

*Chen Po-ta*

NOTES ON MAO TSE-TUNG'S  
"REPORT ON AN  
INVESTIGATION OF  
THE PEASANT MOVEMENT  
IN HUNAN"



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It was as the representative of the Chinese proletariat that Mao Tse-tung in this report presented a complete solution to this central problem of the revolution (which was also the most pressing problem of the day). His report not only definitely solved this problem, dispelling the confusion in the minds of many people and democ-

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IN the "Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan", the facts are so vividly presented and the author's feelings are so profoundly expressed that every sentence, every word is permeated with boundless love for the revolution and the working people, and with irreconcilable hatred for the counter-revolution and the cannibalistic exploiters.

The contradictions between the broad masses of the Chinese people and foreign imperialists and between the peasantry and the feudal forces constituted the basic content of modern China's semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. Mao Tse-tung wrote this report precisely at the moment when the revolutionary movement had placed the peasant problem on the agenda of the revolution as the most urgent and prominent question of the day. As the Resolution of the Seventh Enlarged Session of the Communist International stated:

The increasingly urgent agrarian problem has become the central problem in the present situation. The class that can get a firm grasp of this problem and offer a complete solution to it will be the leader of the revolution.

It was as the representative of the Chinese proletariat that Mao Tse-tung in this report presented a complete solution to this central problem of the revolution (which was also the most pressing problem of the day). His report not only definitely solved this problem, dispelling the confusion in the minds of many people and demon-

strating that the proletariat is the true leader of the Chinese revolution, but it also raised fundamental questions regarding the revolution in the period of the First Revolutionary Civil War (1924-27). Moreover, it drew conclusions from the experience gained in the mass struggles to guide the Party's Bolshevik course of action at the time.

## I TWO METHODOLOGIES

Learn from the masses, summarize the experience of their struggles and their views and then lead them — this is the revolutionary methodology Mao Tse-tung has always employed. This report by Mao Tse-tung is one of the most outstanding examples of the application of this methodology. Its successful application requires that one should regard the sufferings and joys of the masses as one's own, and have full confidence in the might of the masses, in their wisdom and their future. Those who master this revolutionary methodology are not alarmed by the spontaneous revolutionary actions and creative energy of the masses; nor do they "trail behind them, gesticulating and criticizing", but courageously and resolutely welcome them, learn from them and "march at their head and lead them" so as to enable them to get results and achieve victory. Such, then, is the Bolshevik revolutionary methodology, the revolutionary methodology of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin.

Let us recall Marx's attitude towards the Paris Commune in 1871 and Lenin's attitude towards the armed working class of Russia in 1905. Instead of censuring

the action of the masses in "storming heaven" as "childish" and condemning them for "going too far", these great architects of the proletarian revolution wholeheartedly applauded them. Instead of remaining aloof and bragging about their own learning, they joined the fighting masses, analysed and summarized the latter's experience to provide a guide to victory in their subsequent struggles. Mao Tse-tung took precisely the same attitude as can be seen in his praise of the peasant revolution in Hunan:

This is a marvellous feat never before achieved, not just in forty, but in thousands of years. It's fine. It is not "terrible" at all. It is anything but "terrible". "It's terrible!" is obviously a theory for combating the rise of the peasants in the interests of the landlords; it is obviously a theory of the landlord class for preserving the old order of feudalism and obstructing the establishment of the new order of democracy, it is obviously a counter-revolutionary theory. No revolutionary comrade should echo this nonsense. If your revolutionary viewpoint is firmly established and if you have been to the villages and looked around, you will undoubtedly feel thrilled as never before. Countless thousands of the enslaved — the peasants — are striking down the enemies who battered on their flesh. What the peasants are doing is absolutely right; what they are doing is fine! "It's fine!" is the theory of the peasants and of all other revolutionaries. . . .

The most violent revolts and the most serious disorders have invariably occurred in places where the local tyrants, evil gentry and lawless landlords perpetrated the worst outrages. The peasants are clear-sighted.

Who is bad and who is not, who is the worst and who is not quite so vicious, who deserves severe punishment and who deserves to be let off lightly—the peasants keep clear accounts, and very seldom has the punishment exceeded the crime.

Mao Tse-tung defends the masses unreservedly, but never blindly. His defence, which is perfectly consistent with the realities and truth of historical development, is certainly needed to demolish various counter-revolutionary arguments. If we want a revolution at all, we must heighten the fighting will of the masses and destroy the arrogance of the enemy. There can be no great or completely successful revolution without violent mass upheavals. And Mao Tse-tung was precisely the kind of proletarian revolutionary who came out in praise of violent mass upheavals. However, if anyone thinks mass upheavals too violent, I venture to say: Don't you want to know about revolution? This is exactly what a real revolution is like. This is the kind of revolution of which we sing. Mao Tse-tung, in this report, gave an excellent scientific definition of revolution:

... a revolution is not a dinner party, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery; it cannot be so refined, so leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous. A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another. A rural revolution is a revolution by which the peasantry overthrows the power of the feudal landlord class. Without using the greatest force, the peasants cannot possibly overthrow the deep-rooted authority of the landlords which has lasted for thousands of years. The

rural areas need a mighty revolutionary upsurge, for it alone can rouse the people in their millions to become a powerful force.

Is it not possible that the masses may go "too far", that they may exceed "the proper limits in righting a wrong". Answering this Mao Tse-tung said:

All the actions mentioned here which have been labelled as "going too far" flow from the power of the peasants, which has been called forth by the mighty revolutionary upsurge in the countryside. It was highly necessary for such things to be done in the second period of the peasant movement, the period of revolutionary action. . . . To put it bluntly, it is necessary to create terror for a while in every rural area, or otherwise it would be impossible to suppress the activities of the counter-revolutionaries in the countryside or overthrow the authority of the gentry.

And he continued:

Proper limits have to be exceeded in order to right a wrong, or else the wrong cannot be righted.

This is an important objective law of revolution pointed out by Mao Tse-tung on the basis of the experience gained in the mass struggles of the 1927 revolution. This is the objective dialectic of the revolutionary struggles of the masses. A revolution does not aim at reforming the old system; it aims to use the might of the masses to destroy the old system. And, once the masses rise, they will give vent to their pent-up anger and hatred for what has been oppressing them for generations, "they will smash all the trammels that now bind them and rush forward along the road to liberation". The reformists may say that the

masses are "exceeding the proper limits in righting a wrong". But the "proper limits" that the revolutionary masses go beyond are only a line drawn by the reformists for the purpose of preserving the old system.

Of course, this does not mean that the masses never make any mistakes in their struggles. But a revolutionary should never try to fetter the masses beforehand and prevent them from crossing the line drawn by the reformists to preserve the old system, just because of the fact that the masses may sometimes make mistakes in their struggle. On the contrary, the masses must be permitted to break through that line. It should be understood that though the masses may make mistakes they should be allowed to learn in struggles, learn how to correct these mistakes.

It is a law of physics that a pendulum swings well beyond its resting point before it finally comes to a stop. A similar law applies to the revolutionary activities of the masses. In his "*Left-Wing*" *Communism, an Infantile Disorder*, Lenin spoke about the defence of the French Revolution by Plekhanov, who wrote:

In history, the reign of terror of the French Revolution has had no precedent. The reign of terror of the French Revolution lifted on to the historical stage the true knights of steel who descended on France like "thunder and lightning", ruthlessly destroying all the vestiges of the "old system". . . . The might of the reign of terror is the might of the people's revolutionary movement. The salient feature of the tactics of those who advocate a reign of terror is that it is aimed at sustaining and developing under all circumstances the revolutionary spontaneity of the masses. Instead of

being the result of "disappointment" with the might of the mass movement, such reign of terror is the result of unwavering confidence in this might.<sup>1</sup>

This is what Plekhanov wrote when he was still a Marxist and a revolutionary. As a great proletarian revolutionary, Mao Tse-tung in his characteristic way encourages and expresses confidence in the creative energy of the masses who are capable of changing the world; he maintains that by relying on such mass creative energy and by summarizing the experiences of the revolutionary masses, the proletarian revolutionary party can lead the masses forward along a path that conforms with the laws of history.

In the revolutionary period of 1924-27 there was another methodology — the Menshevik methodology advocated by Chen Tu-hsiu<sup>2</sup> which was opposed to the Bolshevik revolutionary methodology as expounded by Mao Tse-tung. Chen Tu-hsiu and his followers belonged to the type of people whom Mao Tse-tung often described

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<sup>1</sup> Plekhanov's article mentioned by Lenin is "White Terror", published in *Iskra*, No. 48, 1903, and included in *Plekhanov's Works*, Vol. XII, Russian edition. The present English translation of this quotation has been made from Lenin's "*Left-Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder*", Russian edition, published by the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute, Moscow, in 1936.

<sup>2</sup> In the last period of the revolution of 1924-27, the Right opportunism in the Communist Party of China as represented by Chen Tu-hsiu developed into capitulationism. While co-operating with the Kuomintang, the Right opportunists relinquished the Party's leadership among the peasant masses, the urban petty bourgeoisie and the middle bourgeoisie and especially among the armed forces, thus causing the defeat of the revolution in the First Revolutionary Civil War. An emergency session of the Central Committee in August 1927 adopted a resolution removing Chen Tu-hsiu from the post of general secretary of the Party. In November 1929, he was expelled from the Party for taking a counter-revolutionary stand with the Trotskyites.

as "bookish". These people used to mouth "revolutionary" phraseology, particularly before the masses had been fully aroused. They even portrayed themselves as unique "brave revolutionaries" or "revolutionary heroes". They drew up their "revolutionary" plans and blueprints in the quiet of their studies and loudly ordered the masses to toe their line. But, if the mass struggle took on a somewhat different aspect, that is, if the masses departed from these plans and blueprints, and especially if the masses were fully aroused and of their own accord began to "smash all the trammels that now bind them", then these "bookish" individuals would quickly take fright and cry: "Now, you've gone and done it! Wait a minute! Here's another wonderful plan. Let us first negotiate with the enemy. You take a rest for a bit!" Then they would get angry and complain: "Pshaw! You people are acting foolishly. You are completely ignorant, so why don't you obey our orders?" Finally, they would shake their heads, sigh and curse: "The world is topsy-turvy. This is absolute lawlessness. There will surely be trouble soon. There's no way out! No way out! Still, it doesn't bother us if you land yourselves in a mess!" And, if the masses suffered defeat, these "bookish" individuals would feel more than ever justified and become still more arrogant: "It serves you right! We anticipated it long ago! But you wouldn't follow our advice. Now you have no one but yourselves to blame for suffering the consequences!"

In his "Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War", Mao Tse-tung wrote:

A revolutionary war is a mass undertaking; it is often not a matter of first learning and then doing,

but of doing and then learning, for doing is itself learning.<sup>1</sup>

This, of course, is true not only of revolutionary wars, but of all other revolutionary activities of the masses. This truth, however, is repulsive to these "bookish" people. They said: "How can there be such a thing in the world? Revolution can only come out of books. How can books come out of revolution?" These people dreaded both counter-revolutionary terror and revolutionary terror, and they dreaded the latter much more than they did the former. Because of this, they would not support the spontaneous revolutionary actions of the masses, nor did they want to learn from the revolutionary masses. And eventually they had to quit the revolutionary ranks.

Chen Tu-hsiu attempted to set a limit for the peasant movement at the very beginning when he was drafting the Resolution of the Third Enlarged Session of the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party of China in September 1926. He wrote: "Left deviations have occurred in the peasant movement in various places: either the slogans are too advanced or the actions are too left. Very often we suffer serious losses before we have even hit the enemy." The masses were only just rising — even Chen Tu-hsiu himself admitted at the time that the enemy had not even been struck down — but he had already become impatient and shouted "Too left!" At a favourable time when the mass movement was just becoming active and counter-revolution was trying to resist it, Chen Tu-hsiu said, "We are suffering serious losses!" and then used this as a pretext for restraining the peasant

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<sup>1</sup> Mao Tse-tung, "Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War", *Selected Works*, Eng. ed., FLP, Peking, 1965, Vol. I, p. 190.

movement. In the same resolution, he wrote, "When a dispute occurs between a landlord and a poor peasant, the old peasant association (a lawful organization set up before the revolution and controlled by the local bullies and bad gentry — *Chen Po-ta*) should be made the mediator." Chen Tu-hsiu's idea was to settle rural problems through mediation by the old "peasant association" instead of through struggles by the peasant masses. Mediation was his fundamental concept — a concept which belittled and ignored the role of the masses and put a curb on them. This was a Menshevik methodology. When a new revolutionary phenomenon appeared among the masses, Chen Tu-hsiu refused to face it squarely and welcome it whole-heartedly. He shrank from it and became annoyed and impatient. Contrast the attitude of Chen Tu-hsiu with that of Mao Tse-tung, and you will see the glaring difference between Menshevism and Bolshevism.

The further the revolutionary movement of the masses advances, the further the Mensheviks will retreat; the two move in diametrically opposite directions — this is a law. During the 1924-27 revolution the great Chinese working class had waged heroic struggles. Under the leadership of the valiant Communists, the workers of Wuhan recovered the British Concession,<sup>1</sup> and the work-

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<sup>1</sup>On January 3, 1927, a mass meeting was held in Wuhan to mark the victorious northern expedition of the National Revolutionary Army. British imperialist marines attacked the meeting, killing and wounding over thirty persons. The workers of Wuhan staged a demonstration in protest, expelled the police from the British Concession and occupied it. Acceding to the demand of the people, the National Government in Wuhan made the British return the concession to China.

ers of Shanghai shed their blood in heroic uprisings.<sup>1</sup> These two courageous actions by the masses, following the Canton-Hongkong strike<sup>2</sup> and constituting an important part of the revolution, did not please but rather annoyed Mensheviks like Chen Tu-hsiu. The great peasant revolution in Hunan gave the Mensheviks another headache. After the counter-revolutionary coup d'état of May 21, 1927, the Hunan peasants, led by stalwart Communists, marched on Changsha, the capital of the province. It was a great march. If one compares the relative strength of the opposing forces, one will see that the march could have been successful. The opportunists, however, made a defeatist decision to halt that magnificent march, they undermined the heroic efforts of the masses, broke up their revolutionary ranks, and encouraged the arrogance and ambition of the counter-revolution.<sup>3</sup> As far as the

<sup>1</sup> In 1926-27, co-ordinating their action with the northern expedition of the National Revolutionary Army, the workers of Shanghai, led by the Communist Party of China, staged three armed uprisings against the rule of Sun Chuan-fang, a warlord of the northern clique. The first and second uprisings on October 24, 1926, and February 22, 1927, were drowned in blood. Many workers and their leaders were slaughtered. The third uprising on March 21, 1927 led to the ousting of Sun's troops and to the occupation of Shanghai by the workers.

<sup>2</sup> In June 1925, about 250,000 workers of Canton and Hongkong staged a general strike in protest against the massacre by British and Japanese imperialists of workers and revolutionaries in Shanghai, Canton and other places. Supported by the Revolutionary Government in Kwangtung Province and by millions of organized peasants, the strike lasted 16 months, causing serious losses to British imperialism. It greatly accelerated the revolutionary movement throughout Kwangtung in support of the northern expedition of the National Revolutionary Army.

<sup>3</sup> Aided and abetted by Chiang Kai-shek and Wang Ching-wei, the reactionary Kuomintang army commanders in Hunan, including Hsu Ke-hsiang, on May 21, 1927 ordered raids on the

revolution was concerned, it was a most ignominious and spineless decision. This was a crucial event in the history of the period of the Wuhan Government,<sup>1</sup> a critical historical event which helped to bring about the defeat of the revolution. Subsequently, a series of despicable orders were issued, prohibiting the revolutionary actions of the peasant masses. At the same time, the workers' pickets in Hankow and the Working Youth Corps were dissolved. All these actions were contrary to the stand taken by the many Bolsheviks in the Party represented by Mao Tse-tung; all these were the inevitable, disgraceful results of the fear with which the Chen Tu-hsiu Mensheviks regarded the revolutionary actions of the masses.

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provincial trade union headquarters, the peasant associations and other revolutionary organizations in Changsha. A great many Communists, revolutionary workers and peasants were arrested and murdered. After this counter-revolutionary coup, the Communists organized 100,000 armed peasants from the counties near Changsha and marched on the provincial capital from all directions, to launch a counter-attack against the counter-revolutionaries. The opportunist Chen Tu-hsiu, fearing this might destroy the Kuomintang-Communist co-operation, took a shameful decision and halted the march.

<sup>1</sup> In the winter of 1926, after the Northern Expeditionary Army had occupied Hunan and Hupeh, the National Government moved from Kwangtung to Wuhan. This government was formed jointly by the Kuomintang and the Communist Party and later opposed the "National Government" set up by Chiang Kai-shek in Nanking after his counter-revolutionary coup d'état in April 1927. To distinguish between the two, the National Government in Wuhan was called the Wuhan Government. In July 1927, the leading Kuomintang elements within the Wuhan Government—Wang Ching-wei and others—betrayed the revolution and joined the reactionary Nanking Government. The Kuomintang-Communist co-operation broke up and the Wuhan Government was dissolved.

Bolshevism actively supports the spontaneous revolutionary actions and the revolutionary creative energy of the masses; but Bolshevism is as far apart from adventurism as the sky is from the earth. Adventurism is characterized by the fact that it divorces itself from the masses and acts blindly (as did the "Left" opportunists in the later period of the Second Revolutionary Civil War — 1927-37). Adventurism cannot help the masses develop revolutionary heroism; on the contrary, it dampens their revolutionary spirit, because it inevitably ends in failure. Bolshevism, on the other hand, is characterized by close contact with the masses and participation in the struggle side by side with them. Before making decision on any action, Bolsheviks first take into full consideration the frame of mind of the masses, their organization and the disposition of their forces. They also take into account the various conditions prevailing at the time. They do not lag behind the masses in their struggles; they keep up with the actual progress of the struggle, gradually enhance the revolutionary heroism of the masses and lead them to victory.

Bolshevism is also diametrically opposed to tailism. The characteristic of tailism is that it blindly follows the masses, deviating either to the Right or to the "Left". Tailism is incapable of summing up the experiences of the struggles of the masses in order to help them orientate themselves; instead, it causes them to lose their bearings and suffer defeat. It is another form of isolation from the masses. Bolshevism is entirely different. Bolshevism is the ideology of the vanguard of the proletariat and all the revolutionary people because it brilliantly sums up the experiences of the mass struggles and crystallizes the views of the masses. Not only does

it absorb all that is fine and progressive in the mass struggles; it also discards all bad and backward elements born of class oppression and blind faith in the old things. It shows the masses clearly the direction to follow, takes into consideration the various factors for the offensive and defensive in struggles, formulates concrete flexible strategy and tactics and corrects the mistakes they may have committed. This is precisely what Mao Tse-tung meant when he said "march at their head and lead them". In other words, a person is a Bolshevik not only because he associates himself with the masses but, what is more, because he is their leader. It is thanks to the existence of many such Bolsheviks in our Party that we have been able to make the earth-shaking Chinese revolution.

Adventurism and tailism are, in fact, only varieties of Menshevism. It is in the struggle against Menshevism and its different varieties that Bolshevism in China, as represented by Mao Tse-tung, has gradually developed and become an invincible banner.

## II

### **THE PEASANT PROBLEM — PIVOT OF THE WHOLE COURSE OF THE CHINESE REVOLUTION**

At the beginning of his report, Mao Tse-tung raised the question:

... the present upsurge of the peasant movement is a colossal event. In a very short time, in China's central, southern and northern provinces, several hundred million peasants will rise like a mighty storm, like a hurricane, a force so swift and violent that no

power, however great, will be able to hold it back. They will smash all the trammels that bind them and rush forward along the road to liberation. They will sweep all the imperialists, warlords, corrupt officials, local tyrants and evil gentry into their graves. Every revolutionary party and every revolutionary comrade will be put to the test, to be accepted or rejected as they decide. There are three alternatives. To march at their head and lead them? To trail behind them, gesticulating and criticizing? Or to stand in their way and oppose them? Every Chinese is free to choose, but events will force you to make the choice quickly.

The question was thus posed clearly, decisively and unequivocally. The events which occurred during the few months following the publication of Mao Tse-tung's report fully confirmed the ideas expressed above. And his judgement has not been contradicted by the vicissitudes of the revolution and counter-revolution during the last ten years and more. On the contrary, his every sentence, his every word, has retained its freshness through the years. The correctness of a theory is determined by whether it can stand the test of reality. This is the yardstick by which we evaluate Mao Tse-tung's teachings.

Why is it that the attitude towards the peasant revolution is the final criterion by which one judges whether a man is a revolutionary or a counter-revolutionary? Mao Tse-tung answered this question in the light of the social structure of China. He said:

The patriarchal-feudal class of local tyrants, evil gentry and lawless landlords has formed the basis of autocratic government for thousands of years and is

the corner-stone of imperialism, warlordism and corrupt officialdom.

That being so, the demolishing of this basis, the smashing of this corner-stone, is to pave the way for victory in the struggle against imperialism and feudalism; on the other hand, to sustain this basis, to protect this corner-stone, is to uphold the rule of imperialism and feudalism. Mao Tse-tung therefore continued, "To overthrow these feudal forces is the real objective of the national revolution." On whom should we rely to demolish this basis and smash this corner-stone? Naturally on the peasants, the rising of the peasants, the peasant revolution. If a man agrees that imperialism and feudalism should be opposed, and yet if at the same time he does not approve of the rising of the peasants and of the peasant revolution, then he is sure to fall under the influence of the imperialist and feudal forces, even though, subjectively, he may not want to be their apologist.

China is a great peasant country, in which the agricultural population constitutes between 80 and 90 per cent of the total. For over two thousand years, as Mao Tse-tung pointed out, peasant wars constituted the real motive force behind the development of Chinese history. But before the birth of the modern Chinese proletariat, the peasant struggles were without competent leadership and failed to bring about the final liberation of the peasants. It became a vastly different matter, however, after the emergence of the Chinese proletariat under whose leadership the peasantry gained tremendously in fighting power and came closer to its ultimate liberation. The increasing political weight of the peasantry was also due to the leadership given by the proletariat and its party —

the Communist Party. In China, all revolutionary politics, military action, propaganda and culture directed against imperialism and feudalism must be those characterized by the leadership of the proletariat over the peasantry. The whole anti-imperialist and anti-feudal united front organized by the proletariat with other classes emphasized the importance of arousing the peasants. The scope of the leadership of the Chinese proletariat over other classes in the democratic revolution against imperialism and feudalism is very wide (for a certain period even the national bourgeoisie is included among those classes that come under the leadership of the proletariat; the national bourgeoisie needs the leadership of the proletariat as long as it needs the revolution, e.g., in the revolutionary period of 1924-27 and in the present War of Resistance Against Japan). Nevertheless, the fundamental thing is to secure leadership over the peasants; otherwise, leadership will be hollow.

In order to transform the democratic revolution into the socialist revolution and to carry on socialist construction, it is also absolutely necessary for the Chinese proletariat to rally the peasant masses round itself. In plain words, without the real emancipation of the peasants, there can be no real emancipation of the Chinese nation. If the Chinese proletariat proves unable to lead the peasant revolution, it will never consummate the cause of the nation and the proletariat. For all these reasons, Mao Tse-tung called upon all Party members and revolutionaries to march at the head of the peasants and lead them:

Every revolutionary comrade should know that the national revolution requires a great change in the countryside. The Revolution of 1911 did not bring

about this change, hence its failure. This change is now taking place, and it is an important factor for the completion of the revolution. Every revolutionary comrade must support it, or he will be taking the stand of counter-revolution.

Sure enough, during the revolutionary period of 1927, there were Chiang Kai-shek and Wang Ching-wei in the Kuomintang, who did not support this change. In the end both went over to the counter-revolution. Likewise, the Menshevik Chen Tu-hsiu and Peng Shu-chih, who were then lying low in the Communist Party and refusing to support this change, finally joined the counter-revolution.

Two lines existed in the peasant movement at that time, the revolutionary and the reformist. The latter was actually a counter-revolutionary line drawn up after the rising of the peasants by representatives of the landlords and bourgeoisie as a counter-poise to the revolutionary line. Mao Tse-tung said in his report:

The right-wing of the Kuomintang says, "The peasant movement is a movement of the riffraff, of the lazy peasants." This view is current in Changsha. When I was in the countryside, I heard the gentry say, "It is all right to set up peasant associations, but the people now running them are no good. They ought to be replaced!" This opinion comes to the same thing as what the right-wingers are saying; according to both it is all right to have a peasant movement (the movement is already in being and no one dare say otherwise), but they say that the people running it are no good and they particularly hate those in charge of the associations at the lower levels, calling them

“riffraff”. . . . They are issuing orders and are running everything. Those who used to rank lowest now rank above everybody else; and so this is called “turning things upside down”.

The struggle between the revolutionaries and the reformists in the peasant movement, as reflected in our Party at that time, became the struggle between the Bolshevik line represented by Mao Tse-tung and the Menshevik line represented by Chen Tu-hsiu. Mao Tse-tung called the “riffraff”, as the reformists labelled the poor peasants, “the heroes who have performed the great revolutionary task”. He heartily applauded their “turning things upside down”, because had it not been for this, there would have been no revolution in the countryside. He said:

According to the survey of Changsha County, the poor peasants comprise 70 per cent, the middle peasants 20 per cent, and the landlords and the rich peasants 10 per cent of the population in the rural areas. . . . This great mass of poor peasants, or altogether 70 per cent of the rural population, are the backbone of the peasant associations, the vanguard in the overthrow of the feudal forces and the heroes who have performed the great revolutionary task which for long years was left undone. Without the poor peasant class (the “riffraff”, as the gentry call them), it would have been impossible to bring about the present revolutionary situation in the countryside, or to overthrow the local tyrants and evil gentry and complete the democratic revolution. The poor peasants, being the most revolutionary group, have gained the leadership of the peasant associations. In both the first and

second periods almost all the chairmen and committee members in the peasant associations at the lowest level were poor peasants. . . . Leadership by the poor peasants is absolutely necessary. Without the poor peasants there would be no revolution. To deny their role is to deny the revolution. To attack them is to attack the revolution. They have never been wrong on the general direction of the revolution. They have discredited the local tyrants and evil gentry. They have beaten down the local tyrants and evil gentry, big and small, and kept them underfoot.

Mao Tse-tung first of all made a penetrating analysis of the classes in China's rural population and then drew conclusions concerning the strategy and tactics to be adopted in carrying on the revolution in the countryside — the real revolutionary line of the peasant movement. He concluded that the poor peasants, who constitute 70 per cent of the rural population, must be the backbone of the peasant movement. "They have fought militantly," he wrote, "through the two periods of underground work and of open activity. They are the most responsive to Communist Party leadership. They are deadly enemies of the camp of the local tyrants and evil gentry and attack it without the slightest hesitation." Therefore, those who support the agrarian revolution must, first of all, support the revolutionary action of the poor peasants. Mao Tse-tung repeatedly said in his report, "Many of their deeds in the period of revolutionary action, which were labelled as 'going too far', were in fact the very things the revolution required." But it was just because he considered the poor peasants' deeds as "going too far" that Chen Tu-hsiu adopted the policy of "one who stops

taking food altogether because he once choked while eating". Chen Tu-hsiu's basic slogan was: "The unorganized, unrestrained activities of the peasants should not be given free play." This slogan was issued for the purpose of bringing the great revolutionary upsurge in the countryside to a halt, and it perfectly suited the tastes of the counter-revolutionaries of that time.

In his "Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution", Lenin wrote as follows about the tactics of the proletariat in the Russian Revolution of 1905:

One of two things, gentlemen: either we, together with the people, must strive to carry out the revolution and win a complete victory over tsarism *in spite* of the inconsistent, self-seeking and cowardly bourgeoisie, or we do not accept this "in spite of", we fear lest the bourgeoisie "recoil" from the revolution, in which case we betray the proletariat and the people to the bourgeoisie — to the inconsistent, self-seeking and cowardly bourgeoisie.<sup>1</sup>

We all know that Chen Tu-hsiu was filled with abject fear lest the bourgeoisie recoil from the revolutionary front; and so he dreaded the peasant revolution. True, the bourgeoisie in semi-colonial China is different from the bourgeoisie in Russia; the former has its revolutionary side. Consequently, the tactics of the Chinese proletariat in dealing with the Chinese bourgeoisie is vastly different from the tactics adopted by the Russian proletariat in relation to the Russian bourgeoisie. The Chinese proletariat should organize a revolutionary united front

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Selected Works*, Eng. ed., FLPH, Moscow, 1952, Vol. I, Part 2, p. 103.

with the bourgeoisie, whenever necessary and possible. Nevertheless, if the peasants rise and the bourgeoisie (the "right-wing of the Kuomintang" as Mao Tse-tung put it) opposes their rising, hinders by various means the union of the proletariat with the peasantry and threatens to break up the united front, then the following question will arise: Should the proletariat disregard the obstructions of the bourgeoisie and go ahead together with the peasants to complete the revolution, or should the proletariat submit to the obstructions of the bourgeoisie, desert the peasants and cause the failure of the revolution? That is a crucial question. The proletariat must choose one way or the other. As everyone knows, Mao Tse-tung chose the former and Chen Tu-hsiu the latter. Chen Tu-hsiu's choice, however, failed to prevent the bourgeoisie from betraying the revolution; on the contrary, it only hastened their betrayal.

Mao Tse-tung's idea was in complete agreement with that of Stalin, leader of the international communist movement. At the time when Chen Tu-hsiu used the slogan "Oppose imperialism" as a pretext for opposing the revolution in the countryside, Stalin refuted this erroneous idea in his speech "The Prospects of the Revolution in China" delivered in November 1926 before the Chinese Commission of the Executive Committee of the Communist International:

... there are Kuomintangists and even Chinese Communists who do not consider it possible to unleash revolution in the countryside, since they fear that if the peasantry were drawn into the revolution it would disrupt the united anti-imperialist front. That is a profound error, comrades. The more quickly and

thoroughly the Chinese peasantry is drawn into the revolution, the stronger and more powerful the anti-imperialist front in China will be.<sup>1</sup>

It is quite clear that Stalin objected to separating or isolating the peasant revolution from the anti-imperialist united front. Again, in May 1927 Stalin spoke on "The Revolution in China and the Tasks of the Comintern", and said among other things:

Thus, the present revolution in China is a combination of two streams of the revolutionary movement — the movement against feudal survivals and the movement against imperialism. The bourgeois-democratic revolution in China is a combination of the struggle against feudal survivals and the struggle against imperialism.

That is the starting point of the whole line of the Comintern [and hence of the C.C., C.P.S.U.(B.)] on the questions of the Chinese revolution.<sup>2</sup>

Summarizing the controversies with Trotsky at that time, Stalin pointed out in the same speech two fundamentally different lines. He explained:

Thus we have two basic lines:

a) *the line of the Comintern*, which takes into account the existence of feudal survivals in China, as the predominant form of oppression, the decisive importance of the powerful agrarian movement, the connection of the feudal survivals with imperialism, and

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<sup>1</sup> J. V. Stalin, *Works*, Eng. ed., FLPH, Moscow, 1954, Vol. VIII, p. 385.

<sup>2</sup> J. V. Stalin, *Works*, Eng. ed., FLPH, Moscow, 1954, Vol. IX, p. 292.

the bourgeois-democratic character of the Chinese revolution with its struggle spearheaded against imperialism;

b) *the line of Trotsky*, which denies the predominant importance of feudal-militarist oppression, fails to appreciate the decisive importance of the agrarian revolutionary movement in China, and attributes the anti-imperialist character of the Chinese revolution solely to the interests of Chinese capitalism, which is demanding customs independence for China.

The basic error of Trotsky (and hence of the opposition) is that he underestimates the agrarian revolution in China, does not understand the bourgeois-democratic character of that revolution, denies the existence of the preconditions for an agrarian movement in China, embracing many millions, and underestimates the role of the peasantry in the Chinese revolution.<sup>1</sup>

The line represented by Chen Tu-hsiu, in fact, fully tallied with that of Trotsky. Later, "Chen Tu-hsiuism" openly merged with Trotskyism to form a counter-revolutionary whole. It was no accident that Chen Tu-hsiu's clique finally became a group of counter-revolutionary Trotskyites. In opposing the peasant revolution, the two had very early acquired a common counter-revolutionary ideological basis.

Mao Tse-tung's warning, given in the revolutionary period of 1927, that "every revolutionary comrade must support it (the great change in the countryside—*Chen Po-ta*), or he will be taking the stand of counter-revolution" still holds good and therefore should not be forgotten.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 296-97.

### III

## THE DEMOCRATIC DICTATORSHIP OF THE REVOLUTIONARY PEOPLE

Since revolution means the overthrow of the power of one class by another, it is essential to set up the power of the new class to replace that of the old one; otherwise the revolution will be abortive. This is precisely the "dictatorship of the revolutionary people" so enthusiastically propounded by Lenin and is, according to Marx, the "plebeian way" of dealing with the enemies of the people. In the revolutionary period of 1927, Mao Tse-tung whole-heartedly supported this kind of dictatorship, and this "plebeian way" of dealing with the enemies of the people. He described the dictatorship of the revolutionary peasantry at that time in the following words:

The main targets of attack by the peasants are the local tyrants, the evil gentry and the lawless landlords, but in passing they also hit out against patriarchal ideas and institutions; against the corrupt officials in the cities and against bad practices and customs in the rural areas. In force and momentum the attack is tempestuous; those who bow before it survive and those who resist perish. As a result, the privileges which the feudal landlords enjoyed for thousands of years are being shattered to pieces. Every bit of the dignity and prestige built up by the landlords is being swept into the dust. With the collapse of the power of the landlords, the peasant associations have now become the sole organs of authority and the popular slogan "All power to the peasant associations" has become a reality. Even trifles such as a quarrel be-

tween husband and wife are brought to the peasant association. Nothing can be settled unless someone from the peasant association is present. The association actually dictates all rural affairs, and, quite literally, "whatever it says, goes". Those who are outside the associations can only speak well of them and cannot say anything against them. The local tyrants, evil gentry and lawless landlords have been deprived of all right to speak, and none of them dares even mutter dissent.

.....

In short, what was looked down upon four months ago as a "gang of peasants" has now become a most honourable institution. Those who formerly prostrated themselves before the power of the gentry now bow before the power of the peasants. No matter what their identity, all admit that the world since last October is a different one.

The change of power marks the change of the old world (society) into a new world (society). The change of power is nothing less than the transformation of the erstwhile oppressed into the present oppressor and the erstwhile oppressor into the present oppressed. Our revolution aims precisely at changing the system of oppression of the many by the few into one of oppression of the few by the many.

In short, all those whom the gentry had despised, those whom they had trodden into the dirt, people with no place in society, people with no right to speak, have now audaciously lifted up their heads. They have not only lifted up their heads but taken power into their hands. They are now running the township

peasant associations (at the lowest level), which they have turned into something fierce and formidable. They have raised their rough, work-soiled hands and laid them on the gentry. They tether the evil gentry with ropes, crown them with tall paper-hats and parade them through the villages. . . . Not a day passes but they drum some harsh, pitiless words of denunciation into these gentry's ears.

Does anyone want to know what the dictatorship of the revolutionary people is? It is exactly what Mao Tse-tung described above. The emancipation of the masses implies, first of all, the practice of such a dictatorship. Mao Tse-tung maintained that in the period of revolutionary action, "it was necessary to establish the absolute authority of the peasants. It was necessary to forbid malicious criticism of the peasant associations. It was necessary to overthrow the whole authority of the gentry. . . ." What Mao Tse-tung had in mind here is the "absolute authority" of the revolutionary people. By qualifying "authority" with "absolute", he meant that this authority must dominate everything; otherwise, the old would not be subjugated and the new would not be able to raise its head. One may disapprove of such a dictatorship for being too crude. But it is precisely such a dictatorship that is reasonable and entirely just. It is a manifestation of true revolutionary ethics. It is genuine and perfect revolutionary order and, hence, the normal order most essential to society and mankind. Such a revolutionary dictatorship may be "crude", but, compared with all the varieties of savage counter-revolutionary dictatorship imposed by the cannibal exploit-

ers on the people throughout the centuries, it is more civilized, a thousand times more civilized!

In the light of the experience of the Russian Revolution of 1905, Lenin made a detailed study of the question of dictatorship and wrote a pamphlet entitled "The Victory of the Cadets and the Tasks of the Workers' Party" published in 1906. He said:

Please note once and for all, Messrs. Kiesewetter, Struve, Izgoyev and Co., that dictatorship means unlimited power based on force, and not on law. In civil war, any victorious power can only be a dictatorship. The point is, however, that there is the dictatorship of a minority over the majority, the dictatorship of a handful of police officials over the people; and there is the dictatorship of the overwhelming majority of the people over a handful of tyrants, robbers and usurpers of people's power.<sup>1</sup>

As regards the power in the revolutionary dictatorship, Lenin wrote:

What was this power based on, then? It was based on the mass of the people. This is the *main* feature that distinguished this new authority from all the preceding organs of the old regime. The latter were the instruments of the rule of the minority over the people, over the masses of workers and peasants. The former was an instrument of the rule of the people, of the workers and peasants, over the minority, over a handful of police bullies, over a handful of privileged nobles and government officials. Such is the difference

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Eng. ed., FLPH, Moscow, 1962, Vol. X, p. 216.

between dictatorship *over* the people and dictatorship of the revolutionary people. . . . As the dictatorship of a minority, the old regime was able to maintain itself solely with the aid of police devices, solely by preventing the masses of the people from taking part in the government and from supervising the government. The old authority persistently distrusted the masses, feared the light, maintained itself by deception. As the dictatorship of the overwhelming majority, the new authority maintained itself and could maintain itself solely because it enjoyed the confidence of the vast masses, solely because it, in the freest, widest and most resolute manner, enlisted all the masses in the task of government. It concealed nothing, it had no secrets, no regulations, no formalities.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, it can be definitely said that the dictatorship of the revolutionary people described by Lenin is the very dictatorship of the revolutionary people lauded by Mao Tse-tung. Lenin unreservedly extolled "the people, the mass of the population, unorganised, 'casually' assembled at the given spot", who "itself appears on the scene, exercises justice and metes out punishment, exercises power and creates a new, revolutionary law".<sup>2</sup> What Mao Tse-tung most enthusiastically acclaimed was also this very creativeness of the people. Concerning the setting up of revolutionary power by the Russian people, Lenin asked, "Is it good . . . ?"<sup>3</sup> and answered, "Yes, it is very good. It is the supreme manifestation of the

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 244-45.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 246-47.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 248.

people's struggle for liberty. It marks that great period when the dreams of liberty cherished by the best men and women of Russia *come true*, when liberty becomes the cause of the vast masses of the people, and not merely of individual heroes."<sup>1</sup> And "It's fine!" was Mao Tse-tung's simple, clear-cut answer to the question of the establishment by the Chinese people of their power in the period of the 1927 revolution. Yes, it was fine, excellent, very excellent indeed! Why? Because it was a marvellous feat never before achieved, not just in forty, but in thousands of years; because it was the highest manifestation of the Chinese people's struggle for their freedom; and because it meant that the dreams of freedom of the best people of China were being turned into deeds, into the deeds of the masses themselves.

In his great work "Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution" written in the period of the 1905 revolution of Russia, Lenin pointed out:

The Jacobins of contemporary Social-Democracy — the Bolsheviks, the *Vperyodovtsi*, *Syezdovtsi*, *Proletartsi*,<sup>2</sup> or whatever we may call them — wish by their slogans to raise the revolutionary and republican petty bourgeoisie, and especially the peasantry, to the level of the consistent democratism of the proletariat, which fully retains its individuality as a class. They want

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Vperyodovtsi*, *Syezdovtsi*, *Proletartsi* — different appellations for the Bolsheviks arising from the fact that they published the newspaper *Vperyod*, that they convened the Third Congress of the Party, and from the name of the newspaper *Proletary*, which began to appear in May 1905 by decision of the Third Congress of the Party. (V. I. Lenin, *Selected Works*, Eng. ed., FLPH, Moscow, 1952, Vol. I, Part 2, p. 598, Explanatory Note, No. 9.)

the people, i.e., the proletariat and the peasantry, to settle accounts with the monarchy and the aristocracy in the "plebeian way", ruthlessly destroying the enemies of liberty, crushing their resistance by force, making no concessions whatever to the accursed heritage of serfdom, of Asiatic barbarism and human degradation.<sup>1</sup>

In comparing the Bolsheviks to the Jacobins of the French Revolution, Lenin in no way meant to confuse Bolshevik ideology, political programme and revolutionary methods and the Bolsheviks' eventual aim in the revolution with those of the Jacobins. This was very clearly explained by Lenin in the same article when he said:

By our comparison we merely want to explain that the representatives of the progressive class of the twentieth century, of the proletariat, i.e., the Social-Democrats, are divided into two wings (the opportunist and the revolutionary) similar to those into which the representatives of the progressive class of the eighteenth century, the bourgeoisie, were divided, i.e., the Girondists and the Jacobins.<sup>2</sup>

The reason for quoting Lenin's comparison is to compare the two wings into which our Party was divided in the period of the 1924-27 revolution. Who represented the Jacobins within our Party — the Bolsheviks in the proletarian party? The above-mentioned facts give the

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Selected Works*, Eng. ed., FLPH, Moscow, 1952, Vol. I, Part 2, p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

answer: That most outstanding representative was none other than Mao Tse-tung.

The next question: Who represented the Girondists within our Party — the Mensheviks in the proletarian party, in the period of the 1924-27 revolution? The most degraded representatives of the Girondist type were Chen Tu-hsiu, his disciple Peng Shu-chih and his other followers, whom we have mentioned more than once in the foregoing paragraphs.

How did the Girondists within our Party behave during the period of the 1927 revolution? Let us again quote from what Lenin said in 1905 about the Girondists within the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party:

The Girondists of contemporary Russian Social-Democracy, the new *Iskra*-ists,<sup>1</sup> do not merge with the *Osvobozhdentsi*,<sup>2</sup> but in point of fact they, by reason of the nature of their slogans, follow at the tail of the latter. And the *Osvobozhdentsi*, i.e., the representatives of the liberal bourgeoisie, wish to settle accounts with the autocracy gently, in a reformist way, in a yielding manner, so as not to offend the aristocracy, the nobles, the Court — cautiously, without

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<sup>1</sup> New "Iskra-ists" refers to the supporters of the Menshevik newspaper *Iskra* (*The Spark*). The *Iskra* was founded originally by Lenin in 1900 but, in 1903, it passed into the hands of the Mensheviks. To distinguish it from Lenin's old *Iskra*, the Menshevik *Iskra* was referred to as the new *Iskra*. (Cf. V. I. Lenin, *Selected Works*, Eng. ed., FLPH, Moscow, 1952, Vol. I, Part 1, pp. 658-59, Explanatory Note, No. 8.)

<sup>2</sup> The followers of *Osvobozhdeniye* (*Liberation*), a fortnightly journal of the liberal-monarchist bourgeoisie, who later made up the core of the Cadet Party, the principal bourgeois party in Russia. (Cf. V. I. Lenin, *Selected Works*, Eng. ed., FLPH, Moscow, 1952, Vol. I, Part 2, p. 597, Explanatory Note, No. 1.)

breaking anything — kindly and politely, as befits gentlemen in white gloves. . . .<sup>1</sup>

This passage of Lenin's on the new *Iskra*-ists gives us enough enlightenment to discern the face of the Chinese Mensheviks represented by Chen Tu-hsiu, Peng Shu-chih and others. There is hardly any need to add much else. It was precisely these Chinese Mensheviks who, at the very moment when the people's revolutionary movement was surging forward to its height, actually helped Chiang Kai-shek and Wang Ching-wei to carry out their bloody counter-revolutionary activities with impunity. Then when the revolutionary people were experiencing the most difficult times, they openly deserted to the counter-revolutionary camp together with the Trotskyites.

With the development of the people's revolutionary struggles, the question of power came more and more to the fore. Revolutionary power at that time could assume various forms. It could take the form of a revolutionary Kuomintang (which was co-operating with the Communist Party at that time), that is, a Kuomintang transformed into a genuine organization of the common people; or it could assume other forms, as pointed out in the Resolution of the Eighth Enlarged Session of the Communist International:

Absorb the broad masses through the Kuomintang, let the people elect the leading bodies of the Kuomintang, and set up, through the organizations formed on basis of elections, a national revolutionary govern-

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution", *Selected Works*, Eng. ed., FLPH, Moscow, 1952, Vol. I, Part 2, p. 59.

ment — this is a special form of alliance between the labouring masses and revolutionary state power, which suits the needs of the present stage of the Chinese revolution. Because of the different conditions obtaining in the provinces under the control of the Wuhan Government, the local organs of power have to assume diverse forms in the initial period — “peasant committee” and “peasant association” in the countryside, the Kuomintang committee, etc. . . .

The point here is that the revolutionary people should really be able to achieve power and that our Party should be able to lead them boldly in seizing it. Marx taught us: “We do not say to the world: Cease struggling — your whole struggle is futile. All we do is to provide it with a true slogan of the struggle.”<sup>1</sup> But Chen Tu-hsiu’s credo was just the opposite. What he told the masses engaged in the struggle was simply this: “Cease struggling — your whole struggle is futile. All we do is to provide the world with the slogan of ‘courtesy’!” We can see how Chen Tu-hsiu lectured the people on “courtesy” from what he wrote:

Although the *min tuan*<sup>2</sup> is an instrument in the hands of the landlords and the local bullies and bad gentry for fleecing and oppressing the common people and protecting their own interests, it is impossible to uproot such an organization at present. We should adopt the following policy: Carry out propaganda among the *min tuan* members so that they will not help the local bullies and bad gentry in their evil deeds.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Marx’s letter to Ruge of September 1843.

<sup>2</sup> Armed forces of reactionary landlords.

At the same time, propose that *min tuan* commanders be elected at village meetings, or that bad gentry be replaced by good gentry as *min tuan* commanders by other appropriate means, so that the authority over the *min tuan* may first be shifted to the enlightened petty bourgeoisie. Thus it will stop being an obstacle to the peasant movement.

How humble, restrained, amiable and courteous Chen Tu-hsiu was to the counter-revolutionaries! What Chen Tu-hsiu had in mind was not the destruction of the machinery of oppression of the old regime; he held that it was then impossible to uproot it. Instead of the replacement of the power of the gentry by that of the peasant masses, he advocated the substitution of the old power of the bad gentry by the new, reformed power of the "good" gentry.

With regard to the question of "armed self-defence", Chen Tu-hsiu was even more brazen when he said:

A. It is now necessary for the peasants to demand armed self-defence. There are, however, two points that must be observed:

1. They should not go beyond the limits of self-defence (such as interference with administrative affairs and disarming of the *min tuan*). The self-defence in question should be defensive and not offensive in character.

2. They should not have any standing organizations; otherwise, there may be frequent conflicts over power between the peasants, on the one hand, and the landlords, the *min tuan*, the army garrisons, etc., on the other.

B. The name of the "Self-defence Army" should be changed to "Self-defence Corps", or some such other expression, so as to avoid misunderstanding and resentment.

C. The organization of the Self-defence Corps should not be too complex and it should be so organized as to function easily.

D. More stress should be laid on political training in the Self-defence Corps than on military training; otherwise, with arms in hand, the peasants, who have never been organized or gone through any training before, may on occasion overstep the objective limits, or may even be utilized by warlords or the leaders of the Corps.

(The preceding quotations are from the Resolution of the Third Enlarged Session of the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party of China, as drafted by Chen Tu-hsiu.)

In a word, Chen Tu-hsiu aimed to perpetuate the rule of the feudal landlords by preventing the peasants from fighting for power. To put it more plainly, he attempted to forbid the peasants to turn everything "upside down", i.e., to rise in revolt. "Striking the landlord down to the dust and keeping him there" is a reasonable exercise of power in the eyes of the revolutionary masses. It is reasonable precisely because things were most unreasonable in the past when the landlords knocked the peasants down and trampled them underfoot. Things will be reasonable only when the peasants have restored the order of things unreasonably turned upside down by the landlords.

Chen Tu-hsiu was opposed to the peasants interfering with administrative affairs (even interference was impermissible, let alone the seizure of power); to their launching an offensive for their own self-defence (even this was impermissible, let alone assumption of power by the peasants); and to their coming into conflict over power with the authorities, namely, with the authorities controlled by the local bullies and gentry (even such conflicts were impermissible, let alone the establishment by the peasants of their supreme power). All this was tantamount to defending the old counter-revolutionary power of the landlords and opposing the establishment of the new revolutionary power of the peasants.

Chen Tu-hsiu said, "With arms in hand, the peasants . . . may on occasion overstep the objective limits. . . ." What, after all, were the "objective limits" that Chen Tu-hsiu had in mind? In the final analysis, these "objective limits" were nothing but the limits of the power of the landlords! As a matter of fact, the peasants will be able to overthrow the oppressive rule of the warlords (political representatives of the landlords and compradors) only when they have their own armed forces. Yet Chen Tu-hsiu claimed that the peasants "may even be utilized by warlords"! How original are Chen Tu-hsiu's sophistries in defence of the armed forces of the landlords!

In overthrowing the counter-revolutionary regime, we revolutionaries have shown ourselves to be courageous and daring in seizing power because we are with the masses and believe in their inexhaustible strength. Chen Tu-hsiu, on the other hand, proved to be chicken-hearted and surrendered power because he had divorced himself from the masses and did not believe in their strength.

In fact, during the 1924-27 revolution, Chen Tu-hsiu thought only of assisting the big bourgeoisie to seize power; he never allowed the workers, peasants and the urban petty bourgeoisie to seize it. In his "Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution", Lenin said that the Menshevik new *Iskra*-ists "even consent to lead the insurrection of the people — in order to renounce that leadership immediately after victory is won (or, perhaps, immediately before the victory?), i.e., *in order not to avail themselves of the fruits of victory but to turn all these fruits over entirely to the bourgeoisie*".<sup>1</sup> It is as if Lenin had Chen Tu-hsiu in mind when he wrote these words. Just remember how Chen Tu-hsiu behaved in the 1924-27 revolutionary period, and when the workers of Shanghai won victory after three uprisings (see footnote 1 on p. 11)!

Lenin concluded his article by posing the question: "Dare We Win?"<sup>2</sup> Mao Tse-tung actually answered this question in the affirmative during our 1924-27 revolution. He did this by boldly affirming the necessity of the democratic dictatorship of the revolutionary masses, and by daring to set up such a dictatorship. It need hardly be said that the line advanced by Mao Tse-tung was none other than that advocated by the then Communist International, namely, the line advocated by Lenin and Stalin. The characteristic of Mao Tse-tung's thought, like that of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and all other outstanding Communists, is that it was capable of drawing conclusions by generalizing the vital and concrete realities, and thus went a step further in concretizing the general line

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Selected Works*, Eng. ed., FLPH, Moscow, 1952, Vol. I, Part 2, p. 78.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

laid down by the then Communist International regarding the question of power in the Chinese revolution.

#### IV

### **“WHOEVER WANTS TO HELP THE VACILLATING MUST FIRST STOP VACILLATING HIMSELF”<sup>1</sup>**

This advice, repeated so often by Lenin, was stressed by our Party's Central Committee when it reviewed the experiences of the 1927 revolution in the “Appeal to All Party Members” adopted at its meeting on August 7, 1927. Mao Tse-tung's report on the peasant movement in Hunan is permeated with this spirit. At that time, the peasant movement was being widely discussed. Some were opposed to it while others vacillated. In his report, Mao Tse-tung gave a vivid picture of the situation:

The peasants' revolt disturbed the gentry's sweet dreams. When the news from the countryside reached the cities, it caused immediate uproar among the gentry. Soon after my arrival in Changsha, I met all sorts of people and picked up a good deal of gossip. From the middle social strata upwards to the Kuomintang right-wingers, there was not a single person who did not sum up the whole business in the phrase, “It's terrible!” Under the impact of the views of the “It's terrible!” school then flooding the city, even quite revolutionary-minded people became down-hearted as they pictured the events in the countryside in their mind's eye; and they were unable to deny the word

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Selected Works*, Eng. ed., FLPH, Moscow, 1952, Vol. II, Part 1, p. 56.

“terrible”. Even quite progressive people said, “Though terrible, it is inevitable in a revolution.”

The policy upheld by Mao Tse-tung was resolutely directed against the first kind of people described here, namely, the open opponents of the peasant movement — those who took a counter-revolutionary stand on the question of the peasant movement. Mao Tse-tung said:

All talk directed against the peasant movement must be speedily set right. All the wrong measures taken by the revolutionary authorities concerning the peasant movement must be speedily changed. Only thus can the future of the revolution be benefited.

Mao Tse-tung further pointed out the gravity of the following incidents:

A good many chairmen and committee members of township associations in Hengshan and Hsianghsiang Counties have been thrown in jail. This mistake is very serious and feeds the arrogance of the reactionaries. To judge whether or not it is a mistake, you have only to see how joyful the lawless landlords become and how reactionary sentiments grow, wherever the chairmen or committee members of local peasant associations are arrested. We must combat the counter-revolutionary talk of a “movement of riffraff” and a “movement of lazy peasants” and must be especially careful not to commit the error of helping the local tyrants and evil gentry in their attacks on the poor peasant class. . . . in no circumstances should soldiers be arbitrarily sent to make such arrests as would damage the prestige of the poor peasants and feed the arrogance of the local tyrants and evil gentry.

Mao Tse-tung's opinion was that reactionary sentiments must be suppressed while the revolutionary atmosphere must be stimulated; what we needed was a firm revolutionary policy, and not a vacillating policy, much less a policy aimed at suppressing the peasant movement.

To help the vacillators to stop vacillating, one must first stop vacillating oneself. But this does not mean that we never criticize vacillators or that we do not oppose their erroneous opinions. Mao Tse-tung wrote:

Then there is another section of people who say, "Yes, peasant associations are necessary, but they are going rather too far." This is the opinion of the middle-of-the-roaders. . . . Those who talk about the peasants "going too far" seem at first sight to be different from those who say "It's terrible!" (those openly opposing the peasant movement — *Chen Po-ta*) as mentioned earlier, but in essence they proceed from the same standpoint and likewise voice a landlord theory that upholds the interests of the privileged classes. Since this theory impedes the rise of the peasant movement and so disrupts the revolution, we must firmly oppose it.

In the above-quoted passages Mao Tse-tung thus graphically describes the different stands (left, middle and right) taken by different classes in the revolution, and he also points to us the policy the proletariat should follow.

Mao Tse-tung's analysis is based entirely upon the realities of the revolution, which, in their turn, have more than once testified to the correctness of his analysis. The following quotation makes this plain:

In the face of the peasant associations' power and pressure, the top local tyrants and evil gentry have fled to Shanghai, those of the second rank to Hankow, those of the third to Changsha and those of the fourth to the county towns, while the fifth rank and the still lesser fry surrender to the peasant associations in the villages.

"Here's ten yuan. Please let me join the peasant association," one of the smaller of the evil gentry will say.

"Ugh! Who wants your filthy money?" the peasants reply.

Many middle and small landlords and rich peasants and even some middle peasants, who were all formerly opposed to the peasant associations, are now vainly seeking admission. Visiting various places, I often came across such people who pleaded with me, "Mr. Committeeman from the provincial capital, please be my sponsor!"

In the Ching Dynasty, the household census compiled by the local authorities consisted of a regular register and "the other" register, the former for honest people and the latter for burglars, bandits and similar undesirables. In some places the peasants now use this method to scare those who formerly opposed the associations. They say, "Put their names down in the other register!"

Afraid of being entered in the other register, such people try various devices to gain admission into the peasant associations, on which their minds are so set that they do not feel safe until their names are entered. But more often than not they are turned down flat, and so they are always on tenterhooks; with the doors

of the association barred to them, they are like tramps without a home or, in rural parlance, "mere trash".

Apart from the passages cited above, there are some detailed descriptions of the same kind in the section headed "Vanguards of the Revolution". All these facts show that the firmer and stronger the leadership in the surging maelstrom of the great people's revolution, the greater the possibility of the wavering elements ceasing to vacillate and the greater the possibility that those who formerly sided with the counter-revolutionaries will be forced, under the impact of the great revolution, to surrender to the revolutionary camp. They also show that the firmer and stronger the leadership in the surging maelstrom of the great people's revolution, the broader will be the revolutionary united front, and the firmer will be the foundation of the revolution. Otherwise, the vacillators will turn to join the counter-revolutionaries, and the latter will then become still more aggressive.

This was the most important policy for our Party in those crucial days of the 1927 revolution. The adoption or rejection of this policy would decide whether or not the peasant revolution could be carried out in a big way, whether or not the revolutionary united front could be maintained, whether or not the national revolution could be brought to a victorious conclusion. Chen Tu-hsiu the opportunist, however, adopted a policy which was contrary to the policy pursued by Mao Tse-tung and many other Bolsheviks, that is, the policy pursued by the Communist International, by Lenin and Stalin. His policy fanned the flames of the counter-revolution and increased the vacillating of the waverers; the peasant revolution suffered a setback, and, as a result, the revolution of

1927 failed. This was a very bitter lesson learned at the cost of a great deal of bloodshed, a lesson which we should never forget.

But does Mao Tse-tung reject all the necessary compromises in all circumstances? Of course not. It is common knowledge that a revolution often tends to advance along many zigzag courses. We all know that Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin stressed time and again the necessity of flexible revolutionary tactics. Flexible revolutionary tactics demand that, in order to develop the revolution and speed up its advance to its goal, we should make different decisions at different stages, by basing ourselves upon the specific historical conditions, and by taking into full consideration the many different characteristics of the revolutionary movement. If the masses have not yet awakened, we revolutionaries may adopt, wherever necessary, appropriate, flexible tactics to help arouse them; if the masses have awakened, we may also adopt, should the conditions require, appropriate, flexible tactics to consolidate what they have achieved. In this connection, Mao Tse-tung holds that, when the masses are on the point of awakening, we should resolutely help them rise and transform themselves into a force capable of storming and taking the enemy strongholds, and thus destroy the enemy's arrogance and attain our goal. It is only after all this has been done that we will be in a position to consider other things, to consider whether, under the existing conditions, there is any need of making certain compromises in order better to be able to forge ahead. However, if the masses are just awakening but have not yet become a force strong enough to take any of the enemy's

positions; if it is the enemy who wants a compromise just to keep the masses from forming themselves into a force capable of taking his positions, and attempts thereby to undermine the prestige of the masses and save himself from an imminent crisis — if, at such a moment, we revolutionaries fall for such a compromise so completely detrimental to us, we should be betraying the revolution. Such a compromise is impermissible.

Stalin was right when he said:

Some think that Leninism is opposed to reforms, opposed to compromises and to agreements in general. This is absolutely wrong. Bolsheviks know as well as anybody else that in a certain sense “every little helps”, that under certain conditions reforms in general, and compromises and agreements in particular, are necessary and useful. . . .

Obviously, therefore, it is not a matter of reforms or of compromises and agreements, but of the use people make of reforms and compromises.

To a reformist, reforms are everything, while revolutionary work is something incidental, something just to talk about, mere eyewash. That is why, with reformist tactics under the bourgeois regime, reforms are inevitably transformed into an instrument for strengthening that regime, an instrument for disintegrating the revolution.

To a revolutionary, on the contrary, the main thing is revolutionary work and not reforms; to him reforms are by-products of the revolution. That is why, with revolutionary tactics under the bourgeois regime, reforms are naturally transformed into instruments for disintegrating this regime, into instruments for strength-

ening the revolution, into a base for the further development of the revolutionary movement.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, the concrete problems of revolution and reforms, which arise out of the different historical conditions obtaining in different countries, are not identical. None the less, as Stalin pointed out, the difference in the views held by revolutionaries and reformists on the question of reforms is the same everywhere. During the 1924-27 revolution, Chen Tu-hsiu acted just like the reformists while Mao Tse-tung identified himself with the revolutionaries mentioned by Stalin.

Stalin also gave an excellent exposition of the question of reforms after the seizure of power by the revolutionary masses:

The situation changes somewhat, however, after the overthrow of imperialism, under the dictatorship of proletariat. Under certain conditions, in a certain situation, the proletarian power may find itself constrained temporarily to leave the path of the revolutionary reconstruction of the existing order of things and to take the path of its gradual transformation, the "reformist path", as Lenin says in his well-known article "The Importance of Gold", the path of flanking movements, of reforms and concessions to the non-proletarian classes — in order to disintegrate these classes, to give the revolution a respite, to recuperate and prepare the conditions for a new offensive. It cannot be denied that in a sense this is a "reformist" path. But it must be borne in mind that there is a fundamental distinction here, which consists in the

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<sup>1</sup>J. V. Stalin, *Problems of Leninism*, Eng. ed., FLPH, Moscow, 1953, pp. 93-94.

fact that in this case the reform emanates from the proletarian power, it strengthens the proletarian power, it procures for it a necessary respite; its purpose is to disintegrate, not the revolution, but the non-proletarian classes.

Under such conditions a reform is thus transformed into its opposite.<sup>1</sup>

Stalin referred to what, in a certain sense, is a "reformist path" under the dictatorship of the proletariat. In China, our problem is one of reforms under the new-democratic dictatorship. It is a problem which at the same time involves the issue of our revolution traversing a circuitous path in its transition from new democracy to socialism. Although the concrete historical conditions are different, it cannot be otherwise in China where the revolution will advance along a zigzag line even after the establishment of a revolutionary power. On a number of occasions, Mao Tse-tung made brilliant Marxist analyses of this question in the course of fighting opportunism of all descriptions both in the period of the ten-year civil war (1927-37) and in the present War of Resistance Against Japan.

## V

### THE SLOGAN "GET ORGANIZED!" IN TWO DIFFERENT STAGES OF THE REVOLUTION

During the 1927 revolution, Mao Tse-tung, on the basis of the experience gained in the peasant movement in

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 94-95.

Hunan, pointed out that there were two stages in the revolutionary struggle of the masses. The first stage, in the words of Mao Tse-tung, was the period of organization. The slogan for this period was "Get organized!" Once organized under the leadership of the Communist Party, the peasant masses were able, within a brief space of time, to bring about "a great revolution in the countryside, a revolution without parallel in history".

The second stage Mao Tse-tung termed the period of revolutionary action. The slogan for this period was "Down with the local tyrants and evil gentry! All power to the peasant associations!" "As a result, the privileges which the feudal landlords enjoyed for thousands of years are being shattered to pieces. . . . With the collapse of the power of the landlords, the peasant associations have now become the sole organs of authority and the popular slogan 'All power to the peasant associations' has become a reality."

Having seized power through revolution, the peasants set out to change the relations of production as well as to reform themselves. Mao Tse-tung wrote:

Though a few of the poor peasant leaders undoubtedly did have shortcomings, most of them have changed by now. They themselves are energetically prohibiting gambling and suppressing banditry. Where the peasant association is powerful, gambling has stopped altogether and banditry has vanished. In some places it is literally true that people do not take any articles left by the wayside and that doors are not bolted at night. According to the Hengshan survey, 85 per cent of the poor peasant leaders have made great progress and have proved themselves capable and hard-working. Only 15 per cent retain some bad habits.

In the course of revolution man makes progress with lightning speed. The revolutionary masses, who are politically unrivalled in the administration of state affairs, are capable of creating a better social order than any that previously existed. Mao Tse-tung in a few lines brings all these points effectively home to us. The world belongs to the revolutionary masses, to the exploited masses — this is not only right but has also been proved by reality to be a historical necessity.

A new stage followed the conquest of power by the revolutionary masses and the stabilization of social order. Although Mao Tse-tung raised the same slogan "Get organized!", this time it had a different meaning from the slogan for the first stage — it called for the revolutionary masses to "get organized" on the production front. In this report, Mao Tse-tung discussed several questions concerning agricultural production, including the question of the co-operative movement. Though Mao Tse-tung touched upon such forms of organization as consumers', marketing and credit co-operatives, he did not, however, raise in a concrete way the question of organizing the peasants for production. This is because at that time the peasant struggle in Hunan had not yet developed to a point where it was appropriate to raise such a question. The question of organizing the peasants for production came to the fore only in the course of the ten-year civil war, that is, during the period of the agrarian revolution. This means that after the proletariat has led the peasants in the revolution to seize power and land, it must be able to organize the peasants for production through the mutual-aid and co-operative movement, in order to consummate the emancipation of the peasants. This occurred during the ten-year civil

war when the peasants in the Central Red Area<sup>1</sup> were organized in mutual-aid working groups.

"Get Organized!", a speech made by Mao Tse-tung at a reception in honour of the labour heroes of the Shensi-Kansu-Ningsia Border Region<sup>2</sup> on November 29, 1943, ranks in historical significance with the earlier published "Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan". In this speech, Mao Tse-tung summed up the general experiences of the peasant revolution and the peasant movement for increased production accumulated since the 1927 revolution, and during the ten-year civil war and the present anti-Japanese war.

In this historic speech, Mao Tse-tung told the toiling peasant masses:

Among the peasant masses a system of individual economy has prevailed for thousands of years, with each family or household forming a productive unit.

<sup>1</sup> This refers to the revolutionary bases built and developed in the Kiangsi-Fukien area under the leadership of Mao Tse-tung and Chu Teh after the failure of the First Revolutionary Civil War in 1927. Prior to the withdrawal of the Central Red Army in 1934, the Central Red Area was the centre of the Chinese revolution.

<sup>2</sup> This refers to the revolutionary bases gradually built up in the course of the people's revolutionary guerrilla warfare in northern Shensi after 1931. Following the arrival of the Central Red Army which had come from Kiangsi on its Long March under the leadership of the Party's Central Committee and Mao Tse-tung, the Border Region became the central base of China's revolutionary movement. In the War of Resistance Against Japan, it was in the Border Region that the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and its Revolutionary Military Council and the people's leader, Mao Tse-tung, had their headquarters. Yen-an, administrative seat of the Shensi-Kansu-Ningsia Border Region, became the political centre, directing the various anti-Japanese bases in the enemy's rear and the people's revolutionary struggles throughout the country.

This scattered, individual form of production is the economic foundation of feudal rule and keeps the peasants in perpetual poverty. The only way to change it is gradual collectivization, and the only way to bring about collectivization, according to Lenin, is through co-operatives. We have already organized many peasant co-operatives in the Border Region, but at present they are only of a rudimentary type and must go through several stages of development before they can become co-operatives of the Soviet type known as collective farms. Ours is a new-democratic economy, and our co-operatives are still organizations for collective labour based on an individual economy (on private property).<sup>1</sup>

He said further:

I hoped that . . . you will lead the people, lead the masses and work still better, and first of all get the masses organized on a voluntary basis into co-operatives, get them even better organized and in even greater numbers.<sup>2</sup>

The slogan "Get organized!" is, in the first stage of the revolution, aimed at destroying the old relations of production, whereas in the later stage it is aimed at establishing relations of production of a new type and developing the new productive forces. After liquidating the system of feudal exploitation, the mutual-aid and co-operative movement is the only road along which the Chinese peasants can avoid falling into the grip of capitalist exploitation and gradually advance to a common

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<sup>1</sup> Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Works*, Eng. ed., FLP, Peking, 1965, Vol. III, p. 156.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

prosperity. By taking this road, under the leadership of the Chinese proletariat and its vanguard — the Communist Party, the Chinese peasantry will advance from the victory of new democracy to the victory of socialism.

## VI

### CONCLUSION

The "Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan" by Mao Tse-tung is one of those works in which are embodied the best thoughts of the finest people ever known in China's history. This report on the peasant problem is, in essence, a generalization of the Bolshevik strategy and tactics of the Communist Party of China in the period of the 1924-27 revolution. In the words of Kang Sheng,<sup>1</sup> it is a summary of the Bolshevik programme of our Party in the period of the 1924-27 revolution, manifesting the concrete integration of Marxist-Leninist strategy and tactics with the practice of the Chinese revolution.

The process from the founding of our Party to the time when it brought about the 1924-27 revolution, was as follows: First, our Party organized the working-class movement and built up its own strength in the united front against imperialism and feudalism. Next, with its own strength as a basis, our Party organized the Kuo-mintang-Communist co-operation, namely, the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal united front, thereby paving the way for the peasant movement. Then, our Party

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<sup>1</sup>Kang Sheng — an alternate member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party.

proceeded to develop the peasant movement extensively so as to deal a fatal blow to the imperialist and feudal forces and achieve the regeneration of the Chinese nation.

During these three phases, the whole Party waged a dauntless struggle, its members shed their blood, made heroic sacrifices, and added epic pages to the history of China, bringing immortal glory to our country. Never before had such rich revolutionary experience been acquired as during this period.

From the founding of the Party up to the 1924-27 revolution, the revolutionary activities of Mao Tse-tung also went through these three phases: First, he participated in the working-class movement; next, in united front work; and then, in the peasant movement. In each of these phases, Mao Tse-tung stood at the foremost and most important post, threw himself whole-heartedly into revolutionary activities, worked unpretentiously, came into the closest contact with reality, established the broadest connections with the masses, showed the deepest concern for the revolutionary cause and pondered most profoundly over questions of the revolution. In Mao Tse-tung, there was not the slightest trace of the faults of the doctrinaires such as Chen Tu-hsiu, nor of those "gentlemen" who dabbled in the revolution. With the birth of our Party, and in the period of the 1924-27 revolution, Mao Tse-tung emerged as the most outstanding Bolshevik representative of the Party, who was capable of systematically solving fundamental questions of the Chinese revolution by correctly applying the Marxist-Leninist standpoint.

Ever since the Taiping Revolution (1851-64), Hunan has been one of the focal points of the struggles between

the revolutionary and counter-revolutionary forces in the country, and between the progressive and conservative forces. In successive periods it has witnessed typical struggles between revolution and counter-revolution, between progress and reaction. It has also witnessed the emergence of personalities typical of both the revolution and the counter-revolution. In Hunan, the revolutionary masses have rich revolutionary experience while the reactionaries have rich counter-revolutionary experience. On the eve of the 1924-27 revolution, the workers in Hunan were waging an inspiring struggle in which they made great sacrifices. During the 1924-27 revolution, Hunan was the great arena of struggles among various classes. Its peasant movement shook the entire continent of East Asia and thus became the beacon for the peasant revolution in the country. For all these reasons, Mao Tse-tung's "Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan", which sums up the experience of the struggle of the peasant masses in Hunan and that of the mass struggle throughout the country during the 1924-27 revolution, is the epitome of that whole epoch, that whole historical period.

Bolshevism in China as represented by Mao Tse-tung came into being the very day the Party was formed. The 1924-27 revolution was brought about by all the Bolshevik members of our Party. The entire political line of this revolution, the line of the national revolutionary united front, and the various mass struggles — all these were Bolshevik creations of our Party. When the mass struggle and the scope of the revolution had not yet fully developed, the Menshevik elements, with Chen Tu-hsiu as their representative, still remained in the Party side

by side with the Bolshevik members and echoed the line of the anti-imperialist, anti-feudal united front, but even at that time there were already struggles between them and the Bolshevik elements. The Menshevik ideology of Chen Tu-hsiu, Peng Shu-chih and their like exposed itself step by step as the mass struggle developed and the revolution spread. In fact, the general Menshevik programme of Chen Tu-hsiu began to reveal itself in the Resolution of the Third Enlarged Session of the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party of China, which had been drafted by Chen Tu-hsiu himself. But obviously, all the Bolshevik members of the Party at that time followed not Chen Tu-hsiu's Menshevik programme, but the Bolshevik programme. This is why the mass struggle and the scope of the revolution continued to develop. Thus this historic work by Mao Tse-tung is actually a document manifesting the open ideological split between the Party's Bolshevik members and its Menshevik elements headed by Chen Tu-hsiu.

In the period of the 1924-27 revolution, however, our Party was still young; history had not reached a stage where the conscious Bolshevik political line of Mao Tse-tung could hold undivided organizational sway over the whole Party (we must never forget: at the final, decisive historical moment in the struggle between revolution and counter-revolution, we will not be able to defeat the enemy if Bolshevism does not hold undivided organizational sway over the whole Party). Meanwhile Chen Tu-hsiu's Menshevism caused only harm to the revolution. But this failure of ours in the past has only further confirmed the irrefutable truth of Bolshevism as represented by Mao Tse-tung in China. Now, there is

no doubt that this Bolshevik truth will for ever guide our Party and illuminate the path forward for the entire Chinese people.

Spring, 1944.





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