
UNIT 15 THE CHINESE REVOLUTION*

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15.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- identify the political forces active in China after the Second World War;
- learn about the civil war in India;
- explain the reasons for the defeat of GMD;
- identify the difficulties faced by the Communist regime;
- analyze the economic, political and social framework of the new regime;
and
- assess the significance of the Chinese Revolution.

15.1 INTRODUCTION

This Unit deals with the period from 1945 to 1949. That is from the date of the surrender of Japan up to the period when foundation of the Peoples' Republic of China was formally proclaimed. These four years marked a period of civil war between the forces of the Guomindang and the Communists. The civil war ended with the victory of the Communists. A new regime, based on peoples'

democracy, was thus established in China. After taking into account these aspects the Unit also discusses the difficulties faced by the new regime and the economic, social and political framework adopted thereby.

15.2 SOME OBSERVATIONS

In a period of less than four years the GMD or the Nationalist government based at Nanking gradually but surely collapsed. It lost out not only in the military battles and in its inability to bring about an economic reconstruction of China in the postwar years, but also because of its refusal to usher in any political or social changes. Thousands of Chinese people had already experienced a new quality of life in the liberated areas during the Kiangsi and the Yan'an periods. They were now not willing to accept a reversal to the old oppressive order under the GMD. The inability of the GMD to meet their aspirations was, therefore, as much a cause for the GMD's defeat. As Lenin once pointed out, "great upheavals occur in history only when very large sections of people no longer want to continue living in the old way, and when a sizeable section that has a stake in the old ways is no longer able to continue with the old ways." Precisely such a great historical juncture arrived in China in the year 1945 to 1949.

But the civil war which ensued after the Japanese defeat and the triumph of Chinese nationalism was not simply a war to decide who would be China's future rulers. It was also a war to decide the future of millions of Chinese people i.e. what their politics, society and everyday lives would be like. Therefore, what is significant for us to understand about this period is not only why the GMD lost, but also why and how the Chinese Communists won. In short, we must be able to see not only what the Chinese people fought against, but also what they fought for. The positive alternative that the Communists offered was a blueprint for a society which was characterized by a far greater democracy and social justice than they had ever known or had known only for the brief periods i.e. till the 'liberated' zones lasted.

It is equally important to understand that in fighting alongside the Communists the Chinese people were fighting for themselves. What was taking place, in fact, was not simply a civil war or a military conflict. It was a revolutionary process, by participating in which, the Chinese people were transforming themselves as much as they were transforming Chinese society and all that it stood for. In subsequent sections we will underline these social processes in order to have an understanding of the Chinese Revolution.

Moreover, a revolution involves not only a change in the government. It involves the overthrow of an entire social order and its replacement by another—a more progressive one. Therefore, it becomes important to study the revolutionary processes of this period from the point of view of the change in the correlation of social and political forces in China. Similarly, some understanding of the content of the movement for peoples' democracy is also necessary.

The Chinese Revolution of 1949 was not a socialist revolution of the kind that the Russian Revolution of 1917 was. The Chinese's Communists themselves saw the 1949 victory as the:

- outcome of the entire national movement,
- victory of peasant struggles, and
- restoration of unity in a country which for so many years had been torn apart by conflicting forces.

They called it a peoples' democratic revolution which brought to political power the Communists who stood for socialism.

On October 1, 1949, Mao Zedong, Chairman of the Communist Party of China, proclaimed the establishment of the Peoples' Republic of China. The actual victory of the Red Army is however, not so easy to date. Parts of the North had been liberated since 1936 where as parts of southern China were not liberated until 1950. The 1949 victory, therefore, stands for the whole span of time from 1945 to 1951 during which the Peoples' government slowly consolidated its control over all of China. But October 1, 1949 has great symbolic significance. On that day the people of China claimed power over their own fate. In rapid succession laws were passed ending the oppressive traditional practices. It was a freedom for everyone who had suffered under the whole system. These laws, together with the Constitution, became the basis of organization and government in the New China.

15.3 POST-WAR SITUATION AND POLITICAL FORCES IN CHINA

The outcome of the World War II was a great disappointment to the imperialist powers. This was because in spite of the defeat of Italy, Germany and Japan, the victorious powers, Britain, France and the U.S. could not hold on to their privileges in the colonies. In fact, the Soviet victory and the emergence of the Peoples' Democracies in Eastern Europe along with strong national movements set the grounds for a systematic process of decolonization in Asia. In China, not only Japan but the European powers too were forced to withdraw. The emergence of a strong socialist camp at the end of World War II, in fact, changed the whole balance of political forces at the international level. Socialism and national liberation movements were gaining ground. The post-war international situation was, therefore, in favour of the Chinese people in their struggle against the foreign powers and those forces in China which collaborated with the foreign powers. This international climate was of great advantage to the Chinese communists in spite of the fact that in the immediate aftermath of the Japanese surrender the internal balance of forces seemed to weigh heavily in favour of the GMD.

The areas considered as the liberated Red zones had expanded during the course of the anti-Japanese struggle. But at the end of 1945, the GMD still controlled the major portions of the territory. All the international powers in 1945 gave legitimate recognition to GMDs' position. The Chinese Communists were yet to win acknowledgment among the world- powers that they enjoyed considerable support among the Chinese people. The GMD was far ahead of the Communists in terms of:

- financial resources,
- military equipment,

- control over administration and the means of communication, as well as print media and co-operation from the dominant sections of Chinese society.

Yet, one could not write off the Chinese Communists. This comes out clearly from the reports of various war correspondents of that period. In fact, the situation was somewhat similar to that of Russia in February 1917 when there was a kind of “dual power” between two organs of power—one that held the reins of power and the other which drew its strength from popular support. The social processes which the land policy and the experiment with democratic government had initiated in the liberated areas during the Kiangsi and the Yan’an periods had created a substantial popular base for the Communists. It had created the potential for a keen tussle for political power, the outcome of which could not be predetermined in spite of the singular advantages which the GMD possessed in 1945.

It is not that the Chinese peasantry did not have any complaints or criticisms of the Soviet system of government in the liberated areas, or that the Chinese people in the cities had a positive preference for a socialist future. But they definitely preferred their experience with the Communists to that with the GMD. The peasantry, particularly referred to the Kiangsi and the Yan’an Soviets as “our government” and preferred them to what they called the “old days”. Another thing that suggests the Communists’ Popular base is the fact that in the liberated areas the policing and guarding was done almost entirely by the peasant organizations alone. Local defence was shared by the village revolutionary defence corps, peasant guards and partisans.

On the other side, in the areas under GMD control there was a generalized lack of morale and widespread discouragement. The governmental and military structure was gradually becoming permeated from top to bottom by corruption. The authority of the Central Government was weakening in the areas away from the larger cities. It was becoming difficult for the government to collect enough food for its large army and bureaucracy. Peasants in the GMD areas expressed extreme resentment at the forced conscription, tax collection and other arbitrary impositions which continued after the end of war. The salaried classes suffered from the inflation resulting from the economic crisis. The intellectuals were dissatisfied. The political control and repression led to lack of intellectual vigour and leadership.

This contrasting picture between the Red areas and the GMD areas forms the immediate background and the social context within which the struggle between the GMD and the Communists took place. The success of the national-liberation struggle with the defeat of the Japanese, led to a transformation of the internal contradictions in China. The contradiction between China and Japan gave way to that between the broad masses of the Chinese people represented by the Communist Party on the one hand, and the big landlord class and big bourgeoisie represented by the GMD and aided by the U.S. on the other. This became the principal contradiction of Chinese social and political life—the main factor dominating the domestic situation. Having won a victory over the Japanese forces, the Chinese people now saw freedom from their internal oppressors as their main task. Political democracy and social emancipation became the primary issues in China. As the Civil War progressed, the GMD became the main hurdle to the realizations of these aspirations. The number of people involved in the struggle also increased rapidly as the Civil War took its course. The quality

of life in the areas under the control of the two political groupings rather than the size of the areas under their control became the decisive factor in changing the political correlation of forces in favour of the Communists.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Discuss in about ten lines the position of the political forces in China in the post-World War-II period.

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15.4 OUTBREAK OF THE CIVIL WAR

What immediately followed the Japanese surrender in China was a scramble for men, territory, property and military equipment. The Supreme Chief of Staff of the Chinese army, that had fought the Japanese, sent a memorandum to the Japanese Commander-in-Chief in China instructing him to surrender his 10,90,000 troops and equipment only to the Chinese commanders of the war zones. Since all the commanders were GMD officers, this memorandum effectively deprived the Communists, who had fought as equal partners against the Japanese, the right to accept the surrender of any Japanese units. At the same time Jiang Jieshi telegraphed all the units of the Communist Eighth Route Army to stay where they were pending further orders and forbade them to take over the enemy's (Japanese) arms.

The Communists saw through this strategy of the GMD an attempt to emerge as the sole political power in China. Mao Zedong immediately ordered the Red Army units to march towards Inner Mongolia, Manchuria and north and south Shensi, and to make all efforts to attack the enemy troops and be prepared to accept their surrender. This Red Army did under the command of Zhu De. The GMD government branded the Communists as 'enemies of the people' and Mao in turn accused GMD of having 'declared civil war against the Chinese people'.

Immediate conflict arose over Manchuria which the Communists were able to occupy. This was in spite of the fact that the GMD forces at this time totaled about 3 million, while the Communists had less than 1 million. The Americans tried to mediate between the two forces because they perceived that a civil war in China could only go against their interests. General George C. Marshall was sent by President Truman to arrange for peace. Jiang Jieshi refused anything short of complete control over Manchuria where the Communists now held sway. This the Communists obviously could not agree to. By the spring of 1946 all possibilities for successful negotiations ended and a full-fledged civil war became inevitable.

Meanwhile inflation and rising prices in the GMD areas threatened a situation where civil war would be carried into the GMD areas themselves. On the other hand, in the liberated zones, the Communist leaders launched a "movement against the traitors." For example the landlords who had sided with the Japanese were denounced in village assemblies. In 1946, on the basis of an earlier directive, a mass movement was launched for the reduction of rent and interest

rates, apart from abolishing all prior debts of the poor and middle peasants. In May 1946, the slogan of “land belongs to the tiller” was popularized. Landlords also had to pay heavy taxes. In this way developments in both the GMD areas and the liberated zones contributed towards making class struggle (through the agrarian revolution) an important dimension of the civil war even before the negotiations had failed. The Chinese people, although sick of the years of war, became prepared for another war. This time it was for the protection of their own rights over land and livelihood.

15.5 GMD OFFENSIVES AND THEIR DEFEAT: 1946-1947

In June 1946, the GMD with its strength of two million men attacked the large Communist bases in North and Central China. They pushed back the Communist forces from the central plain and the lower Yangtze region. By March 1947 they had seized Yan'an, which had been the base of the Communists after the Long March.

But these victories were deceptive. Still mustering their forces and avoiding a showdown the Communists had not yet begun to go on the offensive. They did not try to defend their territory also. They concentrated instead on disengaging their forces and gathering them together for mobile defence and guerilla warfare from their positions of defence. They, thus, did not lose their forces. The GMD, on the other hand, in order to retain the lost Communist territory, was forced to base a large part of its forces in this territory. There was no other way it could have retained control over a hostile population which favoured the Communists who had given them a new life. The Communists were, thus able to choose their area of combat according to their own resources, and also to concentrate their entire forces in those areas where the GMD was weak.

In the spring of 1947 the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA), under Lin Piao's command, carried out a series of offensives which left the city bound KMT forces dazed and confused. Except for the cities, Manchuria was firmly won by the Communists. In February 1947, the Central Committee of the CPC called for the overthrow of the GMD Nationalist government. By the end of 1947 the Communists were able to regain control over Hebei, Shantung and Shansi areas. They defeated 56 GMD brigades by February 1947, 90 in May 1947 and 97 in September 1947. This amounted to the defeat of nearly 1/4 of the GMD army.

Simultaneously with this military crisis of the GMD, there broke out an economic crisis in the GMD controlled areas caused by the collaboration between the GMD and the United States. After the Japanese surrender, it was the GMD and not the Communists, to whom the Japanese had surrendered all the industrial equipment, the banking and financial institutions. The total value of these assets was 1,800 million dollars, which was controlled by a small clique of big industrial-capitalists. In fact, the capital owned by the “Four Big Families” in China amounted to 70-80 per cent of the total industrial capital of China. Besides the GMD also took over all the agricultural land and other assets which the Japanese had wrested from the Chinese people. Instead of building an independent economy, in return for American aid to fight the Communists, these “Four Big Families” and their collaborators who controlled the GMD, forced the Nationalist government to mortgage the entire Chinese economy to the United

States. It suited the Americans very well as they did not mind helping those forces in China which were anti-Communist and could as well provide them a base against the Soviet Union.

During the civil war itself, in November 1946 the GMD signed the Sino-American Treaty of Commerce and Navigation which opened China to American products. By 1947 the United States occupied a decisive role in China's foreign commerce: 51 per cent of all imports (as opposed to 22 per cent in 1936 before the Japanese defeat), and 57 per cent of all exports (compared to 19 per cent in 1936). Management and training of personnel in many enterprises was put under American control. The U.S. also put up factories in China and acquired or was given many privileges. They made use of GMD State organs to evade taxation, monopolize raw material, control the market and transport facilities.

All this meant a virtual colonization of Chinese economy by American capital. It completely stifled and prevented growth of China's national industry and commerce and was against the interests of the large section of Chinese bourgeoisie or entrepreneurs. In terms of the civil war this meant that the Chinese Communists now found a major section of the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie in China prepared to Collaborate with them. This meant a major re-alignment of social forces in favour of the Communists.

The unprecedented rise in prices further contributed to an acute social and economic crisis in the GMD areas. The price index (100 in 1937) increased to 210 in 1947. The Chinese people were desperate and ready to welcome any change. They also felt that they had sacrificed so much to throw the Japanese out of the country and here was the GMD again selling out to a foreign power i.e. this time the Americans. They saw their newly won independence from foreign rule being systematically eroded and they recognized the Communists as the only consistent fighters.

Popular discontent against the GMD grew among almost all sections of society within and outside the GMD zones. Sometimes this discontent was led by underground Communist cadres. But very often it was spontaneous and created by the GMD policies. In September 1946 the slogan of Communist International "leave China" became popular. There arose a mass movement, whose supporters declared that they would go on agitating until all the American troops withdrew from China. This movement took different forms of struggle in different areas. For example on December 1, 1947 a stall-keepers struggle broke out in Shanghai. The people had to rely for their necessities on pavement stalls and there were many stall-keepers in Shanghai. But in order to monopolize the market for their big commercial supporters, the GMD government issued orders banning stalls on the pavement. This made it impossible for the stall-keepers to earn their living. Their demand to continue with the stalls was met with extreme brutality. Since Shanghai was the centre of collaboration of the GMD and Americans, it produced an unprecedented reaction among the Chinese people. In another case the rape of a Peking University girl-student by an American soldier was the last straw. Five lakh young people from schools and universities went on strike and organized demonstrations.

In May 1947, a "New May Fourth Movement" was proclaimed, protesting against the entire set of GMD policies. This movement was met by repression. Hundreds of young people were wounded and 13,000 arrests were made in just two months. But this only brought the democratic patriotic movement to

a higher phase. By the autumn of 1947 the movement had developed into a “movement for the protection of civil rights.”

After a long period of inactivity the workers’ movement also picked up. In May 1947, riots and strikes broke out in Shanghai protesting against the high cost of living and hunger. “Rice riots” broke out in the cities of the lower Yangtze. The cities, thus again became important areas of struggle against the, old forces resisting change.

In the countryside, in GMD areas, peasant agitation took the form of demonstrations, riots, refusal to pay taxes and rent, and attacks on rent collectors. In Taiwan also there was resistance to GMD rule.

The government again answered with brutal force. The poet **Wen i-tuo**, associated with the struggle for democracy, was murdered. In May 1947 strikes, demonstrations and even petitions by more than ten people were banned. There remained no space for peaceful protest and no way out for those who stood midway between the GMD and the Communists except to join the Communists against the repressive and authoritarian GMD government.

The liberated zones were able to retain their freedom from this repression because of the mass support for the Communists among the peasants. The CPC further consolidated its base in these areas through the October 1947 Agrarian Reform Law which called for the confiscation of landlords’ land. The rich peasants were to give up only those lands which exceeded the allowed limits. The Agrarian Law aimed at the elimination of the feudal lords as a class, but not at wiping them off as individuals. Clear distinction was made between landlords and rich peasants, big landlords and smaller landlords; between the general landlords and those who were local bullies. Each category was treated differently within the general framework of the Agrarian law based on the principle of “land to the tiller.”

Moreover, these measures were not carried out simply by administrative means from above. The poor and middle peasants formed the backbone of the movement for agrarian changes. Land was distributed in the following way: All the public land and the land owned by the landlords was to be taken over by the local peasant association and, together with the rest of the land in the locality, re-distributed equally on a per capita basis. An overall readjustment of landholdings was made so that every person in the locality became the owner of a piece of land roughly equal in terms of size or productivity.

Within a year of the law, 100 million peasants in the liberated areas received land. The CPC also led the peasants in a movement for co-operation on a voluntary basis in order to make improved methods of cultivation easier to implement and to increase agricultural production.

Thus, we see that the Communist victories of 1947 were not won by military means alone. The different forms of class struggle in the areas of the GMD and the CPC weakened GMD and strengthened the CPC support base throughout China. Having obtained land the peasants enthusiastically participated in the civil war on the side of the Communists. The total number of GMD troops was reduced from 4,30,000 at the beginning of the war to 3,70,000 by July 1947, while the PLA grew from 1,20,000 to nearly 2,000,000. There was also as a result, a fundamental change in the war situation. People’s

revolutionary forces which had fought a defensive battle for the last twenty years in China were, for the first time, in a position to assume the offensive. The PLA penetrated into the GMD areas. Mao Zedong referred to this stage as “the turning point in the war.”

15.6 COMMUNIST VICTORIES (1948-49)

In spring 1948, the PLA occupied the major cities along the Yellow river. They also reoccupied Yan'an which had been their base during the anti-Japanese war and which they had been forced to abandon in 1946. In three major campaigns later the GMD forces were completely defeated :

- The first of these major campaigns by the PLA was in East China, where, after eight days of continual attack beginning on September 16, 1948, Tsinan, the capital city of Shandong province was liberated from the GMD forces.
- From September 12 to November 2, 1948 the PLA in North-east China conducted a campaign which resulted in the liberation of Shenyang and the entire North-east China, where the most important industrial cities and the most productive regions of the whole country lay.
- In the period between November 7, 1948 and January 10, 1949, the PLA liberated all the areas north of the Huai River and brought the greater part of the areas south of it under its control.

After a campaign lasting from December 5, 1948 to January 31, 1949, another section of the PLA was able to liberate Peking. At this point, Jiang Jieshi tried to make a show of negotiations, while recouping his forces in the meanwhile. His game soon became clear to the Communists, who launched a new campaign in April 1949 to liberate the entire country. It did not take more than three days to capture Nanking which had been the headquarters of the GMD regime for more than 20 years. The liberation of Nanking marked the end of GMD rule, after which the entire mainland of China was won over. Jiang Jieshi, with a section of his forces, was forced to retreat to Taiwan. The western provinces, still ruled by their formerly independent warlords, laid down their arms and acknowledged the Communist regime. The Communists emerged as victors of the civil war. The Chinese people for the first time had a government that was their own throughout the country.

As in the earlier phase, the loss of support for the GMD and increased support for the CPC were significant factors in these final victories. The GMD was not able to check price rise and production came to a halt. It lost support from the people.

The Communists, on their part, in 1948-1949, tried to win the support of larger sections of people, by adopting a more flexible agrarian policy in the new liberated zones. They tried to be more moderate to begin with. For example, the rich peasants were not touched and the middle classes and bourgeoisie were also not alienated through any measures against their interests. The effort was to emphasize national reconstruction and popular unity of all democratic forces, which also included non-Communist groups who had opposed the GMD. The idea was put forward by Mao Zedong in his pamphlet, “**On the Peoples' Democratic Dictatorship**,” and was already implemented in the newly liberated zones.

Therefore, even as victory was achieved, the conditions had already been created for the establishment of new state structures on the basis of broad political alliances with other democratic groups and a “common programme” representing the aspirations of the Chinese people. On October 1, 1949, the new Peoples’ Republic of China was formally proclaimed.

15.7 DIFFICULTIES FOR THE NEW REGIME

There were still some drawbacks for the new regime. The world as a whole would not recognize the new regime. The U.S. continued to recognize Jiang Jieshi, who resumed the leadership of his government in the confines of Taiwan. Other powers hesitated, some making acts of recognition, other holding back. Communist China did not obtain China’s seat at the U.N. Except for the Soviet Union, which was a socialist country, others adopted a hostile attitude. They saw in the new regime a defeat for the forces supported by imperialism, and a victory for socialism to which they were opposed in principle. They forgot all talk about democracy and disregarded the fact that the new regime enjoyed great popular support. The United States, in fact, did not recognize Communist China for more than twenty years.

Other problems faced by the new regime were :

- the total wreck of the national economy,
- galloping inflation,
- disrupted and destroyed communications,
- no foreign trade,
- hardly any functional industry, and
- threat of famine in many areas.

There was very little left of, the modern fleet of steamships, also mainly foreign owned, which had conducted the trade and afforded a major line of communications on the Yangtze river.

For these reasons many observers believed that the new Communist government would not be able to survive long. But it had certain advantages. For example it had the support of the vast majority of the Chinese people. They saw the new regime as a new start in the history, of their country and in their personal lives. Few knew about Communism, but they were conscious of building a new society. The poorest of the poor felt a new dignity and usefulness in society. The whole country, for the first time in many years, was united and was at peace. Communications were being restored fast. This was, as many observers pointed out, achieved by unpaid labour. But the masses who worked on the railway restoration were fed and mobilized by PLA and received equal treatment with the soldiers. The towns did not starve in the winter of 1949. Food was transported, by barges and primitive boats, fourteen hundred miles up the Yangtze. The Chinese people survived the economic blockade by the foreign powers, just as Soviet Russia had in 1917.

The Army had no more wars to fight. It was set to work in the cities, rebuilding shattered dwellings and public buildings. A new currency was introduced. In the middle of 1951, within two years of victory, the inflation was halted and there was some economic stability.

It was on the basis of this new stability that the leaders of the CPC tried to put into practice their experience of Jiangsi and Yan'an throughout the country.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Discuss the factors that contributed to the defeat of GMD forces. Answer in about ten lines.

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- 2) What was the social base of Communists? Answer in five lines.

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- 3) Discuss in about ten lines the problems faced by the new regime.

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15.8 NEW REGIME: ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL FRAMEWORK

In 1948, at Mao's suggestion, one of the May Day slogans proclaimed by the Chinese Communist Party had been: "All democratic parties, peoples' organizations and public personages should quickly call a Political Consultative Conference to discuss and carry out the convening of a People's Congress and the formation of a democratic coalition government." The blueprint for such a government was put forward by Mao in his essay "On the Peoples' Democratic Dictatorship." The political structure envisaged by him allowed for the participation of a very broad section of the Chinese population in the political and economic life of the country. This entire might of the people was to be directed against the power of the landlords and the reactionaries.

As soon as China was proclaimed a Republic with Communist victory, this kind of a government was established. It was a coalition of fourteen parties and groups and there were non-Communists both in the government as well as among the deputy heads of states. This political structure was a symbol of the broad support enjoyed by the new regime. In social terms it represented a united front or alliance of the working class, the peasantry, the petty bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie. Mao Zedong was made the Chairman of the Peoples' Republic.

15.8.1 Land Reforms

The "first major policy to be implemented was that of 'land reform'. This meant that:

- all land should be as far as possible shared out equally between the village or district, and
- the former landlords were to retain a small share, equal to that of others and only to them who were prepared to work it themselves.

In keeping with the broad base of the new political structure, the agrarian policy was also moderate, and such as to retain the support of the broader sections of the Chinese people in the countryside. As such, it was more moderate than the Civil War policy. It was also a policy geared to promote economic development of the countryside and to re-shape social and economic relations there.

Thus, the Agrarian Law of 1950, unlike that of 1947, divided the rural lands and goods of landowners without indemnity, but left them in possession of their city properties and business. The rich peasants, again unlike in 1947, were allowed to keep their lands and holdings, consideration being given to their productive capacity and the fact that cities had to be supplied with rice. Besides, these more flexible measures applied only to the new liberated zones, where agrarian reform was being implemented for the first time. In the old liberated zones the 1947 measures (talked of earlier in Unit 14), remained in effect.

The properties of the landlords were divided among the poor and middle peasants. Tenant farming, with payments both in kind and cash, was abolished. This amounted to 1/4 of the country's agricultural production, which was earlier being handed over to landlords. Forced labour and other feudal services were also abolished. Approximately 300 million peasants benefited from these reforms. They became full owners of their land which they could buy, sell and rent. The rich peasants, however, retained their better quality lands. The Agrarian Reform law also defined the powers of the peasants associations which were set up for carrying out the changes and peoples' courts were also established to deal with the cases of conflict.

With the formation of peoples' courts and peasants associations, the political power of the landlords was also destroyed. This gave tremendous confidence to the peasants. Mass trials of cruel and oppressive landlords were carried out in all parts of China. A number of landlords were executed after these trials, some sentenced to a period of detention, and some merely made to apologize, depending on their crimes. There were cases of cruelty, and it was a period of great political and psychological trauma for the landlords. But the peasantry had been oppressed for so long and subjected to much cruelty that sometimes people took matter into their own hands, simply overcome by their deep resentment. However, such cases were not the general rule of the day.

Agrarian reform also helped to activate the social life in the villages. Health and literacy campaigns were conducted by peasants associations, activities by women's groups and those of young people also ensured the participation of all sections in the transformation of the life of the people.

15.8.2 Industry

Industry and its management was in the hands of the national bourgeoisie, and the Communists had very little control over it. Therefore, through the 1950 law they concerned themselves primarily with labour unions, price control, distribution of primary materials and state orders. The CPC organized a vast network of

unions in factories, city federations, provinces and in the different branches of industry. They represented workers interests in the factories and also carried out literacy campaigns. Private economy was allowed to develop and even make profit under the general guidance of the state. Relentless struggle was carried out against corruption, waste, bribery and other such evils which undermined production. Transportation, finances and commerce were also put in order.

15.8.3 Social Change

The Marriage Law of 1950 was an important landmark in transforming social relationships. Its aim was the establishment of equal rights for women. Through making marriage an institution based on equality and free mutual consent, the position of women was vastly improved. Women played an active role in productive work and in shouldering social responsibilities. They became active citizens of a new China. The Marriage Law was also a law for protection of children. Female infanticide was strictly forbidden. It was illegal to sell children, which had happened frequently during the famines of 1921, 1931 and 1943. Many women married against their wish asked for divorce and were helped by women's organizations. Prostitution became a crime. The prostitutes were given medical care and emotional support to begin new lives.

The peddlers of opium and other drugs were hunted down; the re-education and cure of opium addicts was organized and public gambling was outlawed. In confronting all these illegal activities, the new regime defended the principles of human dignity.

A central problem faced by the new regime was also the cultural backwardness of the country. As Mao declared: "the serious problem is the education of the peasantry." Literacy campaigns were organized in the villages, factories and among the poor sections of the cities. The number of students doubled between 1949 and 1952 from 24 to 51 million primary school children, and from one million to two and half million secondary school students.

These social, political and economic changes were implemented through the creation of an organizational network extending to the most backward areas in the country. The membership of the Chinese Communist Party had grown from about 1 million at the start of the civil war to around 5 million in 1950. Mass organizations linked to the Party grew in all areas of social life: unions, women's organizations, youth groups, professional and intellectual organizations, friendship clubs with Soviet Union and other socialist countries. They were very active and in close touch with the concrete problems found in each social category. In 1952 the women organizations had 76 million members. Democratic Youth Organization 7 million members, Federation of Students had 1,600,000 members, and the union had 6 million members. These organizations helped to:

- link the masses to the important policy measures of the time,
- give them an active role, and
- consolidate new thinking and new values through campaigns in the form of public meetings, discussions, posters and huge marches.

In this way the social, political and ideological foundations were created for a democratic regime that would enable a gradual transition towards a socialist society.

15.9 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CHINESE REVOLUTION

In assessing the significance and worldwide impact of the successful Chinese Revolution, we must look at it from a historical perspective. Both in area and population, China in 1949 was the largest country in the world. Its territory extends to 9 million square kilometres and population, according to official statistics was 410 million in 1939. The destruction of the old order by the successful Chinese revolutionary movement and the establishment of a People's Republic, implied, therefore, the transformation of the quality of life of a large chunk of the world's inhabitants. Given this fact, it was a major event not only in the history of China but in the history of mankind.

Generally, it is recognized by students of history that the modern ideas which first emerged in the West have played an important role in transforming the consciousness of people in the more backward societies. Notable among these are the ideas of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, Democracy and popular sovereignty. But we should also understand that these ideas cannot find fertile soil in a vacuum. It is ultimately the changes in the backward societies which create the favourable climate for new ideas to take root. This happened also in the case of China. Secondly, successful revolutions like those of Russia (1917) and China (1949) have also shown that for democracy and equality to be real, there has to be economic equality, freedom from hunger and organization of production in such a way that it benefits those who are the producers of the world's produce and wealth. Democracy, similarly, can have real content of the political structure if it is receptive to the needs of the labouring poor, who constitute the majority of the population; if its policies are in the interests of this section, and if they have a real presence in governing themselves. The Chinese Revolution of 1949 laid the foundations of precisely such a society and polity in China. In doing so it inspired those who are fighting for social justice and equality not only in the underdeveloped countries but even in the advanced countries of the West. After the Chinese Revolution it can no longer be said that progressive ideas and practices have emanated only from the West.

We must remember that the Chinese Revolution was also a major act of decolonization. Pre-revolutionary China was a country bled by almost all the imperialist powers of the world. Its entire wealth and production was organized for the benefit of these powers. The Chinese people lived a life of acute deprivation under the system of treaties forced on China by the Western powers and Japan. They were equally the victims of the worst abuses of feudalism represented by Chinese Warlordism. Death from poverty and hunger was the norm rather than exception for the poorer sections of the peasantry. The Chinese Revolution in destroying the social and economic basis of feudalism in China also destroyed the social base of the imperialist powers on Chinese soil. In their uncompromising struggle against the imperialists, the Chinese revolutionary masses also gave a rebuff to the Western powers. It changed the balances of political forces in favour of socialism and national liberation. It proved an inspiring example to all Asian countries fighting for national independence.

The Chinese revolution in bringing forth the full political potential of the peasantry, provided a blueprint for the role of the peasantry in the revolutionary transformation of backward societies. The Communist movement in all backward

countries has drawn upon this experience of China. Its concept of a ‘peoples’ democratic revolution, has been incorporated and adapted in the programme of Communist parties in Asian Countries. The Chinese Revolution transformed the entire spectrum of life of the Chinese people — political, social, economic, intellectual — and made those major actors on the stage of world history.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Discuss in about ten lines the major aspects of the land reforms carried under the new regime.

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- 2) Discuss in brief the significance of the Chinese Revolution.

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15.10 LET US SUM UP

After the end of the Second World War, Civil War broke out in China. The GMD under the leadership of Jiang Jieshi directed its attack on the Communists with the U.S. backing. However, the Communists got tremendous support from the people of China. This was because they had adopted pro-people policies and opposed feudal and capitalist exploitation. The Communists emerged victorious in the Civil War. This happened in spite of vast resources with the GMD. The GMD failed to establish a popular mass base because of its reactionary policies.

The Communists established a new regime which faced a number of difficulties in the initial stage. However, with extensive land reforms and organized efforts by its cadres, the CPC was able to gradually overcome these difficulties. Seen in its totality the Chinese Revolution had a worldwide impact and its significance was acknowledged by the struggling poor in various countries.

15.11 KEY WORDS

Nationalist Government : The term is used to differentiate the GMD with CPC. The GMD claimed to be a nationalist force where as the CPC stood for a Communist revolution.

Liberated Zones : Areas that came under the control of CPC were termed as liberated zones by the Communists.

15.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Section 15.3 for your answer.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Section 15.5 and write your answer.
- 2) Peasants, workers, artisans, etc. See Section 15.4
- 3) See Section 15.7

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Base your answer on Sub-section 15.8.1.
- 2) Base your answer on Section 15.9.

