are still lamenting the death of the father when the landlord and some of his armed men come, flourish the deed-of-sale, and drag the girl off. At first Bai Ma Nu serves as a slave girl for the landlord's mother, is brutally whipped and beaten for the slightest offence. Her lover tries to break into the house to rescue her, but is discovered and has to flee the district. He crosses the Yellow River and joins the Eighth Route Army. One night the landlord rapes Bai Ma Nu and in time the wretched girl discovers she is pregnant. An older slave-girl in the household overhears the landlord plotting to sell her off to a brothel as he has been unable to make a willing concubine of her. The older girl discloses the plot and Bai Ma Nu flees at night, headed for the river. The landlord and his men, with guns and dogs, chase her, but finding her shoe at the water's edge, conclude she has drowned herself.

In fact, Bai Ma Nu was hiding in some nearby reeds, and eventually finds her way to a cave in a wild desolate mountain. Her baby is born dead. For nearly two years she lives like a

wild beast. She learns to catch birds and kill small animals with stones. Her long, uncombed hair has turned white. She steals offerings from a Buddhist mountain shrine. Villagers have caught glimpses of a wild apparition flitting in and out of the temple, and a legend grows up that she is the spirit of the mountains. The shrine becomes popular and more and more food is left there.

The People's Army nears the area, and as was the custom, they first sent in a cadre who knows the local people. It is Bai Ma Nu's lover, who is joyously welcomed by the villagers. The People's Army comes and goes, leaving the lad behind to carry out rent reduction and other reforms. The landlord hears that a meeting of villagers is to take place to discuss rent reduction and other matters which would end in his ruin. The night before the meeting he burns down the house of the peasant in whose home the meeting was to take place, and pastes up a sign purporting to come from the spirit of the shrine, warning against such meetings. The frightened, superstitious peasants will not go against the spirit. The meeting is called off and the story of the white-haired spirit is explained to the cadre. He spends a night in the shrine with a comrade, sees the apparition, and chases it up into its mountain lair, where he and Bai Ma Nu recognise each other. Next day the meeting is held, and is turned into an accusation meeting at which Bai Ma Nu, her white hair hidden under a cap, dramatically confronts the stupefied landlord. The opera closes with a magnificent accusation chorus recounting the landlord's crimes and demanding his death.

The story of Bai Ma Nu came to light when government cadres were called in to clear up the mystery of the mountain shrine "spirit." They passed on the story to higher quarters and eventually writers went up and collected material on the whole affair. They lived in the village for months, absorbed local atmosphere, dialect and music, and the result is a most moving opera, every line and note of which finds its response in the hearts of the Chinese audiences. It has been played all over the country now, the beautiful melodies are sung and whistled by opera and film fans—a film version was also produced—throughout China. There were tragi-comic incidents at first in some country centres where the audiences were so carried away by the realism of the accusation meetings that

they started hurling stones at the actor playing the landlord. The people—as in the performance of the dockers' play mentioned earlier—are not yet accustomed to seeing their own miseries, portrayed on stage and film.

China abounds in such stories and such people. There is an immensely rich, untapped field for writers, dramatists and poets, now they have been taught to recognise beauty and drama in the lives of the common people. Unless one has lived in China, it is difficult to realise what an effort had to be made by intellectuals to step down from the heights and recognise the richness of themes available. Mao Tse-tung relates that when he went to school, he at first fell for the habits of the intellectuals.

"For instance," he states, "I was embarrassed when I carried my own luggage on a bamboo pole in the presence of students who could not bear the weight of anything across their shoulders and who could not carry anything in their hands. At that time I felt that the cleanest people in the world were the intellectuals. Workers, peasants and soldiers, they were the dirty people. . . . After the revolution I lived together with workers, peasants and soldiers. Gradually I came to know them and they also to know me. . . . After this, comparing unreformed intellectuals with workers, peasants and soldiers, I felt that such intellectuals had many unclean places, not only in their minds, but also on their bodies. The cleanest people in the world were the workers and peasants. Even though their hands might be black and their legs plastered with cow dung, they were still cleaner than the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie. This is what I mean by a change of feeling—a change from one class to another." For centuries, China's intellectuals have neglected the richest treasure trove of inspiration. Now they are digging down and finding gems like "Bai Ma Nu," which are acclaimed by the whole population.

"Bai Ma Nu" is sure to become a world hit when translations are available. It has already been performed in Prague with great success, and it is but the forerunner of a rich repertoire of work which will establish for the first time an honored place on the world stage for Chinese opera.

Apart from works like "Dragon's Beard Ditch" and "Bai Ma Nu," there are many plays performed which have a short-time educational value for players and audience alike. "Gate No. 6,"

the story of the Tientsin dockers and the smashing of the gang system, falls within this category. In the form in which it was first presented it had more educational than artistic value. Because it was necessary to show the public exactly how the system worked and how dockers lived, it went into too much detail. It took two nights to perform and was played by the dockers themselves. Eventually, because it had good dramatic content, it was radically overhauled, shortened and made suitable for the permanent repertoire. A similar type of play was one about prostitution in Peking, produced after the city government closed down the Peking brothels. It was written by the girls themselves and graphically portrayed the terrible life they led from the time they were sold or tricked into prostitution. It was performed by the former prostitutes in the Peking People's Art Theatre, and was a powerful weapon in exposing the sordid and criminal behind-the-scenes story of the racket in brothels. This play was taken off the stage after it had served its purpose. Another which was a roaring success was performed by a former band of Tientsin pickpockets, who in a fast-moving four hours of entertainment, demonstrated with the genuine background of Chinese street and market life, the pickpockets' methods, from the training of apprentices to actual practice of thieving and disposing of the goods. They were all born actors, and their sleight-of-hand and ingenuity delighted the audience. This however is regarded as short-term expose work and not genuine drama.

In general, as each racket is cleaned up, the victims—and prostitutes and pickpockets are regarded just as much victims of society as the Tientsin dockers—are encouraged to tell everything they know about it, to help writers reconstruct an authentic account suitable for the stage, and then to actually participate in telling the audience how they and the public had been victimised. The I Kwang Tao demonstrations mentioned in an earlier chapter, which cleaned up a sect exploiting the superstitions of the peasants, also fall into this category of education-entertainment drama with a limited vogue.

One abuse which has been swept away since Liberation was the brutal system under which stage apprentices used to work. Would-be actors and singers were apprenticed to an "old hand" for whom they worked for years without pay. Custom was to beat the apprentices as a means of discipline after

every performance. If he performed well he was beaten only lightly, if badly, then he got a sound thrashing. After graduating as a fully-fledged performer, he still worked for several years without payment, paying back the "tuition fees" of his apprentice days. Finally, when he began to collect fees for performances, he had to hand over a large percentage to the agent who arranged contracts. Now there are dramatic institutes where young actors and actresses study free of charge.

The most spectacular success in the cultural field has been the growth of a sturdy infant film industry. Despite lack of experience and equipment, state-owned studios in 1950 produced twenty-six full-length features, eighteen documentaries, and sixty-two newsreels, as well as dubbing forty-eight Soviet films in Chinese language. They presented this rich fare of their own productions to the public in a Month of Films in March, 1951, during which a different film was presented every night for a month in twenty of China's largest cities.

The excellent quality of films which showed real events from the lives of the audiences drove American films off the market. In the four years from 1945 to 1949, Kuomintang China had imported no less than 1,900 American films into China. By 1951 no more than a handful were being shown in a few of the larger coastal cities. At the beginning of 1950, they still dominated the cinema, by the end of the same year, competition from the new Chinese productions plus rising anti-American feeling after the Korean fighting started, drove most of the Hollywood productions into the garbage cans where they belonged. Socialist realism defeated decadent formalism in an open fight. The new films have covered in an artistic and dramatic way the changes of the lives of the people since Liberation as well as epics from the patriotic and revolutionary wars. They not only hold up the mirror of reality to the past and present, but they point the way to future developments. They played an important part in preparing for the acceptance of some of the new reforms. The film "New Style Marriage," for instance, showed up the feudal practices of infant betrothals, of arranged marriages; the miseries caused by the custom of forbidding widows to remarry; the old slave relation of women to husbands, themselves slaves to the landlords. It showed the way to marriage where both partners were free to choose, where marriage is based on love and equal rights. This film helped

prepare public opinion for the acceptance of the new marriage laws introduced in April, 1950.

The film industry, like every other major undertaking, works to a carefully prepared plan of production. It is organised under the China Film Bureau which itself comes under the Ministry of Culture. Many of the directors and producers worked in Yen-an (where, however, exclusively documentary and newsreel films were produced. After Liberation, three state-owned studios were organised in Shanghai, Peking and Mukden. There are another five private studios in Shanghai, including one pushed out of Hong Kong after the war by competition from the American gangster-sex films. Films, like other branches of culture, are planned to serve contemporary revolutionary tasks. A glance at the 1950 production schedule shows how this is achieved. Six films dealt with the military struggle against Japanese aggression, four with heroic deeds by peasants during the anti-Japanese and Liberation wars; eight with battles on the production front, in industry and agriculture; five with historical subjects emphasising the background to the revolution, and three dealt with women's emancipation and national minorities. The outbreak of fighting in Korea and the threat of American imperialism changed the programme for 1951. Five films were devoted to exposing Western imperialism in action, but two were devoted to promoting internationalism to offset any excess of anti-foreign feeling that might arise because of the Korean fighting. Others dealt with epics of the revolution, social and production themes.

In all of these productions one tastes the fruits of the Yen-an conference. One feels that only actors and producers who have really lived with the peasants and workers, could produce the realism which these films display. And it is so, film workers do go to the people. The scenario writer and his assistants go first to factory or village about which a film is to be produced, and collect the authentic material which is to be used. Before "shooting" starts, producers, actors, actresses and other workers live and work for two to three months in the factory or village. In the film, "Unite for To-Morrow," for instance, written around No. 9 Textile Mill at Shanghai, some actors went to the factory, others to the villages from which most of the mill girls were recruited. They stayed there for two months. Cadres and workers from the factory were invited to read and

criticise the script. Some of the chief scenes were acted in the factory theatre before they were filmed, and workers voiced their criticisms. Much was changed and revised on the basis of the factory showing. It is an invariable principle that no matter what the story, as long as it is one on contemporary affairs, producers, photographers and actors must go to the place where the scene is laid and gain practical experience there.

Under these conditions there is no chance of Hollywood fantasies and glamor creeping into productions. The private studios soon began to copy the state concerns and to send their staff also to learn from the people. One of the most successful films produced in 1950 by private studios was "Captain Kwan" which entailed writers and actors spending weeks in the village from which Kwan originated, and then more weeks in the regiment of the Third Field Army in which Kwan had served. The result was an accurate picture of village and army life which peasants and soldiers hailed as the real thing.

Another impressive film made by the state studios was "Stand Up Sisters," a full length feature, excellently and sensitively produced and filmed. It is a simple and factual account of one of the prostitutes from the Peking brothels, a peasant girl who came with her mother to live with city relatives when the father died, and left them penniless. The mother finger-printed a document which both thought was a labor contract for work in a textile factory. The girl was taken instead to a brothel, where she had the customary initiation by being raped by the proprietor. The film faithfully follows the case history of one brothel where abortions were carried out by the "madame" with scissors and no anaesthetic; where a girl dying from haemorrhage is dumped into a coffin which is nailed down while she is still alive; where girls who tried to escape were branded on the shoulders with red-hot irons; an accurate record of the inhuman life of girls sold into prostitution, and the way they have been set on their feet since Liberation. There is not a hint of moralising in the film as far as the attitude towards the girls is concerned. There is starkest realism softened through the filter of humanism, which touches every aspect of life in People's China. There is no hint that it was disgraceful for the girls to have been prostitutes; emphasis is on the brutal social system which put the girls into brothels and the fact

that the girls can now have a good start in life with every avenue of study and profession open to them. It was a film which left many people in the audience weeping on the occasion on which I saw it, because of its moving humanism.

Freed from the shackles of capitalism, from the reactionary control of the Kuomintang which exercised stringent censorship and even set up a "Society for the Extermination of Communists in the Film Industry," freed from the influence of Hollywood glamor, decadence and illusionism, the Chinese film industry has already moved very rapidly forward and is not only making its contribution to the fulfilment of the Chinese revolution, but also to world culture. The great humanism of the Chinese revolution comes to its full flowering in this realistic presentation of new life in the making.

In order to bring these new creations to the public in a land where there are only seven hundred cinemas for nearly five hundred million people, there are over six hundred mobile cinema units which tour villages, factories and army units. As few villages have electricity yet, most of the units are equipped with battery-operated projectors. Soviet specialists are helping to develop color film techniques, Czechoslovakia has sent cinema equipment and specialists to install it and to train Chinese operators. In form and content the Chinese productions have already left Hollywood far behind, and they are rapidly overhauling them now in technique also.

The films and new operas have brought to life and popularised a branch of people's culture which has long remained stagnant. In Chinese villages since the Liberation, there have been teams of prospectors prowling about seeking the hidden riches of people's music, which, like every other form of art in China, is now regarded as a national treasure. Folk tunes which have long lain buried have now been resurrected by the "Research Society for People's Music." There was practically no written music in the whole of China until the research society started its work. As in so many other branches, work had to begin from the ground and even under the ground. In the past, popular songs and even arias from Chinese classical opera were handed down from memory. The research teams dig the tunes out; sometimes from local village actors and musicians, more often from the peasants themselves. Tunes are committed to manuscript and carefully filed away like specimens of precious

metals. In North Shansi alone, over two thousand tunes were collected and stored in the research libraries. When a writer is working on a new opera or film, he can go to the research libraries and have the tunes played or sung until he finds the ones which most nearly express the emotions and atmosphere he wants. Those he selects are then worked up for solos, choruses or orchestration by the composers. "From the old, we create the new," said Chairman Mao, and this applies to music as well as to drama and literature. The beautiful melodies in "Bai Ma Nu," referred to earlier, were all collected by the research society's teams in the villages where the white-haired girl lived.

Folk music had not been popularised in the past in China except in the area controlled by the Eighth Route Army. Singers and musicians being rated as the lowest dregs of society, it was only in the tribal areas where the national minorities were outcasts anyway, that popular music and dancing developed on a mass scale. The national minorities are now providing a rich and vigorous treasure house of song and dance and their talents are given every encouragement by the People's Government.

The Eighth Route Army was the first in China to set up dance and music groups in its units. In the villages of North China, there was traditional music and dance knowns as the "yang ko." "Yang ko" means the "first green shoots" and it was sung and danced when the first green shoots of grain poked up through the snow-covered earth in early spring. It could be performed also when the harvest was gathered in. The Eighth Route Army developed it by creating the famous "yang ko" troupes, who followed close on the heels of the army into newly liberated villages and towns, and gave dashing performances for the local population, singing local tunes set to revolutionary words. They accumulated new "yang ko" tunes as they moved from place to place, and adapted tunes and dances to suggest every form of activity from tilling the fields and reaping the harvest, to hauling in fishing nets, laying mines and destroying Japanese invaders.

Recently composers and research workers have been overhauling the whole of Chinese music including that of the classical opera. One of the main difficulties again, however, has been the absence of anything committed to notes. In

Chinese opera, drama and music do not form an integral whole. The same drama may be performed a dozen different times and each time with a different series of songs, according to the whims and talents of the actors. There is a standard stock of popular operatic songs which express various emotions. There are heroes' songs, songs of filial piety, of wifely submission, of the cruel despot, the good emperor, songs to express grief at the death of a friend and similar themes well-known to Chinese operagoers. The artist may pull out of the repertoire anything he likes for the opera in which he is appearing, as long as the correct emotions are expressed. He may at any moment introduce his own variations on the original melody which the accompanists do their best to follow. Famous artists have their own musicians—usually fiddlers and drummers—who are expert at following the most complicated variations. Everything is played by ear with the chief musician following the singer, the others following the leader. In between stanzas, gongs are beaten with varying intensity and tempo according to the passions being expressed.

As all female parts were taken by males, actors became famous or otherwise for their ability to impersonate female voices as well as gestures. Actors wear masks and costumes which immediately and conveniently identify them for the public as hero or villain, good king or bad despot, submissive wife or dutiful son, so the only scope for dramatic display is in the use of voice and gestures. An old man with a beard must sing in a thin, quavering voice, submissive wife in high pitched treble, hero with a stirring baritone, and so on.

These musical histrionics have done much to distort Chinese singing, as not only the male actors but also music and opera fans try and sing their favorite airs in unnatural, plaintive trebles. The very nature and misery of Chinese feudal society before Liberation was such that songs which appealed to the public were subjective, self-pitying laments which fitted in with the themes favoured by the ruling class and censor. And as mentioned earlier, the brutal training the actors received, the miserable life they led, conditioned them to howl their misery on the stage.

The reforms which have taken place in the classical opera have already changed many things. Female parts are now usually played by females; male actors can concentrate on

manly, robust songs. Emphasis is laid on positive, patriotic dramas, and the old self-pitying, reactionary rubbish is cast aside. Extra instruments have been added to the orchestra and lively dances and choruses introduced. In general, however, apart from having been vastly cheered up, the music as well as the form of the classical opera remains the same. It is in the new opera and films that the basis for a great development of Chinese music is being created. Here, drama and music are created as one whole. The music is specifically written for the drama or script from themes which spring from the life of the people. In the old opera, music is exclusively of the one-line variety with some contrapuntal work in the accompaniment. In the new opera and films, there is rich orchestration full of vivid colors and harmonies. The simple village melody formerly unknown outside a radius of a few miles becomes a fine aria with full orchestral accompaniment. A "yang ko" tune known in the past to a few score peasants in some remote district, becomes a rousing chorus sung by fifty or sixty mixed voices. Local "yang ko" dances become the basis for an orchestral suite. When Chinese composers can take time off from writing functional music, these tunes will grow into string quartettes and symphonies. The village tunes, painstakingly collected by the research groups, become popular throughout the whole country as they are broadcast through the films and radio. There is the answer to the Marshallisation of culture, the export of standardised American jazz which has drowned national music all over western Europe in the past decade!

The Department of Music is carrying out its task to collect the riches of Chinese music and popularise it on a national scale. It is music which breathes the spirit of old China but presented in a form in keeping with the hope and progress of new China. Musicians and composers like actors and writers, now have an honored place in the new society. As long as they are prepared to learn from the people, write and perform for the people, they are supported by the State and given every chance to create and perform to their hearts' content.

Any dramatist, writer, composer or poet who has a drama to create, a book to write, music to compose, or a poem to pen will receive full support, financial and otherwise, from the State, as long as that play, book, musical work or poem contributes to the upward striving of humanity and the Chinese people.

That is the yardstick by which all creative effort is measured in People's China.

For pictorial artists the same standards apply. In the past they were even more remote from the people than were most intellectuals. A Chinese painter worked in his atelier, quite oblivious to the world of reality. In general he painted flowers, birds, bamboo, horses, Chinese characters, bearded philosophers with their hands thrust into the sleeves of their gowns, or delicate women in silk robes—usually from imagination. Each was a specialist, had his own style and painted nothing but birds, bamboos, horses and so on. But in the Yen-an period painters, too, accepted Chairman Mao's principle that all artistic inspiration must come from life itself, from life as it is lived and not as it is seen from an ivory tower. After Liberation it was difficult for the old painters, the specialists, to adapt themselves to the new vigorous forms of poster painting and cartoons demanded by the needs of the day. There were no longer landlords, wealthy bureaucrats and foreign tourists to buy the ornate water-colors on parchment screens and scrolls. Used to working with the finest of camel-hair brushes, with the lightest of delicate strokes for the eyes of the connoisseurs, many shuddered at the thought of whacking paint on ten feet square wooden hoardings, or on placards to decorate tramcars. Formerly they had painted for a handful of aesthetes, now they were required to splash on the paint in vivid colors to carry a message of protest against American aggression in Korea to hundreds of thousands, to millions of people.

Those who could not adjust themselves to the new needs were not cast aside. They were given jobs in academies where their technical skill could be passed on to students, who now study every form of painting. Many were given jobs copying the masterpieces of ancient wall paintings in the world's greatest natural art gallery in the caves of Tun Huang, the ancient centre of Buddhist culture in China. There in Kansu province there are hundreds of caves, the walls of which are lined with magnificently preserved paintings dating from the 4th to the 10th century. Laid end to end, there are no less than twenty-five miles of these paintings, which are now all being copied and exhibited throughout China. China's most famous brush painter of the old school is Chih Pai-hsieh, who although he is over 80 years old, has been made a professor at

the Fine Arts Academy. He teaches the old technique which will be used by his pupils to express subjects from real life.

The younger painters, grouped around those who studied and worked at Yen-an, have thrown themselves into the new art with great vigor. There is ample scope for their activities; many are teaching at the Central Fine Arts Academy in Peking, formerly the Peking Academy. Its president in the Kuomintang days, Shin Pei-heng, a famous painter of horses, has been retained as chief of the new academy. He is an eager exponent of the new theories as to the role of art and artists. Most of the painters in Peking work in one of three institutions, the People's Fine Arts Publication Society, the Fine Arts Working Society, or the Fine Arts Supply Society. In these three bodies they can do everything from newspaper and book illustrations, to designing badges for a peace rally or painting a portrait of Mao Tse-tung. They go to factories and villages and after actually working and living with the people, getting their legs covered, as Chairman Mao expressed it, with cow dung, their hands blistered and soiled with grease, they paint the peasants and workers at their labors. In the publishing department they design strip cartoons with social and political content. These are encouraged by the government as a quick means of getting a message over to a highly illiterate public for whom books are useless. Ku Yuan, one of China's most famous woodcut artists, whose works are well-known abroad, works in the Publications Society.

All artists, no matter what their branch or speciality, have a chance to work and live decently in People's China. Their living is assured by congenial work which, even if it is not the ideal as far as the individual artist is concerned, provides him with his bread and butter—or rice and noodles. In his free time he can create whatever is nearest to his heart's desire. If the results satisfy the people's needs, he will have no lack of buyers. All artists can submit their spare-time creations to the Federation of Fine Art Workers for inclusion in exhibitions regularly arranged throughout the country. They can also arrange private exhibitions or group exhibitions as in capitalist countries. But unless they are depicting the life of the people in its upward struggle, they will find themselves as isolated as poets and writers who still write laments about the leaves fluttering to the ground.

There is no room for abstraction, surrealism or mysticism in art in a society where the mass of the people are the final critics—and the buyers. There are no wealthy dowagers or neurotic cranks to invest fortunes in meaningless scrawls and daubs. The painter can still paint abstractions, the poet can still write incomprehensible gibberish, but they will lament that they are even less "understood" in People's China than in the capitalist world. By insisting that art starts with the people and must satisfy the needs of the people, the socialist realists have dealt a death blow to the pessimistic formalists of the West.

## CHAPTER VIII

### VOLUNTEERS FOR PEACE AND INDEPENDENCE.

A FAMILIAR sight to travellers in Kuomintang China was lines of miserable-looking young men being marched along a road under armed guard. Their hands were bound together with rope or wire, and they were roped up in single file with just sufficient space between them to allow them to march. They looked like slaves being marched to a market place or prisoners being marched to an execution ground. Often enough one saw them dead or dying on the roadside with their hands still bound. They were not slaves or prisoners, but peasant conscripts for Chiang Kai-shek's armies, and were on their way to the nearest base—perhaps a week's march distant. The word had gone forth to the local villages that each headman had to provide so many conscripts by a certain day, and the headman, in co-operation with the landlords, rounded them up exclusively from the landless, the poor and middle peasants. Army policy was to give them just enough food to keep them alive during the march, but to keep them too weak to attempt to escape. The policy of the guards who escorted them back was to feed them nothing at all and let them die if possible, so they could collect and sell the rations. If enemy planes came strafing, the guards dived for cover, leaving the conscripts on the road, floundering with their ropes. If some were killed, the others had to carry them. The guards would draw rations for the full complement, and at the base explain that they had been killed on the last day of the march. Sometimes the conscripts did escape, but as deserters they could never return to their native villages. Those who were drafted into the army stood a likelier chance of death from disease than from enemy bullets.

In the first years of the united front against the Japanese, in 1937-8, there was enthusiasm to fight the invaders. Peasants and workers volunteered, but when Chiang Kai-shek's generals settled down to trade with the Japanese in the front-line areas and suppressed any form of anti-Japanese propaganda; when



the Kuomintang concentrated its main forces against the Communists, attacking the only elements which consistently protected the people from the invaders, the stream of volunteers dried up, enthusiasm died away. The peasant's son was given no ideology to fight for, he was treated equally badly by Japanese, Wang Ching-wei puppets and Kuomintang, and he had no interest in the war. Conscription, for the majority, meant never to see one's family or native village again. It meant a heavy risk of death from disease in a cause about which one had neither knowledge nor faith.

Rank and file soldiers were despised and beaten by their officers, feared and detested by the population. They rarely received even the pitifully meagre rations laid down under Kuomintang army regulations. The generals drew full quantities and sold them on the black market. Medical supplies which poured in from America and welfare organisations all over the world never found their way to army units, but were sold in elegant chemists' shops in all the main cities—and to the Japanese. If a soldier were sick or wounded, he bought his own bandages or medicines, or went without—and usually it was the latter as I saw in a three months' tour of Kuomintang front-line areas in 1942. Soldiers clapped green leaves and bits of newspaper on their wounds for want of any better medical attention. He received neither enough food to keep from starving nor money to buy medicines if sick, so he stole and pillaged. It was an iron rule in Chiang Kai-shek's armies that troops should not serve in their native provinces. They might fraternise with the local population; the temptation to desert might be too great. Stationed in foreign provinces, the troops had little compunction in stealing from the peasants.

The entry of Kuomintang troops into any district was the greatest misfortune imaginable to the people. First would come the quartermaster troops demanding grain, and there would be beatings for peasants who did not hand over enough. Then would come others demanding manpower to dig trenches and act as porters; demanding animals and implements. For a peasant the loss of a draught animal often means bankruptcy and the loss of his farm, but the Kuomintang led away horses and oxen as they needed them. Rarely if ever were they returned. The soldiers raided granaries, poultry pens and pigsties. When peasants protested they were dealt the same sort

of treatment from fists and rifle butts that the soldiers received from the fists and pistol butts of their officers. One could not blame the troops. They were starving and bitter, and the only relief from their own misery was to inflict misery on someone else.

But the system under the Kuomintang made a soldier a despised and hated creature, and soldiery a profession to be avoided at all costs. In the final analysis the relations between officers and troops and between army and the population was the greatest single factor in the defeat of the Kuomintang. Conversely, the relations between army and people was the greatest single factor in the victory of the People's Army.

In the cities, students were exempted from military service and as to be a student, one must be a member of the upper classes, it was only the poor who were press-ganged into service. Intellectuals who, as Chairman Mao describes, thought it degrading to do anything with their hands, remained entirely aloof from military activity.

With the growth of the Red Army, the attitude towards soldiery changed completely, just as the status of the soldier himself had changed. The future People's Revolutionary Army was born on August 1, 1927, when the Workers' and Peasants' Revolutionary Army formed under Mao Tse-tung in Hunan commanded by Chuh Teh, Chou En-lai, Ho Lung and Yeh Ting, which had revolted, following the massacre by Chiang of tens of thousands of Communists, workers and peasants, and the smashing of the Kuomintang-Communist alliance.

Around these forces was gradually built the Red Army. After defeating numerous "annihilation" campaigns launched by Chiang Kai-shek against its bases in Kiangsi province, the greater part of the Red Army marched north to Yen-an in Shensi province in October, 1935, in order to develop a base against the threatening Japanese aggression. Part of the forces remained, however, south of the Yangtse river, and eventually became the nucleus around which was built the famous New Fourth Route Army. The story of the epic "Long March" from Kiangsi to Shensi during which a whole army, including thousands of women, numbering 100,000 in all, fought and marched an average of twenty miles a day for an entire year, wiping out 411 Kuomintang regiments on the way, has never fully been told. Neither has the background to the Sian incident, in which

Chiang Kai-shek was kidnapped and released only after he had agreed to call off the war against the Communists and join forces with them to fight the Japanese. Edgar Snow, the late Agnes Smedley, and other writers have given an idea of what took place, but the full, incredible story of the Sian incident and the 8,000 miles march must wait until Chairman Mao or another of the Chinese leaders can find time to fill in the details. Certain it is that there is no parallel in history for the 8,000 miles march at the end of which, with only between four and five thousand fighting effectives, and with at most five cart-ridges per man, they fought and won a decisive battle against three crack divisions of Chang Hsueh-liang, amongst the best equipped troops in China.

It was as the result of an exchange of letters between Mao Tse-tung and Chang Hsueh-liang, following this battle, that the latter decided to cease fighting the Communists, refused to carry out Chiang's further orders, and when the latter came to Sian to discipline him, kidnapped Chiang in the famous "Sian Incident."

After agreement was reached to pool forces and fight the Japanese, the Red Army in the North was reconstituted as the Eighth Route Army, and later on the elements south of the Yangtze were formed into the New Fourth Army. These designations remained until the end of the Japanese war when Chiang launched his war of "extermination" against the Communists. The two revolutionary armies joined forces under one command, and with the new name of People's Liberation Army.

The form the future People's Army was to take was laid down in December, 1929, at a conference held in Kutien in the coastal province of Fukien, when a nine-point resolution drafted personally by Mao Tse-tung, was adopted. Amongst other things, this dealt with the abolition of corporal punishment, privileged treatment for wounded soldiers, special education for young soldiers, political education for all soldiers, and propaganda work among the population. Complete political democracy was introduced so that off duty soldiers and officers were equals. At special meetings, soldiers could criticise officers for their personal behaviour or for their attitude on the battlefield. Officers and men shared the same food. Under the motto "two heads are better than one," the greatest use was made of the initiative and ingenuity of the rank and file soldiers. At meet-

ings before battle officers and men discussed tactics on an equal footing. Similar meetings were held to sum up the results of an engagement, to analyse weaknesses and criticise individuals. As far as was compatible with essential military discipline, democracy was introduced and operated everywhere except during drill or on the battlefield. During discussions and in the school-rooms and mess halls relations between officers and men were those of comrades. But obedience to officers' orders was naturally demanded in military questions. There is no time to call a meeting on the field of battle.

As a result of the Kutien conference a basic code of conduct for Red Army men was worked out by Mao Tse-tung. This became known as the "three disciplinary rules" and the "eight points for attention." These rules and their application make the Chinese People's Army the most highly civilised in the world. The three rules are: (1) Obey orders under all circumstances; (2) Do not take a single needle or a piece of thread from the people; (3) Hand in all enemy booty to the government. The eight points for attention are: (1) Talk to the people politely; (2) Observe fair dealing in all business transactions; (3) Return everything you have borrowed; (4) Pay for anything you have damaged; (5) Do not beat or scold the people; (6) Do not damage crops; (7) Do not fool around with women; (8) Do not illtreat prisoners of war.

The rigid observance of these eleven points constitutes the main strength of the People's Army; the reason why the people's attitude to soldiers changed and why soldiers count it an honor to serve in its ranks. An ignorant, illiterate peasant lad who joined the People's Army was a relatively educated man after a few years: literate, versed in the history of his army and country, with a fair smattering of mathematics and a knowledge of a trade or two to boot. The People's Army, where possible, grew its own crops from reclaimed waste land, spun cotton raised on its own fields, weaved it in its own looms, turned it into uniforms in its own tailoring departments, fought with hand grenades and mines made in its own arsenals, the arsenals built by army smiths. It became a point of honor among troops, and still is, never to accept the gifts which peasants tried to press on them. Instead, they helped the peasants. They used their cavalry and draught animals to help plough the rice-land, gave their man-power at harvest time. When

they moved away from an area they were often able to turn over hundreds of acres of reclaimed wasteland for distribution among the poor peasants.

This was a new army. A people's army which could not exist but for the whole-hearted support of the people. Peasants willingly sent their sons to serve and be educated in this army, willingly helped to build fortifications, and in times of battle eagerly helped to transport supplies and act as stretcher-bearers. This was not only an army that treated the people as friends and equals, it was an army which really fought the Japanese and protected the people. When the People's Army entered a district, the peasants knew, too, that reduction of rent and taxes would follow; there would be an end to persecution by the local landlord. And, of course, after Liberation, the peasantry and the whole population realised what the red banners and dancing "yang ko" troupes of the People's Army really symbolised for China.

China has an army of about five million men, literate, politically conscious and relatively well-educated. It was the hope of the government, soldiers and people, that this army, after having cleared the Kuomintang remnants from the mainland and Hainan Island, would finish off Chiang Kai-shek in his island hide-out of Taiwan (Formosa) and return the troops to industry and agriculture. China needs these men, she needs peace.

When the Korean fighting started and America threw in her troops, there was not one Chinese in a hundred who did not believe that American imperialism was on the march along the same invasion route Japanese imperialism had marched in 1931 when she invaded Manchuria from Korea. The United States, with its well-organised majority in the United Nations, may have been able to convince people in many countries of the contrary, but the Chinese people, with their bitter experience of over a century of foreign invasions, were quite clear as to the issues. The pretexts have varied in the past, but the effects have varied only in the nationality of the imperialist invader. The United States in Chinese eyes was trying to regain by force of arms what she had lost when her puppet Chiang Kai-shek was thrown into the sea, and was even prepared to use Japanese troops to attain her objectives. Hopes of turning the five million men back into the great tasks of peaceful

construction that awaited them, receded. An American 7th Fleet stood between them and the liberation of Taiwan. American tanks were rumbling towards the centre of China's heavy industry in Manchuria. American planes were bombing and strafing Chinese towns and villages. American propagandists were writing that the Yalu river, towards which American troops were advancing, could be disregarded as the natural frontier between Korea and China—just as American-led South Korean troops disregarded the 38th parallel in Korea when it suited them. American magazines published maps showing China's heavy industry at the mercy of U.S. air bases which would be built in Korea. American congressmen gloated over the use to which a Korean base could be put for an invasion of China and the Soviet Union. All this aroused Chinese public opinion as it had never before been aroused. When Truman openly began to support the remilitarisation of Japan, America lost the last shred of support even from those who had previously been her supporters in China.

There were spontaneous protest meetings all over the country, people clamored to be allowed to help Korea as Koreans in their thousands had helped China in the anti-Japanese war. When a declaration of support for volunteers for Korea was published by the eleven parties which make up the coalition government of China, it opened the flood-gates to a vast stream of eager recruits. There is nothing in Chinese history comparable to the great volunteer movement which sprang up. Over the entire country men and women of every stratum of society demanded to go to Korea and keep the aggressor away from China's doorstep. It was unprecedented even in the best days of the united front in 1937, that intellectuals should volunteer in tens of thousands. On the basis of surveys which I made at the time, literally millions of people pleaded to go to Korea. The only difficulty the authorities had was explaining to them why the majority could not be accepted, but must remain at their posts on the home front.

In factories, mines and villages I have visited, a very high percentage of all the able-bodied men and women wanted to go. A call went out for seventy-two locomotive drivers, a thousand applied within a few hours. In one district the local peasants' association called for two hundred volunteers. Ten thousand registered within twelve hours and were not satisfied

until they were promised their names would be kept and if more than two hundred were needed they would be notified. Of the girls' train service team at Peking station, fifteen of sixteen volunteered the first day, the sixteenth was sick but offered to support the family of the first girl accepted. In a tractor-training station for girls, more than half demanded to go as tank drivers. When it was pointed out that they had not yet mastered even tractor-driving, they asked to go as nurses. Only a tiny proportion of those who enlisted could be accepted. First of all managers of enterprises where they worked, directors of institutes where they studied, had to give their consent, and this would not be given if it meant disruption in production; secondly, rigorous physical tests had to be passed. Those who were accepted were given not only thorough military training but also political training based on the Army's code of conduct, and a course in internationalism to combat the very healthy hatred which has been built up for imperialism of the American, Japanese or any other brand. The Chinese volunteers went into battle knowing exactly why they were there and for what they were fighting. By the Koreans they were accepted as brothers and sisters come to share the hardships and brutalities of American imperialist aggression.

Many times I asked ordinary villagers why they had volunteered for Korea. They gave almost identical answers. "For the first time in our lives we've had a year or two of happiness. We've got land, we eat enough, our children go to school. We've suffered from the warlords, from the Japanese and from the Kuomintang. We'd suffer even more from the Americans. They even want to bring the Japanese back. They must be stopped before they cross our frontiers. Everything we have we owe to the Communist Party and Chairman Mao. Now we should help them and help ourselves at the same time."

A typical intellectual I spoke with on the day he left for the front was Professor Feng Yeng-ch'ien, one of China's best surgeons, and Chief of the Faculty of Medicine at Shantung University. He is a slender, rather ascetic-looking man with a sensitive face and delicate surgeon's hands. Until Liberation he was a remote intellectual, a medical professor at Shantung University with no political ideas. He had seen nothing of warfare except once when he inadvertently got mixed up in some bombing and fighting at Shanghai. He was 45, his wife,

a professor of pediatrics at the same university. They have two children. At the time this is being written, he is somewhere in a front-line hospital in Korea. Why did he go? He was quite clear about it.

"Tsingtao (chief Shantung port and seat of the University) has had German, Japanese and American occupiers," he said. "In many ways the Americans were the worst. In our university hospital we were constantly operating on girls who had been raped, on children and old people knocked down by American jeeps and trucks. When they killed people they thought they were being generous by paying for human lives, two hundred dollars a time. Even that went into the hands of the Kuomintang officials. If they behaved like that when they came as friends, how will they behave when they come as enemies as they do now. It is clear they want to dominate China, then Asia and the whole world. I had given up hopes for humanity through the years of Japanese occupation, and the years of Kuomintang corruption which followed. I only wanted to work and earn enough to keep my family alive. But we have had two years of a new life, full of hope for us all. Can one stand idle and see that destroyed? No! In the past we intellectuals stood on one side. We let others do our fighting and even our thinking for us. That is finished for ever. I volunteered three times for Korea before I was allowed to go. China needs surgeons and professors too, but I felt that for every Korean soldier or Chinese volunteer I save in the front line, I am saving the lives of perhaps twenty or thirty Chinese civilians in our own towns and villages. Perhaps I even save the lives of my own family if I can help stop the aggressors from crossing our frontiers."

Professor Feng Yeng-ch'ien spoke very earnestly. His eyes were filled with tears behind his thick-lensed glasses as he described how his wife supported him in his decision to go to Korea and brought the children down to the station to see him off, pledging herself to take good care of the family and work hard for the volunteers in the rear. He was elected head of a detachment of several hundred medicos and nurses, and was deeply conscious of his responsibilities. It was no light step for a 45-year-old Chinese intellectual to step out of his family and the university which had been his home and workplace for 15 years, to rough it in the blood, mud and snow somewhere in the mountains of Korea.

I attended a farewell ceremony for his detachment at which the president of the Chinese Red Cross, Madame Li Teh-chuan (widow of the late "Christian General" and elder statesman Marshal Feng Yu-hsiang) told the volunteers just what to expect in Korea. "You'll find there," she warned them, "the Americans have left you no roofs to sleep under, few buildings to work in. There will be little food, great hardship and constant danger. But there is no nobler cause than that for which you have volunteered, to help our brothers, to protect our frontiers and to save world peace."

The detachment spontaneously broke into the famous partisan song, "We'll go where we are needed," a song which expressed the mood of tens of millions of Chinese volunteers and would-be volunteers.

I found that almost all my friends from previous visits to China had volunteered for Korea, including one woman who has long had Chinese nationality, but who was rejected because she had blonde hair. "They said it would give rise to rumors that there were Russians at the front, so I offered to bob my hair and dye it black," she said. "But it was no good. They said my big nose would give me away and they didn't want to give any ground for stories that Soviet troops were being used or that an international brigade had been formed." Many who were rejected in one place volunteered again in another. If they were turned down at their place of work, they registered again with the political or social organization to which they belonged. Usually names were handed in at factory and village mass meetings. There was a genuine, burning anger among all sections of the population that after all they had been through, the ten years of civil war, eight years of anti-Japanese war, and another four years of civil war, that they should have to turn and fight again just as the new life was being built.

While the volunteers fought in the front lines, their families were cared for by factory and village comrades. Now and again, volunteers were brought back on lecture tours and reported in the factories and villages from which they had volunteered on the actions of their units. Factory and village delegates would give an account of their stewardship over the families, and what they had done on the production front, so the volunteers could pass the word on when they returned

to the front. At Chinese New Year, every volunteer's family was visited by delegations bringing New Year gifts. Such solicitude for soldiers' families was quite unknown in the past. There was a feeling of close connection between the fighting at the front and the work and welfare in the rear.

In addition to the "Volunteer for Korea" movement, a mass movement was developed against the rearmament of Japan, in which every section of the population took part.

Shanghai touched off the demonstrations with a march of nearly 700,000 people, including workers and office employees of Standard and Texaco Oil Companies, Buddhist monks and Christian priests and nuns, thousands of merchants and students as well as the hundreds of thousands of industrial and transport workers. In a vast procession that lasted from 9 a.m. till 6 p.m., the marchers carried glowing silk banners which reminded onlookers that 10,000,000 Chinese died on the battlefields or from Japanese bombs and massacres; that almost 4,000 factories were destroyed. Realistic cartoons provided grim reminders of Japanese murder, rape, arson and looting. Trade Union groups proudly held aloft lists of their members murdered and tortured by the Japanese police. From the city's skyscrapers enormous banners fluttered, with slogans demanding an end to American plots to rearm Japan.

Following the Shanghai demonstration similar ones were held in every town and village in which literally scores of millions of people took part. These were not empty demonstrations. They were parades of people including the blind and the crippled, people whose eyes had been gouged out, lips, ears, noses and tongues cut off, fingers and toes crushed, women who had been raped, widows and orphans, a cross section of the tens of millions of families which had directly suffered from Japanese imperialism. The very blood and nerves of these people cried out against American attempts to enslave them again; against American plots to put arms again in the hands of their Japanese or Kuomintang torturers. In one of these demonstrations there took part survivors of an infamous vampire institution, set up in the county of Lalin, in Manchuria, where the Japanese vied with the Nazis in a monstrous perversion of science.

The peasants had no idea what went on inside a great compound the Japanese had built in their village, surrounded with moats and high tension wires. Watch-towers at every corner

were guarded by Japanese machine-gunners. At first tarpaulin-covered motor-trucks used to carry in masses of Chinese, later railway waggons were diverted through the compound gates. Acrid, greasy smoke issued from the tall chimneys. Peasants shrugged their shoulders and guessed it was a factory for explosives. One day twelve peasants from near Harbin were arrested for suspected anti-Japanese activities. After the usual beating with clubs and tortures of hot needles under their finger-nails, hot peppered water in the nostrils, hosepipes pushed down their throats, and water pumped into their stomachs, the twelve, with a number of other prisoners, were taken to the Lalin compound. They supposed it was another concentration camp and were astonished to find that they were given an excellent meal on arrival, including meat and plenty of good, red wine. They were given several such excellent meals and encouraged to eat heartily—and then found out what was expected of them. They were to make blood for Japanese army hospitals. Prisoners were "tapped" every few days and fed well to make more blood, until the supply began to give out; the food no longer replaced blood taken, and they started to weaken. When they ceased to respond to the good food, they were tied to poles, the veins opened, and the blood drained out to the last drop. Whatever fats had accumulated were extracted from the body, the rest was burned in a big furnace. Scores of fresh blood banks arrived daily.

One of the group of 12 from Harbin, Wang Tsu-yang, was a Communist, and he made careful plans for escape. There had been many revolts in the past, and attempted escapes, but all had failed. Wang watched the habits and routine of the guards and studied the camp lay-out very carefully. He kept up the spirits of the other 11, told them to eat well and conserve their strength. One night they knocked a guard on the head with a wine bottle, grabbed his keys and got out of their cell. One volunteered to throw himself across the electric wires so that the others could climb over his body. He threw himself at the wires but the power was not switched on that night, and all 12 managed to escape from the compound. They were quickly guided to a guerrilla unit by a peasant. Plans were made by the guerrillas to raid the compound, but a day or two after the escape the Japs. blew the whole camp to pieces, including the remaining inmates, and withdrew from the area, evi-

dently fearing swift guerrilla revenge once the escapees told their story.

Such stories may not be known to the outside world because General MacArthur did his best to protect the reputation of his friends among the Japanese militarists, but they were well-known inside China. The story of the plant for preparing germ warfare set up by the Japanese High Command 20 miles from Harbin, was also carefully shielded from the West because it might have influenced public opinion against the plans to rearm Japan, but it is well-known in China, especially in areas which suffered from bubonic plague germs dropped by Japanese planes in 1941-2. The full account of this infamous plant at which experiments were carried out on American as well as Chinese and Russian prisoners of war and political prisoners, was disclosed at the Khabarovak war crimes trial, news of which was almost completely suppressed in the Western press. Some of the chief accused are free in Japan to-day, and others are acting as advisers to the Americans on bacteriological warfare.\*

In brief, the Japanese set up two secret branches of the army in 1936, camouflaged as (a) administration for water supply and prophylactics, and (b) anti-bacteriological service. The code names were Department 751 and Department 100. Together they employed about 3,000 scientists, doctors and laboratory assistants. The latter lived together as an autonomous colony, sealed off from the outside world near Harbin, in Manchuria. Behind the heavily fortified walls they produced germs for bubonic plague, typhus, anthrax, cholera, and other contagious diseases. A prison in the compound was regularly supplied by Japanese intelligence officers, with Chinese, Russian and a few American prisoners on whom experiments were conducted. In many cases the prisoners were tied to iron stakes and bullets and shells which had previously been infected with one of the variety of diseases cultured, were fired into them or exploded near them. The process of the disease was then watched until

\* Anybody interested in the complete details should read the verbatim report of the trial, published in English and other languages by the Moscow Foreign Languages Publishing House, entitled: "Materials on the Trials of Former Servicemen of the Japanese Army Charged With Manufacturing and Employing Bacteriological Weapons."

the patients died, usually in dreadful agony, as the wounds were never treated.

General Kawashimi, one of the first to give evidence at the trial, described the types of weapons chosen to spread the bacteria, ranging from sprays in fountain pens, and fitted into the shafts of walking sticks to be used by special sabotage squads, to "Ishii" bombs—named after their inventor, General Ishii—made from porcelain and dropped from aircraft. The experiments carried out in South China in 1941-2 were mainly with bubonic plague germs dropped in these "Ishii" bombs. Kawashimi described boilers with a capacity of one ton each which produced the food on which the bacteria lived and multiplied. One section of 4,500 incubators produced fleas as carriers for bubonic plague. A special section bred thousands of rats to be turned loose with the plague-infected fleas.

During 1945 the special sabotage squads equipped with walking stick and fountain pen sprays were stationed along the frontier between Manchuria and the Soviet border. At one point alone 15,000 rats were to be let loose. Kawashimi told the Soviet court that the orders to prepare for germ warfare against the Soviet Union were contained in a special secret document signed by Emperor Hirohito. General Yamada, chief of Japan's elite Kwantung army, also gave evidence and confirmed that the "Ishii" bombs had been selected as the most effective method of spreading the germs. Typhus germs according to Yamada would affect not only human life but also animal and vegetable life, and the earth itself. There is no doubt that Yamada who was counted one of the top-flight Japanese generals knew what he was talking about.

A third witness, General Karasawa, explaining the experiments carried out on American airmen who were afterwards killed, said, "We found that they were immune to several diseases known in the East, and our problem was to develop bacteria which would overcome this immunity."

Correspondents who were in China in 1941 and 1942 will remember that Chiang Kai-shek's press chief in Chungking alleged on a number of occasions that the Japanese were spreading bubonic plague by dropping from the air plague-infested fleas. At that time it was not known how they were dropped, but investigations were started when bubonic plague appeared in areas, where it was hitherto unknown. On some occasions

it was found that Japanese had dropped bundles of rags full of fleas which were distributed by rats. I sent despatches at that time to the Daily Express, other correspondents to the London Times, the New York Times and world news agencies. General MacArthur, however, contemptuously rejected the evidence at the Khabarovsk trial, denied there had been any suggestions of germ warfare in China, and cleared General Ishii and other high-ranking officers named in the trial, of any guilt, including Hirohito. The reason for MacArthur's unnecessarily loud defence of these criminals became clear when it was learned that General Shiro Ishii, the chief criminal, was employed at a U.S. War Department Laboratory at Detrick, near Washington, where he is doubtless engaged in the same type of "anti-bacteriological" work that he engaged in near Harbin. Numerous boasts by top officials of the U.S. War Department make it clear that the United States is busily preparing for germ warfare based on the activities of the Japanese war criminals, and with their active assistance.

One could forgive the Chinese, after all they have suffered at Japanese and American hands, if they were now violently anti-American and anti-Japanese, but this is not the case. The streets were plastered during the various campaigns with posters and cartoons hitting out at American and Japanese militarism, but these attacks were balanced every day in the press and on the radio by accounts of the fight the American and Japanese people themselves were putting up against their militarists. A march on Washington, a peace demonstration in Madison Square Garden, collections of signatures for peace, strikes by Japanese students and workers, any activity at all for peace and internationalism, received the fullest publicity. The press went to some pains to explain that Japanese workers and peasants are just like Chinese peasants and workers; that they are exploited in the same way as were the Chinese under Japanese and Kuomintang. The Chinese people are taught that the mass of the American and Japanese people are their friends. No breath of nationalism or chauvinism was permitted to creep into the propaganda which was directed solely against imperialism and aggression.

If it became necessary for an all-out effort to halt aggression in its tracks. Mao Tse-tung would have tens of millions of volunteers to-morrow. That is not an exaggeration. Unless the

West realises that for the first time in its history, China is a highly politically-conscious, tightly united nation, determined to the last man and woman to defend its new-found happiness, the Western nations may get involved in tragic mistakes from the consequences of which all the atom bombs and "Ishii" bombs will not save them.

## CHAPTER IX

## THE DUAL VICTORY OF CHINA'S WOMEN.

IN a previous chapter I mentioned Wu Chang-ying, the girl student at the Central Literary Institute. The story of her early life is a good starting point to illustrate the rottenness of Chinese feudal society before Liberation, the slave status of women and their heroic struggle for a decent life. Wu Chang-ying has only a hazy memory of her father, but she knows he was a middle peasant, struggling to free himself from his debts to the local landlord. As his plight grew more hopeless he began to gamble and drink. When he got drunk he beat his wife. Eventually the farm was seized by the landlord, and the father vented his fury by beating his wife so mercilessly that she took little Wu Chang-ying with her and fled. For a year, the two begged for their living, wandering from village to village, and occasionally into towns. Sometimes they did not eat for days on end. Both went barefoot in summer and wrapped their feet in straw and rags in winter. Usually they slept in the open, huddling together in hay-stacks, sometimes under the eaves of landlords' houses. But they preferred even this type of freedom to the misery and tyranny at home.

One day the mother fell sick and she lay down to rest in a heap of dried reeds on a landlord's property. The landlord found her and literally kicked her to death, while Wu Chang-ying screamed and kicked and bit him. She was nine years when her mother died, and alone in the world. The next thing she knew, she had been sold to a rich peasant as a child bride. She is still not certain who sold her, but supposes it was the landlord who killed her mother.

"My life was terrible," she said, "everybody beat me. I worked from before dawn until long after dark. I did all the housework, spinning and weaving as well. I had the left-overs from what the rest ate. I always went to bed hungry and my body was always sore from beatings. My only happiness was when they sent me out to mind the cows in the mountains, or



in the winter when I was sent to the forest to gather wood. At first, I was afraid. I had never seen rabbits before, and I thought they were wolves. But then I met another cowherd, a child bride like myself, but a bit older. We shared our bitter experiences and sometimes cried together. That was the only comfort I had in those days. I remember a song my mother used to sing, about how terrible it was to be a child bride, that it was better to run away than endure such a fate. It didn't mean anything to me when she sang it, but now it did. I suggested to my friend that we run away. I said we could live as beggars and this would be better than our terrible lives. But she was afraid. One day I took the cows out in the morning but didn't take them back. I ran away and started begging again."

She was 11 by this time, and for another two years she lived by begging and occasional work as a cowherd. By the time she was 15 she had drifted to a town near Nanking, and as she was at starvation point, she took a job as a serving girl in the house of a rich merchant. Everybody in the house despised her as a slave. Again she toiled from morning till night every day in the week for the slops and left-overs from the merchant's table. As she grew older and attractive, she had to put up with the merchant's attempts to seduce her. Every time the mistress of the house went to visit her relatives, the merchant tried to molest her, and she was brutally flogged for resisting him.

When she was 18, Wu Chang-ying was scrubbing clothes one day at a pond where the poor women of the neighborhood did their washing. She overheard them talking about guerrillas operating in and around her home village. She asked what the guerrillas were, what they did. "They fight the Japanese and protect the poor," one washerwoman told her, and immediately Wu Chang-ying determined to join them. Again she ran away, and set off back towards her own village. On the way she had the misfortune to be recognised by relatives of the rich peasant to whom she had been sold. She was seized and handed over to him. By this time she was the beautiful girl that she is to-day, with large, coal black eyes, a sensitive mobile mouth, and skin like the finest silk. The peasant decided to marry her immediately. For four days she was locked in a room while the wedding was prepared.

Elaborate preparations were made, and on the fifth day the unhappy girl was draped in silk robes and a fantastic headdress and led out to be sacrificed. The wedding was being held in the peasant's home, because guerrillas and cadres were already in the village and such forced marriages were prohibited. "When I was led out of the room," she said, "the air was full of banging gongs and screeching fiddles and heavy with the scent of incense. Tables were piled with gifts and the room full of hateful, grinning visitors. I was told to kneel down before the ancestral tablets. I didn't want to bow and the relatives started to force me to kneel. My head was full of bitter thoughts. Had I gone through everything up to this moment to start back at the beginning again? When they laid hands on me, something snapped inside my head. I fought back, knocked the candles over and upset the incense. I pulled the headdress off and started yelling at the top of my voice. Everything was upset. The guests were all aghast, the peasant was furious. Everybody tried to shut me up, but I yelled louder than all of them because I could hear someone knocking at the street gate. The peasant started to force me back into the room I had been locked in, but suddenly the gate burst open and a crowd of peasants came tumbling in, headed by a cadre in uniform. They thought somebody was being murdered. That was the happiest day of my life. On that day I joined the revolution."

The cadre explained Communist policy to the infuriated rich peasant; told him that in Liberated areas child betrothals and bought brides were not legal; that no marriage could take place unless both man and woman were willing. Wu Chang-ying left the house with the cadre and immediately joined the guerrillas as a worker in the supply department of the New Fourth Route Army. She worked at first in a small factory making uniforms in a nearby village with a unit which included many other women. "And that's where I made my approach to literature," she explained. I asked her to describe some of the deeds of the workers, which moved her so much and which started her on her literary career.

"Every day we were in danger," she said. "The Japanese were all around us. Our men workers were armed with rifles, the women with grenades. The peasants used to warn us when the Japs were coming. If it was only a small band, we would

bury our machines in the ground and go out and lay an ambush and kill them. If it was a big band we would pack everything up on mules and on our own backs and keep moving. When we had a chance—even if only for a day—we would unpack and start working and perhaps move on again the same night. We moved round and around in the same area, hiding, fighting, marching and working. I had never dreamed such people existed, their courage and kindness moved me very deeply. I used to cry at nights just thinking about them. I saw our peasants in a different light too. They warned us about the Japs, risked their lives by letting us use their cottages and barns as factories; they hid comrades who were wounded or sick.

"In 1945 when the Japanese surrendered, we thought our troubles were over. But while Chairman Mao was in Chungking for peace talks with Chiang Kai-shek, the Kuomintang sent a big force to wipe us out. We marched and fought and worked again, but eventually we were surrounded and had to break up and escape as best we could. Five of us women got to the Yangtse together. Four got into one boat and I into another tiny one. Just after we left the shore, Kuomintang soldiers started shooting. I saw my four, good comrades killed one after another. The fisherwoman rowing the little boat I was in was hit in the arm. We both huddled together in the bottom of the boat and it drifted with the current, out of range.

"For seven days we drifted down the Yangtse with only a few rice-balls and dried fishing-bait to eat. We were frightened to show ourselves because Kuomintang motor-boats were patrolling the river and they had troops on each bank."

Eventually, sheer hunger forced them to go ashore at Wuhu, about 60 miles from Nanking. Peasants looked after them and escorted Wu Chang-ying to the headquarters of the 2nd Division of the New Fourth Army at Pukow. From then until the final victory over the Kuomintang armies, she led the usual hard life of a revolutionary worker. She was transferred to Shantung in the north and again worked in an army supply factory. "The winter of 1947 was worse than anything we experienced under the Japanese," she said. "We were completely blockaded. After work we used to go out to look for

fuel and to gather roots and seeds of wild grasses for food. Many of our comrades fell sick from starvation and bad food. But the rest worked like heroes and never complained. I studied harder and harder, because I wanted to write down what our people did. I wanted all China and all the world to know about it."

The rest of the story I have already told. To-day Wu Chang-ying, a vital, beautiful girl, is training to become a writer under the tuition of the finest authors in China. To-morrow she will pen epics of the Chinese revolution. There is little doubt that her story will reach the people of China. The people of the world too are beginning to learn of the heroism of Wu Chang-ying's comrades, the simple people, the peasants, workers, army men—and above all—the heroism of China's women. Talking with her in the Literary Institute, it was difficult to grasp all that this girl, as so many more Chinese girls of her age, had been through. She looked like an ordinary university student, her closely-bobbed black hair pushed out of the way under a blue peaked cap, dressed in blue dungaree trousers and short-sleeved jacket, her face flushed with excitement as she talked; her great black eyes moist as she related the death of her four friends and the heroism of the fisherwoman; her voice vibrant with pride as she recounted the valiant deeds of her comrades; her whole expression of radiant happiness as she told of her new life. In terms of Western experience, Wu Chang-ying is an exceptional woman, but there are millions like her in China, millions of exceptional women.

Veterans of the revolution never tire of relating incredible incidents to illustrate the courage, endurance and ingenuity of the village women. Under the very noses of Japanese and Kuomintang, they spun and wove, made uniforms and shoes for the guerrillas; they rowed the boats that ferried troops across rivers, often under fire. On one occasion on the Wulung River, a detachment of women's militia worked in icy water all night to build a bridge so that troops could cross the moment they arrived at dawn the next day. Peasant women worked alongside their husbands as stretcher bearers and supply troops. When the gendarmes came to the villages, they hid the cadres and pretended they were husbands or sons; many were executed rather than divulge a scrap of information. The Japanese had a trick of swooping down on a village to locate guerrillas or

cadres. They called all the villagers together. The women had to squat on one side, the men on another. As each man stood up, a woman had to claim him as husband, father or brother. Any men left over were executed as suspects. Time and again, risking certain death if the Japs discovered their tricks, the women spoke up to claim each man and keep them in their houses as long as the Japs remained.

Li Hsing-ke comes from a village not far from Peking. She is wrinkled and old for her 49 years. When she was 18 she was sold for twenty silver dollars to a man thirty years older than herself. They had three children and in one bad year when food was very short, the husband fell ill. They discussed selling their thirteen-year-old daughter, but after days of discussion, the old man (73 by this time) said he would rather die—and he did. The two boys joined the guerrillas and Li Hsing-ke was left alone with the girl. Three months after her husband's death, one of her sons turned up with a guerrilla cadre who addressed the mother as follows: "Your son says you are brave and good. We have found one of our guerrillas tortured by the Japanese devils and buried alive, but he is not yet dead. Can we bring him to you?" She agreed, and it was arranged that the wounded guerrilla would be brought the same night.

That night Li Hsing-ke sat up late, spinning and towards midnight the guerrillas carried in an unconscious, bleeding wreck of a boy. They laid him on the "kang" and left immediately, as Japanese troops had started to search the village. His scalp was laid open with a sword-cut, one buttock was almost gone, wrists and legs were torn open with gaping wounds. "He had five big and ten small wounds all full of earth." Li Hsing-ke said, "he had only one breath left in him." She washed him with the sterilised cotton the cadre had left, covered him with a black cloth and put on mourning herself. In the morning the Japanese came and her daughter literally shivered with fright. The mother moved the black cloth slightly to disclose the wax-like face of the patient, and pointing to the trembling girl, said: "She has fever too. It must be typhus. I'll make you some tea." The Japs left in a hurry. Shortly afterwards a miracle occurred. The earth floor moved, erupted and broke open. Four medical workers squeezed through into the room. The guerrillas had cut a tunnel from an underground hide-out

to the house during the night. The medicos inspected the wounded boy. He seemed to be a hopeless case, and after leaving some medicine and bandages, they left. The patient could not move his jaw, but Li Hsing-ke fed him with milk, dropped from a chipped cup, on to his tongue to trickle down his throat.

A surprising new world opened up to her. The tunnel from her "kang" led to a bigger tunnel which went for miles underground to the next village, and to the next village beyond that. And probably further; she did not know. In little redoubts were other wounded guerrillas and she began cooking and caring for them too. She spent her time crawling through the tunnels from her own special charge to other patients, preparing food in her kitchen and taking it to the redoubts, doubly difficult for her with her tiny, bound feet. Her own patient could not be moved, his head had to remain completely still. For eight months she never took off her clothes; she nursed him day and night, washing him, changing his linen, dressing his wounds and feeding him.

"I couldn't sleep," she said, "I was so afraid he would die. I kept putting my hand in front of his mouth during the night to feel if he still breathed." After eight months, the boy could sit up and eventually could be moved from the "kang" to the underground "hospital." Then she devoted all her time to looking after the other wounded, preparing food in different places so as not to excite suspicion, in houses of friends in the other two villages with which the tunnel was connected. In all she saved six nearly dead men and 29 others. She never lost a patient.

"And after Liberation," she concluded, "they gave me the best house in the village, and when land reform was carried out they insisted on giving me the best piece of land. I have a three-roomed house with real glass in the windows." Li Hsing-ke represented her district at the first All China Women's Congress and became one of the foremost leaders in the Mutual Aid teams in her district. The first boy she saved has "adopted" her as his mother.

A heroine of a different type is Sun Yu-ming, a 22-year-old slip of a girl with twinkling eyes and a mischievous smile—and as the Japs found to their cost, with a mischievous mind. The Japanese had a garrison stationed a few miles from her village;

they often carried out raids, killing the men and raping the women. When she was 14, Sun Yu-ming, without her mother knowing, joined the underground women's militia. She used to practice running every morning, until she became very fleet of foot over long distances. Then she learned to handle a rifle and pistol. As bullets were very precious, even her first practice shot was aimed at a Japanese. She learned to use mortars and to lay mines—and it was in mine-laying that her art really flourished. She studied the enemy's habits, the tracks used by the troops and she practised at night the setting of mines. She mastered seven different types, knew just how to space them, and at what depths the pressure mines should be placed for foot troops or for horse-borne, and how to lay them in chains to cope with the squad formations the Japanese used. When the Japs started to use mine detectors, she tricked them by using mines with no metal in them. The detectors were useless against her porcelain mines filled with sharp rocks and plenty of good, black powder. She organised many of the villagers to make and set mines. In her first six months of activity she killed six Japs and made her village a dangerous place for the enemy to enter. She developed a special technique of wandering near a Japanese sentry and pretending to flirt with him. When his interest was aroused, he would start to follow her. She would skip and prance ahead and lead him to a path where there was a well-laid mine, and suddenly sprint ahead to be well clear of the explosion.

Her mother knew nothing of these activities and was constantly scolding little Sun Yu-ming for ruining her shoes. She used to carry her mines in a basket covered with cabbages and turnips and together with the activities of the other women, the paths were made so dangerous that the Japanese would only approach the village by walking down a shallow stream. Sun Yu-ming devised mines to set under the stepping stones, and after a few troops had been blown up in the river bed, the Japs kept away from the village altogether. Sun Yu-ming killed 16 Japs with mines she personally laid and one with her rifle during target practice. On several occasions she led guerrilla patrols at night on to Japanese positions that she had studied carefully during the day.

After the Japs surrendered the Kuomintang troops came to the area to wipe out the guerrillas. The villagers took up their

mine-laying again, but the reputation the village had for sudden death by mines was sufficient to stop the Kuomintang troops from ever setting foot there. Most of the village men went away to fight Chiang Kai-shek and Sun Yu-ming became a production heroine. The women's militia got some of the old men to teach them about farming, and with little Sun in the lead, they ploughed, sowed and reaped and kept up the food production. Her brother also went off with the People's Army and died on the battlefield.

After Liberation every member of Sun Yu-ming's family, including her dead brother, was allotted land, but Sun said it was too much and insisted on handing some back.

"My mother was very backward," she sighed. "She was a slave girl and had the spirit beaten out of her. I always had trouble with her about my activities. Once we were warned that the Japs were coming to search the houses, I laid a mine in front of ours but mother made me dig it up. She said we would all be killed, and didn't see that it would be better to be killed than taken by the Japs. In the end they didn't come after all. Only once she was pleased. That was when we blew up some mounted troops and I took home some horse-meat. Now she begins to take part in the new life. She works out in the fields with my sister, my dead brother's wife and myself."

In every village there are people like Wu Chang-ying, Li Hsing-ke and little Sun Yu-ming. They were fighting the double battle against the foreign oppressor and the feudal society which oppressed them. By their courage, endurance and ingenuity they proved they were not inferior to males in the qualities which made for survival and victory. With guns in their hands they won the right to be freed from their feudal status. In the front lines and in the rear they performed marvels of courage which are unparalleled in history, and an inspiration to women everywhere in the world.

In many places, when Japanese or Kuomintang troops entered areas where most of the men were away fighting on other fronts, the women formed guerrilla units of their own and fought with mines, crude hand grenades, and even scythes and bamboo spears. One epic is that of a 24-year-old woman guerrilla leader, Li Lan-ting, who managed to evacuate five hundred wounded People's Army men from an area surrounded by Kuomintang troops, bombed and strafed by Kuomintang planes.

She got hundreds of peasant women to help her and with Li Lan-ting helping to carry the first stretcher, by circuitous paths known to the peasant women, the whole five hundred were evacuated without loss.

Inspiring examples were set from above by women like Soong Ching-ling (Madame Sun Yat-sen), widow of the founder of the Chinese Republic. The other members of the Soong family deserted the cause of the revolution, and there were powerful temptations and pressures exerted on Soong Ching-ling to do the same. Her sisters were the wives of Chiang Kai-shek and of the corrupt Minister of Finance Kung, her brother was T. V. Soong, Chiang Kai-shek's Foreign Minister. But Madame Sun never faltered in her devotion to her husband's principles of co-operation with the Communist Party and friendship with the Soviet Union. In 1927 when Chiang Kai-shek launched his murderous assault and white terror against the Communists who had been his closest supporters, Soong Ching-ling formed the "Society for Defence of Civil Rights," and saved hundreds of people from the Kuomintang hangmen. In Shanghai, in Canton and Chungking, in the heart of the enemy camp, watched day and night by Kuomintang police, followed wherever she went, she never for one moment concealed her contempt for Chiang Kai-shek and the rest of her family for their bloodthirsty betrayal. She risked her life every day by her steadfast support of China's progressives, hundreds of whom owe their lives to her protection. To-day she is Vice-Chairman of the People's Republic of China.

Kang Le-chin, wife of General Chu Teh, commander-in-chief of the People's Army, commanded a special women's brigade during the Long March, a brigade which fought alongside the men with equal courage and carried out the most arduous and perilous tasks. To-day she is a military specialist, a true comrade in every respect of her warrior husband. Cheng Hsiao-ming, a former embroidery worker and a textile mill girl, fled to Central China after the Japanese occupied Tsingtao. On her own initiative, she formed a special guerrilla band. When the Japs set a heavy price on her head, she disguised herself as a man and set up her own "liberated area." She developed into an excellent political leader as well as a guerrilla expert and only a few top cadres knew that she was a woman. She was elected secretary of a provincial Communist Party

committee, and is to-day a candidate member of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. She is also secretary-general of the All China Federation of Textile Workers. The wife of Premier and Foreign Minister Chou En-lai, Teng Ying-chao has fought with the revolution all her adult life from the time she took part in the May Fourth movement in 1919. She worked in the highly dangerous underground movement in Shanghai, organised students in Tientsin, worked with Soong Ching-ling in Canton. Wherever the need was greatest and the fight thickest, there was Teng Ying-chao. Despite poor health she accompanied her husband on the Long March and later shared the dangers of his delicate mission in Chungking where he tried to hold together the thin threads of the united front against the Japanese.

A separate book could be written about each of these women who have written with their own lives some of the most important pages of Chinese history. Sai Meng-chi is to-day an honored member of the People's Consultative Conference. She spent her whole political life doing underground work in Kuomintang territories. She was tortured and imprisoned time and again. In one beating, in an effort to make her disclose the names of party comrades, both her legs and one rib were broken. Peppered water was poured in her eyes, nose and ears; every fiendish device that could be thought of was used, but they never broke her will. The moment she was released, she went straight back to her underground activities.

One might well ask what manner of women are these. What steeled them to such extraordinary deeds? Whether they were from workers', peasants', or upper class families, their devotion and courage was the same. They fought the double fight for the liberation of their own sex as well as the liberation of their country. To-day the women of China reap the fruit of their sacrifice.

For centuries China had been one vast slave camp. Three hundred years of the Manchus, a hundred years of Western imperialism capped by Japanese and Kuomintang fascism. There were centuries of slavery marked by sporadic and heroic revolts usually drowned in baths of blood. The fate of the Chinese peasants and artisans was a terrible one, but the fate of the great majority of China's women was ten times more terrible.

From cradle to grave they were unwanted, despised creatures whose role was to be slaves to other slaves, to be thrown into a brothel or the gutter or even into the river, as fate decreed. At best, a woman might hope to become a rich man's plaything but liable to be broken as suddenly as a child breaks the toy it has tired of. The very birth of a girl was regarded as a misfortune and strangling or drowning of girl babies was as common in China as the drowning of puppies and kittens in the West. It was usual for a girl to be betrothed at an early age to some child or man she had never seen, and then packed off to live the rest of her life as slave to her mother-in-law and husband. She became an integral part of the new family and could not return home. For a peasant a girl child entailed putting aside a great part of the income, or borrowing from the landlord, to provide a dowry when it was time for her to marry. Otherwise he could sell her as a slave girl for a few bags of grain if she were attractive. If the daughter was pretty enough and the parents unwilling to part with her, the landlord would find some way of getting the father in his power and forcing him to give up the girl in lieu of debt payments.

No matter how hard or cruel life was, the girl bride had to put up with it. If the husband died, she could never marry again. If she did defy custom and remarried, the law would protect her relatives if they killed her to save the family's good name. If the "betrothed" died, a girl could be forced to "marry" his memorial tablet and would become a widow at marriage to spend the rest of her life as a slave of the "in-laws." She had no money or property of her own and usually ate the scraps left over after the rest of the family had eaten. Most landlords had half a dozen slave girls or daughters-in-law attached to their households to do the menial work. The slave girls were usually kept until they were 15 or 16 and then sold off as concubines or to the brothels. They were used as a cheap commodity, a commodity which a poor peasant could not afford to keep but which the landlords could turn into good capital by just letting them "grow into money" and getting cheap labor from them at the same time. If a girl became the bride of a landlord or rich merchant, she had no right to initiate divorce and had to accept with humility the presence of as many more wives and concubines as the husband could afford. As she grew older she would have to stand the insults of the younger

concubines, and if she protested too much, she ran the risk of swallowing a dose of poison. As the landlords controlled the courts, they disposed of unwanted wives with little risk. (During the accusation meetings which followed agrarian reform, there were many cases in which women from the household accused landlords of having murdered wives and concubines.) Even the wife who was happily married had no chance to take part in public or social life, and she never accompanied her husband on social occasions—except in a few cases in the coastal cities. (Madame Chiang Kai-shek's public appearances were fiercely attacked in ruling Kuomintang circles. It was only because the "moderates" were able to prove the glamor value of Madame Chiang for hauling in dollars from America and sterling from England, that she was able to pose as a public figure. Incidentally, admirers of the former Shanghai gangster and famous convert to Christian Methodism, Chiang Kai-shek, and his American-educated Methodist wife, Madame Chiang, may find it difficult to square this couple's devotion to Christianity with the fact that at the time they were married Chiang already had three legal wives. The mother of his elder son, Chiang Ching-kuo, was living in Chekiang province; the mother of the younger son, Chiang Wei-kuo, was in Japan, and his first wife was living in Lanchow in Kansu province. These were in addition to a number of concubines attached to the household at various times after the marriage.)

As industry began to make some inroads into China's feudal structure, the social code was relaxed enough to permit women to act as semi-slave laborers in the textile, carpet and tobacco factories of the industrial cities. They were allowed to do only the most menial work with no chance of advancement into administrative or technical jobs. They were at the mercy of any foreman who wanted to rape them, and often enough were forced into prostitution with the foreman "farming" them out and pocketing the proceeds.

Girls went into factories from the age of eight. For the first three to five years they got no pay. They were "apprentices" and were lucky if they got a handful of millet or rice to eat in a working day of up to 14 hours. As they grew older and earned wages, the money went to support their families, who had a direct interest in preventing them from marrying. Marriage meant that all the earnings would go to the husband's

family. In any case marriage almost always meant demotion and pregnancy if noticed, usually meant the sack. Girls did marry secretly, and when they became pregnant, they tightly bound their stomachs round with strips of cloth that it might not be noticed. They worked right till the very day and often the very hour of childbirth. None could afford to lose the month's pay which was deducted for even one day's absence. Of course, they made themselves ill and often died in childbirth or from blood-poisoning afterwards. (Where surveys have been made in industrial areas, more than half the women examined were found to be suffering from gynaecological disorders from attempts to hide pregnancy, from unassisted or carelessly assisted births and from lack of rest after childbirth.)

In many cases, because of the economic loss for a woman industrial worker in getting married, children were born illegitimate. The mother had no claim on the father; there was no mother-in-law to look after the child, and the mother could not take time off from her job. They could lock the babies up all day without food in their rooms in the factory compound and risk starving them to death, or smuggle them into the factories, as many of them did, to manage marvels of subterfuge in feeding them at work. Many had to abandon their babies, and in the last year of the Kuomintang occupation of Shanghai, 6,500 babies were found abandoned in the streets. Tens of thousands more must have died of starvation, as they died every year, in every town and village because of the monstrous economic and social system. Chinese mothers love their babies as passionately as any mothers. The very difficulty with which they are brought into the world, the suffering that goes into keeping them alive, makes them doubly love those which survive. But few of the families of workers and peasants had any joy from family life, surrounded as they were by misery, death and starvation. Mothers often enough faced the dreadful dilemma of having to sell one child to provide food for another.

These were the sort of conditions that fired the souls of China's woman revolutionaries; made them willing to endure any hardships and dangers in their twin fight for their own and their country's freedom. I have spoken to many Chinese women, peasant women, factory workers, and wrinkled old women with tiny bound feet, and asked them to tell me of one happy day in their lives. Occasionally I got the reply, "When

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my son came back safe and sound from the army," but in nine cases out of ten, they replied: "When the People's Army came to our village," "When I first heard about the new marriage laws," or "When I got my own piece of land." They had no happy days in their lives before Liberation. The days that stand out as landmarks of happiness in the West had no meaning for Chinese women.

Wedding day? It meant marriage to a person one had never seen before; to be sold into slavery. School days? Not one in twenty went to school. Birthday? A day on which to mourn that one was born female. Childhood games? In the villages she was kept within the family walls in feudal seclusion, spinning, sewing and scrubbing; in the cities she was beaten for falling to sleep over the looms at an age when Western children were at their games. Life before Liberation was a round of unrelieved gloom and darkness. There were no happy days.

The Marriage Law which came into force on May Day, 1950, is another of the great human documents which with one stroke swept away many of the basic causes of thousands of years of misery for China's women. It is worth while quoting it extensively as the law itself reflects the tragic status of women before Liberation, and at the same time it announces a new status for women which is only possible in an advanced form of society. The law was adopted only after months of discussion in factories and villages, and after an eighteen months' careful survey of marriage customs in all parts of China. It takes into account the traditional strong respect for family responsibilities.

Article 1 announces the abolition of the "arbitrary and compulsory feudal marriage system based on the superiority of man over woman and which ignores the children's interests. The New Democratic marriage system is based on free choice of partners, monogamy, equal rights for the sexes, and on the protection of women and children." Article 2 abolishes "bigamy, concubinage, child betrothal, interference with the remarriage of widows, and the exaction of gifts or money in connection with marriage." The village match-maker's job is done away with and the bugbear of the peasants, the dowry system, is also finished. Article 3 states that marriage must be based "on the complete willingness of the two parties," and Article 4 stipulates that men can marry from the age of 20 and women from 18 years. Article 5 deals with impediments to marriage

and forbids the marriage of blood relations or of partners with serious infectious or mental diseases, or who are sexually impotent. Article 6 lays down the form marriage shall take, namely a simple registration ceremony in the village or sub-district where one of the partners resides. The elaborate ceremonies in the past which forced the parents to mortgage home and property with the moneylender or landlords are done away with.

Articles 7 to 12 deal with the rights and duties of husband and wife. They are described as "companions living together and shall enjoy equal status in the home." They are in duty bound to "love, respect, assist and look after each other, to live in harmony, to engage in production, to care for the children, and to strive jointly for the welfare of the family and for the building of a new society." Each has the right to free choice of occupation, and both have equal rights in the possession and management of family property. The woman has the right to retain her own family name if she wants to, and each has the right to inherit the other's property. On the rights between parents and children (Articles 13 to 16), it is found necessary to state that "infanticide by drowning and similar criminal acts are strictly prohibited," and that parents, including step-parents have the duty to "rear and educate their children" and "children, including step-children, have the duty to support and assist their parents. Neither the parents nor the children shall maltreat or desert one another." (This is a concession to the age-long traditions of filial piety and the responsibilities of children to care for their parents.)

"Children born out of wedlock shall have the same rights as children born in wedlock. No person shall be allowed to harm or discriminate against children born out of wedlock." The person against whom paternity has been established by the mother or other witnesses is responsible for the upkeep and education of the child until the age of 18. In the section dealing with divorce (Articles 17 to 22) a simple procedure is outlined. Where both parties desire it, a divorce certificate is issued after the local government has ensured that the questions of children and property have been properly settled. In the event of only one party seeking divorce, the authorities must try and bring about reconciliation and a certificate issued only if that fails. A husband may not divorce his wife while she is pregnant, nor for one year after the child is born, but the

pregnant mother may initiate divorce proceedings. In the case of members of the People's Army, a partner may not start divorce proceedings without the consent of the partner serving in the army if the latter is in regular correspondence with his or her partner's family. Only if there had been no correspondence for two years before the promulgation of the Law and for one year after the Law was accepted could divorce be obtained without the consent of the army members.

On the subject of property and maintenance after divorce (Articles 23/25), the woman retains what property belonged to her prior to marriage and property mutually acquired since is allotted by the local court in case the partners cannot reach agreement. One very interesting provision which reflects the complete economic equality of the sexes is contained in Article 25, which states that "after divorce, if one party has not re-married and has difficulties in maintenance, the other party shall render assistance. Both parties shall work out an agreement with regard to the method and duration of such assistance, and in case agreement cannot be reached, the people's court shall render a decision."

Modifications were worked out for the national minorities according to local traditions, but by and large the new marriage law as outlined here is in force throughout the whole of China. Naturally there was an immediate rush for dissolution of arranged marriages, and for divorce by women who were second, third or fourth wives to landlords. There was a rush also of girl widows to re-marry and end their slave status, and of girl factory workers to marry when marriage no longer affected their economic position. In many areas, disputes arising out of marriages made up 90 per cent. of all cases heard in the law courts. Within a year of the passing of the new law, the rush for divorces was slackening off, especially in the areas where land reform had been carried out. Many of the women first heard of the law, however, when the cadres came to pave the way for land reform, and others only applied for divorce after land reform when they got their own piece of land and economic independence.

The old economic inequalities were abolished together with the social injustices. All trades and professions, all branches of study and administration, were thrown open to women. Equal pay for equal work, the provision of nurseries and



creches, rooms for breast-feeding at factories all helped to make the new status of equality a reality and not something that just existed on paper. In the villages the women got land in their own name, the slave girls, concubines, child brides, beggar women whose husbands had lost their land, widows—everybody got the bright new documents which brought them real, economic freedom. In black and white with red seals, the documents represented a law which said they were entitled to a certain piece of land and the income from it. They could not tear their eyes away from the fields marked out for them. One heard of them standing with tears in their eyes, letting the good earth trickle through their fingers, even gazing at it at night with lanterns after the first sods had been ploughed.

In the factories, apart from benefiting from the general reform of working conditions, women got special benefits. The labor insurance laws adopted in February, 1951, provided that women should have eight weeks' leave on full pay at childbirth, fifteen days in case of a miscarriage during the first months of pregnancy, thirty if during the third to seventh month. Minimum wages for unskilled women workers were set at sufficient to support two persons with increases according to skill. At the age of 50 in ordinary jobs, and 45 in heavy or dangerous jobs, women workers can retire on a pension ranging from 55 to 60 per cent. of their wages at the time of retirement. (For male workers, ages for retirement on pension are 55 and 60 years.)

Creches, nursery and primary schools at the factories ensure that the mother is relieved of the haunting anxiety she had in the old days, fearing the foremen would discover the baby hidden under the loom, dreading to return to her miserable hovel in case baby had starved or suffocated. To-day she works, confident that her children are in specialised hands, fed regularly, playing in a clean nursery or going to school. Motherhood is regarded as an honor, children as a national treasure, and there are precise laws to protect this conception.

In July, 1951, it was announced that in the North-East every industrial plant where there are mothers with an aggregate of more than 10 children must set up at least a creche, and where there are more than 20 children between three and six years of age, a kindergarten must be set up as well. All costs are to be borne by the management. The North-East has set a

pattern which will quickly be followed throughout the rest of China.

The fight waged and the victory won by China's women and the results achieved within two years of liberation must make their impact on women's movements in every country, especially in Asia, where hundreds of millions of women still live in feudal misery and slavery. In Japan, where conditions for women are similar to those in China before Liberation, where starvation wages and ruinous rents and taxes make it impossible for poor families to rear their children, there were two million abortions in 1950, according to a Japanese Ministry of Health survey. In the same year hundreds of thousands of girls were sold by their parents into slavery and prostitution. Tokyo alone has 300,000 prostitutes. But women of Japan, India and other countries in Asia and the Middle East are beginning to take note of the examples of Wu Chang-ying, Li Hsing-ke, Sun Yu-ming, and the others.

## CHAPTER X

### THE POLITICS OF FLOODS.

AS far back as history records and legend relates, China's greatest and most constant scourge has been that of flood and famine. Drought follows flood and flood follows drought. In bad years the two come together. They are closely followed by famines which wipe out millions of people. One of the most famous heroes in Chinese history is Yu the Great, "great" because over 4,000 years ago, during the Shun dynasty, engineer Yu fought floods. He carried out mighty works of drainage canals and built hundreds of miles of dykes along the Huai, the Yangtse and the Yellow (China's Sorrow) rivers. His father was also an engineer, but failed in his work, and was exiled by Emperor Shun. Yu succeeded so brilliantly that he was nominated Emperor by Shun as the latter approached his end. According to Chinese records, engineer Yu became Emperor Yu at the age of 93, and ruled till his death seven years later. During his reign the great work of flood prevention was continued. Much that is legendary was attributed to Yu, such as splitting gorges through mountains with supernatural aid, but the fact that these legends persist and his name is still honored to-day as the great engineer-emperor who fought floods is a measure of the immensity of the sufferings of the Chinese people from the periodic floodings of their great rivers.

The Yellow and the Huai have been the greatest menaces in the past, but in recent years, the Huai has outstripped all other rivers as the worst offender.

Some 4,148 years passed between the death of Yu the Great and the promulgation of a decree by the Administrative Council of the People's Government of October 14, 1950, initiated by Chairman Mao and demanding a basic solution to the recurrent Huai river floods. During those four thousand years no basic solution for China's flood troubles was ever attempted. The peasants sacrificed at the temples to the local river gods

and hoped for the best. Officials periodically collected taxes for flood prevention projects, but the taxes usually lined the pockets of corrupt bureaucrats.

A few examples from the very recent past will suffice to show what floods mean to China. In Hopei province, which includes Peking and Tientsin, the floods of 1949 covered an area of 5,500,000 acres, affecting 10,000,000 people, one-third of the population. The year 1949 was a bad year, in a normal year two to three million people are affected, and in the very best year on record at least half a million. "Affected" is a mild term to apply to the sufferings of the people. Direct loss of life from drowning is usually not very heavy, as the waters rise relatively slowly and villages are built on whatever high ground is available. But the margin of life and death in China is so slender that the loss of one harvest over a large area means death for millions of people and economic ruin for many more millions unless outside aid is rushed to the spot—and in the past this was never done. The livelihood of thirty or forty million peasants in China is constantly menaced by floods, which mean the loss of an entire season's work and usually the loss of an affected peasant's fortune. Every season the ground is well prepared, the seeds—often bought with money borrowed from the local landlord—have been well sown, the autumn crops are usually above ground, the summer crops ready for reaping or threshing when the floods strike in July or August, washing away the sheaves of ripened grain, washing out the new crops of maize and millet, destroying the daily food of tens of millions of people.

In the great floods of 1950 in the two provinces of Honan and Anhwei alone, seven million acres with a population of thirteen million, were flooded with a loss of at least five million tons of grain. In the past this would have meant certain starvation for many millions of peasants, but in an action unprecedented in Chinese history, the People's Government rushed over a million tons of relief grain to the area and no one died from starvation. While the Western press was screaming that millions of tons of grain were being shipped from Manchuria to the Soviet Union and tens of millions of peasants were starving, while Truman and Hoover were rubbing their hands hoping to buy their way back into China with relief grain, wheat and millet was speeding from Manchuria by train and

water transport to the afflicted areas. People suffered and were hungry, but none died from starvation, as I was later able to establish in a visit to the worst hit areas in 1951.

Floods were usually followed by diseases as well as drought and famine. The stagnant flood waters were a perfect breeding ground for mosquitos which brought malaria, and, in parts of East China, elephantiasis as well. There was no system of reservoirs to hold the water when it was plentiful, the few primitive dams were usually washed away, and, after the flood waters drained off or evaporated, drought set in. The most serious of these in recent years was in Honan province in 1942 and 1943, when numbers, variously estimated at between three and ten millions, died. The Kuomintang made no attempt to help the people who were hit with a combination of flood, drought and plagues of locusts. I visited the area at the time and saw tens of thousands of living skeletons staggering along the roads and dying by the wayside. There was not an ear of grain or a blade of grass left on the brown earth for thousands of acres, not even leaves or bark left on the trees. Anything which could be digested by the human stomach had long been eaten, including bark, dried grass and leaves, which were sold as food in the village markets. A great exodus from the stricken parts started with millions of peasants leaving their native villages never to return. They sold up farms, implements, wives and daughters in an effort to stave off disaster, hoping to rebuy them again when times got better. They ate their seed stocks, their oxen and donkeys, the dried up grain stalks in the field, and even tried to stop their hunger pains by eating the earth itself. The Kuomintang did not lift a finger to help them, although Chiang Kai-shek had a specially horrifying report by the reactionary Catholic Bishop Paul Yu Pin and many others, based on eye-witness accounts of the disaster.

In 1942 I saw two great famines, that of Honan and the rice famine in Bengal later in the year. In both cases the direct causes were imposed by nature and human neglect, but the resultant death of millions of peasants was caused by criminal maladministration by British and Indian officials in the one case and Kuomintang bureaucrats in the other. Military expedience forced the British administrators in India to take relief measures in Bengal, threatened at the time with Japanese invasion. But not even the imminent Japanese threat to Honan

moved Chiang to send one ear of grain to the starving millions. Those who tried to cross into the Eighth Route Army area where relief was promised, were machine-gunned by the troops of Hu Tsung-nan. When the Japs did attack in Honan, they captured the vital Honan plains with hardly a shot fired.

Why should floods be such a menace to China? There are many contributing factors, and a thorough answer requires a little delving into China's history and geography. Politics, as we shall see, have also played a decisive part in launching floods. The picture will be clearer if we concentrate mainly on the Huai river, which is at present the greatest menace, and the river on which the greatest efforts are being concentrated to-day. If we take great liberties with the map of China and exclude the whole western part of China as well as Manchuria in the North, we have something like a rectangle, bounded by Inner Mongolia and Manchuria in the North, sporadic mountain ranges in the West and the sea in the South and East. The rectangle is neatly bisected north and south by the Canton-Peking railway. In the centre of the rectangle lying west to east is the Huai river. It is spread on the map like the bones of a fish, the central spine being the main river bed, with hundreds of fine bones branching off each side representing the myriad tributaries which almost touch in the north the mighty Yellow river, and in the south reach almost to the no less mighty Yangtse. The area covered by this skeleton represents the Huai river valley of twenty-five million acres of cultivable land, supporting a population of fifty-five million people. It is a very fertile valley of rich loess soil, producing heavy crops of wheat, rice, cotton, millet and soya beans in the three provinces of Honan, Anhwei and North Kiangsu.

For three thousand years, according to very precise Chinese annals, the Huai was a moderately respectable river. It gave periodic trouble, but in the main it flowed steadily along its course to the sea with its water level well below ground level. But then politics took a hand. In 1194 the Chinese were at war with the Chins, who themselves were being pressed by the Mongols from the North. Genghis Khan was a lad of 20 at the time, but already with mighty victories to his credit and looking for new worlds to conquer. The year 1194 was a year of heavy rains, there was danger that the Yellow river, China's northern frontier at that time, would breach its banks. Tens

of thousands of workers were rushed to the danger point at Yun Wu to plug the breaches, but the Chins attacked heavily and drove them off. They saw in the floods an unexpected ally to keep the Chinese busy while they devoted their attention to the Mongols. The swirling waters of the great river, yellow and heavy with the sands of Mongolia and earth gouged out of Tibetan mountains, overflowed its banks and swept southwards, pouring down through the myriad channels of the Huai and finally into the main course, throwing the Huai out of its own bed and forcing it to make another channel for itself. The modest bed of the Huai could not accommodate the great giant, swelled by countless tributary reinforcements trying to find a way to the sea. As the great rush of waters entered the plains of East China where the ground is so flat that it falls only foot in six thousand yards west to east, and has the same grade north to south, where waters shed from the banks of the Yellow and Yangtse rivers find their way down to the Huai, the flood waters slowed down and began dropping the thousands of tons of sand from the deserts of Central Asia, silting up the lower reaches of the Huai bed. The old way to the sea became blocked. The waters spilled out to form a big lake, meandered on for a few more score miles, and formed another lake, and finally emptied into the Yangtse.

(The Chins, incidentally, had no profit from their actions. A few years later Genghis Khan, with his famous horsemen, crushed them completely, drove them out of China, captured Peking and set up his own rule.)

After seven hundred years, the Yellow river had so heavily silted up the lower and middle reaches of the Huai that in 1885, it was forced to go back to its more commodious bed, leaving a very uncomfortable and fouled bed for the Huai to use. The original course to the sea was blocked and it was forced at the first flood to spill out of its normal course and form a chain of shallow lakes on its way to empty into the Yangtse.

In 1938, politics took a hand again—and once more in 1946-7. When Chiang Kai-shek was kidnapped by the Manchurian "Young Marshal" Chang Hsueh-liang in December, 1936, and agreed to call off the war against the Communists and combine with them to fight the Japanese, he had no intention of keeping his word, as is clear from subsequent events.

He merely changed his tactics. Faced with widespread demands from the masses and threat of revolt by patriotic army officers, he appeared to accept the popular demand to stop the civil war, but in fact he planned to stop using his troops against the Communists, but force the Japanese to fight them. He would keep his own troops intact eventually to wipe out any Communists that might survive the Japanese. The pattern of these tactics was repeated over and over again from the first days of the united front till after VJ day, when Chiang tried to use Japanese and puppet troops to disarm and defeat the Eighth Route Army while he tried to wipe out the New Fourth Army. It was against these tactics, of course that the U.S. General Stilwell protested so vehemently that he was withdrawn from China.

The Japs started advancing westwards into Hopei from the coastal regions in June, 1938. Chiang Kai-shek had well-armed, well-trained troops in the area which could have fought and stopped them. But he needed to safeguard these troops to fight the Communists. Instead of fighting he sent a division of troops under General Liu Shih to breach the dykes of the Yellow River at Hua Yen Kou about 20 miles from the key railway junction of Chengchow. Without any warnings to the villagers, Liu Shih placed mines in the dyke walls, and, in the middle of the night, blew a forty-five foot gap in the dyke at a point where the Yellow River water level was nine feet above the surrounding ground level. Villagers who heard the noise and rushed out to try and plug the breach were driven back with machine-gun fire. Many were wounded and the waters continued to press through, crumbling the dyke walls away as an incoming tide sweeps away children's sand castles.

The scenes that followed, as related to me by survivors at Hua Yen Kou, were indescribable. Whole villages were swept away. Men, women and children, and thousands of animals were caught up in the boiling waters which without a word of warning, swept down on them in the middle of the night, spreading over thousands and tens of thousands of acres of farmlands where the summer crops were just about to be harvested. Lucky ones floated on pieces of timber and bits of trees for scores of miles, and eventually paddled themselves to dry land. Oxen, donkeys, pigs and other animals swam until they were exhausted, and drowned. Half a million people,

## CHINA'S FEET UNBOUND

including many of Chiang's own soldiers, were drowned in the first 24 hours of the flood. Millions perished later from famine. Sixty-six counties were flooded in Honan, North Kiangsu and Anhwei provinces with over six million people made homeless. Over a million acres of land was completely submerged, millions of acres more temporarily flooded, and the crops on them lost. The flooding did not hold up the Japs for even a week. They had bridging equipment with them, crossed to the west of the flooded areas where Chiang Kai-shek's troops, as usual, refused to do battle and fled. The Yellow River again forced its way into the Huai system, silting up the middle and lower reaches, raising the waters above ground level. Every year following the blasting of the dyke at Hua Yen Kou until the great flood of 1950, there were serious floods in the Huai valley as a direct result of Chiang's criminal act in 1938.

In 1946-7 Chiang, with American help, once again turned the Yellow River back into its old course, and once again for political reasons. Despite all the Kuomintang efforts and treachery, the Communist armies survived the war with vastly increased prestige and a much larger territory under their control. Each retreat by the Kuomintang forces paved a way for a further increase of Communist-controlled areas. They could fight and beat the Japanese because they had the support of the people. At the end of the anti-Japanese war the area controlled by the Eighth Route Army had merged with that controlled by the New Fourth. One great bloc of liberated areas stretched from north of the Yangtse along the central and coastal areas clear through to North China and Manchuria. While General Marshall was in China ostensibly to negotiate agreements between Kuomintang and Communists, he and Chiang developed the idea of turning the Yellow River back into its old course and cutting the liberated areas in two. The fact that hundreds of thousands of peasants had made their homes and started farms in the rich former bed of the Yellow river, made no difference. With funds supplied by U.N.R.R.A., under American engineers, new dykes were built at Hua Yen Ko with forced peasant labor. The old breach was repaired and the Yellow River turned back into its old course. Simultaneously, Chiang's armies launched a full-scale attack against the troops south of the new course of the Yellow River, cut off from the Communist headquarters in the North. Chiang Kai-

shek had as much success as did the Chins against Genghis Khan.

The old course of the Yellow River had been silted up by erosion, and also by the large-scale farming which had been carried on during the previous nine years. The old cycle of flood and drought started again for the peasants along the lower reaches of the river. This was also to Chiang's liking, as this part of the river flowed through Communist areas, and he felt the troops would be too busy fighting floods and famine to put up serious resistance in the civil war which he had again started. But as in all other of his calculations, he reckoned without the masses of the Chinese people and the energy and enthusiasm generated by the Communists.

The People's Government of the Liberated Areas organised engineering squads from among the peasants themselves with such technicians as could be spared to train and lead them. They set up armed peasants' bandit protection squads to defend the new dykes from Kuomintang saboteurs. Chiang's planes bombed the dykes and strafed the workers, but the work of flood prevention went on, the Yellow River course was deepened new dyke walls built, and old ones strengthened. Only due to superhuman efforts by peasants and People's Army soldiers were serious floods averted. While the peasants grappled with the floods, the People's Liberation Army both north and south of the Yellow River fought off Chiang's armies and eventually went over to the counter-offensive. Meanwhile the Huai river valley was left in a worse condition than ever, with its tributaries, middle and lower reaches virtually paralysed in flood season. The volume of water when the floods came down was four to five times the discharge capacity of the river.

So much for the politico-historical background to China's floods and droughts. It is important also to glance at the natural causes.

The Huai has its origins in the Fu Niu mountains, west of the Peking-Canton railway in Honan province. There are many tributaries which are quiet, trickling mountain brooks throughout most of the year, but which become roaring torrents after heavy rain. In this part of China most of the rain falls in July and August. The average rainfall in July is 30 inches, but as much as eight inches can fall in a single day. In the months when rain is badly needed for the summer crops, from

April to June, only half an inch falls monthly. The mountains fall away steeply to the rolling plains which extend about six hundred miles east to the sea and about eight hundred miles to the south-east, with, as mentioned earlier, the very gradual slope of one foot in six thousand yards in each direction. During high water season, the water level in the Huai and many of its tributaries is well above the level of the surrounding fields and is held in its course only by the man-made dykes which have been replenished throughout the centuries.

In flood season the plains themselves are saturated with rain-water, the shallow sub-soil rests on an almost waterproof clay foundation which is excellent in irrigation areas, but dangerous where there is no drainage system. If the dyke walls hold, the tributaries faithfully deliver their waters to the Huai, which bears them along to the Yangtse; the latter, itself swollen with its own flood waters, rejects the Huai reinforcements. The flood waters roll back along the Huai and back along the myriad tributaries, smashing down the dyke walls or flowing over the top of them and spreading out over thousands of acres. Small lakes overflow and join up with other lakes. Half a dozen lakes form into a vast sea, dotted with isolated villages built on higher ground. The sub-soil quickly reaches saturation point and the water lies for weeks and months before it disappears through evaporation. This is what happens in the "best" of cases when all the dyke walls hold in the original advance of waters, but in practice there is usually far more water in the Huai course than it can carry on its way to the Yangtse and overflows its banks long before it reaches its mouth.

Forty-five per cent. of the Huai area is mountainous, the remainder rolling plains. There is no water conservation system in the whole area except for the lakes in the lower reaches. In the mountains, indiscriminate felling of timber carried out by the landlords added to cultivation of the mountain slopes, caused large scale erosion. Every heavy rainfall washes tons of soil from the mountain sides, eventually to silt up the channels.

Following the great floods of 1950, Chairman Mao said that a basic solution must be found to the problem of the Huai river which, though small compared to the Yangtse and Yellow rivers and constantly bullied by them like a servant forced to bend to the will of two tyrants, has become the most danger-

ous of all China's rivers. At the end of 1950 a Huai River Harnessing Commission was set up, charged with working out plans for a final solution of the problem. As we will see, the term "Harnessing Commission" is no misnomer, because the basic solution now being worked out does not just mean abolishing floods. It means not only controlling how much water will flow where and at what time, but it means harnessing the river to great irrigation projects, to provide electric power for the whole Huai Valley, to open up new river navigation lanes. It means a project the like of which has not been dreamed of before in Chinese history.

In the past such a project was impossible because of the complex political and economic interests involved. Only under a People's Government which administers the whole country for the whole of the people, could such a project be started. The over-all plan falls into four main parts: (a) building a system of reservoirs in the mountain sources of the river to control the rate at which the waters rush down to the middle reaches; (b) smaller reservoirs, dams and water-traps in the middle reaches, gouging out deeper and wider channels in the tributaries, putting in locks and sluice gates to reduce the volume and rate at which flood waters rush to the sea; building hundreds of miles of dykes, and at the same time reducing the water level of the rivers; (c) open up a new outlet to the sea in the lower reaches, also strengthening dyke walls and deepening channels here; encourage peasants to dig wells and drainage ditches to lower the saturation level in the sub-soil.

It was planned to complete by the end of June, 1951, the building of one key reservoir in the mountains with a capacity of 47 million cubic metres, to construct 1,250 miles of new dykes, carry out 480 miles of dredging (mostly to be done by hand), to build a vast system of sluice gates at a point on the Huai River where 7.2 billion cubic metres of water could be detained, to install 47 locks or sluice gates at various points, complete with hoisting and opening equipment. The work would require the labor of three million peasants and ten or fifteen thousand technical workers. Within eight months of the signing of the decree and within six months of any work starting, it was planned to shift 183 million cubic metres of earth, about two and a half times as much as was shifted in

the building of the Suez Canal, and as much as was shifted at the Panama Canal.

The plan was the more ambitious when one considers the dearth of equipment and technicians in China; the fact that engineering projects of any size in the past have been carried out by British or American engineers; the fact that no surveys had been made, and there was virtually no technological data on which preliminary work could be based. But People's China is a revolutionary country with revolutionary leaders used to mastering every task as it comes along. Within a few days of the promulgation of the October 14 decree, workers were being mobilised, survey teams were on their way to the Fu Niu mountains, orders were being placed with Shanghai factories for steel sluice gates and hoisting equipment.

In the early summer of 1951 I spent some weeks along the Huai river and its tributaries, watching at its work, the greatest army of labor ever mobilised for a peaceful project in China. The report that follows can give an impression only of the tremendous force that New China has generated; the force that with its bare hands can change the face of nature and harness it to the needs of the people.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE HANDS THAT MOVE MOUNTAINS.

FOR a night and a day the train from Peking roared across the great plains of North and East China, through green fields of waving wheat and barley, with the gold just beginning to creep up the stalks. Villages in the distance seem as ripples and folds in the yellow earth. The high encircling walls and houses themselves are made from earth on which they stand. Mud bricks are drying in the sun in village squares. The villages on the plains of Honan, Shantung and Anhwei grow up out of the soil and crumble back into the soil again to make mud bricks for future villages which will replace them. For thousands of square miles there are green crops on flat yellow earth, yellow villages in green plains, turgid yellow streams flowing through green and yellow fields with cone-shaped grave mounds poking up like nipples through the lush crops. Hour after hour the train rushes through countryside as flat in all directions as the eye can see. One speculates as to how it was possible for guerrillas to operate in such an area that gave no rock or cave for shelter, but the earthwork fortifications round each railway station were reminders that this area was one of the most active regions of the New Fourth Route Army. Guerrillas emerged from the earth itself to do battle and disappeared back into the earth again. Remains of villages which had all but merged with the soil again told of Jap and Kuomintang punitive expeditions against partisans and the peasants who supported them.

The target of the train journey was Szuhsien, the capital of the administrative sub-region of Suihsien in North Anhwei, one of the worst affected areas in the flood of 1950. In a little white-washed building an hour after arrival, Commissioner Wang Feng-wu, of Suihsien, gave a report of the floods and the work that gone on since. Of the population of 5,500,000, nearly 70 per cent. had been affected in 1949, and 80 per cent. or 4,500,000 in 1950. The reason was that the Huai rejected

the waters of the Sui river which flows through the area, the Sui breached its dykes and flooded over three million acres. Commissioner Wang used a phrase that I heard many times afterwards. "In this area," he said, "heavy rains mean a major flood, light rains a minor flood, and no rain means drought." And that was the situation over the greater part of the entire Huai Valley. After the floods, the government rushed 200,000 tons of relief grain, about 90 pounds per head of the affected population to the area. Local authorities organised auxiliary production of mat weaving, oil pressing, firewood cutting, fishing and transportation to tide the people over the difficult period.

The main work to be done on the Sui river involved widening and deepening the course of the Sui for 110 miles and cutting a new channel, 21 miles long to divert the Sui away from the Huai, and empty it into a lake instead. Over twenty-two million cubic metres of earth had to be shifted. The whole project was almost completed, well ahead of schedule. No machinery had been used, the whole of the earth was cut with hoes and spades and carried away in woven baskets. How had they mobilised the peasants for such a herculean task?

"Of course it required a lot of education," explained Commissioner Wang. "We held mass meetings in the villages where we encouraged peasants to get up and tell of their past sufferings. Our cadres then explained the political and natural causes of floods. The Kuomintang was primarily responsible because on the one hand they breached the Yellow River dykes, on the other hand they did nothing about flood prevention works. When we asked the peasants to volunteer in large numbers for the work, we still ran into all sorts of difficulties, but these were overcome with patient work by our cadres.

"The peasants had been tricked too long by the Kuomintang not to be suspicious of us. And we are working in an area where land reform has not yet been carried out. With experiences of Kuomintang methods fresh in their minds, they thought: (1) They would be left in the rain and cold at the river bank without proper shelters. Most of them hardly had any winter clothes after a decade of poverty through floods. (2) If they went to the river, their families would starve at home. (3) They might not get paid. (4) If the government did put up the money, the cadres would pocket it as the Kuomintang officials used to do. (5) If they went to the river, bandits might rob their

families at home. (6) They might not get home in time for the spring sowing and summer harvest. Well, we persuaded them that we were building shelters and that if it rained too hard for them to work they would still be paid one and a half pounds of rice a day so they wouldn't starve. We guaranteed to provide auxiliary production for the families at home and even give advance payments. We laid down basic rates of payment for every type of work done, classified in five categories according to the depth at which earth was dug, the type of soil or stone, the distance and height to which it had to be carried. The standard was set at two pounds of rice for every cubic metre dug at ground level and carried seventy yards away. We promised the peasants they could appoint their own paymasters, mess and purchasing committee, and we offered to pay the first five days wages in advance. To protect the families against bandits, we allowed each village to elect its own militia from the women and aged, and we gave them weapons for defence, and lastly, we helped them organise mutual aid teams from amongst those who stayed behind to take care of sowing and harvesting for those who went to the river.

"When these things were proposed and organised, we had more volunteers than we could cope with. We accepted 226,000 for the river work, another half a million we organised for work in the rear, cutting drainage ditches and sinking wells and helping in their spare time the 350,000 old and sick peasants, women and children organised into mutual aid teams for the farm work. At first everybody regarded the work on the river as a relief project, just to give the peasants something to do and some money to earn to tide them over till the next harvest. But when we got the work started, they began to understand its scope and with frequent lectures and education, they soon grasped the idea that we were on our way to banish floods for ever. When that was understood, they worked with boundless enthusiasm. Already they can see the results. The wheat harvest on 1.1 million acres of land is already for the first time in five years assured. The spring floods came and our newly-built dykes held, the waters flowed where we wanted them to flow. If we have only normal rains this summer, even the autumn crops will be saved too. With next year's work completed, we'll have broken the back of the problem over the whole area."



The next morning I was taken to have a look at a section of the work, driving for three hours through flourishing wheat crops and fields where teams of women and children were preparing the ground for kaoliang (sorghum) and maize. The first impression of seeing such mass human labor at work on such a big project with nothing but its hands is breathtaking. We topped a high dyke wall, and there, spread out as far as one could see in each direction, were thousands of scurrying human ants, digging, carrying, ramming, singing and chanting as they worked. They were at work on the last seven mile section of a new channel twelve feet deep, 150 feet wide at the bottom, and 660 feet wide at the top, topped with a dyke wall twelve to fifteen feet high. (Next year the bottom channel would be doubled in width.) There was a symphony of sound and movement.

Much of the work is done by teams, requiring co-ordinated effort. The ramming teams standing ten or twelve around a 250-pound stone, lean back on ropes which send the stone hurtling high into the air to thud down on the earth as they relax their hold on the ropes to which the stone is attached. They chant to keep their movements in perfect unison so the stone flies as high as the ropes will let it, and falls dead flat on to the ground. The carriers jog-trotting from the channel bed up the dyke bank, each with two basket of earth swinging from the ends of a bamboo carrying-pole chant so their steps will be co-ordinated with those in front and behind: "Hei-ho, wei-hei, hei-ho, wei-hei," with accents on the "hei" and "wei." Chanted in different rhythms by several thousand voices combined with the rise and fall of hoes and picks, the smooth upward and downward flight of scores of ramming stones, the rhythmic swaying back and forth of the ramming teams, the lines of jog-trotting porters, altogether produced the most powerful impression of human activity I have ever experienced; activity that was gay and enthusiastic and carried on at a tremendous tempo.

Across narrow ridges of earth specially left at the original ground level, long lines of carriers filed to clamber up the dyke banks and empty their two baskets of earth on top, to be rammed into place by the ramming teams. By the time they returned two more filled baskets would be waiting to be hooked to the carrying poles of each of them. The workers were organised

into brigades of a hundred or more each, brigades split into squads of fifty, squads into teams. Team members took their turns in digging and carrying. Each individual on this part of the project dug an average of four tons of earth a day, and carried it 70 yards up to the top of the dyke wall. He marched an average of eight miles a day, carrying for half the distance between 80 and a 100 pounds of earth in his baskets. Engineer Chang Tso-ying smiled when I expressed amazement at the vast amount of work done with wooden spades, a few picks, stone rammers, wicker baskets and bamboo carrying poles.

"What mechanical equipment we had, we abandoned as too costly," he said. "We had a number of five and a half horsepower diesel operated pumps. We used them for a while, but we found that they pumped 36 cubic metres of water an hour, whereas hand-operated water-wheels pumped 30 cubic metres and we could move 14 cubic metres with bucket brigades. But for the cost of shifting one cubic metre by diesel pump we could shift 22 cubic metres with the water-wheels and 14 with the buckets.

"We installed 220 water-wheels and with a few bucket brigades we coped with the pumping problem without difficulty, along the whole 21 miles of the new channel. From a social point of view too, it is better to give our money to the peasants who need it so badly than spend it on imported fuel."

At one point on the work site a peasant band entertained us with a gay selection of local folk songs, played with trumpet, gongs, drums and the "seng," a strange curved reed instrument with a cluster of half a dozen pipes of varying lengths, and I think the only instrument in China capable of producing harmony. Peasants looked up from their work long enough to shout "Long live Chairman Mao" at us, then bent their backs to the toil again. "Hei-ho, wei-hei, hei-ho, wei-hei" filled the air for miles ahead and miles behind us. At an improvised mat-covered smithy, husky blacksmiths in dogskin aprons were working their way through a pile of scrap iron and beating it into solid-looking hoes; "Rewards for model workers," engineer Chang, explained.

At Shao Hsi Chu, the headquarters for this section of the work, I was able to talk to a few peasants who had been nominated by their team-mates as "model workers." There was Li Chin-tsai, a sturdy looking 24-year-old poor peasant, who

plunged into a breach in the dyke caused by the spring floods. Thirty of his comrades followed his example, others rammed the dirt in, and the breach was plugged. I asked him if he had ever heard of machines for digging and rolling, he replied: "I only know we have no machines and so we use our hands." He had saved enough from the winter and spring work to buy a donkey for the piece of land he had been given provisionally until land reform was carried out. There was a small girl, Yueh Ling, who hardly looked her 16 years. In February there was still ice on the ground, but ditches had to be dug to drain off water from melting snow. She pulled off her shoes and trousers and jumped through an icy crust into the water, setting an example that others followed. Later she volunteered for Korea, but was not allowed to go. Another 16-year-old was a former beggar girl, Pan Hung-sha, who, a cadre explained, worked "like a demon." When she hurt her leg and could no longer carry, she insisted on being allowed to dig all day. Once she disappeared for a few days and turned up with 19 more girls from her village. They became a model team. She was rewarded with a long, warm, padded gown. Chang Shao-shen, a poor peasant, with only half an acre, led his brigade in the literary classes. He carried a door from his own house down to the river site to serve as a blackboard, and got a "literate" to teach his team members at lunch-time and during rest periods. He raised the slogans, "The ground our paper; our fingers pens." "When no lamps, use the moon." He spurred his team members on to dig more and carry quicker under the slogan, "If we work with one heart, the earth will turn into gold." At present virtually a landless peasant, he will doubtless be rewarded when land reform comes to his village.

Pei Hsing-hua, a good-looking brown-faced woman peasant of 24, was one of the most remarkable amongst the several labor models I met at Shao Hsi Chu. The wife of a poor peasant, she expressed herself with great confidence and precision. "I came to work on the Sui for my own good," she said, "and I'm very grateful to Chairman Mao for looking after us. Surely half of us would have starved here if we hadn't been given grain loans and relief work. How could one not co-operate and work hard when it is for our own good." She organized half the able-bodied women of her village to come to the site.

In the team of 12, which she led, there was one man, but he soon volunteered for Korea. (I suspected the reason was the driving force of this serene and energetic young woman, whose team set a pace that few others could keep up with.) "Why do I work hard? Because when the Sui is harnessed, there'll be good harvests, people will have enough to eat. That's why our team gets up earlier than any other and goes to bed later. In the past, when the floods came, people were drowned, millions starved, and nobody cared." She described the efforts her team was making to learn to read and write. She borrowed some text-books and brought them to the river and asked a "literate" to come and teach them. "To be illiterate to-day is to be blind with your eyes open," she said. I asked why she worked so hard to protect land that still belonged to the landlords, and she was very confident in her answer. "Because soon all the land will belong to us peasants who work it," she replied, and added: "The landlords have no guts now. Before they would have stopped us leaving the village because that means so much labor taken off their land. Now, they daren't say a word." Pei Haing-hua, a poor peasant, who had never spent a day in school, has now learned 450 characters. She was quite sure of the future and knows just where she is going. She wore a faded, blue cotton jacket, and short, flimsy black trousers with a green comb in her bobbed hair, the only concession to femininity. She knew well about her role in helping solve China's problems, "Our volunteers resist America and aid Korea at the front," she said. "We can't go there but our work in the rear is nearly as important. And," she smiled (probably thinking of her twelfth team member), "we can persuade others to volunteer." In addition to learning 450 characters at the river site, she had also learned three new songs and so raised her cultural level, a matter taken very seriously by workers and peasants in New China.

Within a stone's throw of the new channel was a village where we talked with a middle-aged peasant woman. Shao Ching-chieh. Once she had had some trifling trouble with her leg, a quack-doctor stuck a dirty needle into her knee and infected it, and she now hobbled around on crutches with a crippled leg. We sat out in a sunny courtyard amongst primitive farm implements, with chickens scratching in the grass, a sow grunting in the dust in a corner, and Shao Ching-chieh's

fat daughter plying us with dishes of tea. "Is it still necessary to talk about floods?" she said when I asked if she could tell something about what happened in 1950. "If it hadn't been for Chairman Mao half of us would have starved to death, that's quite sure. If the government hadn't started this project, we wouldn't even have grass roots to eat, let alone grain. Well now, about the flood," she explained. "It was in August and the water rose in the night about an inch a minute. In one hour around five feet. Everybody was out before dawn trying to patch the dykes, but what chance did we have. I was there with the rest, but it's more than one village could handle. Soon, the dykes gave way, the water just streamed over them, and over all our land for as far as you could see. All our crops went with it, flat as if we'd just cut them. My house was all right, but others were half under water. For six weeks it was like that. Then the cadres came and with them came food. They showed us how to drive timber into what was left of the dykes and ram dirt in and around and on top. Till they came all we ate was a thin gruel, but then we could have proper dry food again. Then when the work got started in December we got really first class food again." Her ruddy face clouded over and she spat disgustedly on the ground when I asked if the Kuomintang had not helped in previous years of flood. "Pah!" she said, "Officials came after the floods all right, but not to help. They demanded money and men for forced labor. If we didn't pay up we were beaten and arrested, threatened with being shot. And if our men were taken off they worked under whips and starved and froze to death. When the word was passed round that Kuomintang officials were coming we ran away, taking as much as possible of our belongings with us. They robbed us of every single ear of grain. Once my brother was grinding grain and they even took the few handfuls left in the stone grinder. Now these new cadres, they're decent lads. They'd starve sooner than put their hands on one speck of ours."

At frequent points along the dyke walls blackboards had been set up in prominent positions with a summary of the day's news written out in chalk. It ranged from war news in Korea and the meeting of the Foreign Minister's Deputies in Paris, to reports on progress being made in other sections of the Huai project and the nomination of labor models on the local site.

"We try and keep the workers as fully informed as possible as to what is going on," Commissioner Wang Feng-wu explained, "and in this way we defeat the rumor-mongers. When the project first started secret agents spread reports that war had broken out and that we were mobilising people to dig trenches. Some said we were mobilising peasants to send to Korea, and others spread the rumor that there would be no grain supplies because Chiang Kai-shek had cut the rail link with the north-east. We held mass meetings where we asked everybody to tell the rumors they had heard. We soon tracked down the handful of agents that been sent to disrupt the work. But the best way of combating such stories is to keep the real news of what is going on constantly before the workers. The peasants themselves have now set up their own security guards and anti-espionage units on the job. We gave them some arms and they protect the earthworks day and night."

Many of the peasants in this area had been members of I Kwan Tao, and other secret societies to which they contributed grain to appease the wrath of the river spirits. As they saw the great works growing under their own hands and watched the spring floods flow down the channels they had cut, they switched their faith to their own labor and the guidance of Chairman Mao. In some places they took the images out of the shrines and threw them in the river to emphasise their break with the past. The river work in fact was making a great impact on their lives. Commissioner Wang expressed it as follows: "You can see a peasant's outlook changing from day to day. Like peasants in all countries, the Chinese peasant is an extreme individualist and because of our feudal society the world did not exist for him outside his own family. He comes to the river work at first to earn some relief grain to feed himself and send some back to his family. At most he has accepted the idea that he is working to stop floods on his own land or on land which will be his after land reform. He expects to mark out a piece of ground, dig it out and carry it away as an individual measuring to the last cubic centimetre how much he has cut. Instead of that he finds it is much more convenient to work with a team. If he is on ramming work he can only work in a team. Two things happen to him. He gets the first idea of co-operative work. He begins to exchange ideas with other

peasants. He attends meetings where peasants from other villages and even other districts tell of their sufferings from floods. He sees his work as a larger thing than saving his own farmland. He starts to have a fellow-feeling for his work-mates and sees them working together to save the whole district. He goes to lectures where the cause of floods is explained, and he is told that hundreds of miles away there are more peasants working, building dams, and he begins to see that only by the united labor of peasants over wide areas of the country can floods be stopped. Step by step, by his own experiences on the river site he begins to think in terms of the village instead of his farm, the district instead of his village, the county and region, and eventually he grasps the conception of China. From that it is not a big step for him to understand the danger to China in what is happening in Korea, and he begins to acquire a world outlook. And that is not all. The only reason he can work on the river site is because of organisation at home. His wife and children and aged father have combined with other wives, children and parents to plough the land, sow the crops and reap the harvest. They have pooled their animals to get the work done. Where there are no animals groups of them combine together to pull ploughs and harrows. Here at the front and in the villages in the rear the first steps are being taken in co-operative work. The peasants will never go back to the old individualistic way of thinking after these experiences. They become receptive to the new forms of co-operative work, to co-operative farming of which the mutual aid teams are the first step. So you see," he concluded, "we are not only changing nature, but we are changing the outlook of our peasants at the same time."

Land reform had not been completed in the Suihsien sub-region because there were no cadres to spare for carrying it through. Preliminary work had started, but then all cadres were switched to mobilising the peasants for the more urgent task of harnessing the river. Rent reduction had been carried out, however, and the principle established that rents would only be paid according to the harvest gathered. Where floods had ruined the whole crop, no rent was paid. None of the peasants with whom I spoke had any doubts but that land reform would be carried through immediately the river work was finished. This was an extra stimulus to them to volunteer

and to speed up the work. In one county, with a population of 380,000, 53,000 or 14 per cent. volunteered for the work. Old men and sick people turned up at the work site. It had to be patiently explained to them that this work was only for able-bodied men and women, and 4,000 of them were sent home to help with the agricultural work.

Within a week of the time of my visit the season's work on the Sui river would be completed, the mat shelters along the channel banks dismantled, and the peasants dispersed to their villages. After the autumn harvest, they would return again to widen and deepen the channels already dug, to put a few more feet of earth on top of the dyke walls. To a layman, the work looked beautifully done. The dyke walls, packed as hard as concrete, ran true as a spirit level as far as the eye could see, the bed of the channel flat and clean, the water on the old course held in check by a narrow dam which would be knocked out as soon as the last cubic metre of earth was removed from the new channel. In future it would flow where the engineers wanted it to flow and would reduce the burden on the over-taxed Huai. With the cheery "Hei-ho, wei-hei" of the peasant-workers still ringing in my ears, I left the Sui river to travel back to the mountains of Honan, west of the Peking-Canton railway, where work was being rushed ahead to complete a reservoir at Shih Man Tan, to control the headwaters of the Hung river, one of the most dangerous of the Huai tributaries.

The character of the country changes only slightly as one passes from Anhwei into Honan province. For many hours of train travel the plains stretch like a vast green lake relieved by islands of peach, mulberry and cherry orchards. The population, however, looks more prosperous. Land reform has been carried out and because of the decimation of population in the 1942-3 famines, there was more land to go round, than in other areas. There were practically no able-bodied men to be seen in the fields; their places were taken mainly by women and children. Many of the latter toted ancient rifles and shot-guns as members of the village militia. Dispossessed landlords and Kuomintang agents sent in from Formosa are still capable of doing a lot of damage, especially in villages where the men-folk are away at the river-front. From Chengchow, I drove twenty miles to Hua Yen Kou, where Chiang Kai-shek breached

the Yellow River dyke. The river is well over a mile wide at this point and even at low water is still above the level of the surrounding fields. A black marble monument enclosed in a wooden pavilion stands on the spot where General Liu Shih in an hour's work wrecked the lives of millions of people. The monument is not to the peasants whose lives were lost but to the U.N.R.R.A. engineers who repaired the dyke. It carries a pious inscription signed by Chiang Kai-shek, "Work hard, control floods," and somebody had carved under the signature, a turtle, the most despised creature in China. On the reverse side to the inscription is a long hypocritical statement by Chiang giving a distorted account of how the breach occurred. "The year following the Japanese aggression in China," it reads, "the Yellow River dykes got out of repair. In June, 1938, the Yellow River broke its dyke at Hua Yen Kou . . . etc." The local villagers, however, confirmed the story of the blasting of a 45-foot gap with land mines, and the machine-gunning of peasants who tried to close the breach. As the peasants told their stories, square-rigged junks glided past and ramming teams gave final pounding touches to the reinforced dykes which had been further built up since the U.N.R.R.A. engineers finished their work.

Honan had suffered terribly in the 1950 floods with one-fifth of the cultivable land in the province under water and six million people affected. The breaching of the Yellow River dyke had silted up and paralysed the drainage system of 140 Huai River tributaries. Despite the abundance of water available, there were virtually no reservoirs, and less than one per cent. of the land was irrigated. The only way to break the cycle of flood, drought and famine was, as the political director of the province, Chen Ching-ping, put it, "to harness the Huai and turn it from a harmful to a profitable river." And he added, "the people of Honan fought vigorously and successfully against political oppression in the past, they are fighting no less vigorously to-day against natural calamities." Within three months of the October decree, twelve surveying teams had entered Honan and surveyed the sites for ten mountain valley reservoirs and 22 weirs and dams. Six hundred thousand peasants were organised on the various jobs of widening river channels, strengthening dykes, on soil conservation, building dams and reservoirs. Work had already started on three of

the latter, including Shih Man Tan, which was scheduled for completion before the flood season started. Two experimental stations were set up to test the best types of trees and grass for planting along the river banks and sowing on newly-built dyke walls to bind the earth together. Soil conservation and re-forestation play a large part in the long-range plans of flood prevention.

From Chengchow we travelled south along the Peking-Canton railway to Lo He, the nearest rail point to Shih Man Tan. As always, the service on the train was impeccable, the train service crews most solicitous for the travellers' comfort. As we approached one station famous for its roast chicken (sold on the platform at 2/- each) a voice boomed through a megaphone in our coach, "Comrades, dinner is being served on the train. It is different from the Kuomintang days. Then they used to serve only the exploiters. Now we serve the people. There are good dishes from 2,500 dollars (less than 1/-) and many others at low prices. If you buy food outside the train it is exposed to the air and flies. It is not good for your health. Please take good care of your health comrades. Besides, the train only stops a short time at the station and you may miss it if you are not careful. The dining car is only five coaches ahead. . ."

From Lo He to Shih Man Tan the road gradually led up into the foothills of the Fu Lien mountains. As we passed from the plains to the hills, the mud-brick villages were replaced by those of stone, which fitted the mountain landscape as naturally as did the mud villages of the plains. Despite the years of floods, people looked much better off than in Anhwei. Everybody was decently clad, children were ruddy-faced and firm-fleshed. Ahead of us on the road was a convoy of bulldozers and tractors hauling excavators and massive sheep-foot rollers. In one village where they stopped for water the whole population turned out to inspect them. The old men made wise pronouncements as to what they could be and do, dogs sat gravely on their haunches, yawning; children, greatly fearing at first, were soon clambering all over them, bored-looking donkeys and oxen tethered under the shady pepper trees seemed to have no presentment that these tractors represented the beginning of their liberation. As we trailed the convoy over the winding road, peasants left their work in the

fields and came running from all directions to see the lumbering machines.

When we were still a few miles from Shih Man Tan we could see red silk flags waving like a forest fire in the distance. Hundreds of model workers, with the red banners won by their brigades, had turned out to greet us, complete with a rousing drum, gong and cymbal band. There were roaring cheers for Chairman Mao, for world peace and international friendship. The newly-built matting huts on the headquarters were covered with slogans in Chinese, Russian and English. "Peace-loving Peoples of the Whole World Unite," "Oppose the re-arming of Germany and Japan" and many others. At dusk, a few hours after our arrival, the tiny mountain village echoed with the songs of New China. The workers were returning to the villages where they were quartered. They marched team by team, brigade by brigade, according to the districts from which they had come, dressed in light cottons, pointed straw hats held on with tapes tied under their chins, and with heavy padded collar-yokes which fitted tight round their necks and spread well over their shoulders to take the weight of the carrying poles. Ahead went the standard bearers carrying the brigade and team banners, followed by workers marching three abreast, first those with shovels, then the pick-bearers, porters with their baskets slung on their backs, carrying their bamboo poles like rifles, finally the barrow teams trundling their heavy wooden wheeled barrows but singing with the rest. Team after team, brigade after brigade, marched through the village street and away into the hills beyond. Local villagers sat in their doorways, the men pulling at their long pipes, women suckling their babies. In the background the Hung river rippled surlily past. It had rained heavily a few days previously and making one last desperate attempt to escape being tamed, the Hung had breached the new earthworks in five places, carrying away 20,000 tons of earth. It was back to normal leved now but heavily charged with rich, yellow soil. The hills surrounding the village were topped with red quartz fortresses built and previously manned by the villagers themselves in the days of the warlords and marauding bandits. The sound of the marching choirs filled the air long after the last was out of sight, echoing through the quiet hills and valleys, a strong cheerful sound with the rhythm of work; of ramming, digging, quarrying

and hauling running through it. Early in the morning the hills rang again with the sound of the worker choirs as they marched back to work, the brigades competing with each other to be first on the job.

The rainstorm of a few days previously, unprecedented for that time of the year, gave a good example of one of the problems the engineers are fighting against. The piddling mountain stream which normally flows at the rate of one cubic metre per second changed within four hours to a roaring torrent discharging 180 cubic metres a second, laden with hundreds of tons of soil from the mountain slopes. It had washed away ten days' of labor of twenty thousand peasants, but with another ten thousand peasants on the way, the engineers were confident the reservoir would be finished before the flood season started. The project at Shih Nan Tan was to build a sixty foot high dam between two mountains and block the valley through which the Hung flowed; to retain the water from those sudden rainstorms and let it flow at a rate and in the direction desired by the engineers. It entailed cutting a tunnel for a sluice gate through a red quartz mountain on one side and cutting the top off a red quartz mountain on the other side to serve as a spillway. Sixty thousand cubic metres of stone had to be removed and every scrap of the quarrying was done by hand. The only outside aid was black powder for blasting. Eleven hundred quarry experts and former miners were attacking the mountains with sledge hammers and drills. The tunnel had already been driven through the mountain in an extra spurt of effort to have it finished before May Day, five weeks after the Shih Man Tan project started. The mountain rang with the blows of steel on steel, punctuated by sharp explosions as the quarriers sank a thousand foot long channel into the mountain top of solid red quartz. Altogether the reservoir would cover over 600 acres with a capacity for forty-seven million cubic metres of water, and it was by far the smallest of the three reservoirs on which work had been started. Due to the peculiar distribution of rainfall, it was estimated that in normal years most of the 600-acre bed of the reservoir could be sown and a summer crop of wheat harvested. Most of the water during flood season would be retained in the reservoir, eventually to swell the waters of the Huai. The water which escaped over the spillway would not empty into the old course

of the river, but would be diverted away through a network of channels to irrigate at first 3,000 acres of land, later 16,000 acres. The sluice gate would control the water level in the river sufficient to maintain supplies for irrigation and also to keep the river navigable on its lower reaches. Ten thousand acres of land on each side of the Hung river normally flooded every year would be protected immediately by the work finished in 1951, not to mention the indirect benefit to thousands of acres in the Huai area. Work will be finished on the other two reservoirs in 1952 and work started on ten more on the basis of experience gained in building Shih Man Tan. With the completion of the two already started, over one hundred thousand areas will be irrigated and crop yields on this land doubled. The water which for centuries had been a merciless tyrant will become a useful servant.

Great attention was paid to the political preparations for the project. Six villages with a population of 1,324 people had to be shifted off the site of the reservoir. Cadres addressed mass meetings and explained the meaning of the whole project, how it affected the lives of millions of people. The villagers were assured they would get more and better land in other areas, that help would be given to provide new homes. Delegates came from the villages which were to be their new homes and assured the peasants they would be welcome. When land reform had been carried out a few months previously the government had reserved some land for just such a purpose. By the time the ox-carts came to transport them and their belongings away, the villagers went cheerfully to their new homes. I met one old peasant who had come back to see the transformation that had taken place at his former home, and asked him how he felt to have left his old village. He replied, "To save distressed people in other parts, it doesn't really matter that we had to move away. With the Communist Party and Chairman Mao what difficulties could we have? There's plenty for all now and when this is all finished," he waved his gnarled hand to take in the great basin, black with human ants and lively with the sound of their work, "why, we'll have more than enough to eat."

Seng Cheng-ni, the engineer in charge of Shih Man Tan, estimated that 95 per cent. of the earthworks were completed with hand labor. The bulldozers and tractors were mainly

used for grading and ramming work. The massive dam wall was being built with baskets of earth and clay deposited at the rate of several tons a minute by the unending lines of jog-trotting porters, and then crushed into a compact mass as hard as concrete by the tractor-pulled sheep-foot rollers, the blunted spikes of which sink deep into earth and clay to exert the maximum pressure on each square inch of soil. Deep under the bottom of the dam, the natural foundation had been removed and replaced with heavily compressed clay, to counteract the tendency of water to gouge a channel underneath the earthwork. The base of the dam is twenty times the thickness of the top with a very gradual slope best designed to resist the thrust of the flood waters.

Model worker Ma Fu-cheh came from a village severely hit in the 1942 famine. He was nominated as "model" because of the great care he took of his team members and the fact that he led them in hacking an average of five tons of stone each, and carrying it a distance of 150 yards daily. He looked absurdly like a priest with his shaven head and close-fitting white padded collar. When I asked why he toiled so hard he replied: "It's simple. In the past we had less than half an acre for a family of six. We were oppressed. Now we are liberated and we have our own land to protect. Floods were always serious in our area. For years we reaped no crop in autumn. In 1942, we had everything ready for threshing. The sheaves were drying in the fields when the floods came and swept everything away. What was left when the water went was rotten stalk. Then came hot weather and the land got too hard for ploughing. In any case we had no seed grain. We left the land and ran away. The six of us became beggars. Of the 36 families in our village only five remained. We ate elm-tree bark, grass and roots. In one town 60 miles from our village, my sister got married (it was clear from the way he said it, that she had been sold), but we've never been able to find her since. For seven years we wandered from place to place, sometimes getting scraps of work, most of the time begging. Then we heard that Red Army people were in our village and that they were good. We heard that if they stay in a peasant's home they help cut firewood and carry water. We heard too some rumours about the land being divided up, so we decided to come home. That was two years ago. But

half our village never came back. From the family next to us, six went away and only two came back. The rest died. My uncle's family all died. We were given 2½ acres of land last year, but, of course, it was flooded in the autumn. When Chairman Mao sent out the call for volunteers to stop the floods, I simply got terribly excited. I made two baskets and waited for the day to set out. In the past we wanted to stop floods too, but the Kuomintang wouldn't let us. Instead they broke the Yellow River dyke and made things worse. They then grabbed peasants to repair it, and they starved and froze to death. We knew it would be different this time, and it is." Wasn't he worried about the farm at home? "The Mutual Aid team are looking after it and they won't take a cent for the work. The government gave our family a loan and we pooled it with two other families and bought an ox to make it easier for the women to do the work."

Another model worker, Shi Fu-shan, a brown, wiry man, had "Resist America, Aid Korea" embroidered in red on his padded collar. He had taken the lead jumping into icy water and working during a snowstorm. Once, when his team were working in mud, the baskets were so worn out that the mud kept oozing through and the carriers lost half their loads. He took his only pair of long stockings and patiently unravelled them to get thread to mend the baskets, despite the bitter cold. In one particularly frosty period he had taken his own padded clothes and exchanged them with another worker who had only flimsy cotton ones. His team had averaged almost seven tons of earth each daily. Although he was an illiterate, poor peasant, he had a clear idea about the aims of the project. "We are working for the good of us all," he said. "We have to make the water flow where we want it to flow, and stop it flowing from where we don't want it. That way, we will all have better crops." I asked him if he thought the idea of co-operative work was a good one and if it could be extended to work in the villages. "Of course its good," he replied, "and we'll carry on with it. When we go back home we'll find our wheat harvest already in the bins and our autumn crops sown. Because of the mutual aid teams we can throw our whole heart into this work. We don't have to keep running back to the villages. We've learned a lot from working together here and we'll continue to co-operate back in the village."

On the road back to Lo He and the train there were signs of preparations for the approaching harvest. The gold had crept up the stalks almost to the heads of grain, in the village squares oxen were pulling heavy stone rollers round and round to smooth and press down the threshing floor, where the ripened grain would be beaten out with primitive flails. Village markets were selling enormous wooden forks with prongs two and three feet long, for tossing sheaves and woven cane rakes for gathering the cut grain together in the fields. Within a few weeks, the wheat fields would be showing the same bustling activity as the Shih Man Tan dam site, even if not quite in the same intensified form. The harvest that was almost ready for the reaper's knife, was one that had been saved by the winter and spring flood prevention works already completed.

The final stage of my trip entailed a thirty-six hour trip up the Huai on a river boat from Peng-pu to the focal point of the 1951 project at Jen Ho Chih where the Huai itself was being dammed up and diverted into natural lake-reservoirs with great dyke walls being built clear across a big lake to prevent it linking up with the Huai and other lakes during flood season. This entailed a major engineering project and would be the key to controlling the most vital section of the Huai Valley. Between Peng-pu and Jen Ho Chih sluice gates were being installed at the mouths of the fish-bone tributaries, where they emptied into the Huai. The tributaries are double dangers. Firstly their discharge swells the flood waters of the Huai and secondly they are weak links in the dyke system through which the swollen Huai waters can rush back over the surrounding countryside. So every tributary between Peng-pu and Jen Ho Chih was being blocked with steel and concrete sluice gates which could be slammed shut when the Huai is in flood and form steel links in the dyke wall. We visited the first of these towards dusk one evening.

The reflection from an early moon was just chasing the stains of sunset from the water, cooking fires were twinkling in the distance, their smoke mingling with the dust from dyke walls, freshly rammed; the moonlight gleamed from the polished bamboo carrying-poles of the workers, who on this project were working the night through. Two small streams had been brought together at a point five miles from the Huai, diverted into a deep wide channel, and blocked at the Huai with two



fifteen feet square steel gates set in solid concrete abutments. The river water could flow back along the channel into a lake, big enough to hold the maximum discharge of the two streams for one month. The flood peak on the Huai normally lasted only ten days, so there was a good safety margin. Regulation by means of the series of sluice gates would make the Peng-pu-Jen Ho Chih section of the Huai permanently navigable.

The lines of hurrying haulers, the rhythmic chants of the workers, the thud of the ramming stones, the clattering of a pile driver working under floodlights, all conveyed the impression of ceaseless, urgent activity, the fight against the approaching flood season. A miscalculation as to a day or two could mean the wreckage of months of labour. In charge of the sluice gate construction were one engineer and six engineering students, but they were only part of a carefully conceived and executed whole.

Travelling on the steam-boat was a troupe of actors, actresses and musicians from the Peking Film Studio, travelling down to live with the workers on the Jen Ho Chih project. They decided to give a moonlight concert on deck while we were anchored in mid-stream off the sluice-gate. Peasants gathered at the water's edge and cheered and clapped as the little orchestra started up and the latest film hits from *The White-haired Girl*, *Song of the Red Flag* and others drifted across over the clear, moonlit water. Their shouted demands for favorite partisan songs were readily fulfilled and there were groans of disappointment when the anchor was hauled aboard at midnight and we chugged our way upstream again.

One of the film workers' group, Hsu Chieh, was a petite woman with a charming smile and a voice which captivated her audience. She looked young enough to have just graduated from university, but it turned out she was a veteran revolutionary. She had run away from high school to join the revolution, and except for one short spell immediately after VJ-day, she had spent 11 years in front-line areas, doing propaganda and entertainment work. After Liberation she had worked with cadres preparing for land reform, presenting skits and plays in the village ridiculing the old and praising the new life. She and the others were going to Jen Ho Chih, as she expressed it "to learn from the masses." "How can we be good actors and actresses" she asked, "unless we go down and see just how

people work, find out exactly how were their lives before, and how they expect them to be changed. I have already learned much from the peasants and workers, but we all have still much to learn from them," she said. As we talked on the boat deck, crew men and soldiers gathered round, squatting on their heels and drinking in every word of this to them, new idea, that intellectuals should want to learn from the masses.

All the way during 56 hours of travel from Peng-pu to Jen Ho Chih, the new dyke walls stood high and straight as a ruler above the river banks. In some places grass had been planted to form slogans, easily readable from mid-stream. "Resist American aggression" was, of course, the favorite, but others urged a redoubling of efforts to control the floods. We passed numerous fleets of junks, blunt-prowed, oiled boats with a great spread of sail and shallow draught, skimming over the top of the water, rather than cutting through it. They were part of nearly nine thousand boats hauling stone, sand, timber and machinery to Jen Ho Chih. There were all shapes and sizes amongst them, punts being poled along, small junks hauled with ropes by boat-pullers marching along the tow-path, big sampans propelled with enormous sweepers, wiggled back and forth from the boat's stern. The rendezvous for all those bound upstream was Jen Ho Chih. People on boats we passed constantly shouted to our crew-men: "See you at Jen Ho Chih." We passed fishing boats covered with bedraggled looking cormorants. They are attached with long strings and have rings round their throats so as not to swallow the fish they catch, but drop them instead into master's hands. Women and young people in white coats and short black trousers, with pointed straw hats were already cutting early barley and wheat in the fields, ox-drawn ploughs turning in the stubble to prepare for sowing the autumn harvest. Sheaves were being loaded on to comical four-wheeled cart-sledges or being carried back to barns on the ends of carrying poles.

At Tang Ying Chih we stopped long enough to have a look at another big sluice, this time with four steel gates weighing 16 tons each and a complicated hoisting equipment to allow boats to pass to and fro on to the Huai. It was estimated that this one sluice would save an area of 1,350 square miles from being flooded. Some 25,000 peasants and 3,000 skilled workers were working here under a team of ten engineers building the

gates and cutting a channel to a series of lakes in the vicinity. On a high piece of ground overlooking the complicated scaffolding and supports for the pile drivers, was an ancient monument to Emperor Yu the Great, for his attempts four thousand years previously to tame the Huai.

Our last stop before reaching Jen Ho Chih was at a point where a three miles long wall nearly four hundred feet wide in places had been built in 40 days by 35,000 workers to hem in the Chang Chia Hu lake and stop it joining up with the Huai and another lake to spread over hundreds of square miles of country during the flood season. The wall would help to turn the lake into a reservoir and the flow of its water into the Huai would be controlled by sluice gates which were almost completed.

The big surprise of the trip was to await me at Jen Ho Chih. The engineer in charge of this most important part of the whole project and who concurrently held the post of deputy-engineer in charge of the entire Huai River scheme was 29-year-old girl, a most striking-looking young woman with jet-black hair swept back from a smooth, broad forehead and clipped square with her shoulders, an oval, vital face, brown and smooth as eggshell, with delicate hands, and a charming, youthful smile. It was very difficult to get Director-Engineer Chien Chen-ying to talk about herself. She is as modest as she is capable, and it had to be her colleagues who filled in most of her background. Her story is as much a part of the story of New China as that of the fight against floods.

Her father was a hydraulic engineer who studied in the United States. He came back full of enthusiasm to serve his country, and at first worked for the Kuomintang on the Yangtse. He was quickly disillusioned by the corruption, the servile flattery and bribery needed to advance in the Kuomintang engineering world, and by the fact that there was no real work being done. He resigned in disgust and went to Shanghai as a building engineer. "At that time I wanted badly to be an engineer too," said Chien Chen-ying. "I spent all my spare time on my father's jobs and my childhood games were clambering around in the maze of scaffolding on his construction projects. He was not against my studying engineering, but warned me not to touch hydraulic engineering. 'You'll never get a job, he said.' However, she did take just this subject, but after the Japanese

attacked China she became as much interested in politics as engineering. In 1941 she joined the underground Communist Party in Shanghai, and the following year, although she was top student in engineering, she left college six months before she was due to graduate, and escaped from Shanghai to join the Red Army.

"When I left Shanghai," she explained, "I thought I had given up engineering for ever to become a revolutionary." For the first two years she did only propaganda work with the New Fourth Army, but then she had a chance to do some real engineering work. Although they were in the midst of a life and death struggle for their existence, the New Fourth Army started flood prevention works. Chien Chen-ying was given her first real engineering assignment—on flood prevention works on the Huai river. For nearly two years she devoted herself to anti-flood measures on the Huai, and later on the Grand Canal in North Kiangsu and on the Yellow River in Shantung province—all New Fourth Army areas. But in 1946, Chiang Kai-shek launched his murderous assault against the New Fourth and Chien Chen-ying went back to front-line work. Attached to a sappers' unit, she repaired highways, built bridges, and when necessary, blew them up again. In February, 1948, she distinguished herself by dealing with an ice dam which piled up near the Yellow River mouth and caused a flood of ice and water to spread over several counties. Such ice dams formed periodically, but nothing had been done about them in the past and this one was the worst for half a century. The ice blocked the way to the sea, the water piled up and flowed back and threatened dyke breaches for hundreds of miles. Chien Chen-ying, in freezing weather, worked on the slippery ice, bored holes through the centre of the dam, and packed scores of brandy bottles filled with high explosives under the ice. With the aid of an explosives expert, the bottles were electrically detonated, and a vast hole blown in the centre of the dam. The ice quickly began to crack up with the pressure of water behind it, and the warmer waters from the bottom of the river gushing up through the hole which had been torn by the explosives. Chien Chen Ying and her companion had to leap from floe to floe and reached safety just as the whole mass of ice started to break up and move towards the sea. The flood danger was averted. (Since then the People's Government has

used bombing planes to disperse ice dams, but Chien Chen-ying's exploit was the first demonstration that could be dealt with.)

Most of the Yellow River at that time was controlled by the Kuomintang, and on one occasion when floods were threatening the section controlled by the People's Army there was no stone with which to build an urgently needed dam. This resourceful young woman was not beaten, however. She appealed to the peasants. They brought 32,000 cartloads of stone torn up from courtyards, from destroyed houses, old washing stones and corn grinders, and the dam was built. Workers were bombed and strafed by Kuomintang planes, and in two years 300 peasants working on projects in her charge were killed or assassinated, but from the time she took on the work in the Yellow River, there were no major floods. She refuses to take any personal credit for this work. "Only the correct leadership of the Communist Party made it possible," she said, "No single technician played any outstanding part. The work was done for the people and done by the people—that is the important thing." Chien Chen-ying was having a well-earned rest back in Shanghai when the call went out for the Huai River project. She immediately asked for a job and started work on the preparatory planning commission, later to be sent to supervise the most complicated engineering part of the project. "And so you see," she said, with the smile that lights up her striking face, "the roads of revolutionary and engineer did lead together after all." Her brother, also, joined the revolution about the same time as she did, and when they came back to their father, for the first time, he was so delighted with their progress and bearing that he sent his other two sons to join and be educated by the New Fourth Army. The father himself has now realised his dream of serving the people with his engineering skill, and is a mining engineer at the great Kailan coal mines in Manchuria. The daughter played a heroic part in creating People's China and People's China gave this whole family the chance to utilise their creative talents to the full in the service of the people.

The story of Chien Chen-ying had to be dragged out word by word from her colleagues with little bits of confirmatory detail unwillingly supplied by Chien Chen-ying herself. I had no inkling of it when she walked into a reception room at the Jen Ho Chih headquarters with a sheaf of maps, blueprints and

papers under her arm and quietly and efficiently began to explain the technical, economic and political significance of what was happening at Jen Ho Chih. She presented a complicated engineering project in simple layman's language which made it easy to follow the problem and its solution.

At Chen Yang Kwan, some fifty miles downstream from Jen Ho Chih, was the most dangerous spot on the whole Huai river for floods. In a stretch of 100 miles upstream from this point nine big and small rivers poured into the Huai and together with the main course formed the bulk of the flood waters which breached the dykes at Chen Yang Kwan and spilled over the countryside. The flood waters reached 12,800 cubic metres per second, the channel capacity at Chen Yang Kwan was only 6,500, so the waters were discharged on to the rolling plains at a rate of over 5,000 cubic metres per second, which usually meant several billion cubic metres of water during the period of the flood peak. The problem was to cut the volume of the water in the Huai channel back to something under 6,500 cubic metres per second. After months of planning and consultation with a Soviet hydraulic expert, Bukov, it was decided to halt the Huai at Jen Ho Chih. The river would have to be dammed, a new channel cut, dam and sluice gates, three-quarters of a mile in length built to control the flow of water. Nine of the 15 sluice gate openings would control the water flowing on into the Huai, the other six would divert part of the water into a reservoir, formed by the enclosure of a natural lake. The maximum flow allowed to pass into the Huai from Jen Ho Chih would be 5,500 cubic metres per second, leaving a safety margin of 1,000 cubic metres. All tributaries between Jen Ho Chih and the danger spot at Chen Yang Kwan were blocked by sluice gates as already described, and the Huai would be forced to stick to the channel marked for it by the newly-completed dyke walls. In dry weather, the process could be reversed, the lake outlet gates opened and the Huai reinforced from the lake would be kept at a navigable level. It was a major engineering work entailing the shifting of many millions of tons of earth and stone. About 30,000 tons of special sand had to be transported from Nanking, 135,000 tons of stone from Anhwei, timber from the Yangtse, cement and machinery from Shanghai, all several hundreds of miles distant. Every day 4,000 tons of materials are dumped from boats on the waterfront. In the past much

simpler sluice gates had always been made in England or America. Now giant gates weighing altogether over 1,000 tons were being made in Shanghai. Over 200,000 tons of materials had to be purchased, processed and transported, complicated machinery made; it all had to be made and delivered within two months, and the whole project finished within 100 days from the time it was started. And in charge, a slender serene young woman who seemed to have no doubt at all that it would be completed on time.

"In the past," she said, "such a project was simply inconceivable. Only in the era of the Communist Party and Chairman Mao with an emancipated, united people, is it possible to overcome such difficulties. In Kuomintang China it was not only impossible to carry out such a project but impossible even to draw up plans. The regions through which the Huai passes were dominated by war lords, bureaucratic capitalists, landlords and other local despots. They would wreck the plans of any engineers. This plan would harm this one's property, that one would wreck another's. In the past such an area as Jen Ho Chih was infested with bandits and robbers. We wouldn't even dare set foot on such a place, let alone survey it. If we got as far as driving pegs in the ground, we certainly would get no further. Landlords would complain we were going to take their land, some money would change hands and the matter would be finished.

"But see how it is now. The peasants have confidence in us, the engineering staff not only are able to stay and live here safely, but they rely entirely on the good will and enthusiasm of the people to carry out the work.

"In the past too," she continued, "the Kuomintang entirely followed American technique. They had no conception of revolutionary methods. According to American way of thinking and practice such a project could never be completed in such a short time. We had many controversial discussions with our planners and engineers at first. Those who studied in America and were still influenced by orthodox methods, said that to control ten rivers and eight lakes, we would have to build seven separate dams and gates, and this would take years. Flood control must be a dream for the remote future. Even when this plan was accepted, they estimated that we would need to drive in 12,000 round piles and 10,000 square yards

of sheet piles. Pile-driving alone would take six months, and for sheet piles, we could only use pine imported from America. The problem was hopeless. But we learned from the Soviet experts that clay from the other side of the Huai was just as effective as the pine from the other side of the Pacific. But how were we going to mix concrete when concrete mixers were always imported from America. In Shanghai they produced the first concrete mixers ever made in China with a capacity of 15 cubic feet. They are serving us splendidly. We can thank the American blockade for our made in China concrete mixers.

"Look at the scale on which we do things. The most Chiang Kai-shek ever spent in a year was 7,500 tons of rice on flood prevention, and that was when the Kuomintang was not so badly bankrupt. In this project alone we are investing 50,000 tons and none of it goes in corruption as in the old days." As she talked, her face tinted with sun and fresh air gleamed like a polished chestnut, her eyes shone with faith in the future, the Communist Party and the people. "The workers are full of pride at what they are doing. They say, 'We've moved stone mountains and sand shoals and even factories from Shanghai, all to Jen Ho Chih.' In the past they worked under the clubs and whips of the Kuomintang. They coined the saying that out of flood funds, the chu chief builds a Western style house and has many concubines, the hsien chief builds a tiled house, the pao chief has plenty of meat and fish, and always a full stomach; the peasants and workers slave and starve.\* Now you will see how they work here. We have a mighty army of laborers, organized workers, and peasants, who come willingly from their villages and trades. Cadres live in complete accord with the workers, eat and live with them, share their hardships. Lots of the cadres who were unused to manual work, toiled till after midnight at first so as not to lag behind the peasants. A reasonable wage scale has replaced the old system; the cheerful songs of labor have replaced the sounds of curses and whippings. People understand why the work is being done and throw their whole heart into it. Our headquarters was only set up here six weeks ago, and look what has been done. It could only have been done by people working for themselves.

\* Hsien is a county; chu, district; pao, a unit of one hundred families.

"We are revolutionaries who have had little experience in such tasks. We fought our war in the countryside. We are still primary school pupils as far as factory management, organization of labor, and use of machinery is concerned. We are gradually advancing, and as we advance we learn. Therefore we probably do much irrational and uneconomical work. We know that coming tasks will present us with still more difficulties. But we have faith that we'll overcome them. In the past we had a hard struggle to defeat the Japanese and the Kuomintang. To-day we shall certainly overcome all natural calamities with our own hard labor." This remarkable woman concluded by saying: "We believe you as a foreign friend share this faith and confidence in us, and will make our efforts known to the whole world."

The spectacle at Jen Ho Chih was even more dramatic than anything seen at the other work sites. In a space two thousand yards long by one thousand wide, 50,000 workers were concentrated. A section of a lake had been drained off and millions of tons of earth and stone scooped out to provide a firm foundation for the abutments and concrete foundations for the sluice gates. Work had been in progress only six weeks when I was there, but the reinforced concrete foundations were already finished, and almost the entire earthworks were completed. Hundreds of fishing boats were being unloaded in the new channel which had been cut to replace the present course of the Huai. Teams of women were at work washing sand and road metal in cradles at the water's edge, there were mountains of stone, metal and sand, transported by fishing boats, and now melting away as porters filled their baskets and hurried away to empty them near the concrete mixers, or dump them at the foot of stone masons laying the floor of the approaches to the sluice gates. The superstructure of supports for the gates was already rising up from the foundations, carpenters boxing in moulds for the abutments, concrete mixers whirring, and endless lines of barrow-pushers pausing long enough to get a refill from the mouth of the mixer, hurrying on to dump their load on the maze of steel reinforcements for the sluice gate walls. Every two minutes a fresh batch of concrete gushed from the Chinese-made mixers, standing in lines fed from platforms on which workmen with thick coatings of greenish dust all over them ripped open bags of cement and scooped up shovelfuls of gravel

dumping them into the mixers with ferocious speed and energy. By night the site was as active as by day. Diesel-operated generators lit up the whole area, the electrically driven concrete mixers churned out their harsh song non-stop for 24 hours at a stretch.

They had to shift three million tons of earth and lay twenty thousand cubic yards of concrete, build dykes and channels, and finish everything within a hundred days, no small order even in a state which has the latest mechanical devices at its disposal. But apart from the concrete mixing, everything here was being done by hand. Some tip trucks on light rails were being used to wheel in stone and road metal, but the overwhelming proportion of carrying and all the digging was done with the hands of peasants. By the amount of work done in six weeks there seemed no doubt that the project would be finished on time. The original plan had been to detain 7.2 billion cubic metres of water at Jen Ho Chih, but director Chien had increased this to nine billion, about half the total of water which flowed down the Huai during a flood period.

With a new city of 30,000 workers created out of nothing, one would normally expect something of a boom town atmosphere. But there was nothing of the sort. Workers bought their simple needs of grain, cooking oil, candles, textiles, cigarettes and writing materials at a co-operative store which due to special state assistance sold at ten per cent. less than prices current in the villages. There was no police force at Jen Ho Chih, except the 300 guards appointed by the workers themselves to guard the work against sabotage, but there had been only one case of theft; a worker who tried to steal a pair of trousers. The only other crime reported was an attempt by a gang of three agents to poison the water supply. They were handed over to the nearest state security headquarters for punishment. I attended excellent concerts given on the site at night, with political skits and favorites performed by village artists, scenes from Peking opera complete with elaborate costumes and orchestra, and maintaining a very high standard. Thousands of peasants joined in the literacy classes which were organised at every work site. The discipline and organisation during and outside work hours was an object lesson in how workers can run their affairs, if left to themselves. The wages here were higher than at Suihsian or Shih Man Tan. The average was about seven to

eight pounds of rice daily for ordinary workers, nine to ten for transport workers, and up to 16 pounds for skilled workers. The lowest wage was sufficient to feed one person and support two dependents. Each peasant had been given 100,000 dollars advance to leave with his family when he left home. He was paid in rice but could convert it into money on the spot and transmit some home via post office or banks set up on the job.

The political work was of a very high order. Delegations from villages from which the workers originated come to the site to report on how farm work was going on in the rear, and to report to the wives at home how the project was progressing. While I was there the headman from one village arrived with a letter which read in part: "Old and young, men and women from the whole hsien are engaged in production. Twenty-four mutual aid teams have been organised. The maize fields have been harrowed three times, the cotton fields twice, and the rice seedlings were all planted out within two days. . ." Very encouraging news for peasants from that area. Village women often came down to do laundry work and mending, students came to perform plays—and now, of course, the Peking Film Studio group had arrived to liven up the entertainment scene. A peace committee had organised mass meetings to support the campaign for a peace pact between the five great powers and had collected over 26,000 signatures. The main propaganda line was centred round 12 Chinese characters, which translate as follows: "Recount past sufferings; find root causes; compare present with past; draw conclusions."

One who had drawn correct conclusions was an astonishing 65-year-old peasant elected by his comrades as a model worker. He was introduced to me as Old Huan Chung but his real name was Cheng Hang-shin. He was wrinkled and brown like an old walnut and with enormous ears and a tuft of wisp beard, he looked like a little gnome. There was nothing but honesty and goodness in his cheerful face. When I asked him to tell me something about his young days, his face clouded over, and as he recalled his childhood he began to weep. Tu Tien-ling, another peasant waiting to be interviewed, also began to weep, and my interpreter's eyes filled with tears, probably not so much because of old Huan Chung's story, as that it recalled their own miserable childhood days. "Up to the time I was eight years old," Huan said, "I never had a cover on my body at

night. Just the rags I wore in the day. My father worked for a landlord and tried to save grain from his own food to feed my mother and me. But often there was no work and no food even for him. Once we had nothing to eat for some days and my father went out to borrow a bowl of rice from a rich peasant. My mother took out our last fuel and made a fire. The water was boiling in the cooking pot when he came back with a bowl of rice. He put it in the pot and we stood around waiting for it to cook. A few minutes later the rich peasant came and scooped the rice up out of the water and took it back, laughing at us. My father went outside and hanged himself. My mother, not knowing any better, jumped into the river. That happened when I was eight and a kind neighbour took pity on me and adopted me. I started to work for him from that time on at first looking after geese and later on the pigs and cows. . ." After that Old Huan's story followed the familiar pattern of a landless peasant, working after his adopted father died for the local landlord. Of the landlord, he said: "He was shot last New Year's Day. Tso Yu-ho was a tyrant who drank all the blood of the people. He took the sons of the poor for the Japs and Kuomintang, and shot those who refused. He was a moneylender and his money grew from ten to a hundred, from a hundred to a thousand. He shed your blood to pay back until your body was bled white. The whole hsien was in his pocket until the People's Army came. With them came the blue sky and now Tso Yu-ho is dead and finished. The local peasants' association gave me 1½ acres of land as a start until land reform is carried out."

Old Huan was clear about why he was at the river at his age. "It's very simple," he said. "That old turtle Chiang broke the dyke and the Yellow River flooded our province. We must now build dykes and dams so that the land in both high and low places will yield good grain. All will have plenty to eat and a good life. When the dyke is finished we'll have land reform. We'll have bigger crops and we'll be able to send part of it to our brothers in Korea and to our own volunteers there." He had become a model worker by sheer hard work in a shock brigade, which was rushed to any spot day or night to do emergency work. He was known for unfailing cheerfulness and help to his comrades, was amongst the first up in the mornings, and the last to bed. The happiest memories of his

life, he said, dated back to the previous year when he went to work on the dykes for the first time. "My old companion was worried," he explained. "She said, 'Now you're going away with our son, what shall I eat?' I told her that I would go to the river and earn rice to send home, and she should stay and work with a mutual aid team. 'You're too old to spread manure,' I told her, 'but you can loosen it up and help the others.' Well, she agreed. We went to the river and in the spring we sent home 120 pounds of rice. She used this to buy kaoliang seeds and sowed the whole 1½ acres. When I came here to Jen Ho Chih there was a letter from my old companion written by a neighbour. She said everything was fine, the kaoliang looked well, and we shouldn't worry but just get the work done well." Old Huan's son was 28 years old. His father had challenged him in work contests and was keeping well ahead of him. "I said to him that we've no guns or bullets but we've baskets and carrying poles. Our poles are our rifles, our baskets our bullets, and we'll bury these venomous insects who try and get in through our front gate." I asked why he was nicknamed Old Huan, and a cadre explained that Old Huan Chung was a character from the popular novel "The Three Kingdoms," who never knew that he was old. "And," he added, "by the way Cheng Hang-shin works he doesn't know he's old." Old Huan grinned all over and said, "Well, how could we have a better arrangement than this. We work for ourselves and eat government grain."

I wanted to find out his opinion about working under a woman engineer. "Do you know whose in charge of this project?" I asked. "Of course," he replied, "Chairman Mao." The cadre explained that I meant Chien Chen-ying. "Oh, you mean Minister Chien." He raised his thumb and said, "Hen hao" (very good). "She is very good, especially with us poor people. When she sees us she doesn't look at us in a proud way, but as if we are friends. One day when I was ramming, she came over and praised our team very highly. She must be very clever to organise such a big work. Why shouldn't one work under a woman if she is so clever and good enough for Chairman Mao?"

I spoke to many other peasant workers at Jen Ho Chih. Their stories are all chapters in themselves, fragments from the whole incredible story of China's past suffering and struggle.

her present energy and enthusiasm. Tu Tien-ling told of the local landlord who rounded up over 100 peasants as late as 1948 and shot, tortured and buried them alive because they had co-operated with the People's Army during its temporary occupation of the village. "The landlords wouldn't even let us sit on the benches they used," he said. "They thought it would make them stink if we sat on them. As for food, we hardly ate what their hogs ate. Now, of course, everywhere under the sky is our place." Tu Tien-ling had a perfect understanding from an engineering viewpoint of what was going on at Jen Ho Chih, and took as much pride in the work as if he had designed it himself. "In the past," he said, "if Chiang Kai-shek repaired dykes, he did it hastily with any silt or sand he could lay hands on. They soon crumbled away. Now look how the People's Government works. They bring road metal from up the river, sand from Nanking, stone from Huai Nan, and when they get it here everything is sifted and washed. Nothing but the best goes into it. When we've finished the flood water won't flow freely as in the past. It will be like well-disciplined men. If you want two to go, two will go, if three, then three will go. Chiang couldn't have done a job like this in 20 years."

Expert confirmation that Chiang could not have handled such a job came from the deputy-director of the Jen Ho Chih project, engineer Wu Yu, a big, fleshy man from a landlord family in Chekiang. Chekiang is the province of super-landlords, home of Chiang Kai-shek and the "CC-clique," the notorious brothers Chen Li-fu and Chen Kuo-fu, chief inspirers of Kuomintang policies.

Wu Yu with his big soft frame and stubby beard and moustache looked like a landlord, but he dressed like a worker, complete with straw hat, faded cotton dungarees, sockless feet, and straw sandals. He had come over wholeheartedly to serve the people with his engineering skill. He had worked for 20 years for the Kuomintang as an engineer. For 15 years he worked on the Huai River Commission set up in 1929 by Chiang Kai-shek. In the 20 years of the Huai Commission, according to Wu Yu, they built only three regulators and one sluice gate in the Shao Pa lake, but every year big taxes were collected for flood prevention work. Wu Yu worked for 18 months building the sluice gate in the Shao Pa lake. I asked him how it compared for size with the Jen Ho Chih project.

He made some calculations and estimated it was about one-twelfth the size of Jen Ho Chih which although the most important of the 1951 projects, employed only one per cent. of the total manpower working on Huai River projects. The greatest number of workers Chiang could ever mobilise was 300,000 in 1951-2.

"We had the best engineers in the country on our commission," said engineer Wu, "but they couldn't do anything. They were employed for decoration like vases of flowers on a table. The Huai River Commission existed to provide personal income for Chen Kuo-fu and the engineers had to be there as an excuse for taxes. There was embezzlement on every level, right up to Chen Kuo-fu who got the main rake-off. If a minor official had 70 employees on his pay-roll he boosted it to 100. All the way up you had constantly to pay bribes and give banquets to get anywhere. They were not interested in solving floods. Once rough plans were drawn up, but not even blueprints were made. The main thing people were concerned with was keeping their paper accounts all right. . . . When I was given this job, I thought that if this was under the Kuomintang, I wouldn't touch it even if I was allowed three years. But we've been given 100 days—and we'll do it. I'm proud to be part of it. You know," he said reflectively, stroking his greying stubbly beard, "in the old days I wasn't interest in politics. I used to think there wasn't much wrong with the Kuomintang, but during the latter days of the anti-Japanese war and after VJ day I lost confidence. Mainly because I was an engineer and no use was being made of me. But like most other engineers I hated politics and despised politicians. I thought it was just a dirty business. I had no idea about the People's Army or the Liberation. I was drifting with the waves. I had given up thoughts of my career or happiness, and was content to go to work, earn my salary and eat my meals. But suddenly a new world opened up for me. A chance to work on big projects such as every engineer dreams of. And since I began to work with these people, began to understand what the revolution really means, well, of course, my entire outlook changed. I could never go back on the old road. We'll finish this job and we'll go on to plan and execute bigger and still country. I'm 53 now and I've been an engineer on paper for 28 years, but only since the last few months have I been a real

engineer in practice. It's a funny age to start your real life, but that's about what has happened to me."

One would have liked to stay on the Huai river and see every facet of this great project to secure the livelihood of tens of millions of people; one would have liked to delve deeper into the lives of the peasants and workers doing the job, but the most I could do was visit a few key spots which gave an impression of the work as a whole, speak with a few peasants picked at random whose lives typify those of the masses. How People's China conquered floods is worthy of a complete book to itself, but such a book cannot yet be written. There are much greater projects planned for 1952 and still greater ones in store for 1953 by which time the flood waters will really be harnessed to turn great turbines to bring light and power to the villages and to drive dredges in the river channels, irrigating millions of acres of fertile soil and adding tens of millions of tons to China's grain yield, cotton for millions of yards of textiles. Ships from Hankow, Nanking and Shanghai will be able to sail up the Huai river when dredging work is finished on the lower courses of the Huai and the Grand Canal. Trade will flow freely from the industrial cities throughout the Huai Basin. Doubtless, future projects will even link the Yellow river system with that of the Huai.

Travelling on the river boat back to Peng-pu was a local official carrying with him some antiques unearthed during the excavations at Jen Ho Chih. Some of them were priceless treasures dating back to about 1,200 B.C. There were some of the earliest examples of man-made currency in the form of shells cast in alloy, the first step forward from using actual shells, the currency of the ancients. Alloy shells were used in China before the Chou dynasty which started in 1237 B.C. There were beautiful bronze and jade mirrors of the early Han dynasty, about the beginning of the Christian era, beautifully preserved double-edged swords and bells of the Chou dynasty. One of the most interesting finds was a perfectly preserved clay miniature of a house, a wine-warmer, and porcelain neck rest, which must have been buried, as was the custom, with some wealthy aristocrat at least two thousand years ago. It was interesting to note that the form of landowners' houses has changed little since. There were bronze incense burners from ancient temples, glazed porcelain wine containers, including one that was shaped



like a modern teapot, but which was oxidised blue inside from being buried for thousands of years. They will doubtless gladden the heart of archeologists when the Huai mud is cleaned off them and they are accurately classified by the experts.

My last impression of the Huai was in the early morning before we reached Peng-pu to take the train back to Peking. A great fleet of junks in full sail swept pass loaded to the gun-wales with sand, stone and timber, the muddy water foaming and bubbling under their blunt prows; their crews shouting greetings as they left us their wake. Etched against the sky on the stout dyke wall was the classic silhouette beloved by popular artists and which in hundreds of variations form the theme for the scissor cut-outs which peasants paste up on their windows. Jet black against the powder-blue sky were two oxen with drooping dew-laps each followed by a straw-hatted child. Two peasants followed behind, looking exactly like scale-balances, their carrying poles the balancing arms, their baskets the pans. They were on their way to haul in the sheaves from the summer harvest or perhaps to prepare the fields for the autumn harvest. It was for them, their children and their harvests that the three million on the Huai and the five million throughout China were working in one of the greatest works for peace and livelihood ever undertaken by any nation.



After the war he was transferred to Berlin and for three years served with the "Daily Express" and the London "Times." In 1950 he went to China and his work there is embodied in this book, which ranks in importance and excellence with the books of Snow, Smedley, Epstein and Belden on the history of the Great Chinese Revolution. Burchett's is the first book to tell of the enormous reconstruction and rehabilitation works being carried out in the People's Republic of China, and is an historical work of the greatest importance. The stories told to Burchett by Chinese peasants, miners and students, soldiers, engineers and intellectuals are among the most thrilling recounted in any age.

Wilfred Burchett is at present in Korea as correspondent for the Paris daily "Ce Soir," and readers of *China's Feet Unbound* will look forward eagerly to the book he is now writing about the heroic struggle of the Korean people against the U.S.A. - led imperialist war waged with all the horror and brutality of frenzied capitalism, already employing bacteriological weapons and threatening the use of the atom bomb.

