



Death by Government

China and its Great Leap Forward, 1958-62

The mass killing of a country's population has been a staple of world history since antiquity. It reached new heights during the 20th century. From the Armenians in Turkey during World War I, the mass starvations in the Ukraine in the 1930s, the Holocaust during World War II to the Cambodian *killing fields* of Pol Pot after the Vietnam War, the last century witnessed the emergence of a new type of mass killing, the *democide*, which means, literally, *death by government*.

Dry Martyrs

In his 1994 book *Death by Government*, R.J. Rummel explored the *democide* committed during the 20th century. According to his statistical analysis, governments terminated well over 170,000,000 people in that century alone. As the putative New World Order coalesces closer to one-world governance and a universal green energy policy, this staggering reality should alarm the planet's population.

No episode of democide rivals that of the mass murder inflicted on the Chinese people by their Communist rulers during the era known as the *Great Leap Forward*. The Great Leap Forward (GLF) was the name given to the abbreviated Second Five Year Plan (1958-62) of Communist China's founding father Mao Zedong, during which an estimated 45 million Chinese perished from government policies – most by starvation, but some 3 million by torture and summary execution.

The GLF is especially important to the Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation, which was founded in 1958. More than a dozen former CMF council members not only served in China, but also suffered imprisonment under the Communist regime after it came to power. These *dry martyrs* included such Church stalwarts as CMF co-founder Father C. Stephen Dunker, Father John Houle S.J., and Bishop Cuthbert O'Gara. They understood the evil of the Chinese Communist regime long before almost anyone else in the United States and enabled CMF to be a pioneer in providing grassroots

Americans with knowledge and facts about Communism.

Mao's Trojan Horse

After the retreat of Chiang Kai-shek and his Kuomintang government to Taiwan in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) proclaimed the establishment of the People's Republic of China. They immediately set to work to *build a new Chinese society with permanent revolution* of world Communism as their driving engine.

With rhetoric straight from the Marxist-Leninist handbook, Mao and his acolytes acted as if no divine, human or natural law bound them in any way. They exercised a pure *will to power* that would leave an unparalleled legacy of human destruction. According to their twisted worldview, *infant piglets could be made to spawn litters, broken glass could fertilize crops, and earthen embankments could be put to the same exacting use as concrete dams*.

Their *transition to socialism* corresponded to China's *First Five-Year Plan* (1953-57). This period was characterized by the CCP's attempts to establish the centralization of China's industry, agriculture and political systems. As part of their effort to encourage the participation of intellectuals in the new regime, in mid-1956 Mao initiated a policy that was ostensibly designed to *liberalize the political climate*. Cultural and intellectual figures were encouraged to speak their minds about political, social and economic issues under Communist rule.

This Chinese equivalent of the *Trojan horse* was known as the *100 Flowers Campaign*. Mao personally took the lead in the movement, which was launched under the classic slogan *Let a hundred flowers bloom, let the hundred schools of thought contend*. Many historians believe that this was little more than Mao's deliberate ploy to expose critics of his regime among China's intellectual and political classes. At least half a million members from China's intelligentsia as well as its political and social critics

were summarily purged under this campaign. This effectively silenced any major internal opposition to Mao's revolutionary agenda.

A Sense of Urgency

Utilizing its Communist base, the Chinese Communist Party instituted a plan to modernize China, using Communist economic principles. Introduced in Nanking in 1958, the Great Leap Forward was a radical attempt to industrialize and collectivize agriculture and industry on an unprecedented scale, while concurrently developing China's infrastructure through massive earthworks and irrigation projects.

The central idea behind the GLF was a rapid and simultaneous development of China's industry and agriculture. Mao planned to industrialize China by taking advantage of its massive supply of cheap labor while at the same time avoiding the importation of heavy machinery. The catalyst for the GLF has been traced to Mao's sense of urgency about China's burgeoning rivalry with the Soviet Union after his visit to Moscow in November 1957. *Russian Premier Nikita Khrushchev had provoked Mao with his boast that the Soviet Union would overtake the United States in industrial output by 1972.* China's GLF loomed largely as Mao's ambitious attempt to supplant Khrushchev as leader of the world Communist movement.

Backyard Steel Plants

Chairman Mao saw grain and steel production as the key pillars of China's economic development. Fortified by his faith in the false philosophy of Marxism-Leninism, Mao boasted in 1958 that agrarian China would out-produce industrial giant Great Britain in 15 years. Mao later revised his prediction to just two years. According to British journalist Jasper Becker, the Beijing bureau chief for the Hong Kong-based *South China Morning Post*, the political campaign that was to make China an industrial giant almost overnight was also charged with the immediate transformation of the Middle Kingdom into the world's first fully Communist society.

To achieve his quixotic dream, Mao instituted his Luddite policy of the infamous *backyard pig-iron furnaces*. In what amounted to a substitution of ideology for common sense, Mao hoped to achieve his lofty goals by redistributing labor from large industrial complexes to small backyard factories modeled after 8th-century smelters. The peasants were mandated to melt down their cooking pots and other metals to make steel. At its apex there were 600,000 backyard furnaces in operation. The workers were expected to chant, *Strive to complete and surpass the production responsibility of 12 million tons of steel* as they worked.

To fuel the furnaces, the local environment was quickly denuded of trees and wood taken from the doors and furniture of peasants' houses. Their homes were methodically stripped of all their pots, pans and other metal utensils to supply the *scrap* for the furnaces so that the wildly optimistic production targets could be met. Despite the Herculean effort of the Chinese peasantry, the backyard steel furnace project was a disaster. The finished product was *nothing more than melted-down implements*. Any steel produced by the backyard furnaces was too inferior and weak to be used in construction. Buildings constructed by this substandard backyard steel did not last long. After a year Mao learned that *high-quality steel could be produced only in huge modern factories using reliable fuel*. Yet he inexplicably continued to maintain the program for *fear that this would dampen the enthusiasm of the masses*.

Besides these economic changes, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) implemented major social changes in the countryside including the banishing of all religious and mystic institutions and ceremonies. They attempted to fill this religious void with political meetings and Communist propaganda sessions. They also attempted to enhance rural education and the status of women, such as by allowing females to initiate divorce proceedings. To their credit the CCP ended the barbarous traditional rituals of foot-binding, child marriage and opium addiction.

Hungry Ghosts

But overall, suffering reigned during the Great Leap Forward, especially in the countryside. Despite its utopian goals, Mao's economic tampering methodically brought about a nationwide collapse of China's agriculture. One of the first and most important policies that accelerated this collapse was *land reform*. The CCP's idea of reform meant that the landowners were forcibly stripped of their property. The CCP then redistributed their land to poorer peasants who did not have the necessary resources or organizational skills to farm it properly. The Soviets had done this in the Ukraine before World War II with devastating results on the rural population. Upwards of 15 million Ukrainian kulaks and their families perished in the Soviet democide.

To accomplish this redistribution, the CCP established their newly organized *People's Communes* in the countryside. The driving force for the Chinese corps of *community organizers* was the individual commune, which controlled all the means of local production and accounting. These community organizations were gargantuan collectives where villagers were all herded together. Organized along the lines of paramilitary units, each commune was set up as a self-supporting

agricultural and small-scale local industrial community. The commune also organized schooling, marketing, administration and local security, which was maintained by militias for the rural areas.

People in the countryside were robbed of their work, their homes, their land, their belongings, their livelihood and even their lives. Livestock declined precipitously, thanks to inattention, disease, starvation and some required exportation. Many of the men were diverted from the harvest to help with pig iron production, as were the workers at many factories, schools and even hospitals. Irrigation campaigns forced up to half the villagers to work for weeks on end on giant water-conservancy projects, often far from home, without adequate food and rest.

The communes were also in charge of food distribution, which they did by the spoonful at their collective canteens. Paradoxically the food distribution was according to merit as defined by the commune. This allowed the commune to use food and life itself as a lever to force the farmers to follow the party's every dictate. Starvation quickly became banal for most of rural China. In his e-book *Hungry Ghosts: Mao's Secret Famine*, British journalist Jasper Becker depicted the abject horror of daily life during the GLF. In Tibet, *People ate cats, dogs, insects. Parents fed dying children their own blood mixed with hot water*. Rumors of cannibalism became widespread.

A Pest Problem

While starvation served as the face of the Great Leap Forward, Mao's micromanagement of the Chinese economy also had its surreal moments. The GLF was laden with some bizarre policies that threatened to eclipse the grisly cost of Mao's revolutionary change. To increase crop production Mao originated his policy for the elimination of China's *Four Pests*, namely sparrows, rats, insects and flies.

The entire Chinese population was issued flyswatters! Mao's *Excuse Ministry* calculated the demise of millions of flies after he gave the directive *Away with all pests!* The Chinese were also exhorted to bang drums, pots, pans and gongs in order to keep sparrows flying until, exhausted, they literally dropped dead. Voluminous statistics were kept of the *body count* of dead flying creatures.

By 1961-62 the Chinese people had had enough. As the human death toll mounted, many officials argued that the communes should be disbanded. Without fanfare the CCP quietly suspended the Great Leap Forward's *deadly reforms*. Almost immediately, Mao's artificially manufactured famine came to an abrupt end.

The GLF was not merely an isolated episode in the making of modern China, it was a watershed moment. Mao went on to strip the Chinese people of their Confucian traditions while remaking their family structure, economic livelihoods and social milieu.

When Mao finally accepted the fact that the Great Leap Forward had failed, he left the task of achieving China's economic recovery to his chief strategists Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping and Zhou Enlai. While Mao's economic triumvirate brought about the semblance of recovery, Mao sought a return to absolute power in 1966. This power struggle turned into *the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-76)*, which threw China into the throes of a near civil war.

A Quiet Revolution

One of the most amazing aspects of the Great Leap Forward was Beijing's success in concealing its *state-sponsored famine* from the outside world. Even 50 years later, the Chinese Communist Party stands steadfast in its attempts to cover up the disaster, usually by blaming the weather. The party line was that natural phenomena such as weather, devastating floods, droughts and crop failures were responsible for the human carnage of historic proportions.

Even the United States trade embargo was tossed into the propaganda mix. While there were floods and some drought, the climatic changes were not off the charts. What was different was the radical change of Chinese society and its ability to produce enough food for its growing population. To this day the CCP will not fully acknowledge the degree to which starvation was a direct result of the forcible herding of villagers into communes. As a result there are no museums, monuments or memorials to honor the tens of millions of victims. Survivors, most of whom still live in the countryside, are rarely seen, too often carrying their memories to their graves.

Surprisingly, the Chinese government has partially opened its archives for scholars and journalists. Access to these files would have been unimaginable even ten years ago, but *a quiet revolution* has been taking place over the past few years as vast collections of documents have gradually been declassified. One of the pioneers in this undertaking was a Dutch academic, Hong Kong University Professor Frank Dikötter. From 2005 to 2009 Dikötter examined hundreds of documents while traveling extensively in the Chinese hinterland, from subtropical Guangdong to arid Gansu Province near the deserts of Inner Mongolia. In his 2010 book *In Mao's Great Famine*, Dikötter wrote that the Great Leap Forward was the *worst catastrophe in China's history and one of the worst anywhere*.

Dikötter rejects the blithe use of the term *famine* or even *Great Famine*. He believes this idea lends credence to *the widespread view that these deaths were the unintended consequence of half-baked and poorly executed economic programs*. Mass starvation had been virtually unheard of in China until the Great Leap Forward. He discovered the fact that Mao knew about the mass starvations in the countryside and yet still demanded even greater extractions of food.

Dikötter estimated that at least 45 million Chinese perished during the GLF's systematic reign of torture, brutality, starvation and even murder. As this new evidence demonstrates, coercion, terror and systematic violence were the founding blocks of the Great Leap Forward. This devastating period in Chinese history *ranks alongside the gulags and the Holocaust as one of the three worst events of the 20th century*.

Thanks to the meticulous statistics compiled by the CCP, scholars and journalists have ascertained that roughly six to eight percent of the fatalities, or approximately three million Chinese, were tortured to death or summarily executed during the GLF. Untold numbers simply vanished without a trace because they were too old, weak or sick to work. Dikötter's Chinese treasure trove is just the tip of the iceberg. Most of the sensitive information still remains locked up. Only when the CCP strips away the opaque veneer from its early history of *democide* will the true story of China's Communist ascendancy become clearly visible to the free world.

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Cardinal Mindszenty's respect for mothers was deep. Below is the Cardinal's quote, available on a 5 1/2" x 3" card in color.



The Most Important Person on earth is a mother. She cannot claim the honor of having built Notre Dame Cathedral. She need not. She has built something more magnificent than any cathedral—a dwelling for an immortal soul, the tiny perfection of her baby's body ... The angels have not been blessed with such a grace. They cannot share in God's creative miracle to bring new saints to Heaven. Only a human mother can. Mothers are closer to God the Creator than any

other creature; God joins forces with mothers in performing this act of creation ... What on God's good earth is more glorious than this: to be a mother?

—Joseph Cardinal Mindszenty

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