

THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM IN CHINA

Red Star over China, by Edgar Snow (Victor Gollancz, Ltd.), is a personal account of the struggle between the liberal forces in China with those of reaction which had been going on for years before the present Japanese aggression had united the country.

In the book the rebels are termed the Reds or Communists, while the Government forces, the reactionaries, are called the Whites. The author clearly shows, however, that the warfare was not between communism or socialism, and capitalism, but between a stand for human rights and freedom against the claims of privilege and monopoly—against the exploitation of the people by the system of pseudo capitalism which holds sway over the whole civilized world to-day.

It is an epical account of the fortitude, endurance and bravery of the common Chinese, inspired by the idealism of their leaders, in their fight, against almost overwhelming odds, for their release from bondage. It would be an incredible story if it did not bear the stamp of truth on every page, and if it were not so well documented.

The Whites were fully equipped with all the death-dealing weapons of modern warfare. They had tanks, aeroplanes, machine-guns and other equipment; they had also money. The Reds, on the other hand, had very little material of any kind. They had to rely principally upon what they could capture, supplemented by the rude weapons they could make themselves, or could manage to get smuggled to them.

They learnt to develop guerilla tactics to a fine art—they learnt how to scatter and make themselves invisible on the approach of enemy 'planes—they learnt how to spring out of an apparently empty landscape and surprise and make prisoners of White detachments; but not all their bravery or skilful leadership alone, would account for their survival, much less their increasing strength. No, their success depended upon more than that. It rested upon the fact that everywhere they went they were able to get the peasants to support them, for their cause was the cause of the peasants. And everywhere they went they gathered recruits, so that their numbers, instead of diminishing, were constantly on the increase.

They brought the message of freedom to the people, and, what was more important, they put it into practice—and it was because of that that they were able to carry on.

One of their first acts when reaching a new district was to destroy land deeds and abolish taxes.

They were called Communists, but (to quote):—

"The immediate basis for support for the Reds in the North-west was obviously not so much the idea of 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his need' as it was something like the promise of Dr. Sun Yat-sen: 'Land to those who till it.'

"Among the economic reforms which the Reds could claim to their credit these four evidently counted most to the peasantry. Redistribution of the land, abolition of usury, abolition of tax-extortion, and elimination of privileged groups.

"... Wherever the Reds went there is no doubt they radically changed the situation for the tenant farmer, the poor farmer, the middle farmer and all the have-not elements. All forms of taxation were abolished in the new district for the first year, to give the farmers a breathing space, and in the old districts only a progressive single tax on land was called for. Secondly, they gave land to the land-hungry peasants and began the reclamation of great areas of waste-land—mostly

the land of absentee or fleeing landlords. Thirdly, they took land and livestock from the wealthy classes and redistributed among the poor.

"Redistribution of land was a fundamental of Red policy. . . . Land laws in force . . . provided for the confiscation of all landlords land and the confiscation of all land of rich peasants that was not cultivated by the owners themselves. However, both landlord and the rich peasant were allowed as much land as they could till with their own labour. In districts where there was no land scarcity . . . the lands of resident landlords and rich peasants were in practice not confiscated at all, but the waste-land and the land of the absentee owners was distributed, and sometimes there was a redivision of best quality land, poor peasants being given better soil, and landlords being allotted the same amount of poorer land.

"According to Communists' definition (simplified), any farmer who collected the greater part of his income from land rented out to others, and not from his own labour, was a landlord. By this definition . . . the usurers were put in about the same category as landlords, and similarly treated. . . .

"There did not seem to be any attempt to 'equalize' landownership. The primary purpose . . . was to provide for every person sufficient land to guarantee for him and his family a decent livelihood. . . .

"Thus the Reds not only created the economic base for support in the poor and landless peasantry by giving them farms, but in some cases won the gratitude of middle peasants by abolishing tax-exploitation, and in a few instances enlisted the aid of small landlords on the same basis. . . . There were several prominent Shensi Communists from landlord families."

And so on. It is impossible to quote the whole book. Probably sufficient, however, has been taken from it to show what the so-called Communists aimed to do.

The Reds (the former rebels) have joined with Chiang Kai-shek to fight the Japanese invaders. China is almost certain to hold out successfully, and, if so, a new era will dawn for that country. An era of freedom, for when once the Japanese have been expelled, the liberal forces will be sufficiently strong to assert themselves, and make sure that the privileged do not gain control again.

D. C.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

The general election of members of the legislative assembly of South Australia took place on 19th March. It is gratifying to learn that Mr E. J. Craigie was re-elected for the Flinders division which he contested as an independent candidate, making the taxation of land values and the abolition of tariffs, subsidies and monopolies the first item in his programme. Mr Craigie was first elected in April, 1930. Although the district he represents bears the same name, it is not identical with that he was originally elected for as a redistribution of seats was carried out recently. Mr Craigie has made for himself a well-deserved reputation in the South Australian Parliament by his cogent and well-documented speeches on economic questions.

Two other members of the Henry George League of South Australia stood as candidates—Mr Arnold I. Schubert in Eyre district and Mr Henry S. Denman in Chaffey district—but were not successful.

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