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CHINA'S SECOND LENINIST PARTY-STATE, 1949–1965

If it strains the imagination to recall the ebullient mood that welcomed the Nationalists to power in 1927–1928, the same cannot be said of the Communist takeover two decades later. Although more than half a century has elapsed since the founding of the PRC in 1949, the enthusiasm that accompanied Liberation has been kept fresh by a continuous stream of memoirs, photographs, documents, films, and other official media of commemoration. Having mobilized millions of peasants, first to resist the Japanese invaders and then to rout the corrupt and clumsy Nationalists, the Communists swept into the cities on a wave of popular support and expectation. In many ways, the CCP lived up to the high hopes that greeted its return to urban China. The new regime quickly curbed the hyperinflation that had crippled the urban economy, cracked down on organized crime, and proceeded to put in place an industrial system that offered unprecedented advantages to many factory workers.[1] Further gilding the reputation of the early stage of the PRC, particularly for city dwellers, is its apparent contrast with the traumatic Cultural Revolution decade (1966–1976) that would follow. From the vantage point of post-Mao China, for many Chinese the initial years of the PRC came to resemble a kind of golden age—a period of unusual harmony and goodwill, marked by a special closeness between the Chinese people and their newly established government.[2]

Of course, the conflicts and brutality that characterized Chinese Communist rule, even in its first decade and a half of operation, are well known. Beginning with ruthless campaigns against landlords and

capitalists and ending with the worst famine a population has ever suffered, pre-Cultural Revolution (pre-CR) China provided no paradise for either patrician or plebeian. Those early years did, however, present revolutionary leaders with an extraordinary opportunity to fashion a new mode of interactions between rulers and ruled.

The system of state-society relations that Mao and his comrades constructed has been variously characterized by Western social scientists as totalitarian, pluralist, neo-traditional, cellular, and totalistic.[3] Ideological considerations aside, scholarly preference for one or another model reflects differences in the time period and topic under consideration. As students of contemporary China have come to recognize, rather than analyze the reach of Maoist rule in terms of a unitary state versus an undifferentiated society, it may be more productive to explore the dynamics by which elements of the Leninist party-state aligned with segments of society at specific historical junctures.[4]

The establishment of the PRC in 1949 opened the door for state authorities and agencies to forge fresh relationships with their revolutionary constituencies. Various configurations of state-society affiliation were justified by distinctive conceptions of citizenship that issued, among other things, from dissimilar revolutionary experiences. Whereas a veteran of the labor movement like Li Lisan promoted the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) as a vehicle for enhancing the political supremacy of the proletariat, cadres whose formative years had been spent building a peasant army in the countryside were more inclined to endorse the PLA as the appropriate instrument for overseeing mass (particularly peasant) political involvement. Such disagreements figured prominently in ideological and bureaucratic battles over the role of citizen-soldiers in the new Communist order.

Revolutions are inescapably bloody affairs, and revolutionary citizenship is therefore an inherently violent mode of political participation.[5] During a revolutionary war, ordinary people are called to arms in a conflict that their leaders promise will demolish the oppressive ancien regime and deliver a more inclusive order. Those who respond by taking up arms may be prompted by motives quite far removed from the rationale of the leadership, but having risked their lives in battle, they expect a meaningful role in the new regime. Militias offer an important medium through which the postrevolutionary government incorporates (and tries thereby to tame) its combative citizens. Arguments about who should serve in these inverted institutions, and how much power they should wield on whose behalf, are a continuation of struggles waged over the substance and spirit of the revolution itself.

Compounding the complexities of these conflicts in the Chinese case were discrepancies in the writings of the revolutionary theorists to whom Mao and his comrades looked for guidance. In *State and Revolution*, Lenin quotes Engels's rebuttal to anarchists:

> Have these gentlemen ever seen a revolution? A revolution is certainly the most authoritarian thing there is; it is an act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part by means of rifles, bayonets and cannon, all of which are highly authoritarian means. And the victorious party must maintain its rule by means of the terror which its arms inspire in the reactionaries. Would the Paris Commune have lasted more than a day if it had not used the authority of the armed people against the bourgeoisie?[6]

Lenin then proceeds to provide his own gloss: "Engels takes the bull by the horns; he asks: should not the Commune have made *more* use of the *revolutionary* power of the *state*, that is, of the proletariat armed and organized as the ruling class?" Here, significantly, Lenin has substituted the armed "proletariat" for Engels's "armed people"—a contradiction evident in Marx's own writings on the Paris Commune (see introduction) where he depicted the National Guard, on the one hand, as "essentially working class" and, on the other hand, as the "armed people."[7] While Marx, Engels, and Lenin obviously concurred on the need for armed popular authority in order to preserve the political gains of the revolution against reactionary threats, they offer an ambiguous portrait of the revolutionary citizenry that will actually wield this authority: proletariat or people? Their Chinese acolytes, not surprisingly, would find the issue equally opaque.

NEW DEMOCRACY

The PRC in 1949 officially declared itself a "New Democracy," ruled by a "people's democratic dictatorship" consisting of four "revolutionary classes" (proletariat, peasantry, national bourgeoisie, and petty bourgeoisie) under the "leadership of the proletariat." This innovative formulation had been developed by Mao Zedong a decade earlier, during the war with Japan, when he argued that the Chinese Revolution was still in a "bourgeois-democratic" rather than a "proletarian-socialist" stage.[8] As Maurice Meisner points out, however, Mao's formulation left many critical questions unanswered:

> If the Chinese historical process was in its "bourgeois-democratic" stage in preparation for a future transition to socialism when, as Mao put it, "all the necessary conditions are ripe," then what were the "necessary conditions," who was to determine when they had "ripened," and on the basis of what criteria? What sociohistorical agency was to provide the impulse for China's passage from the "democratic" to the socialist stage? What was the nature of the new state and what was its actual relationship to the society and social classes it claimed to represent? While it is clear that the revolution destroyed the social classes and groups dominant under the old regime (i.e., the compradore bourgeoisie, the landlord-gentry class, and the Kuomintang [Guomindang] bureaucratic caste), it is not at all clear which social classes became dominant under the new political order that emerged from the revolutionary upheaval. What, for example, is the concrete social meaning of a state presumably under "the hegemony of the proletariat" when the ruling party in that state structure had no tie to the actual proletariat for more than twenty years? On the question of the relationship between state power and social classes, the history of the People's Republic begins on a profoundly ambiguous note.[9]

While Meisner exaggerates a bit in suggesting that the CCP had no tie to the Chinese proletariat for more than twenty years prior to the founding of the PRC, he is certainly correct in emphasizing that this period (in contrast to the preceding decade) had witnessed the mobilization of a basically peasant—as opposed to proletarian—revolution. Moreover, the war with Japan underscored the importance of a broad social coalition, stirred by the appeal of nationalism more than by that of class struggle. Yet the terms of New Democracy stipulated a special role for the proletariat.

The uncertainties surrounding the position of the working class in the early PRC reflected the conjoining of contradictory strains of revolutionary citizenship that had vied for supremacy over the previous thirty years of revolutionary struggle: urban versus rural, class versus community, and proletariat versus peasantry. These tensions (heightened by ambiguities of Marxist theory) were in turn mirrored in controversies concerning the constitution and control of militias under the new regime.

People's Peace Preservation Corps

Architects of the PRC had a number of concrete precedents upon which to draw in defining the role of the postrevolutionary militia. The Soviet Union was surely the most orthodox source of inspiration, but the KMT's recent experience as well as the CCP's own revolutionary practices provided other possible exemplars.

The PPPC (see chapter 3), both during and immediately following the Communist takeover of China's major cities, engaged in activities quite similar—and probably consciously modeled upon—the Red Guards who had proven so important in the establishment of the Bolshevik regime. After the victory of the October Revolution in Russia, Red Guards were charged with suppressing counterrevolutionary challenges to the new government as well as with ensuring general public order. Manning guard posts and mounting patrols, they cracked down on "hooliganism," arrested those accused of speculation, and shut down independent presses.[10]

The Communists' reliance upon armed worker militias to buttress their new regime was undoubtedly also influenced by the Nationalist government's deployment of similar forces for a similar purpose. Just as CCP elements had been the major target of the KMT's Industry Defense Corps, so now remnant KMT elements were of cardinal concern for the PPPC. According to Communist estimates, more than six thousand KMT secret agents had been active in Shanghai on the eve of liberation. Many of these individuals remained in the

city after the Communist takeover, engaging in surreptitious initiatives.[11] For example, a group of Guomindang cadres from the Workers' Welfare Association (Lu Jingshi's outfit), wearing counterfeit New Fourth Army Southeast District Special Deputy armbands, tried to assume control of factories in the Tilanqiao district.[12]

At the time of Shanghai's liberation in late May, the PPPC in the city numbered more than sixty thousand workers.[13] Corps members were assigned to patrol duties in factories as well as public spaces, and were charged with uncovering enemy agents, confiscating their weapons, and maintaining order. At the Dalong Machine Plant, for instance, the People's Corps was credited with protecting the nearby rail line and preventing vagrants from ripping out the tracks. Corpsmen at the French Tramway Company, meanwhile, rounded up stray KMT soldiers and cleared away abandoned vehicles to permit the resumption of public transportation. On the docks and in factory warehouses, looters were apprehended by members of the corps.[14]

Despite the notable achievements of the People's Corps, it was disbanded on orders from the Military Control Commission within two days of the New Fourth Army's assuming effective command of the city.[15] This, too, may have been a reflection of Soviet inspiration; there the Red Guards had been deemed unsuitable for long-term service and were soon dissolved and then replaced by a new regularized militia force under tight central control (see conclusion).[16] In any event, the military authorities were keen on ensuring that soldiers—rather than workers—would be the ones to bear arms in the People's Republic of China. This intent was driven by their unhappy experience in Shijiazhuang two years before (see chapter 3), when armed worker pickets engaged in indiscriminate slaughter and property confiscation before being restrained by higher levels. The Shijiazhuang incident had impressed upon central authorities the advisability of limiting worker involvement in the liberation of the cities. Unlike the countryside, where peasant associations were encouraged to mount struggle sessions against landlords, in the cities unions were barred from taking similar actions against capitalists for fear of undermining industrial production.[17]

Reinstating the Worker Pickets

The Military Commission's initiatives were not always welcomed by labor activists, however.[18] Disagreement over the status of worker militias was part of a wider discussion about the proper place of the proletariat in the new postrevolutionary order. Unionists, naturally enough, saw proletarian power as paramount. Li Lisan put it this way at a work conference of the ACFTU in July 1949: "If we say that the People's Liberation Army served as the main fighting force [*zhulijun*] during the wartime period, then during the period of economic construction the working class must serve as the main fighting force."[19] Or, as he argued even more strongly at a training session for union cadres the following month: "We are establishing a new country. While the revolutionary enterprise of the past had to depend upon the PLA (the troops of the working class), from now on the grand construction effort must depend entirely upon the workers."[20] Li insisted, moreover, that the Shijiazhuang case was no longer relevant to current considerations because conditions had completely changed in the meantime:

> Shijiazhuang was the first city liberated in North China. At that time the working class didn't yet believe that we would be victorious . . . so no good people dared step forward, and the unions were controlled by bad elements. But by the time that Beiping and Tianjin were liberated, the workers believed that the Communist Party would be victorious and so good people dared to step forward . . . We must have faith in the masses.[21]

Unionists, however, did not always wield the upper hand in the debate over the role of industrial workers (versus peasant soldiers) in the postrevolutionary urban order. With the establishment of the PRC, Shanghai saw a large influx of cadres from the north (the so-called *nanxia ganbu* or southbound cadres). These cadres generally consisted of former soldiers of the New Fourth Army who, having participated in the military takeover of the city, stayed on to assume top political posts in the new municipal government. As rustic northerners whose revolutionary experiences had been centered in rural base areas, they often found themselves at odds with the more

urbane southern workers who had comprised the heart of the Shanghai underground Communist movement before 1949. Differences in background and outlook led to disputes over labor organization under the new regime.[22]

An SFTU report bemoaned the Military Control Commission's hasty demobilization of the PPPC, noting that KMT secret agents were still actively instigating labor strife and spreading rumors among the workers.[23] Involvement by former members of the KMT's Industry Defense Corps was highlighted as a factor in the swelling tide of industrial unrest.[24] To improve security, the union called for resurrecting the institution of the worker pickets (*gongren jiuchadui*), which—in the manner of the Industry Defense Corps under the previous regime—would be assigned to assist public security agencies in capturing spies.[25] The SFTU justified its plan to rearm the proletariat as a continuation of the CCP's own revolutionary tradition:

> The worker pickets enjoy high standing among the proletariat. In all struggles during the period of Guomindang rule, worker pickets stood at the forefront of battle. At the time of liberation, they confiscated a large number of enemy weapons and armed themselves. But when the People's Peace Preservation Corps was required to disband, everyone was unhappy. Now they're awaiting the time when they can rearm.[26]

They did not have to wait long. In the summer of 1949 the pickets were reinstated in major urban centers across the country. In Beijing, for example, more than two thousand pickets—drawn from the ranks of railway workers, factory workers, and local residents—were quickly mobilized.[27] In Shanghai, the reinstatement of worker pickets was publicly announced on May 31, at a workers' congress to commemorate the May Thirtieth Movement, and implemented soon afterwards.[28]

The first cohort of the reorganized Shanghai Worker Pickets was composed of 320 male metalworkers, an occupation that had proved a source of stalwart support for the Communists during the previous decades of revolutionary struggle. This initial group qualified for service after a two-week political training session.[29] Soon the metal-

workers were joined by volunteers from the East Shanghai cotton mills (from which 1,326 pickets were recruited, of whom 458 were women, 38 were party members, and 388 belonged to the Youth League). This second wave of recruits was subjected to an even longer and more rigorous course of political instruction. In January of 1950, the recruitment drive was extended to West Shanghai, where 245 male metalworkers enlisted. Then West Shanghai textile workers were targeted as well, with both groups undergoing a training routine that now included substantial military as well as political education. Women pickets were said to excel in the thrice-weekly target practices that were a central feature of the upgraded instruction program.[30]

Beefing up the military component of the training curriculum may have been a reaction to the large number of firearm-related cases connected to the pickets at this time. Many of those active in the PPPC during the liberation of Shanghai refused to give back their guns and were responsible for a mounting number of armed incidents in the city.[31] The SFTU issued regulations on January 21, 1950, warning that weapons would be confiscated unless officially registered with the picket office. Instructions on how to clean firearms correctly were distributed, along with a warning that any picket responsible for inflicting injuries through the improper use of firearms would face a prison sentence, while anyone who committed murder—even if accidental—would be executed without delay.[32] With many local unions requesting guns to arm their own pickets, the municipal union was hard pressed to keep the upper hand.[33] The SFTU sternly reminded armed pickets of the limits of their revolutionary citizenship. The pickets' job description was confined to (1) protecting their own factories and preventing secret agent activities; (2) leading the way in production so as to inspire their fellow workers and strengthen support for the union; and (3) actively studying politics and military affairs in order to improve their work.[34]

The union promoted the pickets as a countermeasure to the dangers posed by KMT secret agents still operating in the city. According to a summary report by the newly established Picket Department (*jiucha bu*) in July of 1949, enemy operatives had been especially active the month before—infiltrating the scattered ranks of

the pickets as a cover for their own exploits. These covert agents, many of whom had served in the KMT's Industry Defense Corps, were blamed for inciting the strike wave that was sweeping the Shanghai work force at this time.[35] To counter the walkouts, work teams bolstered by armed, uniformed pickets were dispatched to restive factories.[36]

In the single month of June 1949, municipal authorities reported 668 major labor disputes in Shanghai. The union had presented the reestablishment of pickets as a means of quelling such disturbances, but in fact the pickets did not bring a halt to the problem, and in August of that year, the number of strikes and other industrial disputes soared to 827.[37] The armed pickets sometimes even exacerbated the unrest by frightening workers and making them more reluctant to cooperate with government authorities.[38]

Li Lisan, serving concurrently as de facto director of the ACFTU and minister of labor, tried to walk a fine line between advocating workers' rights and yet admonishing workers against exercising those very rights. As he put it at a national conference of labor bureau directors in 1950:

> Are strikes prohibited? That would be impossible and improper. Strikes are the workers' right, but today the workers don't need this method. In the past, they had no choice but to strike; today, however, they can use rational methods to settle things. If negotiations fail, they can go to the Labor Bureau . . . The old method is not only non-beneficial, but harmful. This is a new form of class struggle. To deny class struggle would be fallacious, but class struggle takes many forms.[39]

Grappling with the question of what forms of class struggle to encourage under the changed circumstances of a new Communist regime, unionists favored the worker pickets as an institution with an established revolutionary pedigree as well as a proven record of dealing harshly with counterrevolutionaries.

If it stretched credulity to suggest that the explosion of labor unrest—coming as it did during a time of extreme economic hardship—was largely the work of KMT agents, the union's insistence on the need for heightened security measures would nevertheless soon

gain support from other events. A major turning point in the SFTU's efforts to revive the institution of worker pickets came with the bombing of Shanghai on February 6, 1950, by Guomindang planes from Taiwan. Although there had been a few smaller raids prior to this date, the February 6 attack marked the first instance of sustained industrial damage. On that day American-made B-29 bombers piloted by Guomindang military personnel flew four sorties over the city, targeting power companies.[40] According to official Chinese statistics, the assault resulted in more than five hundred fatalities, more than six hundred injuries, and more than fifty thousand refugees.[41] Taking place during the city's first Workers' Representative Congress, the raid triggered an emergency bulletin that called upon all unions in the city to organize worker pickets as soon as possible in order to strengthen defenses against enemy air attacks. The Shanghai Power Company, the enterprise most harmed by the February 6 assault, took the lead in forming picket units. On the night of February 7, braving heavy rains, pickets began patrolling the power plant. A former member of the KMT's Industry Defense Corps at the company was immediately seized by pickets after spreading rumors that more airplanes were on the way from Taipei.[42]

An internal-circulation bulletin of the SFTU underscored the importance of the February Sixth Incident, as it was soon known, in converting the mission of the pickets from mundane factory inspections to major public security responsibilities:

> The Shanghai worker pickets were established on the foundation of the Shanghai People's Peace Preservation Corps. After the liberation of Shanghai, because we didn't have a good grip on the situation, the activities of the corps were converted into ordinary inspection work at factories and enterprises. The broad masses of worker activists who had joined the Preservation Corps were quickly reorganized into factory pickets. Because of this, some of them dispersed and most of those who held the title of pickets had no real work. They simply maintained order at marches and demonstrations or when mass meetings were convened, or else they mediated conflicts among workers in the factories or handled petty thefts and other minor problems. In some factories they even took the place of management in keeping tabs on the

workers, conducting body searches and thereby becoming divorced from the masses . . .

During the February Sixth Antibombing Struggle, virtually every factory revived and consolidated a picket organization, to stand guard and carry out patrols, protecting the factory in round-the-clock shifts, assisting military and police forces in carrying out air defense work. They now made a major contribution.[43]

In the aftermath of the February Sixth Incident, an expanded Picket Office (*jiucha chu*) was set up under the auspices of the SFTU. The director of the office, Sun Ming, had been active in the Shanghai labor movement since helping Zhang Qi to organize the Workers' Underground Army in 1944.[44] A dozen or so other veteran union cadres also served as leaders of the enlarged agency.[45]

Under the direction of this office, more than twenty thousand pickets were mobilized within the space of a couple of weeks. The majority (sixteen thousand) were employed at large and medium-sized enterprises and served as intrafactory pickets (*changnei jiucha*) whose mission was to defend their workplaces—especially utilities, transportation companies, shipyards, and iron works—against enemy attack. These basic units were organized by factory, and were under the jurisdiction of the production security committee of the factory union. Another 4,600 extrafactory mobile pickets (*changwai jidong jiucha*), drawn mostly from smaller, scattered enterprises, were assigned to street patrols. Rifles and bullets were issued to the recruits, who received a brief stint of military training.[46]

Extrafactory pickets were organized according to the twenty-four administrative districts of the city, which were in turn subdivided into three or four smaller defense units, each of which might have as many as one hundred mobile pickets under its command. In addition to patrolling in the vicinity of factories, the extrafactory pickets were free to interrogate pedestrians and perform other local police functions. Over the next few months, the most capable individuals among the intrafactory pickets were transferred to the extrafactory division, swelling its numbers to nearly ten thousand.[47]

Patrolling the Patrols

Although the training sessions for new recruits were lengthened to three months, the composition and caliber of the volunteers were of increasing concern. Once again the question of who should qualify as a bona fide member of the proletariat came to the fore. With factory shutdowns having generated a severe unemployment problem in the city, the SFTU decided to target laid-off workers for picket recruitment. The idea was that after their factories reopened, these individuals could return to work as leaders in union, Youth League, production, and picket activities. Hundreds of young new pickets were mobilized in this drive, but many of them proved less than committed to the cause.

According to a classified report from the SFTU, a number of the recent recruits were loath to undergo military training, afraid that they would be sent off to invade Taiwan as soon as they had acquired soldierly skills. Others were more favorably inclined toward the training sessions, but only because they saw them as a chance to enjoy free room and board for a few weeks. Because both men and women were encouraged to join the pickets, many of the recruits evidently viewed their induction as an opportunity to find a marriage partner. Even more worrisome to the union was the discovery that a substantial number of the young male trainees were dandies (*afei fenzi*) who applied liberal doses of cologne and sported a ducktail hairstyle known in China as the "airplane" hairdo. These flamboyant individuals insisted on interrupting their training several times a day to freshen up and change clothes.[48]

A summary report on the training sessions concluded that many trainees felt the program lasted too long and that its content was too abstract to be of help in solving the pressing problem of securing a livelihood. About half of the trainees were illiterate, making it impossible for them to do homework assignments.[49] Some of the prospective pickets were engaged in mobile occupations (rubbish picking, for example) that prevented their staying put long enough to complete the training program. One woman recruit lost interest when her father, who disapproved of organizations that admitted members of both sexes, threatened to beat her to death unless she

withdrew. It was difficult to sustain commitment, according to the report, because ordinary people were "not in awe of the pickets."[50]

The training program was heavily political.[51] Its curriculum included, for example, a history of the Chinese labor movement, a comparison of the achievements of the Soviet Union and the atrocities of the United States, a discussion of why religion undermined working-class consciousness, and an explanation of the purpose of the worker pickets. The course manual also went to some lengths to distinguish the pickets from the Industry Defense Corps of an earlier era:

> In the past, the reactionaries set up the Industry Defense Corps to oppress the workers. That organization was staffed by gangsters and backward elements. The worker pickets of today are entirely different. They are part of a glorious history of more than twenty years that included countless underground struggles. In the 1923 Jinghan Railway Strike, worker pickets—under the general union of the railroad—led opposition to the warlords. In 1927 in Shanghai's Three Armed Uprisings the worker pickets—under the leadership of the Communist Party—initiated military struggle and confiscated the warlords' weapons. On the eve of Liberation, the Shanghai Worker Pickets (whether called Factory Defense Corps or People's Peace Preservation Corps), under Communist Party direction, defeated Chiang Kai-shek and helped the People's Liberation Army seize enemy weapons. In the February 6, 1950, bombing, under the leadership of the Air Defense Command, they continued to play a very positive role.[52]

Despite this effort to differentiate the pickets from earlier Guomindang incarnations of worker militias, the song that the pickets learned in training camp—set to the very tune of the Industry Defense Corps theme song of bygone days—suggested a definite congruity:

> We are worker pickets,
> We are worker pickets.
> We drill long and hard,
> Till we become like steel.
>
> With the Communist Party,
> We've endured the storms of yesterday.

> With the Communist Party,
> We're creating a happy tomorrow.
>
> We're the nation's bridge,
> We're the workers' weapons.
> We have firm organization,
> And self-conscious discipline.[53]

The ease with which the pickets mastered the song was due not only to its catchy tune, but also to the fact that many of the trainees had sung an earlier version (see chapter 3) as members of the Industry Defense Corps. Infiltration of the pickets by former members of the Industry Defense Corps was a serious issue, particularly at factories (like the Number Fifteen China Textile Mill) where the Guomindang presence had been especially pronounced only a few years before.[54]

In April of 1950, the SFTU cautioned its cadres in a classified memorandum that "a small handful of traitors, influenced by American imperialism and acting as secret agents of Chiang Kai-shek's running dogs, spies, bad elements, and the like are wreaking havoc." The memo warned darkly of a conspiracy to bomb Shanghai's Great World Entertainment Center, the four major department stores, and other congested areas of the city. Enemy agents had allegedly set up broadcast networks to communicate directly with the United States. An even bigger concern to the union was industrial sabotage. As rural areas underwent land reform, counterrevolutionaries were said to be streaming to the safety of Shanghai factories. In response, the union was encouraging the formation of Liquidate Counterrevolutionaries Committees at enterprises across the city. These committees were composed of from five to twenty-five activists, depending upon the size of the enterprise. Pickets played a leading role in the committees, which by April 7, 1950, were credited with the arrest of 6,077 counterrevolutionaries, one-third of whom had been operating at state-owned enterprises and the rest of whom were located in private enterprises. According to the union, workers burst into celebratory dancing as soon as the arrests were carried out.[55]

The Communists made pointed efforts to demonstrate that, in contrast to the discredited KMT, they enjoyed effective control over

their worker militias. Whereas the KMT had been forced to cancel a scheduled 1948 May Day parade of its Industry Defense Corps at the Shanghai race course due to fears of Communist disruption, exactly two years later Mayor Chen Yi, SFTU Director Liu Changsheng, and other municipal cadres gathered to review their armed picket force, now thirty thousand strong, as it marched triumphantly around the Shanghai race course in a pointed display of proletarian prowess.[56]

The new Communist regime was undoubtedly more powerful than its predecessor in exercising control over the workers. But conflicts surrounded the pickets nonetheless. Despite the May Day show of strength, serious tensions between the intra- and extrafactory divisions of this impressive force led the SFTU to propose that picket work be limited in the future to "factory defense and the countering of secret agents." In making its case, the union pointed out that some extrafactory patrols had been abusing their authority, behaving arrogantly toward the citizenry at large.[57]

Bureaucratic Politics

Of even greater concern to the SFTU, it seems, was the fact that whereas the intrafactory pickets were entirely under union jurisdiction, the operations of extrafactory pickets fell within the purview of the public security authorities. Once the May Day festivities were over, the Public Security Bureau presented itself as the appropriate overseer of all future picket activities. This step of subsuming worker militias under public security work had already been taken in Canton (and was in accordance with the Soviet precedent of converting Red Guards into members of the secret police). Bureaucratic competitors to the union in Shanghai—including the municipal Youth League and public security authorities—harshly criticized the trade union for its stubborn insistence upon expanding the pickets.[58]

Now that aerial bombings had ceased, the union argued successfully for the need to reorient picket work away from air defense and back toward factory affairs. In September 1950, the two wings of picket operations were nominally amalgamated under union direction.[59] Approximately two thousand guns were also transferred at this time from the Garrison Command to the Picket Department of the union, after which the arms were distributed to grassroots members by their local industrial unions.[60] The idea was to shift picket activism from extra- to intrafactory concerns, thereby guaranteeing full trade union control. Whereas on August 1 the pickets had marched in a large public parade to celebrate the founding of the Red Army and to denounce the U.S. occupation of Taiwan and Korea, on October 1 (the first celebration of National Day) they were ordered by the SFTU to remain within the factories to stand guard against enemy agents.[61]

The narrowing of the pickets' mission represented something of a bureaucratic victory for the trade union, which under the provisions of New Democracy enjoyed a position of considerable prestige and influence as the authorized representative of the working class.[62] Li Lisan, who headed the first Shanghai General Labor Union in 1925 and later lost his party leadership post for continuing to instigate proletarian insurrections at a time when Mao and his colleagues were concentrating on the countryside, had returned in 1946 from a fifteen-year hiatus in the Soviet Union. Under the new Communist regime, Li took charge of both the ACFTU and the Ministry of Labor. During the September 1949 meeting of the People's Political Consultative Congress in Beijing, at which Chairman Mao famously declared that the Chinese people, one-quarter of humanity, had finally "stood up," Li Lisan's remarks highlighted the special role that the proletariat would assume in the new order: "Our working class, as the most conscious masters of the country, will carry forward the revolutionary spirit of heroic struggle, shouldering the arduous burden of constructing a new nation and a new society."[63] Until his dismissal in 1952 on grounds of having encouraged working-class autonomy at the expense of party leadership, Li Lisan would act as a tireless proponent of trade union authority.[64]

In the eyes of other bureaucratic agencies, particularly those charged with maintaining public order, putting guns in the hands of potentially unruly workers was a matter of some concern.[65] Military and public security authorities were understandably unenthusiastic about the union's prerogatives. For the moment, however, there was little they could do to challenge the situation in light of the proletariat's special political status.

The Suppression of Counterrevolutionaries Campaign

The combination of proletarian prestige, vigorous union leadership, and a new national campaign against counterrevolutionaries soon permitted the pickets to enlarge their political role. In October 1950, a few months after the outbreak of the Korean War, Party Central issued instructions on suppressing counterrevolutionaries. The international battle raging just beyond China's northeast border heightened fears of hidden enemies at home. In Shanghai, the SFTU took the lead in carrying out the movement in the industrial arena—expanding picket membership to forty-five thousand by the spring of 1951.[66]

The Suppression of Counterrevolutionaries Campaign went some distance in bolstering the power of party activists within the union. Prior to the campaign, many underground members of the party in Shanghai factories had been reluctant to reveal their identities for fear of being admonished or even assassinated at the hands of their fellow workers. It was less with triumph than with trepidation that they had been forced to go public with their party membership in the summer of 1950.[67] Within a year, however, the Shanghai unions had convened thousands of accusation meetings against counterrevolutionaries with the active participation of nearly half the city's workers.[68]

To carry out the campaign, the Picket Department of the union entered into a collaborative arrangement with the Economic Security Office of the city's Public Security Bureau. The arrangement was not unlike the cooperation that the KMT's Industry Defense Corps had enjoyed with Nationalist intelligence agencies. Although overall command of the pickets remained with the union, crucial information and other resources were supplied by public security. According to the agreement, the head of the Picket Department served concurrently as deputy director of the Economic Security Office. The collaboration allowed the pickets to intensify their constabulary operations both inside and outside the factories, a development that bore fruit during the winter defense (*dongfang*) initiative later that year.[69] As the SFTU noted in February 1951: "Most recently, the principal work of the pickets has been to assist public security agencies with registering reactionary associations and secret agents. Through this work, enemies are isolated, the masses are educated, and

picket work is sinking deep roots among the masses as a foundation for routine economic security duties."[70]

The SFTU organized a five-person special task force, headed by former underground labor leader Zhang Qi, to oversee the local Suppression of Counterrevolutionaries Campaign. In conjunction with the campaign, thousands of pickets underwent special training in how to capture and forcibly restrain victims. Equipped with flashlights, handcuffs, and ropes, they were a formidable element in carrying out the operation. Instead of declaring martial law before launching the assault on alleged enemies, the government decided to adopt more "flexible" methods. Victims would be seized by surprise when they went to work, and then handed over to the police station. Thanks in large part to the efforts of the pickets, nearly 8,500 alleged counterrevolutionaries were rounded up in a single night on April 27, of whom approximately one-third (2,748) were apprehended on the premises of industrial enterprises.[71] By May 5, the number of arrests had topped 9,000.[72] A picket at the Number Five China Textile Mill was deemed so meritorious in capturing counterrevolutionaries that he was touted as a model in newspapers and radio broadcasts across the country.[73]

In some cases, however, the sudden arrests created a backlash within the workforce. The complexities of revolutionary struggle had generated ambiguities that were not always amenable to easy solution. Following the detention of more than thirty alleged counterrevolutionaries at the Shanghai Power Company, mechanics in the repair room raised questions about one of the detainees. Chen Jinfu, head of the Picket Small Group in the repair room, was accused by the authorities of being a Guomindang member who had falsely registered as an activist. On the day after Chen's arrest, the union organized mass meetings to explain its actions and to encourage accusations against all those who had been apprehended. Although workers in the repair room expressed support for the party's basic policy of suppressing counterrevolutionaries at this time of national crisis, they questioned whether Chen Jinfu fell into the targeted category.[74] Union leaders thought that the workers' complaints could be dealt with simply by appointing another skilled worker, with considerable standing among his peers, to take over as small group leader

of the repair room in place of Chen. But their nominee adamantly refused the offer, saying "I don't want to be [a] small group leader. Who can guarantee that if I become the leader I won't run afoul of the authorities too? What was Chen Jinfu's crime? Why hasn't it been openly revealed? In the past, the [Guomindang] authorities first nabbed people and then held a meeting afterwards to settle things. Now the people's government nabs people and then holds meetings afterwards. What's the difference?" After the union leaders roundly criticized his unexpected outburst, the nominee fell silent but refused to recant. His workmates were equally sullen. To get to the bottom of this, union leaders held two days of discussions with the workers. They discovered that the workers simply could not fathom that Chen Jinfu had done anything wrong. The repairmen recalled that Chen had been unjustly imprisoned by the KMT and had served as a diligent worker throughout his career. Although Chen had admitted to a previous affiliation with the KMT, he had also expressed his interest in joining the CCP. Seeing that further persuasion was required, the union cadres selected several reliable workers to convey the union's message to the workforce at large. Chen Jinfu, they insisted, was a close associate of KMT labor leader Lu Jingshi, and he had only pretended to be arrested in order to hide his true identity from his fellow workers. The union's nominee for Chen's replacement was reprimanded with a less than subtle threat: "Although we know that you were just letting off steam, what if the people's government were to decide because of your intemperate remarks to execute you? Wouldn't that be an injustice!" Duly chastened, the nominee made a public confession of his errors.[75]

The Suppression of Counterrevolutionaries Campaign led to a general expansion in the pickets' responsibility for patrolling the revolution. Their new duties ranged from encouraging political activism in the factories to detaining suspected counterrevolutionaries outside the factories. When the designated leaders of the political study groups at Shanghai's Huaming Tobacco Factory decided to skip out on the weekly indoctrination sessions, for example, pickets were dispatched to round up the truants and return them to the factory. Thereafter, we are told, participation in political study at the factory was not a problem![76] In another instance, pickets at the Yihe Cotton Mill were credited in December 1951 with capturing a counterrevolutionary who had escaped from prison and was seeking to change his household registration in order to move out of the neighborhood. With the blessing of their union and the local police station, the pickets acted swiftly to detain the escaped convict.[77]

The Suppression of Counterrevolutionaries Campaign was a vicious drama in which the worker pickets played a starring, if less than heroic, role. But once the pickets had completed their assigned part, there arose the question of what to do with them. The party committee of the SFTU suggested that it was now time to wean the pickets from the task of suppressing enemy agents and direct them to the equally critical job of safeguarding production.[78]

Purifying the Pickets

Redirecting the energies of the pickets was easier said than done, however. Having once mounted the political stage, many of them were reluctant to withdraw from active engagement. Revolutionary citizenship is after all a heady form of popular participation. The union obviously welcomed proletarian activism, but the pickets came under increasing criticism for several reasons. For one thing, the links from the pickets to their Guomindang forerunners raised suspicions about the political reliability of the pickets. For another, like their predecessors, the pickets continued to exhibit disciplinary problems. In some factories, armed pickets had gained a nasty reputation among fellow workers by assisting management in conducting dreaded body searches.[79] As the union's star began to wane in tandem with a tightening of central party control over the industrial sector, the question arose, Were the worker pickets an appropriate institution for patrolling the revolution?

The majority of worker pickets at this time were drawn from the textile and metallurgy industries. Seven percent were members of the Communist Party, about half were Youth League members, and more than seventy percent were under thirty years of age.[80] A substantial number were women.[81] To be selected for picket duty, workers were supposed to have "a clear political record, upright style, good work habits, physical strength, and no bad habits or addictions." The application form included on one side a loyalty oath, to be signed both by

the applicant and by his or her sponsors. On the other side of the form was a résumé of the political and work history of the applicant, together with the opinions of the sponsor(s) and of various levels of picket and union authorities.[82] Judging from the remnant applications in the archives, the great majority of recruits were males from Shanghai or the surrounding Jiangnan region.[83] It was not uncommon for applicants to refer to compromising political episodes in their past; for example, "In October 1948 an underground party member introduced me to the Industry Defense Corps."[84]

The matter of KMT connections was a particularly troubling concern. A confidential report on an investigation at the Number Ten Cotton Mill revealed that "the masses are not happy that so many former Guomindang types are in the pickets. Some of them behave arrogantly toward the ordinary workers."[85] Although Lu Jingshi's Industry Defense Corps was an important target of the Suppression of Counterrevolutionaries Campaign, and many of its members had been executed or sentenced to labor reform as a result, [86] by no means were all former Defense Corps participants eliminated. At the Number Ten Cotton Mill, for example, the postcampaign investigation found that forty-five of the factory's ninety-five pickets had once enjoyed close connections to the KMT; of these, thirteen had participated in the Industry Defense Corps.[87]

Confessed Industry Defense Corps members were interrogated with an eye toward smoking out former colleagues who had been less than forthcoming in registering with the authorities. A typical interrogation went as follows:

> Question: When you joined the Industry Defense Corps, where did you train?
>
> Answer: In the field across from the Number Fifteen Cotton Mill. Later I practiced by myself inside the factory for a month.
>
> Question: When were you made small group leader? Later did you have other titles?
>
> Answer: In 1947. Later I wasn't promoted. Under me were two sections, each headed by a section chief.
>
> Question: Did you participate in the household census?
>
> Answer: Yes. All the Industry Defense Corps in our factory did. I led my group.

> Question: How many Workers' Welfare Association cadres were there in your factory?
>
> Answer: Thirteen. They have registered as level-two cadres, but I don't agree because Liu Jichang was really a level-one cadre. At that time I was considered too young to serve as a level-one cadre.[88]

Drawing clear lines between Communists and Guomindang was no simple matter. Moreover, any attempt to do so raised troubling questions about the strategy of infiltration that the CCP underground had vigorously pursued only a few years before. A worker who was accused of reactionary connections put it well: "There was nothing unusual about participating in the Industry Defense Corps or the Workers' Welfare Association. Didn't the Communist underground comrades also participate? I joined some of those reactionary organizations in order to protect workers' interests. In the past, the KMT said I was CCP; today the CCP says I'm KMT."[89]

Nevertheless, the pressure to reveal past connections was intense. And such admissions could have serious ramifications: those who were deemed too compromised by past liaisons were excluded from the generous *laobao* (labor welfare provisions for workers), which had been drawn up by Li Lisan and promulgated by the Ministry of Labor in March of 1950.[90] These coveted benefits—of medical insurance, job security, housing allocation, decent wages, and pensions—were extended to only a minority of the work force: politically approved workers permanently employed at large state enterprises.[91] The implementation of *laobao* was seen by some workers as the urban equivalent of land reform in the countryside; as a laborer at Shanghai's Wuhe Needlepoint Factory put it, "In the villages, the CCP attacked the landlords during land reform and now they're using the labor insurance law to bring their struggle to the factories."[92] But whereas land reform provided some land (even if too little to make ends meet) to the majority of poor peasants, the generous (and expensive) provisions of *laobao* were withheld from many of the neediest workers—temporary and contract laborers and those employed in nonstate enterprises, in addition to those tainted by reactionary backgrounds. Workers who were denied the fruits of revolutionary struggle often found the situation unbearable. Shut out of the

advantages of the emerging socialist system, a disturbing number of them turned to suicide.[93]

In a case at the Zhenhua Sock Factory, a twenty-nine-year-old employee committed suicide after surveillance by factory pickets resulted in his being deemed a secret agent ineligible for *laobao*. Further investigation revealed, however, that the factory's union director, members of the factory union's organization committee, and most of the pickets had themselves participated in counterrevolutionary organizations. By targeting their colleague they apparently hoped to deflect criticism from their own disreputable pasts.[94]

The SFTU was aware of the pressing need to purify the ranks of the pickets, but worried about the mounting toll of suicides. Mindful of its own complicated history, it cautioned its cadres against too hasty an expulsion of alleged reactionaries, secret agents, and counterrevolutionaries. A good many of the people with such backgrounds, the SFTU suggested, could be reformed through education. If their problems were historical, rather than current, why not give them the benefit of the doubt?[95]

In October of 1951, a registration of the more than fifty thousand pickets in the city was carried out to clarify the situation and establish a line between those with redeemable and irredeemable records.[96] The SFTU's more lenient policy stipulated that before a member could be expelled for past indiscretions, the picket branch must provide written proof of the person's errors along with corroborative evidence from other picket members as well as ordinary workers. Moreover, formal approval had to be obtained from both union and picket authorities.[97] At the Guangzhong Dye Factory, this registration drive revealed that fourteen workers had served as "backbones" in the Industry Defense Corps. Of these, twelve had been dealt with in the Suppression of Counterrevolutionaries Campaign (two having been shot and ten sentenced to prison terms), one had died, and the remaining backbone, who had just been discovered, was slated to be expelled. Nevertheless, the fifty ordinary members of the Industry Defense Corps, many of whom had switched over to the PPPC in the spring of 1949, and some of whom had subsequently joined the Communist Youth League or Communist Party, were permitted to remain in place.[98]

Even after the registration drive had been completed and the pickets had been properly purified, disciplinary problems persisted. Symptomatic of the troubles was the fact that lower-level picket offices had given up submitting the required work reports on pickets' mentality and training.[99]

In November of 1951 the director of the Shanghai Worker Pickets, Sun Ming, was officially reprimanded for "serious anarchist mistakes" because of the bad behavior of two of his subordinates. One of the offending pickets had worked as a translator and policeman under the Japanese and, after 1949, had served tea in a printing house until he was dismissed for drunken brawls and sexual misconduct. The other was notorious for hanging around dance halls and harassing women after he lost his job as a security guard at the Customs House. Despite these seamy backgrounds, both men had been admitted to the Worker Pickets—and even rose to minor positions of leadership. They continued to exhibit "hoodlum-like" behavior, however. On at least one occasion the two men sexually assaulted a woman worker at union headquarters. Discovered, they were brought before a pickets' mass meeting at which a decision was reached—without party approval—to dismiss them. One of the culprits was then packed off to Subei for labor reform. When the other's request to accompany his pal to Subei was denied, he committed suicide by jumping into the Huangpu River. For allowing such misbehavior to occur on his watch, Director Sun Ming was forced to submit to public criticism.[100]

PROLETARIAN POWER?

The problems surrounding the pickets fed into a larger controversy about the role of the trade union, and indeed of the proletariat, in the new political order. The debate came to a head in December 1951, when Li Lisan was criticized for "representing backward workers" and "promoting syndicalism" by treating the union as though it were above party supervision.[101] PRC president Liu Shaoqi, commenting on the situation in state factories, put the matter bluntly: "The union is not the vanguard of the working class."[102] Several local union constitutions

promulgated with Li's blessing from 1950 to 1951 had in fact failed to mention that the trade unions operated under CCP leadership.[103] An articulate champion of worker interests, Li Lisan insisted on the need for union independence. His unceremonious dismissal as leader of the ACFTU in early 1952 plunged unions across the country into a state of pandemonium, undercutting their claim to a separate armed proletarian force.[104] The party secretary of the SFTU, Liu Changsheng, was suspended at this time on grounds of failing to rein in worker radicalism.[105]

A memorandum from a leading cadre in the SFTU expressed distress with the confused situation:

> When I returned from a meeting concerning preparations for National Day, a woman from the Security Department of the Xinguang Underwear Factory phoned me. She asked, "Are the worker pickets under union leadership?" I replied, "Yes—union leadership." She then followed up, "Are they under the leadership of the Shanghai Federation of Trade Unions?" Again, I answered, "Yes." She continued, "Since they're under the leadership of *your* union, why don't *you* step forward and lead them? Not only don't you lead, but you don't even make contact!" She was irate.
>
> We are faced with a steady stream of visits, phone calls and letters. With work units in the midst of establishing security committees [*zhibaohui*], a main concern is leadership of the pickets. At some enterprises, like the Guanghua Machinery Factory, the pickets have been converted into security personnel [*zhianyuan*]. In other cases we retain jurisdiction, but the pickets are highly agitated. In future, if the security forces can't handle the pickets they'll just dismiss them. So it looks as though we must take command. We call on higher levels of the city government to resolve this dilemma.[106]

Although the SFTU had stopped making and distributing armbands to new recruits, the pickets still controlled thousands of guns. Moreover, a large number of workers—energized by their recent political activism and unaware of the union's difficulties—were applying to enlist in the pickets. The SFTU admitted that while there was a pressing need for factory security, disciplinary problems among the remaining pickets had become chronic. Corruption and other forms

of illegal behavior were legion. Such headaches, moreover, were often passed along from pickets to party and police. In the past, activists who were too old to remain in the Youth League but who lacked the qualifications for party membership had often been assigned to a stint of picket work. After undergoing training as pickets, they were frequently promoted to key party positions. Now, with the cutback in pickets, members were applying for police work in unprecedented numbers. The municipal union had to assign a cadre to the full-time job of writing letters of introduction to the district public security offices to cope with the demand for reassignments.[107]

Was there still a role for worker pickets? The reduction in labor unrest that the union promised at the time of the pickets' reinstatement had certainly not materialized. In the month of May 1952, for example, the Shanghai Labor Bureau reported a total of 1,153 labor disputes in the city.[108] And the security concerns that had prompted the expansion of the pickets were receding. With enemy air attacks a thing of the past, life seemed to be taking on some degree of normalcy in urban China.[109] The few Guomindang planes that ventured from Taiwan into Shanghai air space now deposited propaganda leaflets instead of bombs. (In 1952, handbills containing a message from KMT labor czar Lu Jingshi—identified as head of the Free China Labor League—were dropped over Shanghai on both Labor Day and Double Ten Day. The leaflets criticized recent Communist policies, advocated an underground labor movement, and concluded with such slogans as "Long live the Republic of China!" "Long Live Anti-Communism!" and "Long live President Chiang!")[110]

In this transitional atmosphere, confusion over the status of the pickets continued to trouble union authorities. By the fall of 1952, the SFTU's exasperation with the situation was palpable:

> Despite our countless memoranda about the pickets, we've received no guidance. We don't yet know whether our municipal-level Picket Department has actually been abolished or not. But since the picket departments of all the industrial unions have been abolished, all the problems associated with picket work are being referred to us. What is to be done with the more than fifty thousand pickets? In the past, when leadership was unclear the masses wavered. What happens now? The basic picket members

are grumbling, "When the leadership has problems they call on us; when they don't have problems they forget about us."

It's true that in the current situation, where we are combating well-hidden enemies, the pickets aren't terribly useful. But in the past they made many critical contributions. They are activists and backbones of union work. Many are party or league members. Only a minority have political problems.

We need clear and immediate guidance on whether or not to announce dissolution. We don't believe this is really an occasion for secrecy. Certainly the morale of the pickets cannot be sustained through secrecy.[111]

The following year the SFTU followed up with a letter to the Shanghai Party Committee, requesting that the pickets not be summarily disbanded in light of their past achievements and a membership numbering more than fifty thousand—most of whom were "good and enthusiastic," and which included many party and league activists.[112] This time a clear response was forthcoming, but it was not the one the union had in mind. After three and a half years of service under the new regime, the worker pickets' organization was formally dissolved.[113] The end of the Korean War had alleviated anxieties about counterrevolutionary threats, and more importantly, the party had lost confidence in the union's ability to patrol the revolution. A major reorganization of the SFTU, in which a large number of cadres were dismissed on grounds of being "traitorous elements," soon followed.[114]

The disbandment of the worker pickets was part of a broader shift in national policy that accompanied China's adoption of its first Stalinist Five-Year Plan in 1953.[115] Union prerogative was but one casualty of the state's determined drive toward industrialization. Not until the Cultural Revolution would a worker militia again be officially promoted as a means of consolidating the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The party-state was not the only claimant to the tradition of an armed worker militia, however. During the strike wave that rolled across urban China in 1956–1957 in tandem with the socialization of industry, workers themselves organized illegal picket units.[116] In Shanghai, the strikes were marked by numerous instances of workers

surrounding factories, presenting demands to cadres, and refusing to disband until their requests had been met.[117] During these tumultuous confrontations, worker pickets—operating under the direction of spontaneously established "united command headquarters"—were a primary means of enforcing worker solidarity and intimidating party and union officials.[118] When district cadres went to the Hongfa Nuts and Bolts Factory to resolve the conflict there, for example, pickets stationed at the gate refused to admit the officials to the premises when they could not produce the identifying shoulder-badges issued by the strikers.[119]

The draconian manner in which the strike wave of 1956–1957 was eventually repressed (as part of the Anti-rightist Campaign) underscored the regime's fear of unbridled worker militancy. While unions had often been targets of strikers' wrath, the state suppression effort resulted in a further deterioration of union prerogatives. A number of union officials (along with strike leaders) were packed off to labor reform as rightists. Jackie Sheehan sums up the outcome of this campaign: "All things considered, the official unions were left in their weakest position yet and were very unlikely to be able to support workers in exercising increased influence at any level in the enterprise."[120]

Rural Militia

If New Democracy and its aftermath had not exactly translated into proletarian power, the state's emerging relationship with the peasantry proved equally complex. While union-sponsored worker pickets were being phased out in the cities, a very different process was taking place in the Chinese countryside. In November 1952, a national ordinance on militia construction (*minbing jianshe*) clarified the difference between proletariat and peasantry. According to the new regulations, cities were required—under PLA rather than union auspices—to organize militias among peasants in their rural suburbs, but no militias were permitted in the urban districts of metropolitan areas. Factories, mines, shops, and enterprises were explicitly prohibited from establishing militia organizations among their workforce. In the countryside, by contrast, militia construction—again under military supervision—was touted as a national priority.[121]

Rural militias had enjoyed a longstanding relationship with the military, the Red Army having been built in large part by incorporating such forces during the course of the revolution. In the War of Resistance and Civil War periods, Red Guards and other peasant militias actively complemented the regular army in waging war against first the Japanese and then the Guomindang.[122] Closely associated with a Maoist doctrine of People's War, the rural militias enjoyed renewed official sponsorship with the founding of the PRC. Article 23 of the Common Program of the People's Political Consultative Conference, promulgated in September 1949, stipulated that the new government would "enforce the system of people's militia to maintain local order, lay the foundation for national mobilisation and prepare for the enforcement of an obligatory military service system at the appropriate moment."[123] Militias were thus promoted as an important conduit of rural citizenship.

The village militias were charged with the responsibility of patrolling the revolution in the countryside. Leaders of newly established peasant associations served concurrently as militia captains. Discipline groups (*guanjiaozu*) staffed by local militiamen kept a watchful eye on those who received undesirable class labels in the process of land reform: landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, and so-called bad elements.[124] In recently liberated areas, militia loyalty was sometimes questionable as former pro-KMT forces defected wholesale to the new regime. G. William Skinner, who witnessed the Communist takeover of the Chengdu Plain, observed that "Rural self-defense corps quickly changed their Nationalist cap insignia for Red stars."[125] Despite such fickle behavior, local militias were a critical ingredient in the CCP's consolidation of power in the countryside.

During the first few years of the new regime, rural militias took an active role in both surveillance and suppression. To enhance their security role, the militias established intelligence small groups (*qingbao xiaozu*) that carried out espionage activities in their home areas.[126] From 1951 to 1952, such groups reportedly contributed to the detection and destruction of 184 counterrevolutionary uprisings in the south-central region alone. A major rebellion in Shanxi Province, involving hundreds of KMT sympathizers, was quelled by militia

forces from several counties.[127] The militias also were said to have annihilated more than eight hundred armed secret agents from Taiwan in the thirty years from 1950 to 1979.[128] Between 1950 and 1953, militias were further credited with having wiped out nearly 365,000 bandits in eleven provinces.[129] A summary of militia work in suburban Shanghai lauded the force for checking up on landlords and other suspicious elements and for having contributed to the capture of numerous counterrevolutionaries as well as ordinary thieves.[130] Samuel Griffith summarizes the public security contribution of the militias in the opening years of the PRC:

> After the seizure of power, the militia functioned as a police force responsible for establishing order in rural areas. In October 1950, more than 5 million men, an almost inexhaustible reservoir of manpower for the PLA, were carried on militia rolls. During the Korean War, the Party relied on the militia to preserve peace in the countryside, and the militia apparently acquitted itself well. At the same time, the militia took over routine security assignments in coastal areas. After the Korean War, the principal duties of the militia continued to be those of a rural police force.[131]

Although the rural militias were deployed for internal security as much as or more than for national defense purposes,[132] they remained under PLA, rather than police, control. In contrast to the *militsiia* in the Soviet Union, China's *minbing* reported to military authorities, from the Central Military Commission and the military regions on down to the newly established People's Armed Forces departments (*renmin wuzhuangbu*) at county, prefecture, and township levels. The internal organization of the militias was also patterned on a military model. Militiamen operated in teams (*xiaodui*) of eight to fifteen people, with two to five teams constituting a platoon (*fendui*), and two to five platoons a squadron (*zhongdui*). Those militiamen between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five who were physically strong, politically upright, and whose families could spare their labor power were eligible for the core (*jigan*) militia. Core members were expected to undergo intensive military training and were organized into regiments (*tuan*), battalions (*ying*), squads (*ban*), platoons (*pai*), and companies (*lian*) under the command of their armed forces departments.[133]

Despite this close attention to organization and training, rural militias were not entirely unproblematic for the new regime. In Hunan and Hubei provinces, for example, reported transgressions by wayward militia units ranged from harboring bandits and sectarians to supporting village feuds and committing serial rapes.[134] In several counties of Guangdong, rebellious militias staged attacks on local government offices and then retreated into mountain redoubts as guerrilla fighters. Steps were taken in an effort to reduce such infractions and heighten commitment among the militiamen. A mutual responsibility system was implemented by which militias at all levels were required to keep tabs on one another.[135] An educational campaign was also launched to rid the militia ranks of incorrect thoughts: fear of combat, fear of training, fear of missing work, and worship of America.[136] Disciplinary problems among the rural militia strengthened the hand of those within the PLA who argued that the time had come to replace revolutionary practices with a more professional military approach. Defense Minister Peng Dehuai criticized the militia as a fractious force unsuited to modern warfare.[137] But the forceful intervention of Chairman Mao in this debate would soon silence the militia's critics.

THE EVERYONE A SOLDIER CAMPAIGN

As Mao Zedong warned about the growing possibility of war with the United States during the Taiwan Straits Crisis of 1958, the military mobilization potential of the militia was viewed with renewed favor. Fearful of a foreign invasion, party leaders returned to a conception of the militia that stressed its role in promoting people's war, rather than serving primarily as an instrument of class struggle as had been the case during the Suppression of Counterrevolutionaries and the Land Reform campaigns. At an expanded meeting of the Politburo in late August, a decision on the militia question called for arming all the people—rural and urban alike. A month later, Mao emphasized in an interview with a Xinhua reporter the need for a national militia to counter an imperialist invasion. He stressed that every factory, school, government agency, and enterprise must establish a militia. Thus began the Everyone a Soldier (*quanmin jiebing*)

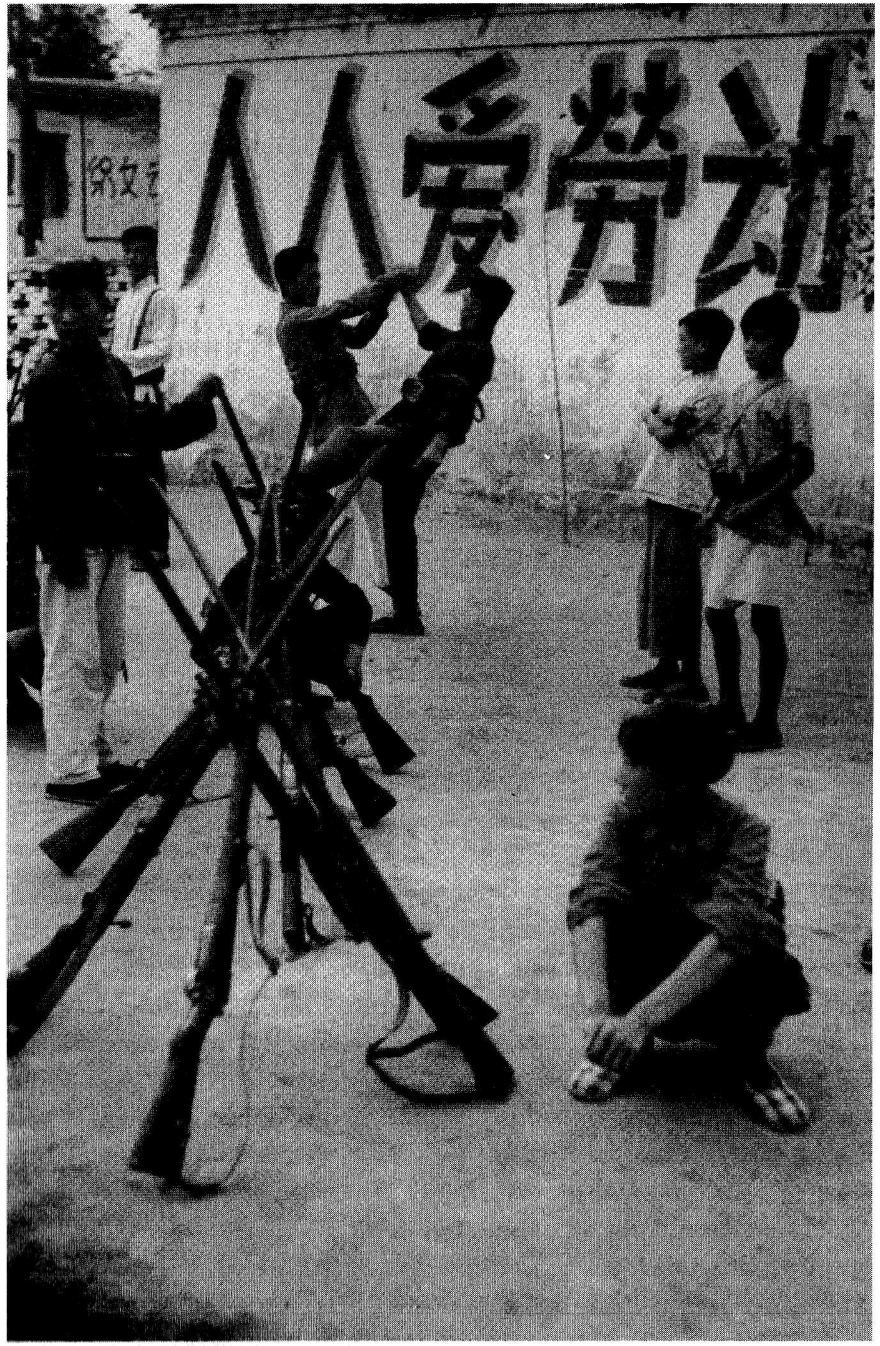


Photo 4.1. Youths outside Beijing conduct militia practice as part of the 1958 Everyone a Soldier Campaign. Henri Cartier-Bresson photo in Cornell Capa, ed., Behind the Great Wall of China: Photographs from 1870 to the Present *(New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1972).*