

## Lesson 20

### Questions for the Lesson/What you need to know in this lesson:

1. What were the domestic policies of the new Chinese Republic from 1949 to 1960s?
2. How did these domestic policies help CCP to consolidate power and establish a socialist state in China?

### IB Questions

#### COMMUNIST CHINA

##### Mao and his Leadership

1. "An absolute monster or a great visionary – or both." Discuss this assessment of Mao Zedong in the period from 1949 until his death in 1976. (M10 Q19)
2. "Government by mass campaigns." How true is this criticism of Mao Zedong's (Mao Tse-tung's) approach to government in the period 1949 to 1976? (N03, Q16)
3. "Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung) was disappointingly inconsistent as a nation builder." Is this a fair appraisal of Mao's leadership between 1949 and 1976? (M12)
4. How successful were Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party in creating a socialist state in the period 1949 to 1961? (N11, Q19)

##### Maintenance/Consolidation of Power through Domestic Policies

5. To what extent do you agree that control of the population was the main motive behind Mao Zedong's policies? (N14)
6. To what extent did Mao Zedong achieve his vision of a socialist state in China by 1961? (M14)
7. Assess the importance for China of the triumph in the 1930s of Mao Zedong's (Mao Tse-tung's) policy of rural revolution. (N04, Q15)
8. Assess Mao Zedong's (Mao Tse-tung's) contribution to China's development after 1949. (N06, Q19)
9. Describe the problems faced by Mao and the Chinese Communist Party in China between 1949 and 1959. To what extent were they able to solve these and establish China on a sound footing? (N10, Q19)

10. "Ten years of communist rule between 1949 and 1959 had transformed China into a major power." To what extent do you agree with this statement? (M08, Q18)
11. Analyse the achievement and failures of the Communist Government of China between October 1949 and the end of 1962. (M03, Q17)
12. "An impressive but flawed (imperfect) achievement." Is this a fair assessment of Communist rule in China between 1949 and 1961? (N02, Q18)
13. Evaluate the successes and failures of Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung) and the Communist Party in their social and economic policies between 1949 and 1961. (N13)
14. With particular reference to a country which you have studied, analyse the changing role of women in society since 1945. (M05, Q23)

### Effectiveness of the Great Leap Forward

15. Why did the Great Leap Forward (1958) fail to achieve Mao Zedong's (Mao Tse-tung's) expectations? (M05, Q18)

#### A. Overview

The new Chinese People's Republic was proclaimed in Tiananmen Square, Beijing, on 1 Oct 1949. An assembly representing all areas, political organizations, and interest groups except those in direct enmity to the revolution, was called under the title of the Chinese people's Political Consultative Conference. The Conference passed an Organic Law as a temporary constitutional basis for the new regime and a Common Programme defining its fundamental policies. **The essence of what they expressed was that capitalist commerce and industry would be encouraged under socialist controls, while the land would be restored to the peasants to be worked individually for their own profit. These policies were to last 'for some time'. They were at once the fulfilment of Sun Yat-sen's democratic revolution and of the Communists' minimum program.**

**Mao Zedong was elected Chairman of the Chinese People's Republic, holding this post along within his chairmanship of the Party.** A State Administrative Council was elected. While all vital posts were put in the hands of members of the Communist Party, lesser positions were put in the hands of members of the Communists Party, lesser positions were given to members of the various 'third force' parties which had decided to support the Communist Party against the KMT.

Potential resistance to the regime was much reduced by the fact that both Taiwan and Hong Kong offered escape routes for the disaffected. Many took with them skills or

capital or both, to create, at China's loss, two of the world's most vigorous and efficient new industrial economies. Yet by no means all of China's intellectuals and entrepreneurs became emigres. The number of those who stayed is more striking than the number who left. The vast majority of China's scientist chose to stay. China's writers and artist, who had suffered much (repression) mostly remained. Most social scientists had long despaired of the Nationalists and took their chance with the new Beijing regime. The industrialists who stayed at their posts also probably outnumbered those who fled.

**Beijing's confidence in nation-wide support was shown in the relaxed policies of the time, which was generous towards capitalist, rich peasants, and even the landlords who, though deprived of their estates, were permitted to retain their commercial and industrial interests. This honeymoon period was brought to an early end by the outbreak of war in Korea.**

**Overall the theory and practice of the new government reflected to a large extent ideas expressed in Mao's *New Democracy* and the Rectification (Intra-Party Struggle) Movement developed in Yenan. The *New Democracy*, a major theoretical work of 1940, was a creative adaptation of Marxism-Leninism to the Chinese situation during the critical transition from semi-colonialism. It stipulated that the economic structure should consist of three sectors: the state economy in which the government should control big industries, mines, enterprises, and public utilities; the agricultural economy in which individual farms should develop into collective farms; and the private economy in which the middle and small capitalists should be allowed to operate. Of the three, the state sector was to assume the position of leadership and strive to increase production faster than the private sector so as to eliminate possible competition. It was also to be responsible for guiding the other sector towards socialism.**

**As regards the political structure, the work set forth the principle of "Democratic Centralism" and the coexistence of the four classes under the leadership of the proletariat and its party, CCP. The Rectification Movement of 1942 was to combat subjectivism and unorthodox tendencies, sectarianism within the party ranks, and formalism in literature. It was a drive aimed at inculcating in the party members a correct understanding of Marxism-Leninism, the thought of Mao, and the general party line in order that they might avoid 'Leftism' and 'rightism.' This was a process of ideological rectification.**

## **B. Political Reforms**

### **(i) Political Organization**

The Organic Law of 1949 made it very clear that the Chinese People's Republic was not a "Dictatorship of the Proletariat" as in the Soviet Union, but a **"Democratic Dictatorship" led by the CCP on the basis of a four-class alliance.** The co-existence of the four classes endowed the government with a "democratic" character,

while its uncompromising and unyielding attitude toward the counter-revolutionaries gave it the attribute of a “dictatorship.”

A cardinal principle followed by the new government was “**democratic centralism,**” **which provided for popularly elected bodies at different level of government.** These assemblies would elect their own representative officials, pending the approval of the higher authorities. The “election” part of this process was democratic while obedience to higher authorities suggested “centralism.” By extension, the term also came to mean free discussion in the formation of policy and tight, unswerving compliance to a decision once it had been made, regardless of one’s original stand.

The **period of New Democracy lasted till 1953**, when a program of Socialist Transformation was launched. By 1956 a new period of Socialist Construction set in. These three stages gives some indication of the progression of Chinese Communism.

## **(ii) The CCP Leadership**

China had a strong political culture that favoured authoritarianism. **Mao was able to use fear to control his opponents (both within and outside the party) although support for and faith in him also came due to the actual achievements from the ground** in the forms of defeating the KMT, expelling the foreign imperialist, various policies and methods to gain the support of the masses for the CCP such during his Yanan years.

Other key leaders of CCP included Liu Shaoqi who was second in command to Mao and was seen as Mao’s successor. **Shaoqi was the deputy prime minister and the general-secretary of the CCP. He identified himself more with the workers** while Mao identified himself more with the peasants. His extreme loyalty to the CCP kept him in line. He was a skilful organizer, engineered ideological work and often organized the conferences and congresses.

**Zhou Enlai** was another key leader. He was **a very pragmatic leader** and could switch sides easily to build consensus. He excelled in providing advice and implementing policy. He would always followed Mao’s orders even if he was in disagreement of the order or policies such as the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution.

**Deng Xiaoping** was yet another leader of whom we were learn about in the last chapter.

## **(iii) The Government Structure**

**The Organic Law remained in force for 5 years while steps were undertaken to introduce a constitution.** In 1953 a census was taken and **an election law promulgated, allowing voting privileges to all citizens 18 and above**, except landlords and counterrevolutionaries. In early 1954 elections were held, with the

village and township congressed electing their representatives to the district congresses, which then elected their delegates to the National People's Congress.

**A new constitution of four chapters and 106 articles were adopted in 1954.** Chapter 1 reiterated the principle of Democratic Centralism and the alliance of the four classes as well as the four types of ownership: state, cooperative, individual and capitalist. Chapter 2 described the government structure. Chapter 3 was the usual bill of rights, with the exception that the government reserved the right to reform traitors and counter-revolutionaries thus avoiding the legal guarantees for those who had the misfortune of disagreeing with the government. Chapter 4 designated Peking as the capital and described the national flag.

**Under the constitution, the highest organ of state was the National People's Congress, which was supposed to meet briefly each year to ponder major policy decisions and elect top government officials.** The position of the chairman of the republic (Mao) emerged stronger than before, since the six vice-chairmanships had been reduced to one, Chu Teh. Below the central government were provincial and district or county administrations.

**The Central Committee controlled executive power.** When it is not in session the Central Committee delegated its power to the Politburo which consisted of 24 men which in turn maintained a Standing Committee of China's most powerful men.

In 1949 the Standing Committee consisted of Mao, Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, Zhu De and Chen Yun.

**Significantly, party and government were closely interlocked and all important party members filled key positions in government as well as in semi-official organizations such as trade unions, farm groups and mass organizations.**

#### **(iv) The Administrative Structure over China**

**China was to be a unified state and not a federal state.** It was divided into 6 massive regions each having their own military command and were directed by regional leaders. But as this posed the threat of creating independent regional leaders, the administration of China was then administered through 21 provinces, 5 autonomous regions and 2 municipalities. **A tightly centralised system was adopted** where provincial party secretaries supervised the dissemination of Central Committee orders.

#### **(v) Political Parties- Creation of One Party State**

The leading part was of course the CCP, which claimed a membership of 4.5 million in 1949, 17 million in 196, and about 46 million in 1988. The party was organized in four channels: representative, executive, and administrative and control. According to the 1956 party constitution, the highest organ in the representative sector was the National Party Congress, which convened once a year and whose members were elected for five-year terms. In the executive sector, there was the powerful Central

Committee, which convened twice a year and delegated its powers to the Politburo, which in turn maintained a Standing Committee of China's seven most powerful men. Until the Cultural Revolution, these seven included the Chairman (Mao), 5 vice-chairmen (Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, Chu Teh, Ch'en Yun and Lin Piao) and the party general secretary (Tseng Hsia-p'ing). The Central Committee maintained 6 regional bureaucrats and a number of departments such as Organization, Training, Propaganda and Social Affairs.

In 1949 the CCP had 4.4 million members and 10 million members by 1955. Many of them came from the worker or peasant ranks and they did not have much understanding of communist ideology or CCP's policies. Yet it was these party members or cadres who replaced the gentry of the imperial times and became the new elites. Many felt alienated in the cities as they came from rural background and were also involved in corruption and abuse of power.

### **Other Political Parties**

As a "People's Democratic Dictatorship" rather than a "Dictatorship of the Proletariat". The Chinese People's Republic permitted a number of non-Communist parties to exist. Some of these important ones included the KMT Revolutionary Committee, which consisted some of the leftist KMT members, who chose to stay in mainland China rather than join Chiang in Taiwan, the Democratic League, which had always sympathized with the CCP during its struggles with the KMT. However, since a Communist dictatorship recognized neither the concept of a loyal opposition nor the freedom associated with political parties as understood in the West, these non-communists parties were essentially window dressing. They possessed only the right to agree and cooperate with the CCP and the government.

Hence, a **one-party state was created**. In all reality all other political parties, at least about 10 of them, disappeared by 1952 due to a set of repressive moves which denied the right of any party to exist other than the CCP.

### **(vi) Political Control over the Masses – Enforcing Conformity**

A basic ingredient of Maoism is the **continuous organization of mass movements for the attainment of specific objectives predetermined by the party**. Indeed, surges of mass campaigns punctuate the daily rhythm of life in Communist China, and **the Chinese people, once described as a pile of loose sand, are now more tightly organized than any other national population in the world (compare it to the past context to understand its significance)**. Practically everybody belonged to some mass organizations **through which the party and the government exercised their control and carry out national policy**. In addition, their **monopoly of the communications media and the omnipresence of their security police and party cadre** have combined to **make the society a watertight compartment unprecedented in the history of China.**



**The mass organizations are actually semi-governmental bodies of gigantic size:** such as the All-China Federation of Democratic Youth with a membership of 18 million, the All-China Federation of Trade Union with a membership of 10.2 million, the All-China Democratic Women's Federation with membership of 76 million and the Young Pioneers which was for children between the ages of 9 to 14 and this claimed a membership of 8 million. **Through these gigantic organizations, the government indoctrinated the people and organized them for demonstrations,** parades and drives such as the Resist-America Aid-Korea Campaign in 1951 and the **Three Anti-Movement in 1951** to combat corruption, waste and bureaucratism and this was targeted within CCP due to the worry that CCP cadres had corrupted themselves. This was expanded into 'the five anti-movement' in 1952. This campaign was intended to stimulate the economy by attacking industrial sabotage, tax evasion, bribery, fraud, theft of government property. The main aim of all these anti-movements was however was targeted at industrialists and businessmen to destroy the remnants of what Mao defined as 'the bureaucratic capitalistic class' so that the state can takeover enterprises in 1952. **It was clear that 3 years after the Communist takeover Mao felt able to turn openly against the classes which he had been obliged to tolerate earlier in order to maintain continuity of administration.** The greatest of the mass campaigns was perhaps the organization in 1966 of hundreds of thousands of students into the Red Guards to combat the Anti-Maoists.

The new society under the Communist encouraged the forging of a new lifestyle and the **creation of a new Socialist Man.** People were urged to mind not only their own business but to check on one another's thoughts and actions, to attend numerous political gatherings and to participate in "learning" and "struggle" sessions. The Socialist Man was to have no regard for face, be prepared to make public confessions, and put the state before his family. His whole being was irrevocably dedicated to advancing the cause of the proletarian revolution rather than seeking individual advancement or bringing honour to the family as in the feudal past. He should only have 5 loves as stated in the Article 42 of the Common Program – love of the fatherland, of people, of labour, of science and of public property.

**In connection with the moulding of the new style of life, there developed a subtle if devastating indoctrination program – otherwise known as brainwashing.** It was a process of psychological coercion. It was used not only to convert enemies and extract confessions but also to **indoctrinate party cadres and transform intellectuals so that they can serve the state rather than be liquidated as in post-revolutionary Russia.**

The **indoctrination process** usually lasts from several months to a year depending on the severity of the objective, but in all cases it takes place in a remote controlled camp where the individual, completely isolated from the outside world, is deprived of all sense of security. The sense of impossibility of retreat, poor living and food conditions, and the imposition of heavy physical labour to insure fatigue and hence weaken the will to resist are methods used together with the study and criticism of each other's background sessions take place. All these happens in the first two months. In the next stage of three to four months, physical exertion is somewhat reduced and more study sessions were included where the focus was to make one

understand the insignificance of the individuals and the omnipotence of the party. The works of Mao and Stalin, Marx and Lenin became the new Bible. The past is depicted as dark, corrupt and decadent while the new life under the Communist regime represented liberation and progress and was depicted as one that provided chances for a new and meaningful existence. Class struggle and the inevitability of ultimate party victory were continuously imposed upon the trainees to make them eventually accept the reality that it was impossible to hide or resist as the party will win anyway. When the indoctrination ends in about 4 months, a quarter of the graduated trainees will be sent for further schooling while the remaining will go into the society to organize and lead the public. **In this way the whole society is a laboratory of mass control.** Up to 9 million were imprisoned for thought reforming during the Great Leap Forward and the death rate was nearly 10% after 1959.

**In 1956 a first challenge to the state came from the public.** The seven strict years of Communist rule had generated considerable resentment and repressed emotion, which erupted after the Hungarian Revolt. Partly to afford people a chance to let off steam – lest there be a Hungarian type revolt in China – and partly to ferret out the real critics, Mao cleverly declared **“Let hundred flowers blossom, let hundred schools contend!”** Many intellectuals naively mistook the statement to mean a liberation of expression and spoke their minds. The severe criticism that ensued surpassed the government’s expectation. Finding it unbearable and detrimental, Mao clamped down with lightning speed. The critics were caught and although they regretted their impudence, it was too late to recant. Many were sent corrective camps or **were forced to sign a “socialist self-reform pact” to renew their pledge of allegiance.** In the wake of this anti-rightist campaign, the government in 1957 initiated a “socialist education movement” among the industrial and agricultural population, followed by the dispatch of military and civil leaders to physical labour as an example to the people. The importance of “redness” (ideology over expertise) was very much emphasized.

**Through mass organizations, secret police, mass communications media and indoctrination, the government has succeeded in controlling and re-moulding the society and the people to an extent unknown in Chinese history.**

### **A society of Informers**

To maintain its control, the CCP turned China into a nation of informers. Local party officials created a system in which neighbours spied on neighbours, workers snooped on their mates, ‘watchers’ who kept the local CCP informed on anyone or anything suspicious and community associations, which were set with the declared aim of providing mutual help, became a major means of exerting control and conformity. Those Chinese who had middle-class or non-revolutionary background knew that such movements would condemn them and were eager to prove their sincerity to the new proletarian China and the new regime by becoming especially eager to denounce others as bourgeois and imperialist lackeys. China had begun to take its first steps towards becoming a society of informers in which conformity was maintained.



## Imposition of Control over the intellectuals

Intellectual life was brought quickly under control. In 'On New Democracy' Mao had appealed to the Chinese people against the oppressiveness of KMT's censorship, suppression of intellectuals, brutality towards students, murders of political opponents and increasingly Fascist methods. However, this freedom that was promised in 'On New Democracy' lasted 18 months before a campaign was launched to exert full command of China's intellectual life.

In 1957, the universities and research institutes were taken over by the government. Their members were subjected to a process of 'thought-reform' in courses of treatment lasting normally about 6 months where through group discussion sessions, physical deprivations, isolation and confessions, and under frightening pressures their feeling of class guilt, their intellectual contradictions and their yearning to be good patriot were used to break down and change their personalities. **Evidence, however, shows that in most cases the effects were temporary and the communist mentors seldom has a permanent effect. In the end all the Communists earned was fear.**

Within three or four years, the educated classes of China, on whom the regime was very dependent, and even more dependent when with the First Five Year Plan the drive began for planned economic growth, were demoralized. Cowed into obedience, they carried out their work perfunctorily and avoided the risks of offering advice or pursuing innovation. In 1956 Zhou Enlai admitted that the pressure had been counter-productive and proclaimed a new and more liberal policy.

### (vii) Party Control over Military

**The Red Army was renamed as the People's Liberation Army and it came under the CCP's Military Affairs Commission.** Peng Dehuai wanted to modernize the army, making it professional and a well-armed conventional army and also wanted to depoliticize it so that it is focused on military duties and not interfere in political issues. He also aimed at reducing military's size. A whole range of military schools and academies were introduced to reduce illiteracy and increase professionalism. Officer rank insignias were reintroduced in 1955 and pay scales became differentiated. However, Peng was removed as Defence Minister in 1959 and was replaced by Lin Biao who favoured the People's War (i.e. 'redness'/ideology or political zeal was preferred over 'technical expertise').

**The military was also used for a series of reunification campaigns.** Tibet, Xinjiang and Qinghai were autonomous prior to 1949. Under the Qing imperial rule, the control over Tibet was very loose. The army was sent by the Chinese Republic and Tibet was brought under its control in Oct 1950. China sought to destroy the Tibetan identity, who were very different in race, culture and religion from the Chinese, through the military invasion and by flooding the area with Hans.

Xinjiang was dominated by the Muslim Uighurs of Turkish origins. The Xinjiang governor was very repressive against the Muslims and this led to revolt by the Muslims. In 1949 the area was reabsorbed into China. Here too the new regime hoped to extend its control over the area and the minorities. It stepped up its migration measures to increase the Han presence.

### C. What were some of the economic problems the Chinese People's Republic was faced with in 1949?

The government in 1949 inherited a badly disrupted economy. Inflation had rocketed beyond control; floods had affected 30-40% of the arable land and industrial and food output had plummeted to 56% and 75% of the pre-war peak, respectively. **Thus, the first order of the business was to rehabilitate the economic life of the nation and restore industrial and agricultural production to pre-war levels.**

To promote financial stability, the government **issued a People's Currency (renminbi) in May 1949** replacing the worthless KMT fabi and banned the circulation of foreign currencies as a medium of exchange. **Strenuous efforts were made to achieve price and wage stabilization** through a drastic reduction of a "wage-point" system for payment of workers based on the prices of 5 basic items – rice, oil, coal, flour, and cotton cloth. As the prices of these articles fluctuated from week to week, the "wage-point" rose and fell accordingly, so that the average salary of workers varied in money value but not in actual purchasing power. Similar methods were used to safeguard savings and bank deposits.

**Effort was also made by the Liberation Army to restore communication lines in order to facilitate the exchange of commodities.** Also put into practice **was a new taxation system** involving agriculture, agricultural commercial, sales and income taxes.

**With these measures, by 1950 inflation was controlled, from 1000% in 1949 to 15% annually. The government budget was also balanced** with ruthless control over government spending and its budgetary deficits were dealt with by selling of government bonds aided by mass patriotic campaigns.

(Recall what Jack Gray's argument was with regards to why the KMT could not balance their budget?)

### D. Economic Policies

#### (i) Land Revolution and Agriculture Collectivisation

**The government launched a vigorous agrarian revolution in an attempt to cure the age-old problem of landlordism.** The government promulgated in June 1950 the **Agrarian Reform Law, which called for the abolition of the "land ownership system of feudal exploitation" and the confiscation of landowners' holdings and farm implements for redistribution to landless peasants.** The **agrarian population was classified** into 5 categories: (i) landlords – those who possessed large land properties and who did no manual labour work themselves but lived on usury and the exploitation of others (ii) rich peasants – those who owned land but worked in themselves (iii) middle peasants – those who owned land but worked it themselves without exploiting others (iv) poor peasants – those who owned little land

or farm implements and who had to sell part of their lands to make ends meet (v) hired land – those who owned no land and had to live on labour or loans .

**Theoretically, the government allowed the landlords to keep their proportions of the redistributed land, and exempted from confiscation the rich peasants' land that they themselves cultivated. But in practice many injustices were committed** in local “accusation meetings” where virulent denunciations of landlords and rich peasants took place under the guidance of overzealous party cadres and vengeful peasants. **The method of mobilizing the peasants by the use of ‘speak bitterness’ meetings during which they were encouraged to recount their grievances and to accuse the landlords paraded before them,** ran the risk of emotions running high and beyond control.

**There was an inevitable ambiguity between the desire to conduct the land reform justly and peacefully and the desire to terrify the rural upper classes in order to neutralize them politically. The Korean War tipped the balance.** Both landlords and rich peasants suffered grievous losses at these meetings and many were summarily shot after a brief public trial. Up to 800 000 to 5 million landlords were killed. The gentry/landlord class, formerly the dominant elites and the backbone of the traditional society was destroyed. **It enabled the establishment of CCP control right to the village level.**

**By Dec 1952 the agrarian revolution had been completed and some 700 million mou (1/6 acre) of land had been redistributed to 300 million peasants.** On the average, in East and South China – where the population density was the highest – each head had received one *mou*, in Central China 2 to 3 *mou* and in North China 3 *mou* and in Manchuria 7 *mou*. On the whole, the land revolution favoured the poor peasants and the hired hands at the expense of the landlords and the rich peasants, while the middle peasants were affected least of all.

**By 1953 the economy had recovered, land reform was complete, the private sector had been reduced to subservience and the Korean War had ended in a protracted truce.** China had been assured that ‘New Democracy’ would last for some time, by 1953 there was no obvious obstacle to the initiation of the ‘transition to socialism’

**No sooner had the land revolution been completed in Dec 1952 than the government started a second phase of agrarian reform – a drive toward collectivization in 1953,** with a view to raising production, preventing the emergence of rich peasants, achieving greater agricultural specialization and proceeding faster towards the goal of socialist transformation. Collectivization involved several stages, the lowest being the mutual aid teams where the teams pooled or loaned their implements and worked joint and seasonally, as during the spring planting and the autumn harvest. The second stage was the semisocialist agricultural producers’ cooperatives, in which the members pooled not only their implements and labour but land as well, although theoretically retaining individual ownership. The third stage was the fully socialized cooperatives, similar to the Soviet collective farm, in which all members collectively owned the land.

**By the end of 1956, some 96% of all peasants' households had officially become members of the semi-socialist producers' cooperatives.** When the collectivization campaign was completed in 1957, there were a total of 760,000 to 800,000 cooperative farms, each average 160 families or 600 to 700 peasants.

A further **move toward socialist transformation** was the introduction of the people's communes in 1958.

**However, Jack Gray argues that the most interesting aspect of China's method, however, was the gradual development within each stage.** The seasonal mutual aid teams were encouraged to take up simple infrastructural developments between the busy seasons, and so to become operating organizations. They were encouraged to acquire common property – equipment, a field reclaimed from wasteland – and so to move one stage closer to collectivization. At the primary co-operative stage similar methods were used. At first the dividend on land might be the major part of the distribution of the proceeds; sometimes as much as 70% to land and 30% to labour. As inputs of other resources grew, and especially as labour inputs were intensified, it would become irrelevant and the co-operative would thus become a full collective.

**If this policy had been maintained over several years collectivization might have been achieved with no loss in absolute income to any peasant.** This could have been achieved well within the average increases in production which actually took place. **The process has scarcely begun, however, when it was overtaken by full collectivization abruptly imposed from above. This was the first occasion, tragically not the last as well, on which the CCP, having created development policies of an intelligent, realistic and liberal kind, have then thrown away the benefits by a reversion to crude and dictatorial means of implementation.** The traditional political genius of the Chinese finds itself at loggerheads with the dogmatic demands of Marxism. In face these sensible policies were created by Mao, the man who himself was to ride roughshod over them.

## (ii) Industrial Expansion

**Recognizing the critical role of industrialization in building a socialist state,** the CCP spared no effort to achieve this goal. By 1952 not only had the pre-war industrial and agricultural peaks been matched, but those of 1949 surpassed by 77.5%. Preparatory work for a First Five Year plan began in 1951 and in 1952 a State Planning Committee was established. However, the First Year Plan was finally put into practice only in 1955 – some two years after the official beginning – due to lack of statistical knowledge and inexperience.

**The Plan was based on Soviet experience. Resources were centrally allocated, including intermediate goods.** The task of managers was simply to deliver to sellers or other producers the goods specified in the Plan. Production was controlled by setting targets not only for output but for all major inputs. The individual manager was responsible to the Ministry for the performance of his enterprise, under the general supervision of the Party branch.

**In line with Soviet precedent, priority in investment was given to heavy industry,** followed by light industries with agriculture last. Within heavy industry the leading

factor was steel production; the steel target was fixed first, and all other parts of the Plan set in relation to it- even the target set for agriculture. **In industry, again in line with Soviet precedent, was to create urban, high-technology, capital intensive, large-scale enterprises. No provision was made for local, small-scale-labour intensive forms of employment.** On the contrary, such pre-modern enterprises were regarded with contempt and neglected when not actually suppressed, so that so far from the possibilities of non-farm employment in the rural areas being increased in the planned economy they were severely reduced.

**Trade in grain was taken over by the state in 1953 and the farmers were obliged to deliver a specified quantity of grain or of an equivalent crop to state purchasing agencies at a fixed price,** in order to ensure supplies at low prices to the growing urban industrial work-force.

**The Plan would have been virtually impossible without large-scale Soviet assistance.** Its backbone consisted of almost two hundred large turnkey factories provided on credit by Soviet Union.

### **The First Five Plan**

It called for the construction of 694 industrial projects, of which 156 plants were to be built with Soviet aid. By the end of the planned period, the industrial output was supposed to be double, the introduction of the cooperative farms was to be effected, and the incorporation of private industry and commerce into state organizations was to be completed, so that a “socialist transformation” might become a reality. Of the total outlay of capital, 58.2% was earmarked for industrial construction, 19.2% for transport, posts, telecommunications, 7.6% for agriculture, forestry, and water conservancy and 7.2% for culture, education and public health.

**The year 1956 marked a spectacular advance in industrial output that topped the previous year by 25%,** matched by an increase of 60% in capital investment. Although the pace slowed down somewhat in 1957, the First Five Year Plan still overfulfilled the original targets by 17% according to the “fixed prices of 1952.” Steel production reached 5.3 million tons, iron 5.8 million tons, electric power 19030 million kwh – each representing 25% increase over the original quotas. The coal production of 122 million tons was an 8% overfulfillment, while grain output was 11.6% above quota.

The success of the First Five Year Plan prompted the government to launch a more ambitious Second Five Year Plan for 1958-1962. It called for an overall increase of 75% in national income.

**But Jack Gray argues that the Chinese took a cautious view of their First Five Year Plan and that by 1956 some elements in the CCP, including Mao Zedong himself, were becoming critical of it.** The First Plan proved, in fact, to be China's only exercise in totally central planning. Yet it was highly successful in its own terms. The main targets were met. The rate of industrial growth was very rapid and the rate of growth of heavy industry remarkable.



### (iii) The Great Leap Forward, 1958 –1961

#### Reasons and overview for the GLF

Great Leap Forward was aimed at transforming both the agrarian as well as industrial sector and create a socialist state.

In **economic terms the GLF represented** in a Chinese form the widespread contemporary reaction against planning principles. The rejection of the idea of giving false priority to heavy industry; **the acceptance of the necessity of creating labour-intensive industries in the rural areas as the first modern census in 1953 had shown that the population of mainland China, so far from numbering 450 million as widely accepted estimates had suggested, was actually 582 million and therefore requiring that a minimum of capital be urgently found to provide new forms of employment, especially in the country side.**

**It was also agreed that greater funds for central investment could be raised by increasing the amount of grain compulsorily purchased from the peasants** due to the failure of the attempt in 1955. **In 1955 a decision was taken to speed up the process of collectivization as experience of the preceding year had suggested that greater control of the marketable surplus of agriculture was necessary.** The resale of grain to villages which claimed to be deficient in food supplies hampered the flow of grains to the cities. False reporting of grain deficiencies was difficult to prevent among a hundred million peasant families who consumed most of their produce and kept their own stocks.

**A second problem was that an attempt in 1954 to increase quotas for grain procurement had failed; its only result was to discourage the sowing of grain. Pressure therefore began to be put on the peasants to enter primary cooperatives.** By the middle of the year, however, the opinion had gained ground that this pressurized collectivization was destroying peasant incentives and endangering food supplies; 35000 newly formed agricultural cooperatives were therefore abolished.

Mao, who had since the beginning of the era of planned development had intervened little, stepped into the controversy with dramatic effect. **He made a speck accusing those who favoured a slower pace of collectivization of acting like ‘old women with bound feet,’ dragging behind the masses, the majority of whom he asserted favoured collective agriculture.** This was in July 1955 and he followed it up by convening a huge conference of co-operative activists from the grass roots, who delivered a succession of favourable reports on the movement. The opposition on the Central Committee was silenced. **His opponents saw no point in collectivizing until China could provide agriculture with modern inputs. Mao’s argument, however, was that China’s peasants might never reach the stage at which they could afford modern inputs unless they first pooled their resources to increase production by the means to hand.**

There were also the high hopes entertained of rural community development; **the belief that popular participation in the process of development was both socially and economically necessary;** the appreciation of the fact that surplus rural labour was actually a resource which could be used to create new rural infrastructure; and



finally the growing awareness **that increased agricultural production and increased peasant income were the true key to rapid growth**; all these ideas were by 1958 widely current.

However, no sooner had the **Second Five Year Plan** had begun than the government plunged ahead in a new feverish drive to accelerate the expansion of the already overheated economy. China was still largely agricultural country and there was **a need to industrialise so that a proletariat could develop which would lead to a communist society**. In early Feb 1958, the Great Leap Forward was announced for the next three years, calling for a 19% increase in steel production, 18% in electricity, 17% in coal output for 1958

Mao talked about catching up with or even surpassing the British industrial capacity in 15 years. **Buoyed by optimism, the exuberant planners repeatedly revised the production targets upward in hopes of achieving an unprecedented rate of growth**. The steel quota was raised from 6.2 million tons in Feb 1958 to 8.5 million in May and 10.7 million in August. A general increase of 33% in industrial output was confidently predicted for the year. **To achieve this phenomenal development record, everyone was urged to participate in industrial production and in so doing everybody regardless of his background – government official, peasant, student, professor, worker and etc. became a proletarian**. By the fall of 1958, some 600 000 backyard furnaces sprang up throughout the country.

### The GLF Process

**Along with this frenzied drive for industrialization, the government took a further step towards socialist transformation by the creation of People's Communes at the agricultural sector.**

The fundamental idea of the Leap was that the local communities should take the initiative in self-development. The role of the Party was to induce the process by democratic methods. The duty of the state was to respond by providing the means: credit, equipment and expertise. The question was at what level of the local society would the coordination take place. The average village level was too small a unit for planning and resource mobilization. For overall local planning the obvious level was the county administration which still remained, as it had been in imperial China, the point at which state and local society met. The county Party Committee became the headquarters for mass mobilization. However, the populations of China's 2000 counties, however now **averaged between 300 and 400** hundred thousand people and this was far too large for the actual management of the new enterprises while on the other hand the existing collective farms were too small for the effective mobilization of resources.

**Hence, it was decided that the existing collectives would be combined together in a single unit of account**. The first task of every commune was to carry through the programme of Great Leap. It was to be collective, owned by its members and making its own economic decisions. In the spring of 1958, **piecemeal amalgamation of agricultural producers' cooperatives** had already begun in some parts like Hopeh

and parts of Manchuria and by July the movement reached a 'high tide' and the term People's Commune formally appeared. **By Nov 1958 there were 26000 communes embracing 98% of the farm population.** On the average each rural commune consisted to some 30 cooperatives of about 5000 households or 250 000 people. **It assumed administrative functions of the villages, controlled the area's agricultural as well as industrial resources, collected taxes, operated schools, banks, nurseries, public kitchens and old folks homes and etc. It appropriated all private properties** such as land, houses and livestock. The communes, each maintaining numerous production brigades, were created to increase agricultural and industrial output.

In **parallel existence with rural communes were urban communes** such as spinning and weaving machinery factory. Collective living began with the moving of workers to the factory area, around which the commune developed clothing stores, public dining, hospitals, schools and etc. The various departments of the commune included industry, agriculture, finance, planning, welfare and culture. There were of course production teams – organized along military lines as regiments, battalions, and platoons – to raise agricultural, industrial and every other aspect of output. The CCP branch at the factory was concurrently the party commune of the commune, over which it maintained close control.

**The communes were, however, more than an economic enterprise; when the process of communications was complete, the parish and the commune became one, so that the commune inherited the political functions of the parish to become an autonomous social and political unit.**

### Impact of GLF

**As the result of the GLF and the introduction of the communes, the government proudly announced at the end of 1958 that industrial production of the year had surpassed that of 1957 by 65%.** Machine tools had trebled; coal and steel had doubled; oil had increased by 50% and electricity by 40%. The progress made was indeed considerable.

**Yet much of the quality was sacrificed for quantity as the government itself later admitted.** In Aug 1959, 3 million of the 11 million tons of steel produced in 1958 was pronounced unfit for industrial use – backyard furnaces simply did not perform the same function as the giant steel mill. **Amid the utopian dreams of instant development, a new feeling of pragmatism began to emerge which stressed realism in planning and expertise in technological operations.** It was becoming that authentic economic progress needed far more than ideological power to become a reality.

**Western sources generally agreed that Chinese economic growth in the 1950s was quite impressive but less so in the 1960s.** China Gross National Product rose from 73.8 billions of yuan in 1952 to 123.4 billions in 1959, an increase of 70%

compared with 30% between 1959 and 1970 (171.4 billions). Taking the period as a whole, 1952-1970, the annual growth rate was about 4 to 4.5%, a respectable though not a spectacular performance.

### **The reasons for failure of the Great Leap Forward, 1958-1960**

**The early success of the Leap created a euphoria in which everything seemed possible.** Production targets, at first moderate, were increased and increased again as dramatic reports of local successes were made the basis of universal demands. Local cadres were forced into promises they could only hope to fulfil by coercion. Local cadres were forced into promise they could only fulfil by coercion. They responded to pressure to from above with false claims of success, which misled even the Political Bureau, and committed the cadres and their community to impossible tasks.

**Euphoria created another problem. Many radicals convinced themselves that the Leap was not only an economic leap but a bound from socialism to communism.** The policy of free supply system, by which the greater part of the earnings of the commune member was in the form of a free ration of food and other necessities, given without reference to his performance at work, suggested this possibility. The creation of communal mess halls, through which much of this ration was provided, increased these hopes as well as hopes that the bourgeois family was about to disappear. Private plots were abolished and the very fruit trees in the cottage courtyard taken into communal ownership.

**In practice the assumption of political responsibilities by the commune compromised its position as an autonomous economic enterprise; it inevitably became simply a new, lower level of the State Party hierarchy, carrying out orders from above.** Its leaders were paid by the state and were responsible to the state and not to the commune members. It became a means to thrust the power of the state directly into the village for the first time in Chinese history. While the communes were to be responsible for their own incomes, their operations were dictated by the higher levels of state and Party. **It was a familiar enough situation in communist countries but was thrown into relief in 1958 because it so sharply contradicted the whole theory of development through community initiative on which the Leap was theoretically based.**

**The new system was also compromised by the attempt to use the resources of more prosperous villages to improve the lot of the poorer,** by including both in the same unit of ownership and distribution. In this, the commune system sought to do what had been tried within the original collectives through the attempt to equalize the assets of the constituent brigades. It had failed in the face of peasant resistance and thus could be expected to fail again with communes which tool in not just a dozen brigades but a dozen collectives.

**The GLF was also adversely affected when familiar gigantism of Stalinist socialism reasserted itself in the Chinese experience.** The initial plan was for a gradual stage by stage progress where initially the production team of 30 or 40 families which would remain the unit of ownership and distribution in farming and the brigade which would assume the ownership and operation of small-scale industrial production

and of agricultural machinery and the commune would assume ownership of all the year round industries and the management of tasks requiring large scale construction. It was expected that as farming was mechanized and as the local economy was diversified the level of ownership of all assets would be raised to brigade and eventually to commune levels but this was to be a gradual process.

**This gradualism was soon overtaken by the pace of coercive mobilization; within weeks the original concept had been forgotten and the commune had become a single huge farm.** What was conceived as a process which generated its own resources in a circular flow that included increasing purchasing power; it came to depend on the massive withdrawal of resources from consumption for huge local investment in grandiose, often duplicated projects, projects of uncertain value, forced on the peasant communities by local authorities which were themselves under irresistible pressure from higher levels. It was supposed to operate by gradually and rationally increasing labour productivity in order to free labour for continued diversification; instead it worked by increasing the hours and the intensity of work to intolerable levels.

The communist cadres took the system of authoritarian allocation of resources, created in the First Five Year Plan and thrust it down into the grassroots which led to results that were politically intolerable and economically disastrous.

**Jack Gray thus argues that, the failure of the GLF which was actually based on sound economic principles failed due to political reasons.**

### **The Winding Down of the Great Leap Forward**

**Even in March 1958, however, when euphoria was at its height, the first notes of alarm were being sounded.** At the Chengdu Conference, March 1958, it was agreed that the Leap must be concluded with more circumspection; Liu Shaoqi drew part a little from Mao in his stronger insistence on caution. More cautious policies might have been reasserted had it not been for the alarming deterioration in China's security which took place at this point of time. The US decided to provide Taiwan with modern missiles. This revived the fear of war with the Nationalist regime.

At the same time, Khrushchev had made it clear that he would take advantage of Russia's new ballistic superiority not to double pressure on the West but to reduce it. China, faced with the possibility of invasion of American-supported Taiwan, was not interested in détente but in an assurance of support from her Russian ally, which did not come when US assured support for Taiwanese government when the CCP tested out the alliance by shelling the Nationalist positions on Quemoy and Matsu islands. At this point the commune militia was again expanded with the aim of creating an 'armed people'. The GL production drive again accelerated and the pace remained frantic until the end of the year.

**Mao emphatically accepted responsibility for some of the worst mistakes of GL policy and particularly for the attempt to spread the manufacture of iron and steel to the villages by the use of small-scale blast furnaces.** This policy was

condemned as completely irrational. To do Mao justice, he was apparently among the first to recognize where and how the GLF had gone wrong. He condemned the arbitrary requisition of peasant resources, reminding his fellow leaders that even the property of China's capitalists had not been confiscated without compensation, asserted that the requisitions were sheer banditry and supported the resistance of the peasants as right and proper.

### **The Lushan Conference 1959**

Mao began admitting that he did not understand economics all the time. Defence Minister Peng Dehuai visited the provinces to discover the real conditions due to GLF. In 1959 the CCP leadership gathered at the Lushan resort. Peng sent a letter criticizing Mao and the GLF and thus Peng was accused of being a bourgeois democrat and leading an anti-party plot. Peng will resign but will be tormented again during the Cultural Revolution. This incident and replacement of Peng by Lin Biao and the reshuffling of the senior ranks in the PLA, which would be a major supporter of Mao during the Cultural Revolution, destroyed any intra-party democracy

### **The Great Chinese Famine, 1959-1962**

The Leap was revived again but not for long. The 1958 harvests had been splendid but the summer harvest of 1959 was poor, and the harvests of 1960 were disastrous. One third of China's arable was stricken with drought and another sixth was flooded. Grain production, which had been about 185 million tonnes in 1957 and perhaps 200 million in the Leap harvests of 1958, sank to 170 million in 1959 and to 160 million in 1960. In 1957, each person had an average of 205kg of grain and this dropped to 154kg in 1961. The famine killed up to 30 million people, covering the whole country. Parents sold their children while husbands sold off their wives for food and cannibalism took place. There was growing peasant unrests, raids on grain stores, killing of cadres and burning down of resources, which however did not pose any real threat to the state.

There had been a deep division of opinion in China as well as in the West as to how much of this disaster was due to the bad weather and how much to the dislocations caused by the GLF and the communes. It is difficult to know. The two policies which had the most severe effects on production incentives of the peasants – the free supply system and the combination of prosperous and poor villages in the single commune unit of distribution had already been rectified. But the indiscriminate creation of non-farm enterprises continued to stretch the rural labour force to such an extent that it could not easily be redeployed to deal with natural disasters. There is also evidence that decentralization to the new communes had made it more difficult to secure the movement of grain from surplus to the deficit areas. It was the acute scarcity of food and the great Chinese famine between 1959-1962 that brought the Leap to an end exposing the failure of the GLF. China's GNP was \$73.8 billion yuan in 1952. The GNP was \$95 billion in 1958 and 123.4 billion in 1959 but dropped to \$72 billion in 1961.



### **The changes to the agricultural system – the ‘cooling down’ strategies**

**The GLF was not from the long-term point of view a complete failure.** The simple methods of labour-intensive construction of flood control and irrigation works developed out of the winter campaigns of 1957-1958 and subsequent years, although they proved inadequate then, have since contributed to the elimination of serious famine in China.

**The communes were broken up into smaller agricultural units. The growing of industrial crops was relinquished in favour of food production.** Private plots were restored. A blind eye was turned on private land reclamation and on local revivals of independent family farming although collective agriculture was in danger of collapse. Peasants were allowed to operate small private handicrafts and sell products at rural markets in 1962.

These reforms supported by Liu Shaoqi was however resented by Mao as these reforms appeared to encourage the return of capitalism.

**Li also decreased the capital investment in industries to aid the recovery of agriculture.** From 1960 -1964 many factories were closed on and there was a 50% drop in employment.

**The Leap also established as part of Chinese socialism the ideas of community development, of local appropriate-technology enterprise, and of labour intensive agricultural construction assisted by the local, collectively owned enterprises.** It broke the dominance of the Russian, urbanized, heavy industry model, and made room for a concept of economic growth based on the increasing purchasing power of peasant communities able to improve their own productivity by diversified development.

**However, although these positive aspects of Maoist strategy were separable from the negative aspects more immediately observable – the excessive egalitarianism, the extreme collectivism, the pressurized mobilization of people and resources – it would be too much to expect the Chinese people, in a situation in which these policies had collapsed in hunger and unemployment, to make such distinctions.** The majority, from the Political Bureau to the grassroots, condemned the whole experience of 1958-1960. But in the end the positive aspects were to be reasserted and by Mao's opponents.

### **Economic Performance by the mid-1960s**

By 1965 agricultural production had returned to 1957 levels. The industrial production grew up to 17% output of steel, electricity, cement and heavy trucks more than doubled that of 1957. By 1965 the output of light industry was expanding at 27% a year and heavy industry 17% a year. It was indicators that China could enter an era of unspectacular yet real economic progress.



## **E. Social Policies**

### **(i) Education**

In harmony with the rapid economic growth, the government radically revamped the system of higher education with a view to producing larger numbers of engineers and technicians in a shorter time. Liberal arts were discouraged in favour of technical education and many technical institutes were created at the expense of general universities. The curriculum was revised and departments within the universities and institutes were reorganized to allow the students greater concentration on a specialty. Thus, specialized knowledge in a narrow field was preferred to general education. Studies show that 90% of China's quarter of a million scientists and engineers in 1960 had been trained since the Communist takeover in 1949 and in 1960 China graduated about 76% as many engineers as the US.

### **(ii) Women under Mao Regime (one whole lesson will focus on this in a future lesson – refer to that notes)**