

THE ARMY AND THE PEOPLE

THE controlling centre, the focus of China's resurgence, the heart and mind, as it were, of the nation, is, of course, Peking. No one who has ever been there ever forgets its elusive charm. Laid out when London was still a village, Peking is a city of walls—of walls within walls. There is the wall of the Tartar city and the wall of the Chinese city, and within them the walls of the Imperial palaces and the smooth rust red walls of the Forbidden City itself. Within this inmost sanctuary lie the golden-roofed palaces, the courtyards and gardens from which Imperial China was governed for over a thousand years. Looted more than once by the Western Powers, these palaces still retain something of their past glory and their almost total isolation from the life of the ordinary mortal.

The present Government, to its credit, is restoring these palaces with skill and devotion, and they never cease to remind the people of China of their priceless historical heritage. The Chinese are determined that never again will they allow their ancient treasures to be carried off or destroyed. Perhaps the single most stringent rule imposed upon foreigners is that under no conditions must they attempt to take out of the country any article over 80 years old. The Government is searching for and replacing as far as it can the early porcelains and bronzes, some of them made long before the birth of Christ, that were either destroyed in the Boxer War or taken by Chiang Kai-shek to Formosa in 1949. The same skill and care are being shown in the restoration of the tombs of the Ming emperors, the Summer Palace, the Temple of Heaven and other ancient monuments which lie outside of the city itself.

The Forbidden City is no longer forbidden. It is open and free to children and to anyone else who can find the equivalent of two cents for admission. . . . I have never before, even in the ancient buildings of Rome and Greece, sensed such a continuity of human history as I did in these superb palaces of China. And yet it soon became too much, too precious, too unrelated to the China of today. I moved almost with relief from the poetry of the past to discuss the latest production statistics of pig iron, or to watch the street-cars, driven sometimes by young pig-tailed girls, go screeching and racketing down the streets.

There is a phrase that one hears everywhere in China. It is the "appeal to reason." The Chinese have a profound conviction that anyone is teachable. They are not sentimental people but extremely rational, and they feel that facts are the most persuasive force of all. So if anyone is acting foolishly or harbours wrong thoughts—and by wrong thoughts they mean thoughts that do not command general respect or would lead to conflicts—they feel such

a person would be accessible to reason, if it was presented to him in the proper way. This appears to run right through all phases of Chinese life. A policeman will see a bicyclist making a wrong turning or driving through a red light. The bicyclist will be stopped—he won't be given a ticket, he will be given a lecture. It's the same on trains. There is a loudspeaker in every carriage, and as a train enters a station a strident female voice will give lessons of good behaviour: how in the New China people do not push, how mothers with children must be allowed off the train first, how thoughtfulness for others will make everyone happy, and so on.

I spent a day with the Chinese Army, and here, too, I saw evidence of this "appeal to reason." There were almost 50,000 troops going through training exercises not far from Peking, and to my surprise they allowed me to go there, and quite unaccompanied. I was the only foreigner there, almost the only civilian. I wandered around alone and no one paid the slightest attention to me. I estimated that there were about 8000 tents set up. Everywhere there was a very marked sense of orderliness and discipline. The tents were accurately aligned and their interiors were impeccable. I saw the artillery, I watched the tanks—Russian-made, of course—and the most precise ceremonial marching drill that I've ever seen anywhere. On one wide paving strip, it must have been a mile or more long, white lines were drawn indicating the exact length of a pace. Twenty men would be marched down this paving in tight, shoulder-to-shoulder formation, and after about 50 steps they would be halted and men with tapes would then measure to see how many millimetres each man had misjudged the length of his step.

The equipment I saw, the tanks, the guns, and the trucks, seemed to be excellently cared for and spotlessly clean. As I said, in the Army I noticed another application of this "appeal to reason." When a soldier made a mistake in the drill, no one would yell at him—there was no sergeant-major stuff at all. An officer would call the soldier to him and discuss his mistake with him. I asked about this later and the officials explained to me that they found if a soldier is yelled at it only makes him more nervous and more likely to make the mistake again. "We explain things to him, reason with him. Then he is much more likely to do better next time." . . .

I noticed that there was a very good spirit between the officers and the men. During the breaks between the exercises they would race together to where fruit juice was being served from great 40-gallon drums. It was quite impossible as they fooled around and joked together to tell officers from men, for they both wore the same kind of uniform, with no insignia that I could see, and the officers and men were equally, and astonishingly, young.

I was interested to see the relationship between the Chinese Army and

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the people. They certainly seemed to have successfully conveyed to these young men that they are the servants and not the masters of the public. They are members of what is called The People's Army, and they are apparently not allowed to forget it. I never once saw any soldiers acting arrogantly towards the public as one did in Japan and Germany before the war. Quite the opposite. Soldiers in China are rather like the policemen in London—they are there ready to lend a hand to anyone who needs them. It was a soldier I saw take the hand of a small child and help him across a busy intersection. And another helped an old man push an extra heavy load up a hill. I never saw a soldier sitting in a bus if it were crowded and a civilian had to stand.

Perhaps the most astonishing example I saw of this solicitude for the civilian was one day in Peking. It was one of the few times that I saw a contingent of soldiers marching in strict formation down a city street, and as I watched them I saw one of the men suddenly step out of line and run over to the side-walk. The soldier had spotted a very small boy who was crying there, all by himself. The soldier knelt down, comforted the little fellow and then led him over to where some women were standing. He then raced quickly up the street and stepped into the marching line again, and no one seemed to think this behaviour was in the least odd.

One day in Peking I saw an event which better than anything else describes this reliance on the appeal to reason. This incident happened on October 1, the national holiday in China. In Peking on this day there was a great parade. I do not usually admire or like parades, but this one is the most exciting one I have ever seen in my life. More than 600,000 people take part in it, so you can see what a tremendous affair it is. It is enormously colourful, boisterous and imaginative. There are brilliant flags by the thousands, coloured dragons and tremendous baskets of flowers. Pigeons are released to flutter in the air and myriads of coloured balloons go sailing up into the sky. Representatives of every industry take part in this parade, showing on banners what they have achieved in the past year. Artists take part and school children and circus riders and tumblers and Buddhist monks, even a committee of capitalists is represented and is heartily cheered as it goes by.

The people of Peking, of course, those who are not taking part, get up early—even at three or four in the morning, to make sure they have a good place along the sidewalk. And I got up early, too, though not as early as all that, to see how the authorities handle a big crowd. Most of the directing seemed to be done by young children, members of the Young Pioneers, which is the Commu-

ist equivalent of the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides. Near where I was standing several thousand people had been allowed by mistake to gather in a section which should have been kept free for the military. An army officer ordered the people to leave, but the people, having got up early and being very pleased with having found such a good place from which to see the parade, didn't pay any attention to him at all. They just stood there. The officer sent for several truckloads of soldiers, and when they arrived the soldiers linked hands and tried to push the crowd from this particular place. But the crowd stood firmly where they were.

The officer then sent for some more troops and these helped the first group, so that physical pressure on the crowd was now very great indeed. The people then did something which I thought was very sensible and very simple. They just sat down. Now it's obvious that no amount of pushing can move a sitting crowd. The soldiers were left standing with linked hands looking a little foolish, while the crowd laughed. Rather to save face, I think, the soldiers laughed too. I stood waiting to see what the officer would do. What he did was to send all the soldiers away; the trucks came and picked them up. I thought the crowd had won—good for them. But I had not reckoned with this last weapon—the appeal to reason. Within a very few minutes up drove a pick-up truck driven by a young man. He didn't look much more than 18 or 20.

Without hurrying, he got out, fixed up a couple of loud speakers, climbed up on to the back of his truck and with a microphone he began to talk to the crowd. He didn't shout, he just talked and the crowd sat and didn't pay the slightest attention to him. He talked and he talked, and the crowd looked anywhere but at him. He talked for well over half an hour, and then suddenly it happened. I don't know what he said to make the magic work, but all at once the people stood up, clapping and laughing. The young man clapped and laughed, too, and then the whole crowd poured into the street and moved away. Pressure and pushing didn't do the trick, the appeal to reason did.

Incidents like this can sometimes tell one a good deal about a people and the dynamics that underlie their behaviour. There is a gesture of Mao Tse-tung which seems to symbolise some of the attitudes of this New China. Mao often uses one characteristic salute in the same way Churchill used his two fingers to make a V for Victory sign during his trips around the bombed areas during the war, and everyone who saw it knew instantly what this sign meant. In Mao's gesture, he, like Churchill, holds his hand above his head, but his fingers are all outstretched with the palm open. This salute need not be explained to any Chinese, they know immediately what it symbolises: the five outstretched fingers represent love of country, love of people, love of labour, respect for knowledge, and respect for public property. The hand held above the head means above self. Not a bad slogan, I think, for any country, and I certainly prefer Mao's open palm to the belligerent, bitter clenched fist used as a symbol by the Communists of Russia.