

How to differentiate the classes in the rural areas

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[Comrade Mao Tse-tung wrote this document in October 1933 to rectify the deviations that had occurred in the work of land reform and to provide a correct solution for the land problem. It was adopted by the Workers' and Peasants' Democratic Central Government of that time as establishing the criteria for determining class status in the rural areas.]

I. THE LANDLORD

A landlord is a person who owns land, does not engage in labour himself, or does so only to a very small extent, and lives by exploiting the peasants. The collection of land rent is his main form of exploitation; in addition, he may lend money, hire labour, or engage in industry or commerce. But his exaction of land rent from the peasants is his principal form of exploitation. The administration of communal land and the collection of rent from school land [1] are included in the category of exploitation through land rent.

A bankrupt landlord shall still be classified as a landlord if he does not engage in labour but lives by swindling or robbing others or by receiving assistance from relatives or friends, and is better off than the average middle peasant.

Warlords, officials, local tyrants and evil gentry are political representatives and exceptionally ruthless members of the landlord class. Minor local tyrants and evil gentry are also very often to be found among the rich peasants.

Persons who assist landlords in collecting rent and managing property, who depend on landlord exploitation of the peasants as their main source of income and are better off than the average middle peasant shall be put in the same category as landlords.

Usurers are persons who rely on exploitation by usury as their main source of income, are better off than the average middle peasant, and shall be put in the same category as landlords.

II. THE RICH PEASANT

The rich peasant as a rule owns land. But some rich peasants own only part of their land and rent the remainder. Others have no land of their own at all and rent all their land. The rich peasant generally has rather more and better instruments of production and more liquid capital than the average and engages in labour himself, but always relies on exploitation for part or even the major part of his income. His main form of exploitation is the hiring of labour (long-term labourers). In addition, he may let part of his land and practice exploitation through land rent, or may lend money or engage in industry and commerce. Most rich peasants also engage in the administration of communal land. A person who owns a fair amount of good land, farms some of it himself without hiring labour, but exploits other peasants by means of land rent, loan interest or in other ways, shall also be treated as a rich peasant. Rich peasants regularly practice exploitation and many derive most of their income from this source.

III. THE MIDDLE PEASANT

Many middle peasants own land. Some own only part of their land and rent the rest. Others own no land of their own at all and rent all their land. All of them have a fair number of farm implements. A middle peasant derives his income wholly or mainly from his own labour. As a rule, he does not exploit others and in many cases he himself is exploited by others, having to pay a small amount in land rent and in interest on loans. But generally, he does not sell his labour power. Some middle peasants (the well-to-do middle peasants) do practice exploitation to a small extent, but this is not their regular or their main source of income.

IV. THE POOR PEASANT

Among the poor peasants some own part of their land and have a few odd farm implements, others own no land at all but only a few odd farm implements. As a rule poor peasants have to rent the land they work on and are subjected to exploitation, having to pay land rent and interest on loans and to hire themselves out to some extent.

In general, a middle peasant does not need to sell his labour power, while the poor peasant has to sell part of his labour power. This is the principal criterion for distinguishing between a middle and a poor peasant.

V. THE WORKER

The worker (including the farm labourer) as a rule owns no land or farm implements, though some do own a very small amount of land and very few farm implements. Workers make their living wholly or mainly by selling their labour power.

NOTES

1. There were various forms of public land in China's rural areas--land owned by the township or district government, by the ancestral temple of a clan, by a Buddhist or Taoist temple, a Catholic church or a mosque, or land whose income was used for public welfare purposes such as famine relief, or the building and maintenance of bridges and roads, or for educational purposes. In practice, most of such land was controlled by the landlords and rich peasants, and few peasants had any say in its administration.