

# *The Situation in Tibet*

By GEORGE N. PATTERSON

THE overall picture of Tibet today is one of complete Chinese control—not in the pre-revolt sense of control through the Dalai Lama, Tibetan officials and institutions, but direct control by Chinese personnel over Chinese institutions reorganized on the Chinese pattern through Chinese heads of departments and Chinese cadres as in China itself.\* There is no Tibetan in any position of influence and trust, and all pretence that there is has been dropped, except for photographs with visiting dignitaries. Only one gesture in this connection has been made by the Chinese authorities in the past year and that was to invite the Panchen Lama, Cabinet Minister Ngabu Ngawang Jigme, chief collaborator since the signing of the 1951 Seventeen Point Agreement, and Pangdatsang Topgyay, Chairman of the East Tibetan Autonomous Government and Khamba leader, to Peking. Since they returned to Lhasa, they have not attended any major function. One luncheon party to be given to the “officials of the Panchen Erdeni Conference Committee” in the Norbulingka, the Dalai Lama’s former summer palace, was suddenly cancelled for the rather specious reason “due to a bad weather forecast from the meteorological department.” Since then persistent rumours have arrived in India that the Panchen Lama has “disappeared” or is dead.

After the initial propaganda following the Dalai Lama’s escape in March, 1959, and his arrival in India, namely, that he was “abducted under duress” from Lhasa by Khamba rebels, then “kept under duress” in India by the Indian Government, the Chinese launched a ruthless campaign to exterminate the rebels still in the country and eliminate any possibility of a similar rebellion occurring in the future.

The main target of their attacks was the monasteries. This was not so much due to the high proportion of monks who took part in the fighting (although a considerable number of them did, and, more

\* I would like to make it clear at the beginning of this article on conditions obtaining in Tibet at present that it is based on reports which by the very nature of the situation in that country cannot be wholly certain. But within the exigencies of that situation I have sought to weigh as carefully as possible the reports brought from numerous sources, checking and cross-checking them with others in no way associated, known to me but unknown to each other. Some of these reports have been brought by refugees, but most of them by messengers either sent from India with special instructions from their officials or leaders or sent from inside Tibet to these officials and leaders in India. There are also reports from other sources at a higher level which I am not at liberty to disclose.

important, the monasteries were in many places the repositories of large stocks of ammunition and food supplies which kept the rebels going) as an excuse for breaking once and for all the priestly hierarchy's domination over Tibetan administration. With the Dalai Lama out of the country, and many leading monks with him, it was an excellent opportunity to do what the Chinese authorities had always wanted, but had not been in a position to attempt for fear of precipitating a nationwide uprising.

Thus, the primary target was the complete destruction of all that pertained to the priestly feudal system. The three large monasteries in the Lhasa area—Sera, Drepung and Ganden—training centres for all of Tibet's priests, were first of all shelled then denuded of all religious treasures. This action was repeated it appears with all monasteries throughout the country, the Chinese authorities identifying the action with the destruction of religion as well as the feudal system by publicly announcing on every occasion that the gold and silver idols and objects were being melted down to make bullets. The brainwashing and indoctrination of the priests was also directed towards this end. The Chinese authorities were not satisfied just with submitting tens of thousands to forced labour; they first crudely forced priests and nuns to dance together, and even copulate in the monasteries under the threat of death. They then used the monasteries themselves as centres for indoctrination. Since the ending of the revolt several thousand truckloads of religious treasures consisting of idols, paintings and manuscripts have been taken to China and monasteries have been turned into storage places and garrisons. The monastic system which previously dominated Tibet for centuries would seem to have been destroyed beyond repair. Even in the unlikely event of the Dalai Lama and his government returning to Tibet it can be assumed that the Tibetan officials themselves would not forgo the opportunity to be rid of priestly authority.

It was no doubt a dawning realisation of this new strategy which jolted the Panchen Lama into contemplating, as some reports suggest he did, a rebellion similar to that of the Dalai Lama in the months following the revolt. However, he had been a puppet of the Chinese for too long to command any significant following; first his father, then his relatives, then his entourage were arrested, imprisoned and sent to do forced labour. As mentioned already, he himself is kept isolated and used only for photographic purposes when necessary.

In Lhasa itself, and afterwards in other towns and villages, the Chinese authorities divided the city into four zones, north, south, east and west, each zone being supervised by a branch committee of the municipality organisation of the Chinese Communist Party, as well as "people's

organisations" such as the People's Committees. These branch committees were, and are, responsible for public accusations, confessions and self-criticisms among the Tibetans. All citizens have been formed into groups of ten persons, with a Chinese political worker in charge of each, and these groups were forced to meet every day after their day's quota of labour was finished.

At first, all Tibetans, both lay and priest, were given just adequate supplies of food if they completed their labour quotas, but after a few months these were cut down as ration cards were issued. Even the ration quotas were not forthcoming.

There seems no doubt that the initial starving was a punitive measure, but the ration cards were issued because of the force of circumstances. Briefly, these circumstances were due to the tactics of the rebels who, over the three-year period of the revolt, deliberately and systematically destroyed all crops within reach of the Chinese, and then took to the inaccessible parts of Tibet. This scorched earth policy, combined with the blowing up of lines of supply, would, they hoped, starve out the Chinese or cause revolt among the Chinese troops; but before it could become effective, Lhasa had revolted, the Dalai Lama had fled and the rebels had run out of ammunition.

However, with a minimum of 10,000 rebels still in the mountains of East Tibet<sup>1</sup> having access to and able to cut the two main highways from China to Lhasa, together with the influx of Chinese reinforcements following on the revolt (a conservative estimate of Chinese troops in Tibet at present is 300,000, not including the hundreds of thousands—the Tibetans say three million—of Chinese civilian colonisers), the food situation became almost immediately critical. It seems to have been these factors rather than a desire for revenge that led the Chinese to remove tens of thousands of Tibetans, particularly children, down country to China, so that the available food could go to the necessary Chinese troops in Tibet.

At the same time as they were eliminating the monasteries—the greatest landlords and grain-storers—the Chinese authorities decided to reorganise on the Chinese pattern right away the land-holdings of the monasteries and the high officials who had fled to India. This they hoped would serve the dual purpose of placating the people for the loss of their Dalai Lama, monasteries and officials, and at the same time provide a wide opportunity for developing agriculture on a more productive scale throughout Tibet.

These measures might have had some success—at least as much as in China—had not the devastating natural disasters of 1960 affected Tibet

<sup>1</sup> See my article in *The China Quarterly*, No. 1, January–March 1960.

as well as China.<sup>2</sup> First of all large-scale floods, then famine, struck Tibet, and with no supplies available from China the food situation in Tibet became desperate.

The food trade was nationalised; no merchants were allowed to sell, and only Chinese government trade shops were allowed to supply rice, tsamba, flour and barley. The Chinese Army also requisitioned all supplies of butter in outlying areas and farmers themselves were only allowed to buy it back at Government shops and prices. Grain for the spring sowing in 1960 which had been promised was not forthcoming and so the land which had been given to the peasants with such great promises of productivity, and had been ploughed in this hope, had to be left unsown.

That this state of affairs worried the Chinese authorities was evident from their actions towards the end of 1960 and beginning of 1961. From the time of the revolt onwards an incessant campaign of anti-Indian propaganda and vilification of the Dalai Lama and his escaped government had been pursued in public gatherings and in the press. In December 1960 the Lhasa authorities ceased holding the interminable meetings, giving no reason, but announcing significantly that "Socialism in its pure form will not be introduced for four years"—the same formula which had been used in 1956-57 in an attempt to head off the revolt. They were also quick to suppress the details of a large uprising in East Tibet, near Jyekundo, where thousands of Chinese are reported to have been killed and two airlifts of paratroops were required to restore order. The Chinese admitted the revolt in a public meeting in Lhasa, without giving figures, but claimed that the paratroop reinforcements had brought the situation under control. Knowing that scores were dying of starvation in Lhasa and hearing rumours of hundreds and even thousands dying elsewhere, and worried by the growing disaffection among the Chinese troops and personnel in Tibet, the Chinese authorities have had to be quick to anticipate anything which might precipitate another major explosion.

Resistance on anything like the former scale, however, is completely out of the question, although sporadic raids take place from time to time, particularly in East Tibet. This is due not so much to the back of the rebellion having been broken, as the Chinese claim, as to lack of supplies, lack of a proper central base, and lack of wireless operators to bring planes to a central air-drop regularly. Within the past few months there have been an increasing number of raids in West Tibet by Tibetans who have crossed over into Tibet. These men have been reinforced by others who, disappointed with their reception in India, have

<sup>2</sup> The Chinese have never admitted that Tibet, like China proper, was affected by serious natural disasters in 1960.

made their way to Nepal's northern borders to take part in marauding attacks on the Chinese from there. There are reckoned to be 20,000 Tibetans on Nepal's northern borders, but there are at the most three groups containing as many as 3,000 men or so which can mount effective offensives worrying to the Chinese. If the King of Nepal, unlike the previous Nepal Government, is inclined to help these groups, they could prove a deadly menace to the Chinese whose supply line to the Chinese forces in Ladakh and the north runs along the Nepal border.

Tragically, but not unexpectedly, the Tibetan exiles in India are quarrelling among themselves and breaking up into different "parties." It was evident even before the Lhasa revolt that this was bound to happen, for the Khambas, who had been responsible for the revolt from 1952 onwards, were bitter at the reluctance of the Lhasa Government officials to join in the revolt. This bitterness was temporarily overcome when Lhasa finally helped them with arms, ammunition and food in 1958, and then joined in the revolt in March, 1959. But after the Dalai Lama and members of the Lhasa Government arrived in India the various feudal cliques which had always intrigued for the hereditary positions of power continued their normal practices. The Khambas, and those who had helped organise the Lhasa revolt and the Dalai Lama's escape, wanted a strong line taken—the Dalai Lama to make a personal appearance and speech at the United Nations, a request for military supplies to be sent to Tibet from interested countries and, if necessary, defiance of India and a request to go to some other more sympathetic country, such as Thailand, which would permit political activities and recognise an exile Government. This group is represented by such formidable figures as Ministers Surkhang and Yuthok (the former was named by the Chinese as the one who planned the revolt with the Khamba leaders as early as 1954) with one Manang Abu, a Khamba who organised the Lhasa revolt, and several Khamba leaders.

The other major group is formed of the majority of the Dalai Lama's Government who fled with him and who, despite lip-service to a desire for "reforms" in statements to the press, probably want a return to the status quo. This is the strongest representative group and has the ear of the Dalai Lama through his brother Gyalo Thondup and his brother-in-law Puntshok Trashi; it includes Tibet's *eminence grise*, Tsepon Shakabpa. Gyalo Thondup, who has had no previous experience of politics of any kind, and Shakabpa, who has been on one or two delegations and is a shrewd manipulator of the feudal politics of Tibet, were chosen as representatives of this group "because of their experience of western politics"—although, strictly speaking, their "experience of western politics" has been limited to living in India for ten years or so as private persons. Neither of them took part in the revolt until a few

months before the Lhasa uprising, when they were forced to do so under threats. They were two of the three leaders of the delegation to the U.N. in 1959-60. Gyalo Thondup is still the leader of the Tibetan delegation to the U.N. in 1960-61, although strong pressures are being brought to bear on the Dalai Lama to remove both him and Shakabpa from positions of influence as being neither able nor representative.

The intrigues between these two groups have caused a major split among the Tibetans. At present Ministers Surkhang and Yuthok refuse to participate in any "discussions" on Tibetan affairs so long as Shakabpa and Thondup dominate the proceedings, because, they claim, both these men have too many personal interests in India, took no part in the revolt until the final few months—and that from the safety of India—and are disliked by 80 per cent. of the Tibetans, particularly the Khambas.

The Khambas themselves, uninterested in these particular political intrigues, have only two demands: one, they want arms to fight the Chinese and, two, they want representation in the new Government of Tibet when they have defeated the Chinese. They, too, are split into several factions, however, being manipulated by the two major groups which, despite what may be said to the refugee organisations, the Indian Government or the United Nations, whip up support among the rank-and-file Tibetans in India with promises of military help and an early return to Tibet. There are officially 60,000 Tibetans now in India, but the true figure, including those in Nepal and Bhutan, would probably be nearer 100,000. The Chinese are imposing few restrictions on others coming across the borders, and are even encouraging Nepalīs and Muslims in Lhasa to leave, and are infiltrating their own agents among them. This not only adds to the confusion among the Tibetans but increases the dangers to the border States as well.