

China, cont'd

Lecture No. 0030 (March 29, 1974)

Transcript digitized in 2026 by the [Harvey Goldberg Center](#), a project of the University of Wisconsin–Madison Department of History.

Preliminary remarks

I'll call one thing to your attention: I generally try to avoid making my own kind of announcements about things that are on campus, because there are a great number of things to get into pretty soon here — and of course this is an addendum to your calendar, but this happens to be a friend of mine who's doing something so I thought I would announce it — and it's a concert. It's free, it's a week from Sunday in the art gallery here, the Elvehjem Art Gallery. And it's Jess Anderson, who is an excellent harpsichordist, probably the best around, and who is giving a concert that will be held at 3pm on Sunday, April 7th... [*audio cuts out*].

Lecture

Let's focus, then, on a couple of documents for a moment, a couple of documents that come out of the very critical Chinese year of 1927. Documents, in a sense, which shed a good deal of light on the trajectory of the Chinese Revolution, and also, and possibly even more important, about that very painful effort — that very excruciating effort, if you please — to try to adapt Marxism. To try to adapt Marxism to the imperatives of the Chinese scene, to try to adapt Marxism to the realities of society in China — in other words, to try to adapt Marxism, if you please, not to an advanced capitalist society, where, presumably, it had been a revolutionary strategy, but to apply it to the Third World: to a vast, populous, underdeveloped, agrarian economy. That became a historic effort, after all, in the very center of this Chinese Revolution.

Now, the first of these texts that I want to deal with, and that I want to cite to you, comes from Mao himself. And it comes from Mao Tse-tung in March of 1927, from a tract that is a justifiably celebrated tract. It is the brochure of Mao Tse-tung, published in March of 1927, called a *Report on an Inquiry into the Peasant Uprising in the Province of Hunan*. And it was Mao going to his native province of Hunan, in the first months of 1927, to see that kind of vast peasant uprising that was going on in that province and to make a report upon it. And I pull from that excellent tract the following observation of Mao, which is an extraordinarily fruitful kind of observation. Listen carefully:

"At the present time, the upsurge of the peasant movement has taken an enormous importance. In a short time, we'll see in the provinces of the center of China, and in the

south, and in the north, literally hundreds of millions of Chinese peasants confronting their class enemies. Turbulent and invincible they will be. It will be like a storm without precedent, and no force will be able to contain it. The peasants will break their chains. They will dig the grave of the imperialists, the warlords, the corrupt bureaucrats, the local despots, and the evil landlords. And they will test the mettle of all revolutionary parties and all revolutionary comrades.

"How will we, the Chinese Communists, respond? Will we march at the head of the peasants and lead them to victory? Or will we fall behind them, berating them for ignoring our time-tested rules? Or will we, in fact, block their way and fight them? We can choose any of these ways, but events are overtaking us and we had better choose now."

An extraordinary document when you get right down to it. Because explicitly, of course, already, in early 1927, Mao Tse-tung is identifying the peasant revolution. But, implicitly, he is doing several other things. Implicitly, he really is challenging what is a Marxist orthodoxy. He's challenging that kind of determinism — that latter-day Kautskyism, if you please — that says that Marxism or a revolution has to come in an advanced, industrial society, and that the proletariat in the cities become the engines of that revolution. And implicitly, also, he is challenging his own Communist Party, and urging them, after all, to confront the specificity of Chinese conditions. And finally, if you please, he is beginning to establish space: space that he never narrowed between himself and the Comintern, between himself and Moscow. And there will be an ambiguity in those relationships that will really endure throughout the long history of the Chinese Revolution.

And so, it is an extraordinary document. And how do we dig the marrow out of its bones? Let us say that it is a triple reflection. It is a reflection, in the first place, of objective reality, of what really China or the Third World is. In the second place, it is the reflection of a specific experience: the experience of Mao in the peasant areas, and knowing that rural revolution at its roots. And in the third place, and perhaps most importantly, it is a reflection of the ambiguity of the Chinese Communist Party toward the peasantry — or, if you please, the ambiguity toward a revolutionary strategy, that ambiguity rooted and anchored in the fact that it was being dictated at that particular point by the Comintern.

And let's take each of those three reflections. And we talk about objective reality, and we talk about what China is in those decades right before the revolution. And, granted, there are workers; granted that there is, already in the 1920s, what you can call a proletariat. And I quite agree with my great comrade and friend Jean Chesneaux, in his massive thesis on the history of the Chinese worker movement, that in the decade of the 1920s, what had been the flotsam and jetsam of

wage earners in the cities began to form into a proletariat. And I quite agree that in that first period of the 1920s, whatever mass base that the Chinese Communist Party had really was an urban proletarian base. And that for reasons that you can well understand: that from 1924 on, from the time that the Chinese Communists went into the Kuomintang, went into the nationalist movement and became a constituent part of that movement, they had a funnel by which to reach especially the urban mass. Because that Kuomintang was operating mainly in the cities of the coastal areas of China, and consequently the Communists went to the workers and began to form their revolutionary consciousness, and began to help them organize unions, and began to help them organize strikes. And much of that turns, after all, on the great events of the 30th of May of 1925, and the consequences of those events.

The 30th of May of 1925, surely a turning point in that early urban history of the Chinese Communist movement, because there had been a catastrophe, or a disaster, in the city of Shanghai. And that is that in a Japanese-owned factory, the overseer — the one who was really the master in the factory, the foreman, who was a Japanese brute — had actually turned upon his workers and simply opened fire upon them. And in response to that, the Communists called, in the city of Shanghai, a strike of workers. And that strike was very badly repressed by the police on the 30th of May of 1925. And the Communists then call for a massive response, and you do get demonstrations and strikes, and you get it spreading from Shanghai into the other cities. And, consequently, at that particular point, you get a certain division. And the Communists began to be magnetic to the Chinese working class.

And it all shows up, you see, in the numbers of effectives that the Chinese Communist movement has. You start with that tiny group, with those twelve people at that first founding congress in 1921. By the time you come to the May events of 1925, the Communists are moving into that working sector. By November of 1925, the Party has 10,000 members, mainly working-class. By July of 1926, it has 30,000 members, mainly proletarian. And on the very eve of the split with Chiang Kai-shek, the 12th of April of 1927, in that famous coup of Shanghai of that year, there are 58,000 Communists, and most of them, to be sure, are proletarian. If you look, for example, at the Chinese Communist youth organization — which was 90% student before May of 1925 — by the time you come to April of '27, to that split, it is 50% worker and only 35% student. And, consequently, you can see that the roots are there.

And I admit that. And I admit further — and it is, quite obviously, inscribed in the facts — that that working class was showing its capacity within a certain framework in the 1920s, that it was organizing into unions. Consider that, at the time of the split in April of '27, there were 1,200,000 Chinese workers in unions, which means that virtually all of them who were wage earners in the modern sectors had really organized unions, many of them Communist-controlled or under

Communist ideological influence. And consider the final fact that those workers even show the capacity for an urban insurrection: that I'm talking about March of 1927 in Shanghai, that it is in that city of Shanghai that Chou En-lai enters the city and organizes the workers in March to make a great insurrection and take over that city, even before Chiang's Kuomintang's army gets into it. All of that is true.

And yet, you see, that objective reality must be modified by two very important data. One is that by 1927, the Chinese proletariat constituted one-half of 1% of the Chinese population — not even the 3% that there were in Russia in 1917. And the second fact, which is crucially important: that in those last years of the Chinese Revolution in the late 1940s, when the Red Army of Mao Tse-tung and Chu Teh was really fighting its way to victory, that there was very little by way of urban action by the working class itself. The workers played very little role in the final victory of Chinese communism. Those armies of Mao and of Chu Teh were largely the peasant masses enrolled into that army.

Now, the explanation for that is not so hard to find: that after the split with Chiang Kai-shek in April of 1927, in those areas that the Kuomintang controlled, there was a terrible kind of repression of the working class. It wasn't only Communists who were rounded up and thrown into prison or assassinated, but they were the leaders of the unions, the most militant workers — 40,000 of them, of the militant cadre of the working-class movement, assassinated and killed in 1927 alone. And we know that in the fall of 1927 — when the Party followed an adventurous line, when the Communists were under Moscow's orders and tried to make urban insurrections in the worst possible condition — that they led the workers again into a trap from which they never came out. And so it is that Trotsky says, for example — and those who are right in the Trotskyist school, like Isaac Duetscher or like Harold Isaacs — and they say that, essentially, the working-class participation in the Chinese Revolution was really killed off by the adventurism of the Chinese Communist Party, leading the workers into hopeless traps in 1927, again in 1930, in the summer of that year. And that is true, but it seems to me that it is a gross exaggeration.

The plain fact of the matter is that, contrary to the analysis that Trotsky very frequently made of the social structure of China, that kind of analogy that the Trotskyists are fond of making — between China in 1927 or '49 and Russia in 1917 — that the analogy really does not hold. That Shanghai is not Petrograd; that Shanghai is an imperialistic city: it is a city in which the major works belong to foreign enterprise and not to native capitalism. It's a city in which the workers are not in the steel industry as they were in Petrograd, but they are in light industry or in transport. It is, after all, a very different kind of structure. And if you take the government at Peking and you destroy it in 1927, it isn't like destroying the tsar; it's just one of many warlords,

and you still have to have that guerrilla army that will take on the warlords one by one. And what I'm saying is that the ultimate social reality of a China, or almost of any Third World country, is that the proletariat is not like the proletariat in the Western countries. And, perforce, whatever its contribution, it will be minimal in comparison to what the engine of revolution in those areas is, namely the peasantry.

And so it is the peasantry that is the other side of that objective reality. And we are talking about a mass of peasants. And we're talking about them in desperate straits, for whom there is no other egress but a revolution. And we're talking about those millennial things: we're talking about the crises of nature that afflicts the Chinese peasantry always. We're talking about the flood, and the drought, and the famine that comes among them and that creates such havoc. But we're talking about something much more important: we're talking about man-made disasters; in other words, we're talking about the distribution of land in China, and we're talking about the social relationships in the village. We're talking about the things that can be undone and remade. We're talking about the fact that in 1945, 53% of the land in China was owned by 10% of the owners, and those the absentee proprietors or the rich peasants; we're talking about the fact that 30% of the Chinese peasantry are tenants and don't own their own land; we're talking about the millions who have no land at all.

Oh, look: that you see that population pressure has become a disaster. You must remember that if you are to appreciate [William H.] Hinton; you must remember that if you are to have the slightest sensitivity of what the hell this Communist regime has done in China. Because you are dealing — by way of the data in agricultural inquiries of the 1930s and 1940s — you are dealing with data like this: that the average holding of those who held land in China, that the average holding in the '30s and '40s was 1.3 hectare. And you get down into a province like Hunan, in the south of China, and the average holding is 2/5ths of a hectare. And 2/5ths of a hectare is a sliver to support an entire family; that what we call a family farm in Wisconsin, at that time, is the totality of the land of the whole village in the province of Hunan. And all of that, you see, just the basic stuff on which the triumvirate of evils — the triumvirate, if you please, of pressures — is imposed.

And I'm talking about rent, and tax, and usury: rent up to 50% of what the tenant grows on his particular farmstead. And that rent, after all, so extravagant that frequently the tenant is in arrears, and consequently can be shoved off by the landlord. We're talking about taxes that keep getting higher in the '30s and '40s because of what are called the surtaxes — so that it isn't only the land tax, but exceptional taxes to build a school or to take care of the public works, but mainly so that the warlords can raise armies and fight against neighboring warlords. And those taxes, collected in advance in the province of Szechwan in 1933, they were collecting taxes for

this year of 1974. And we're talking about a usury that by 1945 hits half the peasants of China, whether they be poor or middle or rich peasants. We're talking about interest rates of 100%... we're talking about a human disaster.

All the more so, you see, because there is process; all the more so because it isn't just the traditional problem of the peasantry. It's one that's getting worse, in which I agree wholeheartedly with [French sinologist Lucien] Bianco and Chesneaux and others who have studied this carefully, who have said that you have a schema in the '30s and '40s in which there is growing concentration of land ownership, which means growing rural proletarianization, which means growing rural unemployment — all of it exaggerated, of course, by this destruction of the rural crafts, so that there is no alternative in those villages. And that's the objective reality or condition that Mao sums up in that passage.

But we talk about the specificity, that the second reflection is a concrete experience. And it's Mao's experience, isn't it? Now, let's not exaggerate, and let's not get into the cult of personality — too much of that. And it is said about Mao, for example, that he is the author or the inventor of Asiatic Marxism. And it is said about Mao that he discovered the peasantry in history, and consequently put it into some kind of a viable revolutionary theory. But, you see, that wasn't what Mao was into, and that wasn't what he was concerned about. Mao was not interested in inventing a theory, but in finding a way. And he wasn't interested in glorifying the peasants over the workers; he was interested in confronting reality. And there is a kind of magnificent pragmatism and realism about Mao that really, in a sense, smacks of Lenin. Listen to this statement of Mao before the Party intellectuals in 1942. And it's a quotation from Mao, very characteristic, and one, it seems to me, that is worth reading: "Marxism-Leninism," says Mao in '42 to a bunch of Marxist intellectuals, "Marxism-Leninism has no special beauty and no mystical value. It is simply very useful. Dogma *per se* is really less useful than manure. Now, we see that dog manure can enrich the soil, and human manure can nourish dogs. But dogmas? They can neither enrich the soil nor nourish the dogs, so what good are they?" [*laughter, applause*]. Whereupon, you see, you've got a certain kind of direction, or a certain kind of pragmatism, about what the Chinese condition is and how you must respond to it. But consider two data which in a sense are contradictory, and you see something about this problem.

In the first place, Mao has very little clout in the Chinese Communist Party for a long period of time: that what he knows or thinks he knows about the peasant and about the basic stock of the Chinese revolution, that's not something that he can sell to the Party leadership. To be sure, Mao is there in July of 1921 at the founding congress, but he's not as important, for example, as Ch'en Tu-hsiu; he's not as important as various others who became the ideologues of the movement at that point. And so he's a minor Communist, as it were. Except that, when 1927 comes, in a sense,

the urban strategy of the Party has been proved wrong. And Mao goes off to the mills of Kiangsi, goes off to the mountains of that southeastern province of Kiangsi, and begins to establish his revolutionary bases. And, curiously enough, even then, between 1927 and '34, Mao still isn't the leader of the Chinese Communist Party. He's still got the Moscow-based Bolsheviks over him, he's still got Communists who think that the urban revolution will be the care of the Chinese upheaval.

And it isn't until January of 1935, it isn't until the little congress or conference that is held in January of 1935, while these Chinese Communist are en route — while they're there in Kweichow province, en route on the Long March — that they stop at a side of a river and hold a congress, and Mao denounced all the mistakes of the previous leadership, and is elected, after all, the Secretary of the Party. And from that point on, he is effectively the leader of the Chinese Communist movement. But that is January of 1935, and you go a long period of time.

And you juxtapose, you see, that fact against the second data. And that is that, from his origins, Mao really knew something about the peasants. Because he is born on the 26th of December of 1893 in Hunan, and he is born into a peasant family. And his father is a poor peasant who begins to become a little more successful, ends up a middle peasant, part-time merchant — which means that Mao can go to school and get a good education. He goes off to the capital city in Hunan, which is Changsha. And in Changsha, he has an excellent education. And, you see, he gets caught up in that whole literary and philosophical movement of modernization, that anti-Confucian movement which plays into the background of the May 4th movement in 1919. But the important thing is that that intellectual life was not for Mao: that those theories, after all, are as nothing to him until they are put to work. And so it is Mao in an excellent insight who says, "To know without acting is to know nothing." And consequently, it is, after all, intellectual base, but it is intellectual base merely as a kind of guide to action.

Mao goes up to Peking in 1918 and becomes the assistant librarian in the University of Peking library, which becomes, after all, under Li Ta-chao, a kind of Marxist hotbed. And, consequently, by 1920, he already is participating in little Marxist groups. Now, in the party, Mao is one of the few that has peasant roots. And, consequently, he's given a little institute of study in the city of Canton to study the peasant problem. But what interests him is the reality of the peasant. And in 1926 and '27, something hellish is happening, which is that once the march northward begins — once the Kuomintang revolutionary army begins its march northward in July of 1926, once it begins to move against the warlords and to try to centralize the government of China — there is an uprising, and the workers do form unions, but mainly the peasants spontaneously begin to organize these peasant leagues. And it's really hell, because in the province of Hunan, his home province, by the beginning of 1927, there are 2 million peasants

spontaneously enrolled in these peasant leagues. And Mao has to go and see what that's about. And so he goes on the 4th of January of 1927, and he's there for a month until the 5th of February. And it's at that point that he writes his tract, *A Report on an Inquiry into the Peasant Movement in the Province of Hunan*. And he says what I have read to you already, but he says something else. What he says is that this is really the beginnings of a revolution. And it is, in a way, not pretty to see. There are many excesses. The peasants are angry, they have millennial anger, they have thousands of years of exploitation, and so they're moving harshly against the landlords. And Mao goes on to say that that's going to divide the peasant revolution from the Kuomintang. It's going to divide the peasants from Chiang, from the Kuomintang Party, because they are the gentry, and they are allied to gentry and to the bourgeois. And, consequently, they'll never accept a genuine peasant revolution.

And so you have Mao in that tract talking about the famous legend of Sheh Kung. Sheh Kung was somebody who Mao introduces to make his point. Sheh Kung, a legendary figure who had a kind of a fascination about dragons. He thought dragons were something very special. And, consequently, he dreamed about dragons, and he drew them, and when he had a coat of armor he put a dragon on his coat of armor. He was really completely obsessed, a little bit beady-eyed about dragons. And then one day, one day... he met a dragon [*laughter*]. And he fled! And so Mao talks about the Kuomintang and he says, "The Kuomintang says we must have a national mobilization, we must rouse the peasantry, but what will happen if they really see the peasantry?" And so I read from this report on Hunan: "The revolution isn't a dinner party, or a literary tea, or a lovely painting. It can't be accomplished with delicacy or courtesy or generosity. The revolution is an upheaval, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another. And so the Kuomintang, which has called so much for a rousing of the peasant — all those daily appeals to rouse the peasant masses — turn into moral fear when the peasants actually do act." And, you see, it is Mao putting his party on the spot and saying, "Will you, then, take the leadership of this movement?"

All of which brings us to the third reflection. And the third reflection, in that original quotation, is of this strange ambiguity of the Chinese Communist Party about peasants, and its ambiguity about its strategy. And in order to get at that, it seems to me we have to keep three facts in mind. First of all, that the Chinese Communist Party, from the very beginning, accepted as a diktat the strategic line given to it by the Comintern or given to it by Moscow. And that strategic line was that the Chinese revolution is a national bourgeois revolution, that the Kuomintang must be the central engine of that revolution, and that the Communists must subordinate their own party and their own goals to that particular purpose. Now, that we have already seen in the Joffe-Sun Accords of the 26th of January of 1923. And I recall that to you, because it's terribly interesting for us to note that when the Russians wanted to make a deal with the Chinese, they didn't go

through the Communists in China, but they went directly to Sun Yat-sen and to the Kuomintang. In a sense, they gave a *fait accompli* to the Chinese Communists. And what Sun Yat-sen and [Soviet envoy Adolph] Joffe agreed upon was that this was a national bourgeois revolution, that the Kuomintang was central, and that the Communists would enter the Kuomintang not as a party with their own special interests, but as individuals where they would be subordinated to the will of the executive committee of this bourgeois- and gentry-led Kuomintang.

Now, all of that, you see, I think has a certain logic. There is something that can be said for it if taken in these terms: if you say that the Chinese Communist Party was very tiny at the beginning, and that an alliance with the Kuomintang would give it some clout; that through the national party, which had much more support, it could begin to reach the masses. And if you think, in the second place, that the masses, both peasants and worker, really are still underpolitized and that a movement of the Kuomintang to reach them is an important transition, then you can justify this line. But what you can't justify, in terms of a revolutionary commitment, are the purposes of both Sun Yat-sen and of Joffe, or of the Kuomintang and the Russians, in striking this accord. Because, for the Kuomintang, it was perfectly opportunistic. Sun Yat-sen showed that by the very fact that he was negotiating with the West, with the imperialist powers at that very time, urging them to come in and help him sweep the country loose of its warlords — which they refused to do — and so he took Russian help as a second-best. And in the second place, that the Russians — and I'm talking now about the post-Lenin Russians, and I'm talking about Stalin — that they didn't give a fig about the Chinese revolution. That what they wanted, after all, was an...

[*audio cuts out*]

... and the second fact to note is that Chiang Kai-shek, from the time that he took over the Kuomintang — which effectively is 1926 — from that very time, he set himself very wholeheartedly to suppress a social revolution in China and to contain the Chinese Communists, and that he gave all kinds of signals of that at a very early moment. You must understand two things. You must understand that when the alliance is struck in 1924, there's a great deal of enthusiasm, and the Communists do begin to work, and there is action among workers and peasants. And Chiang, by 1926, gets a little bit worried. And he is worried even more over the fact that, in the city of Canton — which is where there is a provisional Republican government established by the Kuomintang, that it is in the hands of the left-wing Kuomintang, which wants very close relationships with the Communists. It is Wang Ching-wei and not Chiang Kai-shek who is the president in 1925 and '26, and Chiang wants those people out in Canton. And, consequently, you have that event, that coup, of the 20th and 21st March of 1926, which I alluded to but which it's important for you to remember. Because after that, everything should

have been reasonably plain.

And you see, Chiang used an excuse: a cruiser, a gunboat, had come into the harbor at Canton. And that gunboat was part of the Chinese Navy, and that gunboat was in the command of a Communist commander. And there were cadres on that ship that really were Communists. And Chiang said, "They've come into Canton to assassinate me." And, consequently, he led his troops on the 20th of March into Canton and arrested the core of that ship, the commander and the Communists on it. But then he went at three in the morning, between the 20th and 21st of March, went to the Whampoa military academy right outside of Canton, that new military academy, and arrested the twenty-five Communists who were in the teaching staff — including the vice-president of that Whampoa military academy, who was in charge of political action and political indoctrination, and whose name is Chou En-lai. And he went back into the city of Canton, and he arrested trade union leaders, and he locked up Communist militants. And Wang Ching-wei fled. And Chiang Kai-shek then took over, you see, both the city of Canton and the government that was established at Canton. And that is crystallized in the Central Committee meeting of the Kuomintang on the 15th of May of 1926, because there Chiang Kai-shek is named not only commander of the Kuomintang armies, but President of the Republic. He now has civil and military power in his hand, and a cluster of rules are passed: that the Communists can, now, not be in the leadership of the Kuomintang; that they must submit a list of all of their members to the leadership of the Kuomintang; that they cannot convert members of the Kuomintang to their particular party; all of these things to shackle and to rein in the Communists.

Now, the Secretary General is one Ch'en Tu-hsiu. And Ch'en Tu-hsiu, not really a bad man and certainly somebody who understood a lot more than he's given credit for in the history of the Chinese Communist movement, and he protested to Moscow and to the Comintern at that point. And he said, "We can't do business with this Kuomintang. We've really got to get out of that alliance." And, of course, Moscow turned a deaf ear.

Which leads to the third fact. And the third fact is that long after it was perfectly apparent that an alliance between communism and the Kuomintang would mean a defeat of the revolution in China — that it would mean a defeat of the Chinese masses — long after that became apparent, the Russians (and, consequently, the Chinese Communist leadership) clung to that alliance. And so here you get Ch'en Tu-hsiu, and he says to the Russians, "Look, let's get out of this alliance." And the Russians say no. And they have an agent, a Comintern agent, in China. And his name is [Mikhail] Borodin. And Borodin goes to the leadership and he says, "Now, look, Chiang is really playing tough, but you must collaborate with him." And finally Ch'en Tu-hsiu says to Borodin, he says, "Now, look, you send military supply to the Kuomintang, the Russians send military supply. Why don't they send some military supply to us, to the Communists? Because we're

going to have an eventual showdown." And after Ch'en had been tossed out of the Chinese Communist Party — relieved of his functions as Secretary General, made a scapegoat for all of the tragedy of '27 — after he was tossed out, he published an open letter and he told a lot of what went on in those conversations. And so he tells us in this open letter in the beginning of 1928: "When we proposed to Borodin that some of the arms which the Soviet Union was shipping to the Kuomintang be sent to us to prepare for an eventual showdown, he rebuffed the suggestion and noted, 'In the present period, comrades, the Communists must be coolies for the Kuomintang.'" Not a very elegant phrase for a Comintern agent. But it suffices to say that that was the Russian position at that point. And that meant, of course, that you would come to the great tragedy of '27. All of which shows us a lot in that original quotation.

But I said we wanted to ponder two documents. And the second document is from Chu Teh. And the second document, then, is from the memoirs of Chu Teh, who is the great commander of the Red Army. He will be after all, a military man in the old regime in China, who will become one of great military experts on guerrilla warfare in the twentieth century. And Chu Teh more or less published his memoirs (or, let us say, dictated his memories), and you find those inscribed in a magnificent book called *The Great Road* which Agnes Smedley put together. They're all those conversations of Chu Teh with the journalist Agnes Smedley that come together as, really, as much of a biography of Chu Teh, or an autobiography, as we have. And from those memories of 1927, listen to this: "In May, June, and July of 1927, reaction set in, and torrents of blood flowed through the land. Chiang defected, concluded an alliance with the imperialist powers; he Communist Party didn't arm the workers and peasants, but continued to follow the leaders of the Kuomintang left in the vain hope of avoiding a schism; thousands of peasants in Hunan province and hundreds of workers in Canton were slaughtered like pigs." And you see what that means. What Chu Teh is telling us is that the revolution was often without tomorrows. What he's telling us is that Chiang Kai-shek really was linked up with the Western powers, with the imperialist powers. What he's telling us was that, even after the split of April of 1927, there was a tendency to look for a left wing in the Kuomintang with which to make and to continue that particular alliance.

And let's zero in on that; it's a very important part of the story. So we're talking about April of 1927, and the background for April of 1927 was spelled out on the 10th of March of that year by Chiang Kai-shek himself. And Chiang Kai-shek, in a speech of the 10th of March of 1927, said, "Today the Communists have reached the zenith of power and arrogance. If they're not stopped, they will kill the Kuomintang and destroy the national revolution." And you see what that was about. That is the spring of 1927. You have had a year of that march northward. It has been a great success, but it has really mobilized the mass. And, consequently, there is danger that the national revolution will turn into a social revolution, and much too quickly. You have, in the

second place, the movement of those armies toward the very crucial city of Shanghai. And Shanghai is all-important because that's the center of Western imperialist interests. It's in those great concessions of Shanghai that the West really has its capital center. And it is the center also of Chinese capitalism, of that coastal capitalism that had developed in the 1920s.

And so Chiang's army approaches Shanghai. And when he gets to the 15th of March and to the outskirts of the city of Shanghai, his army stops, and Chiang engages in negotiation with the army inside the city of Shanghai that represents the very shadowy government at Peking. And what he wants to do is to get that Peking army to withdraw voluntarily. He wants no fighting inside the city of Shanghai, afraid that any fighting will touch off a very dangerous kind of upheaval and will damage Western interests there. And he makes these negotiations. And while those negotiations are going on, there is action inside the city of Shanghai; the left wing is not waiting.

And it's Chou En-lai who enters the city of Shanghai and organizes a worker insurrection. And that worker insurrection begins on the 25th of March of 1927 with a strike of railway workers. By the 27th of March, it is an immense manifestation of about 800,000 workers and small shopkeepers and students and artisans. And the army that is there representing Peking flees from the city of Shanghai. And on the 29th of March, a municipal council is set up by this victorious internal insurrection: nineteen members of this municipal council, and all of them Communists.

And the city of Shanghai has fallen into the hands of the Communists. And it opens the door to Kuomintang and to Chiang's army. And Chiang enters the city on the 5th of April. In no way is he interested in sharing power; in no way is he interested in a Shanghai in Communist hands. And he begins that week of negotiations — so very murky, so very crucial to the story — negotiations with the Western powers and the international concessions, negotiations with Chinese bankers who have been backing his government at Nanking. And, consequently, on the 12th of April, Chiang turns against the workers.

And so his army is unleashed on the 12th of April. 120 workers are killed, 180 are wounded. The Communists call for an immense general strike the next day, and it is too late because the workers have no arms and they are frightened. And the strike does not come off. For a week, there is a terrific mop-up by Chiang Kai-shek, as he arrests trade unionists, as he arrests Communists. And then that mop-up spreads to the other cities of the coast.

And the alliance is broken. And then what? And then, presumably, your eyes should be opened if you are a revolutionary. And yet there is a conference that is held of the Chinese Communist Party: the Fifth Congress is held on the 27th of April of 1927, right after this disaster. And at that conference, there are two Comintern agents: the Indian M. N. Roy and Borodin. And both of

them say, "Alright, Chiang really has acted badly, and the Kuomintang really is reactionary, and it's gone over to the counter-revolution. But, you see, we weren't wrong: there really are two Kuomintangs. There is that Kuomintang of Chiang with its capital at Nanking, but then, you see, the left wing broke off in October of 1926 and it went to the city of Wuhan. And there, under Wang Ching-wei, it organized a kind of rival Kuomintang government. And that is really where the alliance is, that left wing of the Kuomintang" — not recognizing that, in that left wing, they were allied and linked to the gentry and the merchants, just as the people in Nanking were. And so the Comintern says, "Yes, yes, we continue the alliance, but not with Chiang. He won't play ball. We will go to Wuhan. And there we will support this left-wing government which is controlling those central provinces, provinces like Hunan and Hupei and Kiangsi, provinces where the peasants are in movement."

Now, is there a difference between the so-called right- and left-Kuomintang? Is there really, substantively, a difference? This left-Kuomintang not as repressive, presumably, as Chiang Kai-shek, a little more willing to give head to the workers, to give head to the peasantry — but basically as class-oriented, as class-based as the so-called right-wing Kuomintang.

And so you have the second part of the tragedy. And the whole business begins again. Because if you have April of 1927, you also have the 15th of July of 1927. And so it goes something like this — and it is, after all, before the tragedy of the 15th of July — there is a meeting of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on the 30th of June of 1927, and it adopts this resolution: "The popular organizations of peasants and workers must respect the leadership and the authority of the Kuomintang government at Wuhan." It's the Chinese Communists saying that they will cooperate and collaborate now with the left-Kuomintang.

Well, you know the result of that. The result is that the peasants, after all, constitute the volatile element. The peasants continue, with their peasant leagues, to seize land, to demand a lowering of their rents; they begin, after all, to make that agrarian revolution. And, consequently, even though the Chinese Communists keep telling them to cool it, keep telling them they're making too many excesses, they cannot control this movement. And so, then, it happens. And on the 15th of July 1927, there is a break between the left-Kuomintang government and the Communists. And they repeat the same story: they imprison, they assassinate, they kill.

And then what? And Stalin writes an article. And it is an effort, you see, to get off the hook. And this is what is so dastardly about the story, that refusal to face up to what has happened and what has been done. The Russians, after all, that the Kuomintang had betrayed the revolution. And Trotsky answered very well. And he said, "Chiang and the Kuomintang didn't betray their class — all they betrayed were our illusions." And that was true. And then next the Comintern said,

"Well, it was Ch'en Tu-hsiu. He's the one who is responsible. He followed an opportunistic line." But all that Ch'en Tu-hsiu did was to follow the line of the Comintern. And in his open letter of 1928, Ch'en really did put it on the line. He said, "I have been honest and honorable to what the Comintern demanded, always. I simply did what I was told to do." And then Stalin wrote an article that set the line. And he wrote an article after the 15th of July events of 1927, and he said, "You see, it's exactly the situation that we had in July of 1917, when [head of the provisional government Alexander] Kerensky turned against us in the July Days of our revolution in 1917, when the right was suddenly on the offensive. And you know what happened: that the masses got very angry about that, and they rose up. And so China is in the same circumstance." And here is Stalin writing — when Chiang has an army, when there has been decimation of the workers, when the peasants are suffering a White Terror even in those central provinces where the left-Kuomintang is — and Stalin is saying, "Now is the time for the left turn; now is the time to unleash a real revolution."

And it wasn't the time. And the real revolution in those terms meant urban revolution. And so the Chinese Communists met on the 1st of August of 1927. And they said, "Yes, this is the time, after all, when the masses have been shown the betrayal of the Kuomintang. We will go to the cities, and we will go even to the countryside, and we will tell the workers and the peasants to take arms and to make an uprising." And they went to the cities in the fall of 1927, and every attempted uprising was crushed in blood. And Mao Tse-tung himself was sent to the province of Hunan. He has had his center in the city of Changsha, and there he engaged in what was called the Uprising of the Autumn Harvest of 1927, in September of that year. And it was crushed in blood.

And, you see, it was first of all the "right-deviation," and then the "left-adventurism," and all of it fails. And out of all that comes something fascinating. Out of all that comes certain perceptions of Mao that I want to note to you. And Mao is keeping it all inside himself. You know, this man really held a hell of a lot of history inside himself. And so Mao says this to Edgar Snow in *Red Star Over China*, looking back at those years 1926 to 1927, and he's evaluating the Comintern agents that have come on to China, and he said, "M. N. Roy? He was an imbecile. Borodin? He was a dunce. And Ch'en Tu-hsiu? Well, at best an unwitting traitor." And what about Stalin? Well, Mao doesn't get too close to that subject. But then there's that *Peking Review* article — I don't know how to read that — number 38 in 1963, when suddenly Mao is defending Stalin. And he's defending Stalin, of course, to use him as a whipping boy against Khrushchev. But then he slips in something to that *Peking Review* article, and it's about as much as you need, and it says, "Even while defending Stalin, we don't defend his errors. We Chinese Communists have long since had firsthand experience with those errors." And, consequently, it is Mao saying, "Well, I mean, this stuff's got to stop."

And so with that remnant, after those awful, awful weeks of August and September of 1927, — with his remnants, about a thousand Communists — what Mao did was to go from Hunan into the frontier area, between the province of Hunan and the province of Kiangsi. And in that frontier area, there was a mountain range. And there in the mountain range, Mao went with those Communists to try to establish some kind of a base. And by October of 1927, Mao Tse-tung had established in the mountain range in the north of Kiangsi what is the first revolutionary base, as it is called, of the Maoist revolution in the Chinese Communist revolution.

And so begins a whole other era. It is an era that we know first as the Kiangsi period, the period that goes from October of 1927 down to October of 1934. And it is succeeded in October of '34 by a year's adventure known as the Long March, that goes until October of 1935. And that takes the Chinese Communists all the way up into the northwest, into Shensi province. And there they establish another revolutionary base, and you are in what is called the Yenan period. And that goes from 1936 to '37, until the Japanese war comes. And something new happens.

And what is it new that happens in Kiangsi? What is this Maoist strategy in Kiangsi? It is a revolutionary base, I say. It is Mao going there with about a thousand. In April of 1928, there is an important conjuncture, because it is Chu Teh joining him in the mountains of Kiangsi with several thousand others. In May of 1928, it is one unit of the Kuomintang army that goes over to the Communists. You start in the summer of 1928 with about 12,000 in this first unit of that Red Army that will ultimately convert to communism more than a half billion people.

Something extraordinary happened in Kiangsi, obviously. In part, it was the political education of the army. Now, you see, the Americans weren't really following this very well. They didn't understand very much about political education of armies, and they certainly didn't understand it in Vietnam. But it suffices to say that what Mao was concerned about was getting an army that would know what it was fighting for. And, consequently, he talks about the political education of the army in this way: "Mentalities aren't changed in a day. The Red Army, as we began to form it, was composed in part of workers and peasants, in part of lumpenproletariat. The only hope was solid political education." And so that political education began among these troops, and that was crucially important. Because even those elite units that the Kuomintang and Chiang Kai-shek had that were equipped and trained and armed by the Americans, those elite units would never fight against that immense and tremendous political will of these soldiers. And Mao describes what really happened to them: "The soldiers of the Red Army have, finally, a class consciousness: clear ideas about the distribution of the land, clear ideas about the installation of power, about the army of the workers and peasants, about what a revolution really is." Now, with that kind of political education, you begin to do the second thing.

And the second thing is to form what is really called the strategy of a revolutionary base. And you know what the strategy of the revolutionary base is in Maoist terms: that you have here this unit of the Red Army in Kiangsi, you have it up in the mountain — it is projected by the natural frontier, and it is surely protected by its own political consciousness — from that base, it begins to fan out in what are concentric circles. And those concentric circles mean that village after village comes to be, really, absorbed into the Communist framework. The villagers, whether by force or spontaneously (mainly spontaneously), come over to the Communists. They're very suspicious at first, these villagers, as these Red Army troops with their political ideas come by. Because, after all, the villagers have always had horrible experiences with soldiers. They have come there in rapine; they have come there to seize. And here are troops that come and tell them that the land is to be redistributed, and that the old landlords are to get no compensation, that they are finally to be able to live decently. And, consequently, suddenly there is a great regard among the peasants for that one leader whom they call Chu Mao, thinking that Chu Teh and Mao Tse-tung are one person. And, consequently, they begin to say that the great Chu Mao had come, really, with his troops and has redistributed this land. And you begin, after all, to make that base a rather large and viable one.

And it means, third, that within that base you form the soviet. And you have these rural soviets, and the soviet basically means that Communist cadres come into the village, and they help the villagers to elect a village assembly. And that village assembly, after all, has power to run the village. And what the Communists do, in their interference (when they do interfere), is to say that certain kinds of customs, certain kinds of ways that have degenerated the population, that these must be destroyed: no more bound feet, no more inequality of the sexes, no more opium, no more gambling. They begin, after all, to try to reconstruct a way of life within the framework of these soviets.

And finally, what that Kiangsi period means — and it's very crucial — is a capacity on the part of Mao and those Communists up in the mountains, really, to resist and finally to take over the Chinese Communist movement. And they have to resist it. Because even after the failure, after all, of those urban riots and those urban attacks in the fall of 1927, Moscow still insisted and the Comintern still insisted that it was a revolutionary moment. It was class against class, *classe contre classe*. And, consequently, they simply looked for a scapegoat, put in a new Secretary General at the beginning of 1928, who was Li Li-san. And Li Li-san, a perfect agent of Moscow, and so once again you begin with this idea that you must have this thrust against the cities — these urban insurrections — and they fail again.

Throughout 1928 and 1929, all the time, Mao is up there in the mountains, slowly, slowly organizing, until the 27 of November of 1931, a provisional soviet republic is founded in

Kiangsi. And Mao is the president.

But that doesn't mean that he controls the party. The so-called Twenty-Eight Bolsheviks arrive. The Twenty-Eight Bolsheviks are the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, most of them are Moscow-trained. And they arrive, and they say to Mao, "Okay, you've done a pretty good job. You've practically taken over the whole province of Kiangsi. But that was these revolutionary bases. You have an army that's growing. Now, Chiang Kai-shek is surrounding you and beginning to counterattack very vigorously. And what you must do is to fight him, state to state, movement to movement, in frontal war." And Mao says, "No, no, that's not what you do. You don't fight a classical war." And Mao in 1930 writes a magnificent tract, a magnificent tract which is called *A Spark that Inflamed an Entire Plain*, and he talks about the tactic of guerrilla war. I really want you to listen to this because, you know, you have the whole weekend [laughter]: "The tactic which we have elaborated on a basis of hard years of struggle differs from everything that has been done everywhere else at any time. Thanks to our tactic, the mass struggle has crested and the most powerful enemy can't crush it. What is our tactic? Partisan war based on the following three principles: Disperse forward to convert and rouse the masses; concentrate forces to face the enemy." First principle is that the Red Army goes in little units to the villagers and really engages in political education, in the redistribution of land, then it reforms to face the enemy as a single unit, and then disperses. Secondly: "The enemy advances; we retreat. The enemy stops; we strike. The enemy is tired; we hit hardest. The enemy retreats; we pursue." And third: "Create stable revolutionary bases. Develop the tactic of progress by successive circles," because the army will live off the people; the army will feed psychologically and socially from the revolution it is making within the framework of those bases.

And you know the story: the story is that the party leadership was not to Mao. From 1931 to the end of '34, there were five successive attacks by Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang against the Communist strength and the Communist base in Kiangsi. And at the beginning the Communists had to follow that strategy of the Party which was frontal war, and they were disasters: four very serious defeats for the Chinese Communists over those years. Finally, they shift into the tactics of Mao, which were the tactics of simply racing and running and hiding and striking and all of that guerrilla war. And finally, Chiang knew that he couldn't fight in the ordinary way, and what he did was to begin to surround and boycott, or surround and simply block out any kind of egress from that particular area. He began, in other words, to starve the Communist base in Kiangsi.

It's at that point that Mao decides they've got to break out of it. And it's at that point, on the 15th of October of 1934, that there is the breakout from Kiangsi. And you read in Agnes Smedley's great *Battle Hymn of China* what happens to those poor people in Kiangsi when the Communist

leave and begin on the Long March. It's just awful, because Chiang's army did go in, and all of those villagers and all of those people in the cities of Kiangsi who had been converted to a revolution, suddenly, really, facing the brutality which really has no peer and no parallel in this early part of the struggle. But the Communist had to do that.

And they began, 80,000, on the 15th of October of 1934, to break out of that ring of embargo, that ring of blockade of the Nationalist Army. And they began what must be the greatest single epic in revolutionary history, in the twentieth century, surely. It is that Long March. A march of 12,000 kilometers, a march that began with...

[audio cuts out]

... ten provinces later, twelve months later, across mountains, across rivers, freezing in the cold, starving along the way, pressing even into Tibet, arriving finally in Shensi way up in the northwest of China, only 8,000.

A Long March that was positively heroic and positively crucial. Because along the way at Tsunyi, in January of 1935, they stopped in Kweichow, and they had a congress. And Mao said, "Out with the others!" And so it is Mao and Chu Teh and Lin Piao and those who become the leaders, really, of the revolutionary war. And by the time they get to Shensi, it is true that they are decimated, but they have behind them all of that fantastic experience of Kiangsi: of how you fight a guerrilla war, of how you organize revolutionary bases, and they will begin again. And what they have that is so terrific — so terrific, really, that it is at the very heart of their revolutionary process — what they have is tremendous and non-traversable distance from Moscow. And the Russians can't get to them. And Mao, after all, is considered to be — well, Stalin said it: that "Mao and his Communists are to revolution what margarine is to butter" *[laughter]*.

So up there in Shensi they would settle in, and the Japanese would do the rest coming in to invade. And, finally, of course, forcing the Maoist and the Communists into a fantastic leadership of the foreign war. And it's at that point that the revolution takes off with a tremendous burst.