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“Our View of China’s Agriculture,” a letter by Niu Weixin and Cai Fumin
[of Nanjing], February 1962

A note from the Fuling branch of the Working Group of the Sichuan Provincial Party Committee, February 19, 1962

To the Provincial Party Committee:

Recently the Fuling County Party Committee received a counterrevolutionary letter from Nanjing. It is a printed letter, and it is quite clear that the authors of this letter are trying to incite trouble. The Fuling County Party Committee made two copies of the letter and sent one to us and one to the Fuling Region Party Committee. We fear that this letter might have been distributed to various other places. Please pay attention to it. The Fuling Region Party Committee has told various counties to destroy the letter if they happen to receive one. We have made a copy of it for your reference.

“The Letter”

The two of us wish to express some concerns about China’s agriculture. We are both very young and naive. Our information comes from what we have witnessed in Jiangsu and Anhui since 1958 as well as what we have heard from a number of villagers in those regions. What we write may not be correct, but our desire is to help our country to eliminate poverty, since we love our country and people dearly. We kept this letter for two years, but in the end we decided to send it out to you. Our aim is for you to read this letter first and to decide whether what we wrote was correct or not. If you could also present some of our concerns about China’s agriculture to the government, it would undoubtedly help the Party to make a better policy.

1. Agricultural collectivization and the people’s communes are a failure. The current reality is proof.

At the moment the majority of the people in China are living in poverty. To improve the material and cultural life of the people is one of the basic policies of the Communist Party. It is also a way to determine whether the Party’s work has been successful or not. Since the implementation of agricultural collectivization, the people’s standard of living in the countryside, as well as in the cities, has fallen. Particularly after the people’s commune became the new form of economic and political organization in rural China, China’s peasant population sank into extreme poverty. In recent years, thousands and thousands of rural villagers have died of starvation. In some areas there have been horrific incidents of humans eating human flesh. Currently 600 million Chinese

are suffering from starvation. In many places people are facing food shortages, fuel shortages, and clothing shortages. Malnutrition and poor health are widespread and becoming worse. The birthrate in the countryside has fallen sharply, and the death rate is on the rise.

The quality of the labor force is fundamental to agricultural development. But in our country we are currently facing a severe shortage of labor since a huge number of peasants have died during the famine, and in some areas the death rate has reached 50 percent. In the past few years, women have taken up the role of chief laborers in the countryside. While many of them lack experience in agricultural production, they are also suffering ill health, for they are extremely undernourished. Owing to the poor quality of their diet and the heavy workload, the birthrate in the rural countryside has almost hit rock bottom. Between 1958 and 1960, hardly any babies were born in the countryside, and most children have been suffering from malnutrition and are in very poor health. This will mean that in the foreseeable future our country will continue to suffer serious shortages of agricultural labor.

Furthermore, the problem of alkalization and nitrification is very prevalent, and the majority of agricultural fields have been severely damaged. [. . .] Take rural Jiangsu, for example. No matter where you turn, all you see is the surface of the earth covered in salt.

Pig excrement used to be a major source of agricultural fertilizer. As a consequence of the radical collectivization in 1958, however, there are hardly any pigs left in the country. [. . .] In most rural villages today, peasants have to use old earth and grass to make fertilizer. The quality is very poor [compared to pre-collectivization fertilizer]. Almost half of the farm animals have died or been killed deliberately. Those still alive are poorly fed and are overworked. They are all suffering from poor health. Furthermore, most agricultural tools have been severely damaged. Shortage of farming tools is a big problem in many places.

2. Agricultural output has also plummeted. [. . .] Most peasants tell us that the current average grain output each year is only half of what it was before collectivization.

So, what has triggered the failure? We consider that the major reason for the failure is human action. The aim of collectivization was to develop agricultural production, to increase agricultural output, and to improve the living standard of the people. But the result is the opposite. [. . .] The reality shows that collectivization and the people's communes are a total failure. [. . .]

We suggest the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party inform other Communist countries [about the results] and warn them not to make the same mistake.

“Appendix: An Appeal”

Dear comrades:

Our country is one of the biggest countries in the world. Its progress and failure will not only affect the Chinese race but will also have a huge impact on the global Communist movement. [. . .] But let’s look at the current reality in our country:

All normal human beings, peasants in particular, are extremely concerned about the current crisis in our country. [. . .]

Dear comrades, we are very worried about the future of our country if this crisis continues. Out of our sacred responsibility for our country and the Chinese people and as members of the Communist Youth League, we would like to make the following appeal to veteran revolutionaries. You are all heroes of our country, since you have sweated and shed blood for the birth of the New China; you should cherish the fruits you have fought for with your life more than anyone. Also, since you have seen the current reality, you understand the problem better than anyone else. We trust you completely, and we would like to ask you:

- To go to the countryside as ordinary members of society and listen to what average peasants have to say. This will help you to profit from all the mistakes our country has made in the past twelve years and to make an economic policy that will benefit the majority of the people in the country.
- To suggest to the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party that land be released to individual farmers and that an agricultural output quota be fixed for each household.
- To throw away dogma and proceed according to the current reality and condition of our country.

Dear comrades, please take action now! Our country and people are waiting in great anticipation! We appeal to you once more to save our country, which is on the verge of extermination.

From Niu Weixin and Cai Fumin, February 1962

· Document III ·

Survey of the Socialist Education Campaign in various ethnic regions
in Xichang, [Sichuan province,] by the Xichang Region Party Committee,
February 4, 1959

During the [Socialist Education] campaign, a small number of landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, and bad elements used the opportunity to spread anti-Party and anti-socialist rumors. For instance, someone in Xichang’s Lianhe township defied Chairman Mao by saying: “Chairman Mao is more brutal than Deng Xiuting.⁷ We are

treated worse than slaves. [Mao] is the despot under heaven.⁸ In the past, a number of ethnic groups had managed to unite together and to overthrow the tyranny of slave owners. Today we can also get organized to wreck this so-called people's government." Another rumor was: "[. . .] The Chinese cadres are much worse than cadres of ethnic origin. In our ethnic area, we don't need Chinese cadres to lead our work." In Yanbian county some bad elements have been spreading rumors such as: "Before Liberation, there was no collectivization, and we had food to eat. Since collectivization, we work day and night, but we only have rice porridge to eat"; "As slaves, we could eat two meals a day, and we did not have to do much work. With collectivization and the Great Leap Forward most of us are leaping into death"; "When it comes to grain procurement, the people's government is much more brutal than former slave owners. We cannot get away [with taking grain] even if [the total amount] is just one grain short." [. . .]

In some areas, a number of bad elements have been using the opportunity to sabotage and organize counterrevolutionary activities. [. . .] In Yanbian county's Hongbao, Yankou, Ningnan, and Liuting [villages], eight rebels have gone into hiding in the mountains to plot revolt. In Shanshu and Liuting, a number of former slave owners and bad elements have been holding secret meetings—we are currently interrogating them. Meanwhile, a number of rumors have been going around. In Xichang's Lianhe township, Shama Hanjia was found spreading rumors such as: "Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalists are coming soon." In Sanhe township, one rumor says: "In Dechang county, quite a number of people have died of starvation in collective canteens." [Another says:] "A [Nationalist] airplane recently flew over the sky in Aqigou township." [. . .] In Ningnan township, there are also rumors such as: "The Nationalist army is coming!" [. . .] It looks as though the enemy is very active at the moment.

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Report on the Rectification Campaign, changes in agricultural production, and people's standard of living, by the Yibin branch of the Rectification Campaign Working Group of the General Office of the Sichuan Provincial Party Committee, September 12–October 12, 1961

In Jiang'an county many rumors are currently circulating. Some even say things like: "Chairman Mao has passed away, and the land will be returned to the original owners"; "The days of the Communist Party are numbered, and the ration coupons have expired," and so on.