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URBAN COMMUNES
- COMMUNIST CHINA -

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URBAN COMMUNES

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Problems of Urban Communes in China

[This is a translation of an article appearing in Ajia Kenkyu (Data for Asia Research) # 215, Tokyo, 26 April, 1960, pages 2-7.]

"The Resolution on Some Questions Concerning the People's Communes," adopted at the sixth plenary session of the Eighth Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on 10 December 1958, provided official guide lines of the Chinese Communist Party for the solutions of problems confronting people's communes. The people's communes have been established in various parts of the nation since the Pei-hai-ho Meeting of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party in August 1958.

Vice Premier LI Fu-ch'un, in the course of his report on 1960 National Economic Plans at the outset of the Second Session of the Second National People's Congress on 30 March 1960, touched on problems of the urban people's communes for the first time. Following his statement, delegates from various municipalities explained that urban people's communes had been established since August 1958 and reported on their current status.

A number of urban people's communes were mentioned during the early phase of the movement for the establishment of people's communes in the summer of 1958, but there had been no further report on urban people's communes until the Second Session of the Second National People's Congress. One is puzzled by this fact and may suspect that they had compelling reasons to 'hide' the development of urban people's communes from the eyes of foreign and domestic observers. We may infer from the way the Communist Party had handled this problem that the development of the people's communes had not been spontaneous as the Communists make it out to be, but rather artificial. In what follows, let us examine a number of problems with which the urban people's communes are faced.

1. The resolution adopted by the sixth plenary session of the Eighth Central Committee of the Communist Party states:

"In the future, the urban people's commune, in a form suited to the specific features of cities, will also become an instrument for the transformation of old cities and the construction of new socialist cities; they will become the

unified organizer of production, exchange and distribution and of the livelihood and well-being of the people; they will become social organs which combine industry, agriculture, trade, education and military affairs; organizations in which government administration and commune management are integrated. There are, however, certain differences between the city and the countryside.

First, city conditions are more complex than those in the country side.

Secondly, socialist ownership by the whole people is already the dominant form of ownership in the cities, and the factories, public institutions and schools, under the leadership of the working class, have already become highly organized in accordance with socialist principles (with the exception of some of the family members of the workers and staffs). Therefore, the switch-over of cities to people's communes inevitably involves some requirements different from those in the rural areas.

Thirdly, bourgeois ideology is still fairly prevalent among many of the capitalists and intellectuals in the cities; they still have misgivings about the establishment of communes, so we should wait a bit for them.

Consequently, we should continue to make experiments and generally should not be in a hurry to set up people's communes on a large scale in cities. Particularly in the big cities, this work should be postponed except for the necessary preparatory measures. People's communes should be established on a large scale in the cities only after rich experiences have been gained and when the sceptics and doubters have been convinced.

This resolution, in its conclusion, predicts that urban people's communes will become social institutions suited to the conditions of cities, but emphasizes that for the time being efforts should be directed to arousing the interests of the people in urban areas in people's communes by pointing out the differences between the city and the countryside.

However, recent statements concerning urban people's communes make reference only to the first part of the resolution and state that the development of the urban people's communes has borne out the accuracy of the resolution. On the other hand, these statements do not deal clearly with problems such as differences between cities and countryside, integration of administration and management of people's communes, and management and control. It seems to us that the main reason for the secrecy surrounding the

urban people's communes is the departure of the development of urban people's communes from the lines laid down in the resolution of 10 December 1958.

2. A survey of the reports made by various delegates to the Second National People's Congress indicates that the primary reason for the establishment of urban people's communes was to mobilize housewives and the idle labor force in order to meet the shortage of labor.

For example, Jen Chung-yi, First Secretary of the Harbin Municipal Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, stated at the 7 April meeting of the Second Session of the Second National People's Congress:

"In 1958 the labor shortage in the city of Harbin became extremely acute....due to the rapid increase in production. To fulfill the 1958 production increase plans, it was necessary to hire more than 200,000 workers in the city. The main way of solving this problem was to mobilize housewives and the idle labor force for socialist production."

The necessity for closer cooperation between large, medium, and small enterprises in cities was originally cited as one of the reasons for the establishment of urban people's communes, but it seems obvious that the basic reason was to supplement the labor force with housewives. There was a similar consideration in the establishment of people's communes in rural areas.

The great economic expansion of 1958 was brought about by a broad mobilization of the agricultural labor force, and people's communes served as instruments for the mobilization of the masses for socialist construction.

All other stipulations of purposes for the establishment of people's communes are secondary and are significant only as minor outcomes or purposes. The historic significance of both people's communes and urban people's communes lie in their roles in mass movement and the mobilization of labor force. Here we see differences in the economic basis and the methods of economic construction between Communist China and the Soviet Union and Communist China and North Korea.

3. The urban people's communes have been established to meet the demands for increased industrial production, and for this reason their main task is to promote small scale industry or spare parts production serving heavy industry and large scale enterprises. Modern industry can progress rapidly only when it is backed up by related industries. Since 1958, when the construction of major

industries was in full swing, needs have arisen for the establishment within cities of small factories related to heavy industries. Urban people's communes have been established to eliminate sectionalism among enterprises and to improve cooperation among enterprises of various sizes. Factories operated by urban people's communes do produce daily necessities and other items, but basically they serve major industries. Party leaders from five major cities including Peking pointed out in their joint communique issued at the 9 April 1960 meeting of the National People's Congress, "these factories are a new force in the industrial front, and will assist in the production of spare parts or processing of semi-finished products for large factories. They can also produce various kinds of manufactured goods for daily use, utilizing waste and used materials. Their products number several hundreds and even several thousands."

4. The backgrounds of urban people's communes are different from those of the rural people's communes. The urban population has a higher cultural standard and its occupations vary widely. The joint communique of the leaders of five cities pointed out thus:

"Since the degree of ideological consciousness, income, living standards, and living habits were different among people of various social circles in the cities, they also did not fully agree with one another in their demands for establishment of urban people's communes. Some capitalists and intellectuals still harbored certain misgivings regarding membership in the communes. At the same time, some people required a longer period to change their living habits. Furthermore, in order to improve and perfect the management of collective welfare and service organizations of all peoples in the cities, it is also necessary to have considerable time."

This, the communique stresses the principle of voluntary will in the organization of urban people's communes. However, it was voluntary only in the principle that it would be impossible for people to refuse to take part in urban people's communes once establishment of the communes is laid down as a policy. If one should dare to do so, he would be labeled sooner or later as a rightest or revisionist and would be subject to criticism.

One broad conclusion we can draw is that the process of the establishment of urban people's communes had been quite complex and it is not as easy to operate urban communes as rural people's communes.

Today, only families of workers are not opposed to urban people's communes because their income has increased

due to such social institutions as the common eating facilities. Staff members of factories, government agencies, and schools and families of intellectuals would not favor the industries owned by communes. Who can guarantee that the outlook of the families of the staff members of various party organs will not change in the future if they are compelled to cook at common restaurants or to carry stretchers?

5. The people's commune is the first experiment of its kind in history. As the Resolution adopted by the Sixtg Plenary Session of the Eighth Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party at the outset pointed out, "in 1958 a new social structure appeared above the broad horizon of eastern Asia like a rising sun," the people's commune certainly is the first social system of its kind in the history of mankind. It is now being expanded from rural to urban areas, and is becoming literally the basic social structure of China. The historic experiment is being conducted on a gigantic scale by the 600 million Chinese people.

It may not be proper to criticize the experiment from outside since it certainly has spiritual as well as political aspects. It is due to political necessity rather than rationality that the institution of the people's commune has been adopted as the best means of bringing about the transition from socialism to communism.

6. It seems that the dismissal of Ma In-chu, President of the Peking University, which coincided with the establishment of the urban people's commune, has an important connection with the issue of developing urban people's communes. Dr. Ma's new population theory and equilibrium theory were criticized as rightist, opportunistic and departing from Mao-Tse-tung's six standards with regards to internal contradictions. The fact that the dismissal of Dr. Ma coincided with the launching of the urban people's communes seems to reaffirm the firm policy pursued by the Communist China against intellectuals and to disallow any criticism about the methods of building socialism such as the establishment of urban people's communes. Since Communist China is preoccupied with the speed of economic progress, it is very likely that for the time being they will give priority to political demands which usually are irrational. It seems that even a progressive scientist such as Dr. Ma cannot catch up with the political tempo of Communist China.

Progress in Urban Communalization

[This is a translation of an article written by Fukushima Yutaka, in Ajia Keizai Junpo (Asia Economic Tendency Report) #431, Tokyo, May 1960, pages 4-12.]

1. Urban Communalization in Full Swing

LI Chieh-po, Vice Chairman of the Chinese Federation of Labor Unions, made the following important statement at the Second Session of the Second National People's Congress held from 30 March to 10 April 1960:

"In a number of cities in China, attempts have been made since the fall of 1958 to establish urban people's communes. A great stride has been made in this direction during the past year and a half. Under the principle of voluntary communalization, a large number of urban people's communes have been established in various provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions throughout the nation comprising nearly 20 million people. The communalization is almost complete in many cities in such provinces as Honan, Hopeh, and Heilungkiang. Today, many urban people's communes are being established rapidly in a mass movement. It is anticipated that communalization of cities throughout the nation will be realized in the near future." (Jen-min Jih-pao, 9 April 1960). In its editorial on 31 March 1960, the Jen-min Jih-pao also commented on urban communalization as follows:

"Industries owned by urban people's communes and factories within cities throughout the nation have been greatly expanded, and their products in 1959 amount to 2 billion Yuan, twice as much as the total of goods produced by state operated and jointly operated public-private enterprises in 1949. This year, enthusiasm for improving efficiency of production and the living standards of the people has swept cities throughout the nation.

Today, many cities have people's communes with factories owned by communes, and providing services such as common eating places, nurseries, and service stations in each residential district. Liberated from cumbersome family chores, tens of thousands of housewives are now engaged in industry and are promoting cultural-sanitary works and wel-

fare activities of various organizations."

These quotations indicate a new trend in the process of urban communalization ---- a trend not manifested in the early stage of the urban communalization. We may safely infer that the process of urban communalization in Communist China is moving from the period of experimentation to the period of full scale realization. In other words, urban communalization is now actively being promoted because it has been found that an institution such as the people's commune is suited also to cities, in spite of original assumptions to the contrary.

The city of Harbin is a leading example of the urban communalization. Although the city has at present a population of nearly 1.8 million, eight people's communes have already been established comprising 1.27 million people or 70.6 percent of the population. In the 5 cities of Peiping, Shanghai, Tientsin, Wuhan, and Canton, "People's communes located in the cities are well operated, and steps are being taken to operate factories, mines, organs, and schools, thereby aiming at the complete communalization of the entire city." (Joint communique by mayors [secretaries of communist Party Committee] of the five cities of Peking, Shanghai, Tientsien, Wuhan, and Canton).

In other words, it seems that all three types of communes now being established in various parts of the nation are already being tried out in cities. Three types of communes are: a) people's communes established around large state operated factories and mines, b) people's communes established around organs and schools, c) people's communes comprising residents in cities.

Full communalization of the urban population is to be achieved presumably by strengthening and expanding these three types of communes. It is to be pointed out that the major emphasis is placed on the development of the third type of commune because the organization of this type of commune in urban areas was lagging behind schedule and had encountered more difficulties than any other type of commune. It may be said that the most important task or basic work in the process of communalization of urban areas is to bring scattered residents of cities to productive labor and collective life.

This article will be confined to a discussion of the movement for the development of the urban people's communes comprising residents of cities, and will leave the discussion of communes of types 1) and 2) separate treatment in the future. Our attention will be focussed on the

development of the urban people's commune comprising residents of cities since it is a way of organizing the life and productive labor of the urban population.

2. Changes in the Life of the Individual Urban Resident and Their Causes

A necessary condition for the establishment of an urban people's commune is an effective organization of the productive labor and ways of living of urban population. The rank and file of the urban population is now undergoing great changes. In many cities today, as pointed out earlier, industries are being developed, services are expanded, public messhalls, nurseries, service stations in residential areas are being established, and tens of thousands of housewives are freed from cumbersome domestic chores so that they can work at factories owned by communes and promote cultural, sanitary, and other various welfare projects. However, this is only a part of the picture of the change now taking place. According to statistical reports, at the end of 1959 more than 1,400,000 people -- the majority of them women -- were working at more than 44,000 factories operated by communes in 43 major cities including Peiping, Tientsin, Mukden, and Chinan. Women accounted for 95 percent of the workers at 4,000 commune-operated factories in Peiping, 90 per cent in Tientsin, 84 per cent in Mukden, and in the fall of 1959 there was practically no one without job in K'un-ming.

Preliminary surveys in ten provinces, namely, Szechwan, Hopeh, Shantung, Kiangning, Heilungkiang, Hupeh, Hunan, Kwangsi, and Kweichow, indicate that the number of nurseries in these cities was 36,000 (with more than 250,000 persons on their staffs), and the number of public messhalls was more than 20,000 (with more than 4 million members). (Jen-min Jih-pao, 3 march 1960).

Thus, tens of thousands of housewives in the cities of China are liberated from domestic labor and are working at tens of thousands of factories and service stations. What a contrast with Japanese housewives who are willing to work but are bound by family chores and babies, and worse still without opportunities to work. How has such a change come about? And what is the true picture of the organization of the labor and life of the urban population.

The change was necessary due to the shortage of labor

and the necessity of coordinating industries under the great leap forward of 1958. The case of Harbin city is typical of the situation at that time. As a result of the great economic expansion in 1958 it was necessary to improve coordination among industries of various sizes. On the one hand, it was necessary to organize small scale enterprises to serve large and medium size enterprises so as to expand major enterprises and on the other hand it was necessary to develop small size enterprises with the assistance of large and medium size enterprises. The shortage of labor became more pressing as the entire economy progressed. To fulfill the production expansion plans of 1958 an additional labor force of more than 200,000 workers was necessary in the city of Harbin. It was impossible to bring so many workers from rural areas at once, and even if they should have been able to bring them to the city, the mass movement of population to the city would have created serious difficulties in terms of extra food supplies, housing, and transportation. Consequently, it was decided that the problem of the labor shortage could be solved by mobilizing housewives in urban areas and let them participate in social labor. And it was necessary to socialize domestic labor in order to let a large number of housewives work out of home. (Jen-min Jih-pao, 7 April 1960.)

Thus, on the one hand, industries owned by communes were organized on a large scale in order to provide many opportunities for housewives to take part in social labor, and on the other hand, social services including public messhalls, nurseries, kindergartens, and service stations were improved in order to liberate them from family chores.

3. The Actual Condition of the Organization of Labor and Life of Urban Population

The work and life of the urban population is organized in the following three categories:

- 1) Organization of Production
- 2) Organization of Social Welfare Projects
- 3) Organization of the Rational Distribution of Commodities

The People's Economic Life Committee has been newly organized to supervise these efforts.

1) Organization for Production -- Industries owned by Communes

As was pointed earlier, there was a total of 44,000 factories owned by communes with a labor force of 1.4 million comprised mostly of women. (Peiping 95 percent, Tientsin 90 percent, Mukden 84 percent). These factories produced goods amounting to 2.7 billion Yuan (or 405 billion Yen) in 1959. The production increased many times during the second half of 1959. The total value of goods produced by industries owned by communes in Mukden in 1959 is eight times as large as the amount of goods produced by all factories in the city ten years ago. Since women began to participate in social labor, the income of women has increased. In the city of Mukden the income of an average housewife increased between 20 and 35 per cent, and as a result the living conditions have improved and families who had received government aid are now able to keep deposits in banks. This indicates that a new productive force is emerging in various cities of the New China.

Factories owned by communes have the characteristics of collective ownership and play an important role in assisting heavy industry. Some of these factories are engaged in processing goods for heavy industry, some others producing parts, and still others producing daily necessities. Thus they use extensively the idle human, material, and financial resources, convert consumption potentialities into production, and change useless things into useful things. In the city of Shih-chia-chuang more than 430 items are produced for large factories, and the factories owned by communes are in fact serving as supplementary workshops or satellite factories in such a way as to allow the large factories to concentrate on the production of important goods. The relationship of mutual dependance between the factories owned by commune and state operated factories necessitate the gradual inclusion within national plans of the industries owned by urban communes, and thereby solve the problem of obtaining raw materials and markets for the factories owned by communes. Through their experiences in industries owned by communes women have obtained skills and serve as reserve labor force for heavy industry. In 1959, the industries owned by urban communes sent to heavy industry more than 5,000 workers. (Jin-min Jih-pao, 3 March 1960.)

Note: Industries owned by communes include shoe factories, clothing factories, loudspeaker factories, and factories making inflammable materials. Characteristics of commune owned industries are as follows (Hung-choi, No. 1, 1960):

- 1) The average number of employees is 33. (The average number of employees in factories owned by communes in Nukden is 135, while it is 19 in Shanghai).
- 2) The majority of the employees are housewives (stated in the main text).
- 3) Methods of managing production vary greatly from industries to industries. People work together at factories, or do the work at home. The number of working hours also vary from 8, 6, to 4 hours depending on the needs and responsibilities of housewives.
- 4) Most of factories are engaged in processing, repairing, and service works. Factories owned by communes serve the production efforts of major urban industries and agricultural production in the outskirts of cities, and the needs of the general public. They also assist state operated enterprises.

2) Organization of Social Welfare Projects

As a result of the development of industries owned by communes, women desired the organization of group welfare projects, service projects, nurseries, public mess halls, service stations in residential area, and repair shops. These having been established in response to the needs for expanding production, these institutions released the labor force and thus brought about a further expansion in production.

At the same time domestic labor has been socialized, the socialistic and communistic consciousness of women had been enhanced, and the people began to associate with a stronger sense of understanding. Emphasis has been placed on the establishment of nurseries, service stations and particularly public mess halls, and attempts are made to collectivize the life of the people through these institutions. Some of the details of these institutions in the case of Nanshan Ch'u of Chungking City are as follows. (Due to the lack of space, we shall merely present some of the highlights. For full details see Jen-min Jih-pao,

11 March 1960).

Public Mess Halls More than 90 per cent of the residents of the city use public mess halls. Meals are served three times a day, with two vegetables and soup with lunch and supper. The commerce department is cooperating in the operation of the public mess halls in various ways. (For details, see the source materials referred to above).

Nurseries are established through the joint efforts of the Commerce Department and the Chinese National Women's League. There are 39 nurseries and nursery stations of various kinds within the city taking care of 3,000 children. The nurseries are widely used.

In addition to nurseries which operate on a permanent basis, there are three kinds of "temporary" nurseries:

1) Temporary nursery Children are brought here when their mothers go out, for example, to attend major activities within their residential districts.

2) Mobile Nursery Station Children are kept near meeting places or lectures halls so that their mothers can attend meetings or lectures without worries.

3) Nursery Station by Hours Nurseries are set up in key transportation terminals or cultural and recreational centers. These are used when housewives go out, for instance, to see motion pictures. The hourly fee is 2 fen, and daily fee is 15 chiao (1 fen is equivalent to 1.5 Japanese Yen and 1 chiao is 15 Yen).

4) Active Nursery Station Those children between 3 and 8 who are not accommodated in regular nurseries, are here taught manners and labor designed to develop their group consciousness. The time, place, and teachers of this kind of nursery station are arranged as required.

Service Stations Since the problems concerning cooking and taking care of children have been solved, a large portion of domestic labor has been socialized. It has become necessary to take care of cumbersome domestic labor such as washing, pressing, and cleaning homes as a large number of women come to participate in productive labor. Various kinds of service stations have been established to meet these needs. During the past year, 18 service stations, 128 mutual aid teams comprising 1,200 people have been established in this city. These service organizations are spread throughout the city. Services include mending and washing clothing, polishing shoes, taking care of patients, shopping for rice and vegetables, cooking for others, cleaning houses for others, and helping at funerals and weddings. In other words, almost all routine

domestic labor is now taken by our service organizations, and some types of work which cannot be done by substitutes are carried out by stores. The majority of the members of service organizations are usually women older than 50 years and unable to participate in productive labor. Those who act as sales agents receive a monthly allowance amounting to 2 per cent of the amount of sales (normally the allowance runs to about 15 Yuan). Those who provide services to a family on a permanent basis receive a monthly salary. There is no compensation for services rendered on reciprocal basis.

Note: Services provided by service stations can be broken down into the following two major categories:

1) Distribution of certain products in cooperation with state operated enterprises and related organizations. For instance, to function as sales agents, to transport goods short distances, to sell newspapers and publications for the publishers, to act as agents in arranging for bank deposits and mail, to act as collection agents of rents, electricity and water bills, and to purchase waste goods.

2) To serve the working urban population. For example, washing clothing, mending clothing, polishing shoes, repairing furnitures, painting homes, installation of water pipes, and electricity, barbering, cleaning, cleaning rooms, and looking after the sick and aged. (Hung-ch'i, No 1, 1960, p. 28).

3) Organization of Rational Distribution of Commodities

Simultaneously with the organization of production and social welfare projects, the Commerce Department is working for the organization of rational distribution of commodities. The basic principle applied in the distribution of commodities is to guarantee adequate supplies to the general public and to meet the needs of key establishments such as factories and mines and special needs of the aged, the sick, pregnant women and the invalid. It is said that the organization of the distribution of commodities is helpful not only in improving production but in

enhancing the communistic sense of cooperation among the masses of the people. In organizing distribution of goods the following three points are stressed:

1) To find out the complete picture of the changing consumption trends and to grasp a full picture about the number of the suppliers and the characteristics of demand for various commodities. (For details, see the source mentioned)

2) To work out different distribution methods in the light of changing supplies and demands (op. cit.)

3) To consult with the masses in order to insure rational distribution of commodities. (ibid.)

The number of commodities distributed to the consumers by this method since 1959 is about one third of the total number of commodities sold by regular stores.

4) Organization and Function of the People's Economic Life Committee

It is the People's Economic Life Committee that provides unified leadership in the organization of productive labor and daily life of the urban population. The Committee was first established toward the second half of 1958 by administrative officials within cities under the guidance of City Branch of the Chinese Communist Party. The members of the Committee are drawn from leaders of district stores, citizens in general, the National Women's League, grocery stores, coal stores, food stores, food stations, banks, major factories, government agencies, schools, and mess halls.

The major functions of the committee are to study the demands of the masses, to organize commerce and service networks, to define the scope and standards of distribution of commodities, to organize group welfare projects related to commodity distribution, and to exchange views, and encourage the people in the production of extra foods.

A staff office is established under this committee which supervises three central service stations. Each of the central service stations has five service stations with a number of workers. This deals with the external aspects of commerce. On the other hand, within each district store, People's Economic Life Committee Leadership Department is organized. Staff members dispatched to this department are in contact with central service stations, dealing with the formation of the internal organization of commerce.

The district stores, on the determination of the

General Party Branch of the Chinese Communist Party, (Municipal), are held by both internal and external organizations, driving the whole organization from inside to outside.

The component parts of the People's Economic Life Committee, are organizing the economic life of the urban population through a mass movement coordinating and dividing labor among its subsidiary organizations.

Thus, the General Party Branch of the Chinese Communist Party (Municipal) is responsible for grasping the economic cultural, and educational life of the people, for guiding the productive labor of the people and for improving the living standard of the people. District stores are responsible for the organization of the productive labor of the people as well as controlling service networks and helping in the management of public mess halls. Food stations are responsible for maintaining food supplies and improving the quality of foods. Vegetable and Food stores are not only responsible for maintaining adequate supplies but for encouraging the people to raise pigs and grow vegetables. The National Womens League is in charge of nurseries. Banks provide buildings and facilities and set up the management systems of public messhalls. Factories, mines and schools publicize the organization of distribution of goods. The representatives of Municipal People's Councils in each district are responsible for the organization and mobilization of the people, and publicity, and selection of service station personnel.

Since the roles of the People's Economic Life Committees are playing vital role in organizing the economic life of the urban population, we are interested in their future development.