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far east

Reporter

CHINA'S GENUINE DEMOCRACY

Among the Communes of Mao Tien

Rewi Alley

Mass Democracy in China

Israel Epstein



The people, and the people alone are the motive force in the making of history.
Mao Tse-tung



A Commune

Headquarters

A Discussion
in the Fields



Fertilizer Pile

Fertilizer
to the Fields



INTRODUCTION

Seven hundred million people in China are in the process of demonstrating how genuine democracy - people's democracy - works. A gigantic process of mass participation, mass learning and understanding, mass responsibility is revealing the potentialities of revolutionary mass power.

Any one who has revisited China since Liberation (1949) has a vivid picture of the changes in the material conditions. But what is significant is that the people, the masses themselves, have effected these changes, and they know it.

It was an old farmer in the inland province of Hunan who told Rewi Alley, "When the masses take charge, changes come." And all about him, as Rewi Alley writes in his article about the Communes of Mao Tien, are the truly astounding changes in the conditions under which people in rural China live today.

Equally vivid and meaningful is the change in the attitudes and outlook of China's working people. "The answer to each and every problem is the way people look at it", Alley observes.

Israel Epstein writes of the attitudes, outlook and actions of the people who are today "expressing themselves on real problems in relation to real needs, the real needs of the situation - socialism's healthy growth."

Amongst the Communes of Mao Tien

Rewi Alley

We did not pick quite the nicest part of the year to come to Mao Tien. The December day was cloudy and chilly when we struck north from the old Red Army revolutionary centre of Pingkiang in north-eastern Hunan, to come 140 kilometres over the mountains into Yoyang county, then down to the village of Mao Tien by the banks of the Sa River. To get to the river, we left the main highway, and then crossed over it, after which we ran for seventeen kilometres along one of the newer highways until we came to Mao Tien village. On the highway after leaving the Pingkiang border, we had passed through Yuch Tien, Huang Tien and Kung Tien, the 'tien' being the word for fields. There are so many hills here that each piece of valley land amongst them takes on considerable economic importance.

The Mao Tien village is the headquarters of one of the 'chu' of Yoyang county, having four communes with over forty thousand people in them all in its area. Once a desperately poor region, it has pulled itself up by its own bootstraps to become nationally known. I had heard of it during a meeting in Peking explaining the cultural revolution, it simply being said there that it was in a back hill area in Hunan, which naturally excited my curiosity only more. I asked if I could visit it, and when permission came, I found that it was well away in the hills

from Yoyang city, which lies by the great Tungting Lake.

Yoyang is a place well known through the long history of China. It was not to write of my thoughts on climbing the Yoyang Tower as did the old poets that I came to this county, however, but rather to see what the hill village folk had done in these years under the inspiration of their Hunan fellow countryman, Mao Tse-tung.

When Change Met Us

We had hardly started to come down the highway into their area when change met us. Words in explanation are hardly necessary when one comes to Mao Tien, so clearly does the picture come as one looks around. Hills recently barren and eroded are now tea gardens, fringed with fruit trees with their trunks white-washed. Hill terraces remade with precision and new strength. New housing, new schools, new co-operative marketing agencies.

Outside one of the schools, the students were waiting for a visiting middle school to come in. We had passed their visiting columns on the road, and guessed it would be dusk before they got to Mao Tien. Youngsters from the county city from between eleven and sixteen, they seemed, all very fresh and well scrubbed, unlike the dusty older ones who have

come long distances and who bring much colour with their red flags and different shades of clothing, packs encased in blue plastic sheeting, and a coloured picture of Chairman Mao carried in front of them. The stream of youth was never ending, those on their way north, then those from the north coming down through Yoyang and Pingkiang to Changsha and Shaoshan. Most tried to look as much like the old Red Army as possible, some even copying the uniforms used in the mass opera, *The East Is Red*, down to red puttees, light blue uniforms and a cloth red star sewn on their caps. Even those with sore feet looked determined and pushed on rapidly. Certainly it is a great period of toughening up for them all, as well as being a piece of practical education in the human and physical geography of their land.

But to return to Mao Tien. Its four communes radiate out a distance of thirty li from the centre, the two most distant being in high mountain levels. It seemed best, due to the limited week available, that we concentrate our visits on brigades of the communes nearest the village centre.

Winter Evening Talk

A winter evening these days in a country village is an experience. People eat around dusk, then meetings and militia drill start, and the place is full of activity for the next few hours until bedtime.

The *Chu* Party Secretary, who is also assistant Party Secretary of Yoyang county, is young, short and sturdy, a typical Hunan type. He is a native of Mao Tien, and an obvious leader. Sitting together over a charcoal brazier, he told me a good deal of the past. Raids of the Japanese Imperial Army with their burn, kill and loot all policy, the Kuomintang terror, then stories of guerillas who fought back, struggle after struggle, until we came down to the last years in which the people have gained the confidence they need to remake their land and their lives. How grain production is now double what it was in 1949 and what are the problems of farming a light, lateritic red soil land with hills of white quartz sand above. How if people only had the spirit to try there were many sources of income they had not thought of. In addition to hill and forest products, gold dust in the

streams, small mineral deposits and so on, which could be dug and marketed.

The first morning in Mao Tien we spent in looking at the remoulding of the terraced fields which was under way. Before of all heights and sizes, they are now being made into rectangular terraced lands that will permit some mechanisation in the future. In the old days when a landlord owned many pieces, and demanded 60 per cent of the tenants' crops, no farmer could even dream of carrying through such a plan. Now all together, with members of other brigades in the commune, a thousand folk get out and really make over their land anew. When they have finished this, they have their eye on a spur that runs down between two valleys, with the general idea that they will remove the whole thing. They even talk of removing the village completely to higher levels. In 1959 they built a dam which holds back a reservoir, that irrigates several valleys and for two thirds of the year provides enough electricity for the township. The first part of the winter is usually dry, and reservoir waters then are low. It is then, though, that most of the bigger fish that breed there are caught. They grow to remarkable sizes and are excellent eating.

A Farm House

We halted for a cup of morning tea at one farmer's home. His wife who brought in the tea was simply but beautifully dressed. Yes, they were getting on very well. In grain they had five hundred *jin* (1.1 lb) a year for each of the six members of the home. The eldest boy had been accepted as a soldier, while the younger ones were still at school. They got around a hundred *jin* of sweet potato and about the same amount of rough grains also, and then too other necessities, such as tea and cotton. Once it had been said that these hill districts would not grow cotton. It would not flower, the old folk said. For many years after Liberation, cotton needed for padded clothing and bedding quilts was brought in. Now the communes here not only grow what they need, but also sell a good deal to the state. Tea is also a new product, and then too the fruit, mainly pears and oranges, which are exported as far as Hongkong. Certainly it is a changed

place, with the fields around Mao Tien village bringing in 1,300 *jin* a *mou* a year, as against the one crop economy of the other days, when three hundred *jin* a *mou* was the best to be hoped for. Now better farming, better fertiliser and better seed selection, as well as better spirit, enables three crops to come off the same land each year, with plans being made for even higher totals yet.

I asked the old farmer about family income before change came to Mao Tien. He said that the family then never had more than half a *jin* of grain a day, and that the rest was vegetables or sweet potatoes. 'You should have seen our land here then! All tiny plots. Hilltops like a bald man's head. Then we terraced them, carried up earth to start tea plants growing, orchard trees, cotton, and now even those white quartz sand hills are producing wealth!

When the masses take charge, change comes.'

Early one morning when we went out to watch the masses in action in field work, numbers of the older village people were together with their little red books studying. Later we passed a group of around fifty, formed into a special class to be leaders of study. Then when passing a primary school we went in and found all learning to recite the little red book there. There is no question that this winter in the countryside is going down in history as the one when the people really got a grasp of just exactly what the quotations from Chairman Mao's works mean to them and their work and future. All over the hillsides could be heard songs like *The East Is Red* and the Helmsman song. Everywhere red banners streamed. Some houses, not content with one framed picture of Chairman Mao above the main doors, had two or even three.

A Very Different Picture

A very different picture from that one would have seen in the miserable old days of landlordism. The farmer we had tea with in the morning was a man of fifty-six. He remembered well the Japanese kill and burn expeditions, the tied up conspirators of the Kuomintang, few if any of whom ever came back home again. The pitiful life of the farmers, and the brutality and callousness of the old ruling class. Hunan is Chairman Mao's home pro-

vince. We ought to do better here than anywhere else, if only in gratitude to him for holding to the revolution and finding the way forward for it, he thought.

We walked into the big and well appointed marketing and supply agency in the village, finding brisk business being done. One section is devoted to buying things the people bring in either from their homes or from the hills, articles from wild animal skins, medicinal herbs down to discarded bits and pieces of worn-out household goods.

As we looked around, we saw several groups of Red Guard marchers going single file on paths around the hillsides, come to learn from the communes here, their red flags winding in and out of plantations of young trees, like something of old Red Army days, when in the period of the Great Revolution this area was under the Hunan, Kiangsi and Hupeh Border Region. It was also said here that the locality could not grow many valuable trees, such as spruce, walnuts, and so on. But now planting of such is being done on quite a large scale.

At the entertainment given by the Communes' Concert Party, there was an act which told of a man who had left Mao Tien because of famine, and had gone to live in Hupeh. After many years his son asked him to come home again. He set out with cotton, rice and other goods on his carrying pole, but when after carrying them for two weeks he arrived home he was surprised to find that Mao Tien now had a surplus of all these things, cheaper than in Hupeh.

One easily understands the reason why in the old days the character for wild grasses, *mao tsao*, was used for the *Mao* of Mao Tien. Today the *Mao* character has been changed to be that for Chairman Mao, but when one goes up the valleys and sees the wild grasses waving on parts of hillsides not yet planted with tea bushes, spruce, tung or orchard trees, one realises how pervading the wild grasses must have seemed to the farmers of older days.

There are around 40,000 *mou* of paddy fields in the four communes of Mao Tien. To this amount has been added the fifteen thousand *mou* of terraced fields snatched from the hillsides for wheat, vegetables, cotton, or sweet potatoes, and then another fifteen thousand *mou* for

tea plants and orchard trees, and one begins to get an overall picture of the new economy.

Spruce plantations border and crown the terraced hillsides, and tung-oil trees are planted by borders and in odd corners. Other hillsides have been converted to orchards. Climbing up a hill ridge now covered with tea bushes in neat rows, we could look down on the paddy fields, now green with winter wheat, or vegetables, and then up to hill ridges at the rear where spruce plantations were growing well.

The Study Room

A morning amongst the brigades of the Nan Chung commune showed us from where the mainstream of activity comes. Each and every brigade has its Mao Tse-tung study room, bright with red posters, charts, essays and pictures. Each has its study leaders and its study models like, for instance, Tso Teng-yang, who is a woman of thirty-eight with five children. Once thought rather stupid, she has through her study really taken hold of life again. Though her oldest child is but eleven, she has arranged her home tasks so that she can take part in the work of the brigade, actually gaining over 2,000 work points in the last year. Her husband, who works full time in the fields, and man like, does not feel that things in the house are his concern, gains no more than 3,500 work points a year.

Then in one of the brigades I met Kuo Shih-chin and his wife, now in their late fifties. They are prime foresters and pig-raising experts, giving their all for the commune. Their story was met by many others, folk who gave up privately held cattle and pigs to the commune, or who gave the best room in their houses for a study room, putting out their strength without limit as the desire to do more for others came to them. Everyone is trying to find new ways of helping others, there being a wealth of examples.

It always seems to be that it is the poorest place that becomes the most outstanding the quickest. Mao Tien is a good example, and even in a poor place like it was, it is the once poorest unit which does best. The sour soil of the Jan Fang brigade was the poorest in Mao Tien. 183 families, 806 people in all, till 763 *mou* of paddy and 120 *mou* of dry land there.

They have eleven Party members, and 30 Young Communist League ones. 635 of them take part in the work of the brigade, and 550 are enrolled in classes for the study of Chairman Mao's works. 180 families have Chairman Mao's picture.

There are three hundred copies of Chairman Mao's works in the brigade, and 900 copies of the three short essays. There are eight meeting rooms, and 165 study activists. Methods of working the soil and in fertilising have brought good results, so that the brigade has been able to get as much as 1,280 *jin* of grain a *mou*, as against the three hundred of poorer days. Members came off relief grain for the first time in 1965, and by then were also sufficient in cotton. Everyone now has all the cotton for padded clothing needed. As a matter of fact, the padded clothing of the Mao Tien farmers must be considerably above the average for even city folk. Youngsters must feel like throwing some of it off on a warm winter's day, as the weather became after a day or two following the cold snap from the north which had welcomed us here. Many too would prefer the good bare feet to the rubber sports shoes on fine days. But now they feel they must look their best, and for the moment that means clothes, the new status symbol.

One warm afternoon, however, we went up one of the side valleys to where remoulding of terraces was being done. There was a row of rubber sports shoes neatly arranged along a path beside, and the younger workers were stepping lightly and freely without them. A fifteen-year-old actually seemed to be flying, his quick feet hardly seeming to touch the ground as he returned with empty baskets and his carrying pole to get more. In the penetrating cold of a wet Hunan day in winter, however, or on a winter's frosty morning, socks and water-tight shoes are real comfort, which everyone now has.

In the headquarters of the Nan Chung commune to which these twelve other brigades as well as a forest farm belong, we found a staff of fourteen, the duties of each being to act as the connecting link between the brigades, collect their statistics, arrange for mutual help, and so on. One cadre for each brigade. Brigade

cadres work along with other members. The commune ones stick to their travel and office work, and do practical work only in rush seasons. Three of them are girls, and are local middle-school graduates.

Old and New

Discarded around houses in Mao Tien one may see the old stone cut tubs and stone fixtures for husking rice. A brigade tractor hitched up to a small rice mill now does the task swiftly and efficiently. A new diesel-powered rice mill is now being put up in Mao Tien village, able to handle much more. Mechanisation will not halt now. People are used to electric lighting already. The truck, the tractor, the rice mill, and the mechanised oil press come to even so remote a spot as the hill village of Mao Tien, where once there was so little to mitigate the sheer bitterness of a deadeningly monotonous fight against tyrants, drought, flood, and pestilence.

The interchange of youth between town and country, the cinema and radio—all bring in new ideas. Reinforced concrete bridges make highways more permanent. Mao Tien youth hikes six days and gets to Shaoshan to see Chairman Mao's old home. There he meets other young folk from all over China. Into Mao Tien, now made famous because of its successes, hike students from Changsha and Yoyang, staying a few days, usually being able to give concert performances in the evenings. I met a group of them in a hillside village. They were reading chapters of the new novel, *The Song of Ouyang Hai*, to the older villagers around their homes. The present stage is certainly bringing a great merging of town and country in a new way.

The Hsiang Ssu Commune

It is not so far to the Hsiang Ssu commune from Mao Tien. Only nine kilometres. But the way lies over a range of mountains, through which the commune members, using a ton and a half of explosive most of which they made themselves, blasted a road a couple of winters ago. It not only connects the commune with Mao Tien, but also with another highway that leads into Tung Cheng county of Hupeh province over its border.

From the range summit where one crosses over, a wonderful view of each valley can be obtained.

The Hsiang Ssu commune has new-built offices, a meeting hall, and another fine view—across the valley to the bold out-lines of Hsiang Ssu mountain beyond, the slopes of which are a forestry farm. We called on several of the eleven brigades which till the 11,500 *mou* of valley land, and 1,600 *mou* of hillsides, besides carrying out small mining ventures, planting hills with spruce and tea bushes. Hard to get at, this commune area was once desperately poor. Landlords and rich peasants did not live nearly so well as do the commune members of today. Eighty per cent of the people however were poor peasants who had a truly miserable livelihood, for not much more than 200 *jin* a *mou* was ever harvested. They had cut all the timber on the hills to burn charcoal, and for them each year was poorer than the last.

With the new day, there came a sharp turn for the better. With their three-crop economy, they now average around 900 *jin* of grain a *mou*. They have dug 850 reservoirs, big and small. One of these is quite a large-scale one, the others mainly ponds. Ten thousand *mou* of their paddy fields can now be irrigated automatically. We walked through a good spruce forest which covered one hill, a few years ago devoid of any vegetation at all. Then up others where tea bushes were growing well. We ate apples, pears and oranges which had been grown here, and saw a whole hillside covered with chestnuts, which were coming along well. Before no walnuts were grown here. Now those planted eight years ago are already starting to bear. It is something for a people to get together as they have done here and plant eight million trees of economic value and then see that they grow.

As in the terraced valley lands around Mao Tien, the paddy field land is being remoulded this winter. As some of the hills are steeper, terrace walls on upper levels are higher, many stone-faced, and a good ten feet high. Down in the valley bottom, there is another problem which has had to be met. Around 2,000 *mou* of the paddy fields became muddy to such a depth that they were not easily

workable. Indeed, one farm lad was drowned in such. The problem has been solved by taking off the necessary depth of earth in winter, then making a base of stone and sand below, finally just putting the whole field back on a solid foundation. Co-operation and the right spirit has enabled this to be done in these past few years. Opposite the commune offices, a hill was being levelled to make a place for a new grain store. 'No, while we have hills,' they said, 'we shall not give an inch of ground that can grow crops to be used for building. Moreover, we plan to move back on to hill levels old homes which still stand on such land.'

Study and Practice

Too much water, too little water—even amongst these hills there is this problem. Drainage ditches must take off water that might drown rice seedlings. Five diesel-engine-operated pumps come into operation if paddy field water is not enough.

Everywhere the strong, clear ideas of Mao Tse-tung are being taken down to mass level in no uncertain way. At one home, a boy of six recited the whole of the essay on 'Serving the People'. Hands in pockets, he seemed to do it effortlessly. Then when we asked how he put it to practice, he pulled out some castor-oil plant beans from his pocket and said, 'I collected these—and I swept the kitchen for the old woman who lives near us—and I minded the babies—and—and—I collected castor-oil beans.' Then with a radiant smile he scampered off.

As in the brigades of Nan Chung commune, each of these in Hsiang Ssu has stories of folk who have given their all to others. But all well realise that it will be through their collective work that they can give most. Their studies teach them that. All houses down the valley road have big red wall murals with gold lettering on them of quotations from Chairman Mao's works. Everyone knows the current songs of the day. The movement is like a strong wind blowing through an old countryside, bringing understanding and the urge for change, along with the determination not to bend before imperialism in any shape or form.

On the way back to Mao Tien, we stopped for a while at a part-work, part-study agricultural middle school, newly

built on the side of a hill, where there is ample space around for practical work in planting many kinds of trees, and making many new terraces. Most of the students were off on a march to the Ching kangshan mountains, an old revolutionary area, a gathering point for most of the middle school students of Central China this winter, after they have first visited Shaoshan. Those who remained were doing practical work helping to bring in materials for school building construction. After graduation, students will go straight into commune brigades, able at once to take part in practical tasks, and to carry what they have learnt on to others. First of all, they learn the lesson, 'What do we live for?' Getting that settled in their minds, they go ahead.

The Last Evening

All good things come to an end. The five days around Mao Tien too soon came to a close. On one of the last evenings we again sat over a brazier of charcoal, and the district secretary summed up some of the things that had been accomplished. How even in 1966, a rich harvest year, there had been many difficulties to overcome. A late snow in the spring which froze many shoots. A deluge in June that flooded and brought much white quartz sand down from the hills. Then a four months' drought at the end of the year, which would have been serious but for the 380 wells which had been sunk, the 44 reservoirs, and 6,500 pools dug.

We talked of people's livelihood, and of how the old tung-oil lamp with its dim light had now been replaced by electric lights in the four communes. How everyone had mosquito nets and bedding quilts, enamel basins, good porcelain and what not, when before such things were for landlords only. Very touching were the stories of old men who refused to be laid off, but who kept on working and getting good results. One of 84 who kept up with the youngsters on earth shifting. A strong old one with two hefty sons, who always demanded the heaviest work. He was 72 when he first became a labour hero. Is 76 now and still working. Then, too, of things people are doing for each other. Taking in old folk who have no dependents, giving blood to the sick who need it in hospital. The old man Hsueh

Heng-lin who put his arms around the necks of two cows the other members wanted to slaughter, saying 'I will take these and look after them. They will breed and we must have more animal power in the days to come.' He is seventy-two now, and for the past eight years he has put his whole energy into looking after these cows and the calves they have had, so that everyone is grateful to him. With the new work that has come to be done, the cattle have been essential, so that he feels he has given much strength to his fellows. The idea of not stopping doing things while any health remains is firmly embedded here.

Local stories of instances are legion. There are five health clinics in the Mao Tien *Chu*, with a staff of 84. Most of the old sicknesses that were prevalent have now been pretty well cleared out.

We talked for a long time into the evening about the new highways that have been made, the mountain sides that have turned green again, the way the whole *chu* goes to school and studies the road forward, the production and use of fertiliser, and of how all the old illusory images in peoples' homes and in wayside shrines, ancestral temples, and so on have been discarded, and the weight of superstition removed from the minds of at least the whole new generation.

On our last day we paid a visit to the third of the four Mao Tien communes. It takes 'Mao Tien' for its name, and is one of eleven brigades. Its conditions are much the same as those of the two already described, being notable in addition, however, for its handicraft industry. In its metal working shops, it turns out 185 kinds of articles for daily use, mainly farm tools and kitchen utensils. It also produces a rubber-tyred handcart with a sturdy hardwood frame, then a range of bamboo articles in everyday use on the farm and in the home.

The big problem here is the control of the Sa River, which when it floods covers much of the valley land. This river has been dyked, but there are many problems concerning it still to be met. More forestry in the hills, a new course for the river to be dug so as to straighten it out, a control dam in the hills, sand dredging and so on are all being worked on. We saw a new road being made into

the mountains, and men carrying up big reinforced concrete pipes to a small power and pumping project in the hills. Seven men to each pipe of seven hundred *jin*. Few people around the world have realised the incredible effort that has gone into the remaking of the Chinese countryside in these years since Liberation.

Looking Ahead

There is much to be done yet in Mao Tien, many problems to be solved. The old methods of house heating in winter, for instance, make for too much smoke in the home, which is not good for old people's eyes. New sources of fuel will eventually have to be found. Still more afforestation has to be done on upper hill levels in particular. The further completion of Hunan's great resources for hydroelectric power, and the extension of the power grid into the hill countries, will after other major problems have been settled in the course of not too long a time solve the problem of smoke in the homes, and also afforestation. At present there is a great contradiction still remaining between the gatherers of fuel and the planters of trees, which the addition of some of the more common electric heating appliances in the home will eventually erase. More mechanisation too will come to the village and to the land. There is little doubt, however, that all of these problems will be solved and that the people who have done so much already will together go on to do things on a still grander scale.

The answer to each and every problem is the way the people look at it.

For the rest, to be enjoyed even if not spoken much of, there were all the simple things of Mao Tien—the sight of children competing with whipping tops, the six workers in the oil press driving wedges in the hallowed old way, yet aware that mechanisation of their task was just around the corner. The women folk with laughing fat babies. The feet of youth stepping lightly, ready to tackle any new long march into the future with the same disregard for self as their fathers had.

MASS DEMOCRACY IN CHINA The Process of The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution By Israel Epstein

Real Democracy Dealing With Real Concerns

China's mass democracy is real democracy. It is a class struggle conducted by the mass of the people expressing themselves on real problems in relation to their real needs, the real needs of the situation - socialism's healthy growth. There are many aspects of this process.

Everywhere in Peking - in factories, schools and offices - there is discussion, in small and big meetings, through big-character posters, through debate on big national issues, on issues within each organization and within each department of the organization. They discuss what their work is for, how to do the work, what is the relation of the particular work to the whole socialist and communist objective. There is criticism of the leaders who have taken the wrong direction and criticism of wrong ways of work. There is control of new leaders, of leaders who are taking a good direction. Everyone participates, everybody within each organization.

Big-Character Posters

On the streets there is the same process on a much wider scale. With the big-character posters the whole street is in a sense like a newspaper. People "read the streets". Since the beginning of the cultural revolution there have been many millions of these big-character posters put up by groups or by individuals. Some are small, some are large, some are the size of a sheet of writing paper; some are huge slogans that take up the whole front of a building; some are like long pamphlets. All are surrounded by knots of people, reading and discussing. And there are parades, meetings, sound trucks on the streets.

People's Newspapers

Another aspect is the printed word. There are great numbers of small newspapers coming out; I don't know how many there are in Peking but among the ones I bought these past weeks there were twenty different titles. There are newspapers put out by groups of revolutionary factory workers; three are published by students in different middle schools; some are put out by the revolutionary groups in various large organizations such as the Ministry of Health and related organizations; workers in the State Scientific Committee and workers of the financial and commercial system issue newspapers; universities have their own very lively papers, and different groups within the universities have theirs. A very sharp cartoon paper is put out jointly by revolutionary groups. In the organization in which I myself work, the Foreign Language Press, we have had two newspapers. And, of course, countless mimeographed papers and broadsheets have been handed out.

The material facilities for these publications and activities are supplied free of charge - paper, paste, ink and brushes for the posters, printing presses for the revolutionary papers, halls for meetings, microphones and public address systems. There is every facility for the expression of opinion. I am convinced that nothing like this has ever before been seen.

Discussion and Contention

Out of the discussion and contention comes the truth and the direction for advance. Arguments are often hot. Suppression of differences of opinion among the revolutionary people is specifically forbidden. Indeed, the essence of the process is that differences of opinion among the working people must be expressed. If these differences are not expressed you cannot arrive at the truth. There is only one truth objectively but it cannot be grasped unless its different aspects are fully brought out. These may at first be in the form of hot, even angry differences in debate. But if the goal is the same, then ultimately the arguments sort themselves out into agreement. If

the goals differ, this too is brought out in debates, and wrong ideas can be criticised or condemned as anti-socialist.

The common element in all these different expressions of democracy is: the people are discussing how to make socialism work better, how to insure the advance to communism, how to bring this down to the concrete terms of every field of work.

Freedom of Expression: China's Kind

The freedom of expression in China today is more extensive and entirely different from the so-called "freedom of the press" in capitalist countries. For instance, in the United States you need several million dollars (or in Britain, an equivalent amount in pounds) to start a big newspaper to influence public opinion. In China, the thing you cannot do is to start a paper simply because you are in possession of funds privately or as a group. If a newspaper were to appear advocating the return to capitalism or in the interest of a privileged group it would be very quickly closed down; if the government was not quick enough the people themselves would close it down.

In recent months, in fact, when some of the papers proved to be under the control of a few persons in authority in the Party taking the capitalist road, that is, in the control of those who were trying to push China towards revisionism and finally bourgeois restoration, these papers were taken over by the revolutionary people, including revolutionaries on their own staffs.

In short, the working people in China do have the kind of freedom that working people in capitalist countries do not have. And exploiters, or would-be exploiters do not have the freedom that exploiters in capitalist countries do have.

Another aspect of China's mass democracy is the freedom of revolutionary contact. People go about from organization to organization, from city to city, exchanging experience as to how to advance their common objectives; and again, material facilities such as fares and stop-overs are provided.

All the constitutions of socialist countries, so far as I know, have a clause of one kind or another, stemming from Marx and Lenin, that the working people have freedom of speech, of the press, of demonstration, of meetings, of the streets. What we are seeing in China today is the fullest and most direct application of this principle.

Mass Democracy Not Bourgeois Democracy

As we have seen, one of the differences between China's mass democracy and bourgeois democracy is that money doesn't count. Another difference is that China's democracy is genuine, not fake. It is true that all kinds of people can and do express themselves in various ways under bourgeois democracy; but so far as the intent and practical functioning of that system are concerned, they boil down to the ability to choose which representative of the bourgeoisie the people are going to be bamboozled into handing the government to; this kind of democracy serves to prevent the people from throwing their exploiters off their backs, serves to prevent the people from assuming genuine rule of their country.

To illustrate the difference between these two kinds of democracy - take the kind of demonstrations in China, and the kind of criticism on various levels. In a capitalist country, under bourgeois democracy, workers who tried to call for the ousting of their boss would be thrown out of their jobs or the police would be called in. If workers tried to carry the action to the streets on a wider scale the authorities would read the riot act, or get out the mounted police and finally the armed forces. If workers wrote the kind of things Chinese workers are writing they would be brought up for advocating the overthrow of this or that by force and violence or incitement to violence or some such charge. In China, where it is not incitement to violence but to revolution - to the removal of all obstacles in the way of revolution - all the forces of the state are mobilized to protect the workers' right to this, not to prevent them from exercising this right.

Mass Democracy: The Dictatorship of the Proletariat

To put the whole thing into political, theoretical terms, what exists in capitalist countries is so-called democracy under the dictatorship of the capitalist class, a democratic cloak over its dictatorship. By contrast, what exists in China is democracy under the dictatorship of the proletariat, which itself is an instrument of the revolution. Mass democracy is an instrument of the revolution and the State is also an instrument of the revolution. Mass democracy is there to see that the State remains and continues to be an instrument of the revolution.

What makes such a mass democracy possible? Here we return again to the dictatorship of the proletariat. In China the working people decades ago took over the machinery of the State. They took over the ownership of the means of production. The army is their army. The means of repression are in their hands, to repress their enemies. And the means of building a new life are also in their hands. The question is how best to build the new, how to prevent anybody from stopping the building of the new, and how to prevent old concepts and people who want to restore the old order from getting in the way or reversing the direction.

What goes on in China now is the consolidation of this dictatorship of the proletariat. The consolidation is proceeding not simply by solidifying something but, by the mass line, spreading it out: making it the active business of millions of people - hundreds of millions - the vast and overwhelming majority.

The Masses: Makers of History

In Marxist-Leninist theory, developed to its highest point by Mao Tse-tung, the idea that the masses are the makers of history - not just leaders, not even the leaders of the masses, but the masses themselves - is a basic idea. If the masses can make history consciously, if everybody knows which way they must go and what is the way to go, then the power of this system is multiplied many times and its potentialities can really be realized.

Great and Basic knowledge Resides in the Masses

The building of a socialist system is something new. Since the October Revolution in the Soviet Union the time is only 50 years, which is a very short time historically. And since the Chinese Revolution only 18 years have passed. The problem is how to consolidate this new system. Here we come to another point of theory: that is, not only are the masses the makers of history, but great and basic knowledge resides in the masses.

The masses are people who work, who engage in the struggle with nature - in material production; and they are the people who engage in social struggle, the class struggle. To concentrate the knowledge of these processes in order to move forward means summarizing the knowledge that exists among the masses in fragments, among different groups and different individuals. This knowledge cannot be summarized unless people express it, unless people express themselves. And a full summary cannot be made unless people also make summaries for themselves, express not only their experience but also their ideas and conclusions. This is a very important aspect of all those millions of posters and trillions of words and hundreds of small newspapers.

They rake over what has gone before to see what was right and what was wrong. They give their ideas on the way to move forward, their ideas of how things can be done better. For example, this system may be bureaucratic, that system may still be run very much in the old way; even though there is a new society people may still work in the old way or in some wrong way. Habit is strong, often with deep roots in the past. Young people particularly have very sharp ideas of how things should be under socialism and communism; older people have a great deal of experience but perhaps not so much freedom from habit, not so much boldness. People with different functions in society, people in positions of leadership, people in the position of working under leadership, each have their own views and their own estimation of different aspects of the truth, of the way things are and the way they should be. In this mass democracy all these views are brought together, sifted, compared.

The Standard: Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tse-tung's Thought

At the same time there is a standard, the standard of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tse-tung's Thought. The standard is what helps socialist society to move forward and to overcome the things that are holding it back. With this kind of activity, with this kind of full expression, the masses of the people know what they are doing; and persons entrusted with leadership have more opportunity to serve the whole mass of the people by summarizing and organizing on the basis of this knowledge. If those in authority fail to do so, if they fail to have this revolutionary urge and the necessary wisdom the people can criticise them and replace them.

All this tremendous debate, all this tremendous contention is for the purpose of forming a new community of views, a new unity for the further socialization of China.

Proletarian democracy, now developed to a new height in China, is real socialist democracy. It is the democracy of the many to make sure that no selfish few can take away from the people what they have created and the hope they have for the future.

China's mass democracy is the preparation of the people for effective rebellion against anything - at any time, at any rung, at any step, at any level of the state structure or the economic structure - that becomes an obstruction to socialism and communism.

CONCLUSION

China's process of democracy and the results of this process stand in vivid contrast to the sorry picture of the United States' effort to foist bourgeois democracy on the people of South Viet Nam.

Surely, this contrast is an international fact - with a sharp lesson for all the peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America now in the process of building their modern societies.

"Mass democracy is real democracy".

Notes Re the Authors

Rewi Alley, a New Zealander, has for forty years been a resident of China. He helped found and was Technical Advisor for the world-renowned Chinese Industrial Cooperative Movement. He is the author of numerous books and articles on China.

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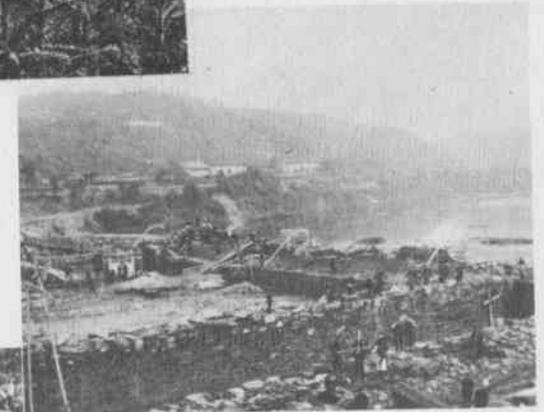
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A Lateral to the River



Building the Lateral



The Finished Lateral