

Telegram to Mao Zedong on the Policy Regarding the Lease of Land to Rich Peasants (1)

(April 25, 1950)

Deng Zihui

Regarding the drafting of the Land Reform Regulations, we have scheduled a meeting for May 1st to discuss them. Before the meeting, we must first seek your advice on the policy regarding the land leased by rich peasants. After extensive research, we have determined the following actual conditions:

(1) The concentration of land in the provinces south of the Yangtze River is no longer as concentrated as it was before the Great Revolution, following the shock of the Great Revolution, the devastation of the eight-year War of Resistance Against Japan, and the long-term oppression of the Kuomintang. For example, in Hunan, Hubei, and Jiangxi provinces, the land owned by landlords, rich peasants, and official officials accounts for less than 50% of the total land. Landowners and rich peasants renting out land accounts for less than 40%. In the old Soviet areas and their surrounding areas, the land is even more dispersed, with landlords and rich peasants owning only about one-third of the land. There are very few landlords who still do not work and rely solely on collecting rent for a living. This situation is in Huangshen in Hubei, Pingjiang in Hunan, Gandong, Ruijin, Xingguo, Suichuan, and Jishui in western Taiwan. This is true, according to our investigations by local Party committees and through casual conversations with relatives and friends after many veteran cadres returned home. Although the landlords restored power and took revenge on the peasants after the Soviets' defeat, they lacked confidence in the counter-revolution and were afraid of the revolution. Many landlords, after making a fortune, moved to the cities to invest in speculation. Many were killed or surrendered, and no longer dared to attack the peasants. Therefore, the fragmentation of land was natural, and it was also natural that the families of landlords, after bankruptcy, would participate in labor.

(2) Based on the above situation, if even the rented land of the rich peasants remains untouched during land reform, the income of the poor hired peasants will be more than 20 percent less than if the land were distributed equally among the population. According to a Hubei survey, it is 30 percent less. Furthermore, since class boundaries are difficult to draw clearly, it is estimated that many small and medium-sized landlords will find themselves among the rich and middle peasants, further narrowing the scope of confiscation. The rich and middle peasants who rent land will then need to be somewhat favored (i.e., receive a larger share). Consequently, the actual income of the poor hired peasants will be even less. The Central Committee has solicited opinions on the idea of no or reduced land distribution for hired peasants and no land distribution for other classes. We believe this is not a good idea. Currently, the urban poor and unemployed workers are still unable to be resettled. If a new group of people are not absorbed from the countryside, instead hired farmhands will be squeezed out, further increasing social chaos and unrest. Therefore, during land reform, hired farmhands, part-time industrial workers, and unemployed urban workers returning home should generally share land equally with poor peasants. Soldiers and service personnel who have been laid off and returned home should also receive a share of land. Other classes, such as hooligans, self-employed professionals, and small vendors, should also be allocated land as appropriate.

(3) Therefore, if the land leased by rich peasants is not expropriated, the amount of land available for distribution will inevitably decrease. Of course, allowing some small and medium-sized landlords to infiltrate the rich peasant class is beneficial, narrowing the area of attack, reducing the number of enemies, and alleviating resistance. However, we should also consider that if the available land is too small and fails to meet the demands of farmhands, the resulting decline in the enthusiasm of the poor and farmhands will be a factor. In some areas, the land reform movement simply couldn't take

off, as was the case in many areas of central China (and Shandong) during the early days of the May Fourth Movement. At the time, the peasants were indifferent to land reform, far less enthusiastic than the campaign against traitors and the liquidation of accounts. It was only later that we realized that the government had overemphasized their preferential treatment. The poor peasants generally said that this distribution was too little (only a few plots of land were added). "Would such a small gain lead to ruin and mortal enmity?" However, we later decided to maintain a balance between the two ends and leave the middle unchanged, and movement quickly took hold. At the time, the only concern was the rich peasants' own farmland. Now, even their leased land is being left untouched. It's hard to say whether this will lead to a repeat of the stagnation seen in the early days of the May Fourth Movement. The land reforms in the suburbs of Beijing and Tianjin were applauded by the democratic figures. It's good that the countryside is not in turmoil, but whether the peasants are truly mobilized remains to be seen. If the peasants remain mobilized after the land reforms, then the reforms become a mere formality, which is not only politically disadvantageous but also extremely detrimental to future production. Because under the specific conditions of China, which relies on manual management, artificial fertilizers, and artificial irrigation, if the majority of the population, the poor hired peasants who are highly productive, have limited arable land and low motivation, the development of agricultural production will be severely restricted.

(4) Regarding the policy of neutralizing the rich peasants, it is completely correct. However, we believe that achieving the neutrality of the rich peasants and maintaining their production sentiment is difficult solely through economic means. Economically, we cannot completely avoid infringing upon the rich peasants' interests, leaving their leased land and other property untouched. However, rent and interest reductions are inevitable, and the burden cannot but be increased. Furthermore, there are always many disputes regarding employment relations, etc. Therefore, in order to achieve the neutrality of the rich peasants and maintain their production sentiment, in addition to appropriate economic considerations, political conditions should also be added, such as the full mobilization of hired and poor peasants, close unity with the middle peasants, and appropriate punishment of bully landlords. If these political conditions truly exist, and if we leave the rich peasants' property and privately-owned land untouched, then we can still maintain a neutral stance toward the rich peasants by moving their leased land, because leased land does not constitute the majority of their wealth. On the contrary, if even the leased land remains untouched, the poor peasants will be discontented, and the rich peasants will not believe that we will continue to hold onto this undivided wealth (since both the landlords' and the government's leased land have been divided), leading to anxiety. This will actually be detrimental to neutralizing the rich peasants. I remember that in 1929, after the land in western Fujian was distributed according to population (only the land was distributed, not the floating property), the vast majority of people, including old-style rich peasants and new-style rich peasants, were very satisfied. Later, after the anti-rich peasant campaign in 1929, social unrest erupted. What most aroused the rich peasants' opposition at the time was not the confiscation of their leased land (which had already been confiscated in 1929), but the seizure of their prime farmland, the simultaneous appropriation of their cattle, the establishment of rents for their cattle, the increase in wages for hired workers, and the transfer of their funds. This should serve as a lesson for us. Today, it is extremely wise not to confiscate the rich peasants' own farmland and all their property, but their leased land can be confiscated, and this will not hinder the neutral rich peasants. Past experience has proven this point.

5) Should we hold off on the land leases by rich peasants now, waiting a year or two to do so? Or should we not do so by law, but allow the peasants to protest and then intervene through mediation? I think this is also not a good idea. If the law doesn't stipulate it and the peasants are allowed to protest, chaos will easily follow. If the land is not moved now, the peasants will receive a

small share of their land. If it is moved again in a year or two, redistribution will be necessary (not individual adjustments, as the land is large), which will affect production (middle peasants will also have concerns about "cutting the youngest vegetables"). At the same time, the legal stipulation that leased land should not be moved will also affect class divisions, which can easily lead to errors due to unclear class divisions. If all ancestral land is moved, even if some class divisions are unclear, it will not be a problem, because all leased land will be moved, which will guarantee the poor hired peasants. And if all farmers' own farmland remains unchanged, there will be no risk of infringement on the middle peasants. This is the natural boundary in land reform. The above points are based on the actual situation in Jiangnan and are the consensus reached after research. I dare to express them frankly. Whether there is any reason for this is still to be clarified.

Notes

On April 30, 1950, Mao Zedong forwarded this telegram to Rao Shushi of the East China Bureau for reference in drafting the Land Reform Decree and to solicit his opinion.