



The Collectivization of Chinese Agriculture in the 1950s

BY JACK GRAY

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The Chinese Communist Party, originating as an urban-based group mainly composed of very young intellectuals, began with orthodox, doctrinaire, and extreme views of the way in which the rural revolution should be conducted. Their aim—the collective organization of agriculture on the largest possible scale—has never varied, but their methods have undergone progressive modification.

Three main factors were involved in this. The first was the nature of Chinese rural society, which stood in contrast to that of Russia. In Russia the village consisted of a group of farmers whose serf background had left them substantially equal in economic status and with a strong egalitarian ethic. The small minority of rich peasants (the kulaks) who had risen above this mass had done so only recently—most of them within living

memory; they were regarded with considerable jealousy; and many of them, established in their *hutors* (isolated steadings) apart from the village, were conspicuously cut off physically as well as socially from their fellow villagers. They were politically vulnerable. Moreover, the evidence suggests that a very large proportion (80 per cent in some regions) of the marketed agriculture surplus came from this small group of rich peasants. It was thus possible to believe that much of the surplus Russian agriculture could be put at the disposal of the Party, and the main source of resistance to the collectivization of agriculture destroyed, by the expropriation and liquidation of this small, isolated group.

In China the Communist Party very quickly discovered that the Chinese village was different. There were

of course enormous local variations; but in general the marketed surplus of Chinese agriculture did not come predominantly from any one stratum of the population. There were very few wholly subsistence farmers in China. Poor peasants, middle peasants, and rich peasants all sold a substantial proportion of their product. The surplus of the poor peasant was certainly partly an artificial one, for two reasons: first, because it was common for poor farmers to grow a high-value crop for sale and to buy low-value foods for family consumption; and second, because at their low level of income, it was to be expected that rising incomes would reduce rather than increase the proportion of crops which they sold—in some parts of China subsistence farming was a luxury which only the most prosperous farmers could enjoy. Land reform could thus be expected to reduce the surplus sold by the poor peasants rather than to increase it. If land reform involved expropriation of the rich peasants, their part in the production of a surplus would also virtually end, and the surplus of the middle peasants would be of crucial importance; even if the rich peasants were protected from land reform, the middle peasant's surplus was still indispensable.

The middle peasants formed about 25 to 30 per cent of the population in most villages. They were an integral and respected part of the village community, bound to other members of the village by ties of kinship. They could not be subjected to coercion as the Russian *kulaks* were. In most villages they owned, on the average, more than the average landholding of the village, and were, therefore, as a group hostile to egalitarian land reform. Reasonably well endowed with land and equipment as a group, they could not be expected to give ready support to the cooperativization of farming.

On the other hand, although always referred to as a coherent group, an examination of their characteristics in a number of villages shows that they were by no means such. As far as their incomes were concerned, judged by the size of their farms, they represented merely the middle section of a smooth concave distribution curve, a curve on which most middle peasants were nearer to being poor than rich, even though they were a part of the prosperous minority of the village. As far as their social position was concerned, although they were in theory all independent proprietors, and indeed represented to Chinese social thinkers the ideal peasant of tradition, in fact a minority of them in most areas (and a majority in some) were at least part-tenants, and had, therefore, something to gain from a land reform based upon the abolition of tenancy. As for the question of indebtedness, it is probable that as a group they were more deeply in debt than the poor peasants, many of whom had become poor because they could borrow no more or had lost the land on which their debts were secured. The middle peasant group was, therefore, one which, although not amenable to coercion, was open to

manipulation by compromise policies designed to split its members.

• LAND POLICIES

The second factor in the development of Chinese Communist agrarian policies, and one which very largely determined their response to the situation described above, was the fact that from early in the Party's history, it ruled over a territorial base. Its first base was established not much more than five years after the founding of the Party, and its leadership has been continuously involved in responsibility for government ever since. The Chinese Communist Party enjoyed only for a very short time the opportunity for purely destructive and irresponsible activities in a hostile state; its first concern since 1927 has been the survival of its own growing territories.

The first important modification of its rural policies came within months of the foundation of the Chingkangshan Soviet, when egalitarian redistribution of land and terrorist tactics were repudiated by Mao Tse-tung in defiance of the orders of the Central Committee. By 1933 the land of middle peasants was wholly excluded from the redistribution, and even the possibility of protecting the productive capacity of the rich peasants had become a matter for agonizing consideration. When land reform was recommenced in 1946, after the end of the Second United Front, there seems to have been considerable uncertainty—or considerable local variation—in policy. At one extreme, a plan for the mere limitation of estates at a quite generous level was implemented. Then, later, when the reform had moved to a new area, there was a brief return to full egalitarianism, tempting in North China where there were relatively few landlords and when recruitment to the People's Liberation Army was at its peak. This was firmly squashed by Mao Tse-tung, but in some areas, for example in Honan, the local cadres were beyond control. The reform involved middle peasants and went to extremes of egalitarianism; it had to be brought to a halt and reorganized firmly on the lines which Mao laid down. As a consequence, Mao insisted that the organization of an elected village government with full representation of the middle peasants had to precede the redistribution of the land, and insisted on the inclusion of middle peasants in the Peasant Associations. The reform continued on these lines; but when conquest spread south to the lower Yangtze and the much more commercialized and complex rural society of that area, the Party decided that it was necessary to protect not only the middle peasants but the rich peasants, who thereafter were deprived only of the land which they had rented out, or in other words were attacked only insofar as they were landlords. This was the line written into the final Agrarian Reform Law of June 1950, which thus at last recognized the fact that the rich peasants of China as a group were no longer (if they ever had been) seriously involved in exploitation.

They certainly employed labor—one or two full-time laborers on average—but they rented out little land and in some areas rented in much more than they rented out, and by the 1930s they seem to have ceased to play a large part in moneylending, having been overtaken by the banks in this role. But the Party was never in full control of its lower levels. Cadres were so scarce that often land reform was carried out by local peasants hurriedly briefed at county headquarters, and the crude methods used by the Party to discredit the landlord class—there were still a million Kuomintang troops fighting in the hills—were in themselves such as to make the maintenance of moderation difficult in face of the passionately egalitarian convictions of the village cadres. Nevertheless, in spite of widespread and often irreversible excesses in the redistribution of land, the result as a whole was to keep intact the farms operated by middle and rich peasants.

The third factor in the formation of communist agrarian policies was the fact that after 1927 increasing study of Chinese rural society and increasing despair at the inability of the Nationalist government to enforce even the most moderate reforms brought Chinese public opinion to a view superficially not very different in principle from that espoused by the Communist Party leadership. "Land to the tiller" was a slogan almost universally accepted; and in addition there was a widespread acceptance of the idea that the association of China's dwarf farms in some sort of cooperative system was a necessary preliminary to increased agricultural production and rural prosperity. Moreover the patent failure of the Kuomintang political apparatus to make any impression on those who ruled the villages had prepared Chinese opinion for a more or less ruthless village-by-village struggle before any significant changes could be brought about in rural life.

In short, the high value attached by the Communist Party as experienced administrators to the need to avoid disruption and loss of production while revolutionary changes were carried through, their knowledge of the limits which Chinese village society set to their power, and the general trend of Chinese opinion produced a sort of consensus concerning the rural revolution. Like any other consensus, it depended upon tactful vagueness on both sides, and although this was easy enough in the honeymoon days after liberation, the progressive revelation of what communist policies meant in practice soon tended to erode away the first solidarity. As far as land reform is concerned, however, although there was much disagreement over whether there should be any land reform at all in southern Kiangsu (which, the dissidents argued, was a capitalist and not a feudal society), armed resistance to the reform seems to have been confined very largely to Chekiang, the heartland of the Kuomintang. There was much alarm and bitterness over local excesses, however, and in the extreme south the movement ran full tilt into the loyalties and interests

involved in the corporately owned clan estates, said to amount to one-third of the total arable land, a situation out of which the Party emerged with its reputation for justice and moderation much impaired.

The ill side-effects of land reform, however, were more than offset by the satisfaction of having completed a long-desired revolution in land tenure, and also by the rising prosperity which the maintenance of order, the rationalization of taxation, and the restoration and rapid growth of urban markets brought about. Thus, in conditions of relative peace and prosperity, the first campaign for the cooperativization of agriculture was begun at the end of 1951.

The campaign was explicitly experimental. It was launched by a party directive which was not then published, although the gist of it appeared in government policy statements. The directive was finally published in February 1953, marking the end of the experimental period. There had already been some progress toward the establishment of mutual aid teams, but this had been prejudiced (as in the case of land reform and in the same areas) by the egalitarian predilections of local cadres; progress had apparently come to a halt, with about 20 per cent of the farmers in mutual aid teams. In any case, most were temporary teams, merely representing a new name for traditional practices.

• VILLAGER ATTITUDES

There were two new factors involved in the attitude of villagers to the prospect of cooperativization. One was that the rather limited nature of the redistribution of land had left many of the recipients in a position where, because of the smallness of their holding and their lack of tools, animals, and capital, they could not hope to make an independent living upon it. Moreover the distribution of animals and tools along with the land had in many cases been to groups, not individuals—each family might for example find itself with a fifth share in a mule—so that some degree of cooperative working was dictated from the start.

This situation perhaps offers another contrast with Russia. There seems to be a general assumption that the redistribution of land there and the expropriation of the *kulaks* had left the Russian peasant in a position where he could carry on as an independent proprietor, and so he had no incentive to accept collectivization. In China, however, it is obvious that many peasants, in spite of land reform, could not hope to farm effectively unless they could get access to the land and capital of the middle peasants either through further redistribution, which was not to be considered, or through cooperative working. There was thus a motive force in the village for the development of cooperative agriculture.

On the other hand prosperity had strengthened the already prosperous. Fewer middle peasants would now see an advantage in cooperative working, and in par-

ticular many Party members who had taken seriously the Party's advice on how to achieve greater production found themselves embarrassingly prosperous. Some quietly forgot their former radicalism; some sold to avoid the dilemma of having to employ labor if they were to expand production further; and a few used their new wealth to found mutual aid teams. There was a danger of the demoralization of the Party in the rural areas, as there had been in Russia. The new cooperative campaign had to be preceded by a rectification of the rural Party machine to bring home to Party members their duty to participate in the campaign; there is no evidence, however, that there were widespread dismissals of Party members, or any attempt to flood the local branches with new and more activist elements.

The attitude of the middle peasants was crucial in the development of organized agriculture as it was in land reform. But they could not be excluded from the process of cooperativization as they had been from land redistribution, even temporarily. It was not possible to form poor-peasant cooperatives into which, at some future date when the farms had sufficiently raised production and incomes, the middle peasants could be brought. Poor-peasant cooperative farms were not viable; the inclusion of some middle peasants was economically necessary from the beginning, and they had to be attracted to and attached to the cooperatives by solid advantages.

● PARTY CONDITIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT

In these circumstances, Party documents associated with the campaign of 1952 stress five conditions for successful development:

Adherence to Agricultural Producers' Cooperatives—APCs—must be voluntary.

Arrangements for the distribution of income, etc., must adhere to the principle of mutual benefit.

Development must be gradual, by a series of "firm steps."

Development must not outrun "collectivist consciousness."

The basic condition of success must be the achievement of increased production and increased personal incomes.

Examination of documents which carried practical instructions and recommendations to the cadres involved in APC work—as opposed to general policy statements to which perhaps no great credence can be attached—strongly suggest that these principles were taken seriously. Indeed, they are never listed explicitly in this way, but emerge from practical discussion of the conditions of local work. The sanction for failure to take them seriously was the breakdown of the APC or the resignation of members; both these results are widely attested to. Local instructions, moreover, describe in detail what these principles implied, and how they were

to be achieved. In 1952 particularly a wide range of alternative methods of implementation was usually given, and the nature of these alternatives strongly suggests that most APCs were set up on the basis of a consensus achieved by a process of bargaining; and the range of issues left to the discussion of the founding members of the APC is quite impressively wide. There appears to have been a substantial degree of "democracy" in the process of formation of the first cooperative farms. Space will not permit the exposition of the full evidence upon which these opinions are based; it is possible here only to give examples.

The extreme point of the voluntary principle was reached in one county in north China in early 1953; there, instructions were given to APC cadres that before an APC was formed, the cadres must have the "voluntary agreement in full consciousness [of the implications] of every member of every family involved." County cadres elsewhere were warned that they must not mistake the enthusiasm of a few Party members and activists for the opinions of the masses, but must in every case check for themselves the state of local opinion. The stress upon the necessity of voluntary adherence to the APCs continued until at least late 1955. For example, in a case in the Sian suburbs in which the cadres were singled out for praise on account of their political methods, only two points in their work were criticized. They had used the argument to the middle peasants that gratitude to the Party for their prosperity in the preceding years should make them feel obliged to support the APC movement; this was condemned as a form of pressure. They had also taken subscriptions to the APCs in a full meeting of the village; this was condemned also as a form of pressure because many of those present felt obliged to conform to the attitude of the majority, and it was stressed that in the future subscriptions should be made individually.

The principle of "mutual benefit" was of crucial importance; without positive steps to insure that this principle was upheld, APCs might either become a means of exploiting the labor of poorer members for the benefit of the more prosperous, who provided more land and most of the tools and animals, or alternatively they could become a means of further redistribution of income in favor of the poor. As one poor peasant member of an APC said, "Land reform wasn't complete, but the APCs will fix that!" Perhaps more was written about the arrangements necessary to insure mutual benefit than about any other aspect of the cooperatives. The practical problems involved included the proportion of the society's income to be paid to land shares, the purchase or leasing of tools and working animals, and the system of remuneration of labor. Not least was the question of the rational use of labor, because it was very easy for the poor peasants to "live off" the middle peasants by the creation of remunerative but relatively unproductive employment. In some

parts of the north in 1952 the party settled for a distribution system by which 60 per cent of the society's income went to land shares—an extraordinary concession made explicitly to encourage the middle peasants to join.

● FUNCTIONING GRADUALISM

Gradualism meant several things. It meant, first of all, growth "from a point to a plane," with successful individual APCs assisting the mutual aid teams around them to develop in the direction of fully cooperative working. It meant also that the internal development of the APC would be gradual. This does not simply mean the three well-known stages of development, from mutual aid teams to lower APCs to higher APCs (collectives); the transition from stage to stage was to be softened by development within each stage. Mutual aid teams, starting from the mere regularization of existing local mutual help practices, would become permanent; they would then be encouraged to undertake ventures which would establish common property (land reclamation, the planting of an orchard, the purchase of an oil-press, and so on), and to arrive at the point of unified working of the land by the rationalization of the use of labor and by a modicum of joint planning—for crop specialization, for example. In time, they would not be too far from the cooperative level of development. Within the APC great stress was also put upon the accumulation of joint property which would give members a stake in the society, and upon gradual rationalization of land use which would wean the farmers from their own former plots and submerge these under a new cropping pattern. But for the APC, the most important form of gradualism was the step-by-step reduction of the proportion of society income paid to land, or the fixing of the reward to land shares in the form of a low fixed rent, as productivity and income rose. In this way it was hoped that the final transition to the collective, in which no reward went to land, would be painless in the sense that even those with much land and little labor power would receive a slight increase in income every year in spite of the falling proportion of the product paid to them as land-owners.

This vital form of gradualism depended wholly upon the possibility of steadily increasing the income of the APC members; it is, therefore, important to estimate whether the increases in productivity and in incomes in the APCs are likely to have been sufficient to lubricate the process of change in this way. The figures quoted for various individual, and usually exemplary, APCs in *The High Tide of Socialism in the Chinese Countryside* (Peking, January 1956) give average increases of 23 per cent per annum for agricultural productivity over the short periods involved. In most APCs existing at that time, three sets of circumstances must be taken into consideration: (1) middle peasants were

in receipt of substantial extra income in the form of leasing charges or installment payments for animals and tools put at the disposal of the APC; (2) labor-intensive methods used to increase agricultural productivity involved only very small amounts of capital, so that costs in most cases form a higher proportion of the higher gross incomes; and (3) income from cooperative auxiliary occupations seems on the whole to have risen in these years much more than agricultural income. It is, therefore, probable that the transition could have been made painlessly in most cases at this level of increase of agricultural productivity in two or three years. This is, of course, a selected group of cooperatives.

The question is whether the recorded increases, averaging 23 per cent but ranging from 10 to 110 per cent, are plausible, especially in view of the fact that in these years the increase on a national average was estimated at only about four per cent per annum. There is no reason to suppose that they are not. The *High Tide* collection inspires confidence by its frankness in other respects, for example, in the readiness with which it is admitted that local successes in the APC campaign were due to especially favorable local conditions. This suggests that production claims may also have been honest. In addition, it was an essential part of the propaganda process that members of local mutual aid teams should participate in the estimates of APC crops, and this must have limited the tendency to over-report. And finally, in most cases, perfectly adequate technical reasons were given for the increases. The accounts and figures, in fact, merely tend to confirm what is probably generally accepted—that at existing yields and with existing practices, there were few technical obstacles to substantial and rapid increases in China's yields, and that the obstacles were social and psychological rather than natural. In other words, startling and immediate increases could be expected in particular places where technical expertise, political zeal, and economic assistance could be concentrated for the purpose of experiment or demonstration.

● THE FINAL CAMPAIGN

By early 1955 about 14 per cent of China's farmers were in lower-level APCs. The number in collectives proper was negligible. By the end of 1955, the proportion in lower-level APCs was 60 per cent. In early 1956 it was virtually 100 per cent, and by the end of 1956, almost 90 per cent were in collectives proper. These were drastic changes, which seem to fly in the face of the gradualist policy which had until then been emphasized. In one sense, they were even more drastic than they seem, in that the national averages conceal the very great disparity between the north (much of it old liberated area), where development had been rapid, and the center and south, where it had been much slower.

Before accepting this as a dramatic and unscrupulous reversal of policy, let us in all fairness try to make the

best case that can be made for the Chinese Communist Party in the circumstances. Let us take first of all the *High Tide* jump from 14 to 60 per cent.

The first question to ask is: How much potential support for cooperative farming could be expected in the average Chinese village? It is reasonable to suppose that the poor peasants, left after land reform with insufficient land and without the means to work it efficiently, were potential supporters. Among the middle peasants it must first of all be reiterated that, on the assumption that their incomes were generally in proportion to the size of their farms, most of them were nearer to being poor peasants than to being prosperous middle peasants; increases of income demonstrated upon existing APCs would not have to be very large in order to excite the interest of two-thirds of those classed as middle peasants. Another factor is that the lower-middle peasants, many of them risen recently from the ranks of poor peasants, were probably more closely associated with the Party than any other class; they were especially numerous on the rural Party committees, and many of them were, therefore, politically committed to cooperativization. Among the middle peasants as a whole, individual economic circumstances varied, quite apart from the level of their incomes; some had more labor than they could employ and might welcome the increased employment opportunities offered by the APCs, while some had more land than they could work, especially when there was political discouragement of the private employment of labor, and so might find it an advantage to invest their land and equipment and beasts in a successful APC.

Economic considerations apart, the Party could expect in the early fifties the solid support of the 25 per cent or so of the village population in adolescence or early youth, as well as the support of many women who saw a means to emancipation in the employment which the APC would offer them. There were also individuals among the more prosperous who were politically committed to the communist program in spite of their short-term economic interests. Kinship ties were useful and constantly used; in particular the relatives of members of the cadres would tend to support Party policy, as a matter of principle and ancient custom.

In sum, providing that the existing APCs were able to demonstrate their efficiency, the Party might expect about 75 per cent support in the village for cooperative agriculture. By mid-1955, the vast majority of villages in China had at least one APC with a history of one or two complete years of operation, after some mutual aid training, open to inspection. In addition, virtually all the farmers of the village, excluding rich peasants, were in mutual aid teams with an average three-year history, more or less closely associated with the APC itself through help and advice given on agricultural methods, accountancy, the organization of labor, and the planning of production. It is, therefore,

not beyond belief that a determined campaign in a year of bumper harvests might induce most of the mutual aid teams to accept the change to APC status.

It is possible, although further investigation is necessary on this point, that there was one significant change in Party policy at this time which may have materially assisted the APC movement. It is clear from the record that many middle peasants, although willing to invest their land in the APCs and hire or sell their animals and tools to them, balked at the prospect of being asked to invest their savings in it as well. This was to put all their eggs in one basket with a vengeance; it caused more strain within the early APCs than any other issue, and it was an obstacle to the adherence of the more prosperous, who felt that the poor peasants in this sense brought nothing, or at least risked nothing, except a paltry entrance fee. At the same time, recruitment of poor peasants lagged because first of all many of them could not raise even the entrance fee and, more important, many cadres were worried about the economic viability of an APC composed very largely of the poor, and so kept them out. Some time in 1955 the habit seems to have grown up of raising the entrance fee to a level which would represent a real investment in the APC, and of lending the necessary sum out of agricultural credit funds to those peasants who could not raise the sum for themselves. If this was in fact general, it represents a major change in the hitherto very niggardly use of agricultural credit funds, and a very good reason why there should have been a sudden breakthrough in recruitment to the APCs.

● ONE HUNDRED PER CENT ADHERENCE

The next question is that of the completion of cooperativization: the rise from 60 to 100 per cent adherence. The significance of this depends upon who were still outside. The rich peasants and former landlords (10 per cent of the rural population), it may be assumed, were not in a position to refuse when their time came; they were essentially an enemy class. It cannot, however, be assumed that the remainder was composed mainly of the middle peasants. In the first place, as we have seen, the APCs could not be built up from cooperatives of poor peasants, as these would have been economically unviable. Almost all APCs included middle peasants from the beginning, and a large minority of them were even formed with the adherence of one or two of the most prosperous peasants. The necessity of forming the APC on a relatively compact area of land also made it difficult to form APCs entirely based upon a single class. Some figures for individual villages show that successively formed APCs differed little in class composition. In early 1956 some areas reported that the new recruits were composed of 80 per cent poor peasants; these were clearly areas where, rightly or wrongly, the mass of the farmers had been excluded for economic reasons at the earlier stages.

There had been complaints in 1955 and earlier that the APCs had failed to absorb both the poorest and the most prosperous. The last stage of cooperativization did not consist, as is very readily assumed, of the dragooning of the prosperous minority of the village into cooperatives of the poor. The situation is rather obscure, but it was certainly more complicated than that. What is certain, given the Party's bias in favor of large-scale cooperatives, is that when virtually 100 per cent cooperation was achieved, it would be normally in the form of cooperatives each embracing the whole population of a single natural village. Since the natural demonstration cooperatives had been spread as widely as possible and as by 1955 averaged well over one per village, it can be assumed that most villages had a well-established cooperative by that date.

Examples of villages wholly cooperativized before the end of 1955 suggest that the normal process was the merging of the more experienced mutual aid teams with this existing APC. Presumably this is what happened to bring the total in cooperatives up to 60 per cent. The pattern of progress suggests that in the north the regional average at this stage would be considerably higher, perhaps very near to 90 per cent. The increase to a national average of over 90 per cent probably took place mainly as a result of increased recruitment in central and south China. The main point is, however, that the spread of cooperativization was not a spread from class to class, but a spread from one area of the village to others whose inhabitants had much the same class structure as the first. The exception to this, of course, is the rich peasant group which was excluded until the very end of the whole movement.

● A DECISIVE DIFFERENCE?

The rapid collectivization of the cooperatives during 1956 seems to have been an even more striking departure from gradualist policy. By February 1956, only four months (and they were the idle months for farming) after the recruitment of almost 50 per cent more of the population into cooperatives, the same total were in collectives, mainly in north China. Most of these, therefore, went virtually straight into collectivism, for in early 1955 only 14 per cent of the population were in cooperatives, and consequently most of the recruits to the cooperatives of late 1955 had been only formally members of the societies, having taken part in virtually no farming operations. At the end of 1956, after the autumn harvest, the other half of China's farmers were also collectivized, mainly in central and south China, where the much slighter development of cooperative farming—demonstration farms with a shorter history and swamped by an even larger number of new recruits than in the north—made a year's further experience of farming necessary before the change.

Mao Tse-tung might argue (and did) that China in mid-1955 had reached the point where mass adherence

to the cooperatives was feasible, and the main problems—political, administrative, and technical—had all been solved in some places and could be solved everywhere; but this argument could not be used, and never was, to justify immediate and rapid collectivization. Virtually all of the few collectives existing in China at the end of 1955 had been formed in exceptional circumstances. Apart from a few established on state-owned land, they were all formed where for one reason or another labor was scarce in relation to the demands made on it. This might occur on farms devoted to specialized production of cotton or other labor-intensive crops, or in areas of resettlement such as the Huai River area; but most of all this situation occurred on farms organized for vegetable production in the rural suburbs of the cities.

How drastic was the change to collectivization? As opposed to cooperativization, it made little or no difference to the organization of the farm; it meant merely a change in the distribution of the product by the abolition of the payment of dividends to land. This assumed, however, that the change was made after the cooperative had solved all the problems of large-scale management; implemented, against the usual opposition, a strict system of piecework and contracts; imposed on this basis a degree of labor discipline wholly unfamiliar to independent peasant farmers; and put through the tricky business of equalizing the productive resources of the brigades. These developments had probably already taken place on the old APCs which became the nuclei of the new collectives. But to extend them to the vast new membership was a formidable task, depending on the ability of the society to cover the loss of income which the most prosperous 20 to 30 per cent of their new members faced, by successfully maintaining on the much enlarged farm the increases of production and income which at *their best* they had won on the old. Furthermore, they must make this good in one agricultural season. The loss to which the more prosperous new recruits were liable was of course partly offset by their reduced liability to land tax and by the installment payments made to them for their tools and animals; the data are too scanty to make any judgment of the importance of this possibility, but it is unlikely to have made a decisive difference.

The 1955 harvests had been very good. This, combined perhaps with a growing confidence that the Party's taxation and procurement levels were stable, produced a mood of confidence and buoyancy, of which this writer was a witness at the end of 1955. Added to this, the local reports, upon which Mao Tse-tung had based the *High Tide* speed-up of the cooperative movement, must have strongly suggested to him that the productive potentialities of organized agriculture were such as would obviate the possibility that, at the end of the season when the produce was distributed, the middle peasants would find themselves with reduced incomes.

The increases of production achieved on the best co-operatives suggested this. The means by which they had been won also suggested, first, that the essential condition of such increases was a very great intensification of labor and that the abolition of dividends on land would help by making all members of the societies largely dependent on labor income; and second, that the investment of large amounts of labor in the collection of organic fertilizers, increased tillage, extended irrigation, and marginal land reclamation could pay off in a single season. The farmers were assured that 90 per cent of them would have increased incomes in the first year; and the state planned for a 10 per cent increase in agricultural productivity in 1956. Even this increase in production could not have given 90 per cent of the farmers an increase in income, but perhaps it is to the hopes of a 100 per cent increase in productivity by 1957, expressed in Mao's *High Tide* preface, that we must look for the higher expectations which justified his optimistic assurances.

The actual increase was 4.4 per cent. This failure, however, does not seem to have changed the Party's assumptions about the lessons to be drawn from the cooperative movement. These lessons were that intensified labor, working with the little local capital available, could produce substantial increases in production; that these increases could be largely immediate; that the larger the scale on which labor could be organized, capital mobilized, and planning done, the greater the increases in productivity would be. Other lessons which were remembered when the time was ripe were the important part played in the creation of local capital by cooperativized auxiliary occupations, and the importance in this respect of freedom for local initiative. These lessons formed the basis of the Great Leap Forward and of the commune movement. They tended to reinforce Mao's belief that in this as in other matters, human resources are what count; the key is to find the organization within which human resources can be employed to the best effect. The problem of production is essentially a political, not an economic one. Hence the communes, which carried labor-intensive, large-scale, leap-forward, quick-return policies to the limit.

• THE COMMUNES

The communes in their original form were a failure. Labor was overextended when the country faced the extreme natural disasters which occurred from 1959 to 1961; the communes defeated the weather, but at an unrepeatable cost of social dislocation and exhausting labor. The Leap Forward put planning in chaos. The results of the attempt to substitute labor for capital were disappointing—large, long-term investment was needed too. Finally, the economies of scale were got at the cost of a departure from normal Party leadership techniques, which were based in the countryside upon natural social groupings and personal relationships.

The "retreat" from the communes was, however, far from a mere withdrawal. The difficulties appear to have led to a reconsideration of the problems of determining the most appropriate scale for different purposes—problems which every type of community development faces. The solution gradually arrived at put local leadership back on the basis of as small and personal groups as was practical. The history of the organization of Chinese farming made this relatively easy. It had been built on small units associated in larger bodies in successive layers, and the constituent bodies could easily be revitalized. Their existence had been, from the point of view of their membership, continuous. This mutual aid team was a group of neighbors who were already associated in traditional forms of seasonal cooperation. It remained in being as the basic unit of work allocation. The mutual aid teams had been merged in the first small APCs of about twenty neighboring families; these remained as the production teams. The larger APCs upon which collectivization had been based usually covered the natural village and were the seat of the Party branch, composed of village farmers and from whom the village and APC administration leaders were drawn; these became the brigades within the communes.

In the new dispensation the conduct of farming reverted from the commune essentially to the production team, the former small APC, which now became the unit of production management and of distribution of profits. The brigades (the village) became the contracting unit vis-à-vis the state trading and procurement organs, with the duty of coordinating the farming of the village—but with little authority to enforce its policies, if the recorded complaints of brigade cadres are to be taken seriously. The commune confined itself to the tasks for which its larger scale fitted it and in which the impersonality arising from its scale was not too great a disadvantage—planning and carrying out, with investment funds derived from its constituent teams and brigades, the establishment of small factories, the coordination of water conservancy plans, and in general the provision of the social overheads of the local economy. In principle, this is an excellent device worth the attention of community development authorities elsewhere. From the point of view of communist political methods, it sought to restore the face-to-face groups of neighbors led by neighbors (indeed, often relatives rather than mere neighbors), while at the same time leaving the Party as free as political conditions permitted to renew the emphasis upon increased scale.

But for all its increased sophistication and flexibility, it is interesting that the system is still based upon natural social groupings; the Communist Party has not yet succeeded in shaking the Chinese rural population free from its intensely personal and local loyalties, and in imposing an impersonal labor discipline upon it.