

China and Tibet : Background to the Revolt

By GEORGE N. PATTERSON

*"What is Tibet? Do we mean the lands controlled by the Tibetan Government and the Tibetan tribal authorities, or the lands inhabited by people of the Tibetan race? . . . While attempting to define the former, let us not neglect the latter, for national sentiment in Tibet, so long in abeyance, is now a growing force."*¹

THE awakening Tibetan national sentiment foreseen by Sir Charles Bell has exploded into a major revolt against China. It has brought the Sino-Indian "Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence" policy into disrepute, has altered the balance of power in Asia and may yet in its continuing repercussions be the prime cause, in the solemn words of Prime Minister Nehru, of the Third World War. In 1960 it is imperative that Sir Charles Bell's warning concerning the importance of not overlooking ethnographic Tibet should be heeded. The cartographic manipulation which has taken place in the past has been possible because of the peculiar isolation of Tibet and can be partly ascribed to foreign ignorance. It will no longer be possible now that the Dalai Lama and his government is in India and the new generation of leaders is educated. It must be remembered that those responsible for the success of the revolt themselves come from what has been casually referred to as "ethnographic Tibet," "*de facto* Tibet," "Inner Tibet," Sikang-Chinghai, Kham-Amdo and Szechuan, according to preference. Not only did the revolt begin in this area, it was carried on with increasing success until this year, and it is not unlikely that it will explode again at any time.

THE HISTORICAL RECORD

It was in the seventh century that Tibet as a nation, and a powerful one at that, emerged from the realm of legend and entered history. A Tibetan king, Srong-tsen Gampo, conquered regions in north Burma and western China and exacted tribute from the Emperor of China, including the marriage of the Emperor's daughter. The same king was equally successful in his attacks on the Indian border, subjugating large parts of

¹ Sir Charles Bell, *Tibet Past and Present* (Oxford University Press, 1924), Introduction Part 2, p. 5.

Nepal and taking a princess from that country also as tribute. These two queens were Buddhists and converted the king to their faith, and in the years that followed he extended the Buddhist religion throughout the whole of Tibet. Until this time Tibet had only had an oral language, derived from the same linguistic family as the Burmese; but Buddhist scriptures were now brought from India and a written character adapted from the Sanskrit to fit the Tibetan language.²

From the time of Srong-tsen Gampo to that of Ralpa-chan, Tibet and China were constantly at war, with varying fortune. Following the death of Srong-tsen Gampo in A.D. 650 the Chinese attacked and captured Lhasa. But during the reign of Ti-song De-tsen, in the eighth century, Tibet became one of the great military powers of Asia, reaching from the Chinese capital of Changan, which its armies had captured, to near the River Ganges in India, and from Turkestan to Burma. Inscribed stone pillars were raised in Lhasa to commemorate an agreement in the eighth century between Ti-song De-tsen, King of Tibet, and Hwang-ti, Emperor of China, "the nephew and the maternal uncle," when they "agreed to hold as sacred the respect of the old relationship and the happiness of the neighbours."³ Towards the end of the eighth century Tibetan armies again overran western China and another treaty was concluded by which the Kokonor Lake was fixed as the north-eastern boundary of Tibet. The Tibetan king abandoned his conquests in China but retained all the mountainous lands as his territory.

In the ninth century there was considerable contact between Tibet and China when about one hundred missions passed between the two countries,⁴ and a peace treaty was concluded on a footing of equality. Ethnographically, the boundary at this time extended from, in the north, the Kuenlun mountains at roughly 35°30' north latitude and 80°30' east longitude to the Kokonor at roughly 100° east, then almost straight southward to near the 28th parallel, through Kansu, Szechuan and Yunnan on a line just to the inside of Sining, Chengtu and Kiating, before turning due west along Upper Burma and Assam at 29°20' north and the general Himalayan range.⁵ (See end-paper Map.)

In the thirteenth century Tibet became a vassal state of the Mongols under Ghengis Khan, but in 1253 when a Tibetan priest, Phagspa, visited Kublai Khan he became so popular that he was made Kublai's spiritual guide and later appointed by him to the rank of priest-king of Tibet and constituted ruler of (1) Tibet Proper, comprising the thirteen

² Bell, *op. cit.* pp. 22-23.

³ Quoted in Bell, *op. cit.* p. 27.

⁴ Tieh-tseng Li, *The Historical Status of Tibet* (New York: Columbia University, 1956), p. 6.

⁵ Bell, *op. cit.* pp. 6-7.

states of U-Tsang Province; (2) Kham, and (3) Amdo.⁶ In the seventeenth century when the Great Fifth Dalai Lama visited Peking at the invitation of the Emperor of the new Manchu dynasty, the Emperor met him one day's journey from the capital. Tibetan records of the event maintain that the Great Fifth was treated as an independent sovereign, the Emperor hoping to secure his alliance in order to establish Manchu rule over Mongolia.⁷

After the death of the Sixth Dalai Lama there was a period of considerable intrigue. At one point the Chinese Emperor sent three armies into Tibet which were eventually successful in defeating the Mongols who were in possession, and he installed a Seventh Dalai Lama of his own choice. China's claim to suzerainty over Tibet appears to date from this invasion. Following it, a Manchu resident and a garrison force of three thousand Chinese troops were left behind and communication with China was kept open by stationing small detachments of troops along the Lhasa-Chamdo-Batang-Tachienlu "road." The new boundary between China and Tibet was demarcated by a pillar, erected in 1727 on the Bum La south-west of Batang. The country to the west of this point was handed over to the rule of the Dalai Lama under the suzerainty of the Manchu Emperor, while the Tibetan chiefs of the states and tribes in the provinces of Kham and Amdo to the east of it were given the status of semi-independent feudatories of China, with Batang and Litang being placed under the administration of Szechuan. This loose arrangement lasted for nearly two centuries, until the Chinese conquest of Tibet under General Chao Erh-feng in 1905.⁸

The absolute rule claimed by the Chinese residents in Lhasa was not maintained for long, however, and after the Opium War and the Taiping Rebellion Chinese influence deteriorated considerably. When an inter-tribal war broke out in Kham in 1860, rapidly involving the whole of East Tibet, the inhabitants appealed to both the Chinese and Tibetan Governments for help. The former were in no position to help because of their involvement with foreign Powers, but the Dalai Lama responded by sending a Tibetan army which suppressed the fighting in 1863. The Tibetan claim to the reconquered territory dates from this time, when the Chinese Imperial Court confirmed the claim.⁹ It was the Younghusband expedition which marched on Lhasa in 1904 and forced the Tibetan Government and the Chinese Amban to sign an agreement that startled the Chinese Government into taking action. Although they signed the Adhesion Agreement to the Anglo-Tibetan Convention in 1906 they took steps to safeguard their interests in Tibet

⁶ Li, *op. cit.* p. 20.

⁷ Bell, *op. cit.* p. 20.

⁸ Eric Teichman, *Travels of a Consular Officer in Eastern Tibet* (Cambridge University, 1922), pp. 133-134 and footnote 51.

⁹ *Ibid.*; also Li, *op. cit.* pp. 5 and 62.

by appointing an "Imperial Resident" in Chamdo, in East Tibet. When the Khambas revolted against Chinese interference a Chinese army under the command of General Chao Erh-feng was dispatched to bring the country under the direct control of the Chinese Government.¹⁰ When Chao finally left Tibet, in 1911, the work begun in 1905 was outwardly completed and there was not a Tibetan ruler left in East Tibet. From Tachienlu up to the Mekong the country was administered by Chinese magistrates, while north of the Mekong several districts had been planned but not actually established. When Chao was killed that same year his assistant took over, and his first act was a proposal that East Tibet should be converted into a new Chinese province to be called "(H) Si-kang" or "Western Kham."¹¹

However, Chinese control over the rebellious Tibetans had not been sufficiently established to withstand much pressure and the greater part of it disappeared following the revolution in China in 1911. By the end of 1912 Chinese authority had ceased to exist in Tibet, and the Dalai Lama having returned from his exile in India, the country became once more an autonomous state.

In 1913 a conference was held at Simla between Britain, China and Tibet. The conference divided Tibet into two zones, "Outer Tibet" nearer India, including Lhasa, Shigatse and Chamdo; and "Inner Tibet" nearer China, including Batang, Litang, Tachienlu and a large portion of East Tibet. Chinese suzerainty over the whole of Tibet was recognised but China engaged not to convert Tibet into a Chinese province. The autonomy of Outer Tibet was recognised and China agreed to abstain from interference in its internal administration which was to rest with the Tibetans themselves. In Inner Tibet the central Tibetan Government at Lhasa was to retain its existing rights, which included among other things the control of most of the monasteries and the appointment of local chiefs. But China was not forbidden to send troops or to plant colonies there.¹²

The discussion lasted for six months and in April, 1914, a Convention was agreed upon and initialled by all three plenipotentiaries. Two days after the draft had been initialled the Chinese Government telegraphed repudiating it, but Tibet and Britain recognised it as binding upon themselves, with China, having repudiated the Convention, entitled to none of the advantages which the Convention would have conferred upon her.

Little of major historical importance occurred in Sino-Tibetan relations between the Simla Convention and the Chinese Communist

¹⁰ Teichman, *op. cit.* p. 20

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

¹² Bell, *loc. cit.* pp. 154-155.

invasion in 1950. In the intrigue following on the Thirteenth Dalai Lama's death in 1933 a small Khamba army recruited by two brothers, Topgyay and Rapga Pangdatshang, was engaged by the official Tibetan Army near Chamdo, then defeated, with the help of the Chinese Army, at Batang. Later, when the Chinese thought that they might require help from the Tibetan tribesmen of East Tibet in their war with Japan, the younger brother, Topgyay, was made an honorary colonel responsible for the Kham tribesmen; a leading Amdo Tibetan, Lobsang Tsewong, was made the same for Amdo. When the Second World War finished, these two Tibetans, with Topgyay's brother, Rapga, and Geshi Sherab Gyaltso (both political intellectuals and rebels) formed the recognised leadership of the great fighting tribes in East Tibet, together with several able Sino-Tibetans who had had an education in China and experience in administration.

Following the war and the deteriorating political situation in China, arms and ammunition on a large scale became available to these East Tibetan leaders and brought the possibility of successful revolt against the Lhasa Government—a long-cherished ambition of the East Tibetans—within reach. The extremists among them were all for overthrow of the central government in Lhasa and the establishment of a new government centre in Chamdo in Kham, from which to administer Tibet through Kham and Amdo officials. They wanted a new trade route from Chamdo and Batang to Sadiya, in Upper Assam, to cut out the ancient but long caravan trail through Lhasa. The moderates were for using political pressure by threats and, failing this, going ahead with setting up their own government in Kham, and gradually eliminating the Lhasa Government through boycott, starvation and attrition.

THE COMMUNIST TAKE-OVER

While some measure of secrecy was attempted, the plans were known to many in East Tibet, and, as events were shortly to show, to the Chinese Communists as well. In August 1949, before they had established their authority over parts of China, the Communists, in a broadcast from Peking, announced that the above-mentioned four leaders had expressed their sympathy with the Chinese and wanted to associate themselves with them in liberating their own people in Tibet. This was a very shrewd political manoeuvre on China's part for at one blow it effectively isolated the most powerful, most populous and greatest area in Tibet from the central government in Lhasa, and gave them time to enter into negotiations with the East Tibetan leaders while at the same time bringing military pressure on them to agree to collaborate with China.

A written ultimatum was delivered to the Khamba leader, Topgyay

Pangdatshang, in January 1950, by the Batang magistrate, who rode into the mountains personally to deliver it. It stated Communist China's intentions of taking over the whole of Tibet, and after that, Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan, and the necessity for the Kham Tibetans to co-operate in this or be annihilated. The Kham leaders made an attempt to get help from Lhasa and the outside Powers, in March 1950, to fight against the Chinese, but this was refused.¹³

RIGHTS OF NATIONAL MINORITIES

"The Soviet Government of China recognises the right of self determination of the national minorities in China, their right to complete separation from China and to the formation of an independent state for each national minority. All Mongolians, Tibetans, Miao, Yao, Koreans and others living on the territory of China shall enjoy the full right to self determination, i.e., they may either join the Union of Chinese Soviets or secede from it and form their own state as they may prefer."

—*From the Constitution of the Kiangsi Soviet Republic*
(Chairman: Mao Tse-tung), drawn up in 1931.

On August 5, 1950, the official Chinese Communist News Agency quoted General (subsequently Marshal) Liu Po-ch'eng, Chairman of the South-West China Military Affairs Commission, as saying that "the People's Army would soon enter Tibet with the object of wiping out British and American influence there. When the country had been liberated Tibetans would be given regional autonomy and religious freedom. Lamas would be protected. The Communists would respect existing customs. Tibetan Government officials would not be removed from their present posts. But the Tibetan Army would be reorganised as part of the Chinese People's Army."¹⁴

On October 25, 1950, Peking radio broadcast that the process of "liberating" Tibet had begun. However, it was still not publicly admitted to be a military action. When the Indian ambassador in Peking lodged a strong protest from his government, "the Chinese reply was equally strong. It practically accused India of having been influenced by the imperialists, and claimed that the Chinese had not taken any military action but were determined to liberate Tibet by

¹³ George N. Patterson, *Tragic Destiny* (London: Faber, 1959), p. 31.

¹⁴ Reported in *The Statesman*, Calcutta, August 6, 1950.

peaceful means . . ."; and later, "the Tibetan question had also settled itself, for the Chinese after the first military display were content to keep their armies on the frontier and await the arrival of the Tibetan delegation for settlement by negotiations. . . ." ¹⁵

At this time the Chinese were almost certainly sincere in their desire for a "peaceful liberation," although not wholly for altruistic reasons. As the historical record indicates, while there was some ground for Chinese claims to Tibet based on their conquests of the country at various times, there was an equally sound basis for Tibet's claim to independence through having ultimately expelled the Chinese from the country. It was this doubt as to Tibet's actual historical status in relationship to China which caused the Chinese to tread softly in their "liberation" action, while at the same time loudly insisting on their "right" to liberate.

Thus the Chinese People's Army, having entered Chamdo on October 29, 1950, remained there for several months before marching on Lhasa in September 1951. Behind this hesitation may well have been a desire to test Indian and United Nations reactions to the Tibetan appeal against the Chinese claims and action. Had firm action been taken by India or the United Nations at that point, to uphold the *status quo* at least, it is arguable that China would have proceeded no further.

It must be pointed out that from a Chinese point of view there was a certain amount of justification for suspicions regarding American intentions *vis-à-vis* Tibet in 1951. There was Lowell Thomas's much-publicised visit in 1949; the following year a copy of a booklet on top-secret military briefing for American troops on Tibet was circulating in certain quarters in Kalimpong and its existence was undoubtedly known to Chinese agents there. ¹⁶ Finally the escape of the Dalai Lama's brother, Taktser Rimpoche, to America in July 1951 was clearly a major factor in the alteration of China's policy in Tibet. Taktser Rimpoche had pretended to go along with China's plans to take over Tibet which included the deposing of the Dalai Lama (this was before his official installation) and with Taktser Rimpoche as president, the altering of the Tibetan administration to suit Chinese demands. ¹⁷ With Taktser Rimpoche in America, the possibility of American intervention may well have seemed imminent; with the Dalai Lama already installed in power in November 1950 by the Tibetan Government, the Chinese must have decided that long-term "peaceful measures" were no longer practicable. It was necessary to make preparations to forestall intervention, discourage possibilities of "counter-revolution" engineered by Tibetan

¹⁵ K. M. Pannikar, *In Two Chinas* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1955), pp. 112-114.

¹⁶ The present writer saw this copy.

¹⁷ The writer was told this by Taktser Rimpoche personally.

FREEDOM OF WORSHIP

. . . (7) The policy of freedom of religious belief . . . shall be carried out. The religious beliefs, customs and habits of the Tibetan people shall be respected and lama monasteries shall be protected. The central authorities will not effect a change in the income of the monasteries.

—*From the 17-point agreement of May 23, 1951.*

"There are 390 monasteries in the Karzey District which are engaged in lawlessness and sabotage. All the monasteries are reactionaries under religious guise. They are all instruments of exploitation, the stronghold of autocratic feudal lords who stand in the way of progressive socialistic production and they are the centre of rebellion against the reform. If they are completely destroyed then the autocratic feudal oppression and exploitation can be destroyed."

Nov. 18, 1958.

"The God and Gods are all false invention for deceiving people. The reactionary Lamas and the leaders of the monasteries use them as their instrument and carry on their objective of exploitation of the masses."

Nov. 19, 1958.

"To believe in religion is fruitless. Religion is the instrument of autocratic feudal lords and religious works have no benefits whatsoever to the people. To explain this we trace the historical background of the origin of Buddhism. The founder of Buddhism was Sakya Muni—son of King Sudhodhana of India. His kingdom was very aggressive among all the Indian kingdoms of his time. It always used to invade the small kingdoms. It was during the reign of Sakya Muni that his subjects revolted against him and later other small kingdoms also rose against him spontaneously. As they attacked Sakya Muni he accepted defeat, but escaped amidst the fighting. Since there was no other way out for him he wandered into the forests. Having founded Buddhism, he brought about a pessimism and idleness in the minds of the people weakening their courage and thus reached his goal of re-domination over them. This fact was clearly recorded in history."

Nov. 22, 1958.

—*From Karzey Nyinrey Sargyur*
(an East Tibetan newspaper).

(All quoted in The Question of Tibet and the
Rule of Law, pp. 41-43.)

exiles in India and bring Tibet quickly under complete Chinese control. The appropriate measures would serve to further what this writer considers the Chinese long-term ambition of being in a position to annex the Himalayan border states.

It was for these reasons that the Chinese ignored the terms of the 17-Point Agreement of May 1951 which had been forced on what was only a goodwill mission to Peking and stamped with a false Tibetan seal.¹⁸ What was the "Advisory Delegation" became almost immediately Peking's instrument of political control.¹⁹ Every effort was concentrated on building a major road into Tibet, the prime, almost sole, purpose of which, even in Chinese publicity, was to carry military vehicles, troops and supplies.

Such a large and unexpected influx of people in the precariously balanced food situation which obtained in Tibet forced the Chinese to make drastic "reforms" of Tibet's archaic methods of food storage, supply and distribution. As those methods were intimately connected with the rights of monasteries as granaries, landowners and tax levies it inevitably resulted in protests and scattered riots. The Chinese justified their actions by stressing the feudal character of the prevailing system, the increasing privations of the Tibetan people, and the necessity for participating in the struggle against the enemies of the motherland in Korea. But to the Tibetans, of course, it was simply an outright violation of the 17-Point Agreement, a means to eliminate Tibetan customs and, most of all, an attempt to weaken Tibetan religion.²⁰

¹⁸ Dalai Lama's press statement of June 20, 1959, at Mussoorie, quoted in *The Question of Tibet and the Rule of Law* (Geneva: International Commission of Jurists, 1959), Document 19, p. 196.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*
²⁰ The following two statements show the two different points of view: (a) the first is from a Mi-mang Tsong-du ("People's Party") Appeal to the Dalai Lama in 1955: "We Tibetan people make the following appeal because we oppose the Chinese Communists who are destroying all our customs and systems, and also because of the complete breach of the 17-Point Agreement signed by them. . . . Since the occupation of Tibet by the Chinese Communists all the former organisations of the Government have ceased to function and the Chinese Communists have established a large number of illegal organisations in their place to carry out the administration. . . . The Chinese Communists have not only increased administrative organisations but they have also established organisations such as the 'Patriotic Youth League,' and the 'Chinese Schools,' with the sole object of indoctrinating the youth of Tibet in Communism, and thus to destroy the civilisation and culture of the nation. Moreover, in opposition to the will of the people the Chinese Communists have destroyed the social system of Tibet in which political and religious life are joined together, and have also destroyed the religion of the Tibetan people. . . ." The author saw a copy of this in Kalimpong.

(b) The second is taken from the Peking *Shih-shih Shou-ts'e* (*Current Affairs Handbook*) of April 30, 1956, giving an account of progress in Tibet: "People's Banks had been opened in Lhasa, Shigatse, Chamdo and other places and in the previous four years had issued more than 1,700,000 yuan of non-interest agricultural loans, and more than 100,000 yuan of non-interest pastoral loans, as well as various amounts of low-interest handicraft and commercial loans. One hundred thousand farm implements had been issued, and 2,000,000 yuan's worth of tea, cloth and daily necessities. Twenty-seven primary schools had been established with a total

The policy of land reform was at first, in 1952, restricted to East Tibet, presumably in order not to frighten and antagonise the Tibetan Government in Lhasa. The Chinese authorities requisitioned lands, property and goods belonging to Taktser Rimpoche at his famous monastery in Kumbum, in Amdo, as a punishment, they said, for his having gone over to the Americans. This policy was rapidly extended to take in other areas and other monasteries.

But while the remote territory in East Tibet may have lent itself admirably to facilitating a rigorous enforcement of land reforms, the policy itself, in an area that was notoriously hostile to the Chinese, was bound to be an explosive issue. In 1952–53 widespread fighting broke out in Kham and Amdo. One Tibetan who escaped, once a “People’s General” in the Chinese Army from Amdo, claimed that over 80,000 rebels were involved in the fighting. Some 12,000 of them, according to him, were deserters from the Kuomintang armies who had settled down in the mountains of East Tibet.²¹ With no immediate help forthcoming from India or America, and because the Chinese, at the persuasion of East Tibetan leaders, relaxed their policy of immediate land reforms, the revolt died down—except in areas where local Chinese commanders made tentative attempts to introduce other reforms; as, for example, veterinary dispensaries which the touchy Tibetans now suspected as centres for calculating their wealth in order to impose heavier taxes.

In Lhasa itself the Chinese proceeded much more cautiously, but even in the capital there were anti-Chinese demonstrations from as early as 1952. Leading priests had been persuaded to co-operate with the Chinese through assurances that there would be no interfering with Tibetan customs or religion, but they were now disturbed by the reports coming from East Tibet. Many of the nobles and high officials, particularly the younger ones, had enthusiastically joined in the earlier programmes of reconstruction and reform but now began to have second thoughts as Chinese pressures and demands on them increased.²² A powerful underground anti-Chinese group known as the *Mi-mang Tsong-du* (“People’s Party”) came into public prominence with demonstrations, placarding of walls, denunciations of Chinese interference with the Dalai Lama’s powers and the customs and religion of Tibet.²³

enrolment of 2,000 Tibetan students. Books and stationery were supplied to students free of charge, and subsidies and living expenses were given to the really poor. Broadcasting stations were set up in various cities and towns. 4,000 Chinese medical workers had been sent to Tibet with 5,000,000 yuan for hygienic enterprises. Hospitals were built in Lhasa, Shigatse, Chamdo, etc. . . .”

²¹ Patterson, *op. cit.* p. 109.

²² The writer was told this by Khamba officials. See also note 20 (a).

²³ *Ibid.*, also *Tibet Mirror*, periodical published in Kalimpong, June 1954, by a Tibetan long resident there. It appears sporadically but is generally accurate.

Many of the issues raised by the anti-Chinese groups were apparently inspired by feudal officials, who wanted little or no change at all and were only using popular sentiment to oppose reforms of any kind. But at the same time popular anti-Chinese sentiment was very much in evidence. This, to a great extent, was due to the irritating presence of tens of thousands of Chinese troops in Lhasa and in other major towns. Some reports placed the total number of Chinese troops in Tibet at 200,000. Then there was the growing shortage of food—accelerated by the unprecedented 1953 floods and subsequent famine which the superstitious Tibetans attributed to the displeasure of the gods with the Chinese occupation. Finally the Tibetans resented the policy of imposing the Chinese language, dress and customs in the schools, and the Communist Party cadres.²⁴

In 1954 two major events occurred which were to have wide repercussions in Tibet. One was the signing of the Sino-Indian Trade Agreement—which included the delineation of “The Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence”—recognising Tibet as “the Tibet region of China”; and the second, the Dalai Lama’s visit to China. The former convinced Tibetans that India and China were prepared to dispose of Tibet “in private arrangements in favour of aggression so as to serve their own inter-Asian imperialist policies”²⁵; while the latter convinced the Dalai Lama that China was prepared to go to any length to sinicise Tibet. In addition to the deliberate favouring of the Panchen Lama throughout the visit, and the pressures put upon the Dalai Lama to make favourable pro-Chinese speeches, there was also a crude attempt on his life coming through East Tibet which the Chinese attributed to “Khamba bandits.”²⁶

It was during this same visit to China that some leading officials of the Dalai Lama’s entourage made contact with rebel Khamba leaders and planned a revolt against the Chinese in Tibet.²⁷ This was of necessity only a loose arrangement but it served its purpose. In March 1955, Peking announced the nomination of a committee to prepare for regional autonomy for Tibet, and in September administrative offices for the committee were set up in Lhasa. This was clearly the start of an attempt to end even the limited special privileges that Tibet enjoyed and bring the country under the tighter control experienced by China’s other national minorities in their “national autonomous” areas. This move was accompanied in the east by ruthless plundering of

²⁴ See note 20 (a) and (b).

²⁵ *Tibet Mirror*, June 1954.

²⁶ The author was told this by another brother of the Dalai Lama, Gyalu Thondup.

²⁷ *Concerning the Question of Tibet* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1959), p. 230.

monasteries and the levying of crippling taxes.²⁸ Late in 1955, the Khambas finally revolted and the plans made earlier meant that even the East Tibetan leaders could no longer contain their people and the whole of Kham and Amdo became involved. Marshall Ch'en Yi, a Deputy Premier (now also Foreign Minister), just escaped assassination when he went to Tibet to attend the inaugural meeting of the Preparatory Committee in April 1956.²⁹

From November 1956 to March 1957, the Dalai Lama was on a visit to India. He asked Premier Nehru for sanctuary³⁰ and would not accept Premier Chou En-lai's guarantee of new Chinese policies. But Mr. Nehru persuaded him to return, promising to use his good offices in Peking. Later Mao Tse-tung in his secret speech on "contradictions" among the people on February 27, 1957 (published on June 18), declared that conditions in Tibet were "not ripe" for "democratic reforms." The reforms were to be postponed until at least 1962. Peking then announced that 91.6 per cent. of her officials would be withdrawn from Tibet in view of the postponement. In fact they were only transferred from Western Tibet, where they could be observed by Indian officials, to Kham and Amdo where they could assist a reinforced Chinese army in disciplining the recalcitrant Khambas and Amdowas.

The Dalai Lama had also been promised a visit by Mr. Nehru. The Indian Premier finally announced on April 8, 1958, that he would be visiting Lhasa, though he did not specify when; it was understood that he would go in September. But by the spring of 1958, the increasing Chinese military pressure in East Tibet against "rebel elements" had convinced the Kham and Amdo Tibetans that they were facing extermination. In desperation they took to the mountains, sabotaging roads, destroying their houses and crops and leaving only their very old and very young behind. The situation was clearly too critical for Mr. Nehru to be allowed to visit Tibet and at the end of July 1958 at the suggestion of the Chinese he announced the cancellation of his proposed visit.

By mid-1958 20,000 East Tibetans, short of food and ammunition,

²⁸ The Dalai Lama, at his Press Conference in Mussoorie on June 20, 1959, was asked: "Is it true that a deliberate and precise campaign has been conducted by the Chinese in Tibet against the Tibetan religion?" He replied: "The report is correct in stating that, until 1958, over 1,000 monasteries were destroyed, countless lamas and monks killed and imprisoned, and the extermination of religion actively attempted. From 1955 onwards a full-scale campaign was attempted in the provinces of U and Tsang for the full-scale extermination of religion. We have documentary proof of these actions, and also of actions against the Buddha himself, who had been named as a reactionary element." From *The Question of Tibet and the Rule of Law*, Document 20, pp. 200-201.

²⁹ The writer was told of this by Khamba officials.

³⁰ Dalai Lama's press statement, June 20, 1959, *The Question of Tibet and the Rule of Law*, Document 19, pp. 197-198.

had fallen back on Central Tibet, and through the earlier contacts made in 1954 were able to gain access to secret stocks of arms, ammunition and food from highly placed officials in Lhasa. These groups then took to the mountains south and south-west of Lhasa and the local revolts became a national uprising. For some time the Chinese authorities were able to keep Lhasa itself quiet by threatening to turn the heavy guns surrounding the city on the capital, including the Potala where the Dalai Lama lived. But with conditions throughout the country at explosion point even this threat no longer served to hold the citizens of Lhasa in check. On March 10 the issue was forced when the people of Lhasa refused to let the Dalai Lama accept a suspect Chinese "invitation"; on March 17 the Chinese fired mortar shells at the Norbulingka Palace and the Dalai Lama and most of his government fled, and on March 19 the city and large monasteries erupted into armed revolt.³¹

AFTERMATH OF THE REVOLT

It can be seen that the Chinese were partly right in classifying the revolt as a "tribal affair"; its location was primarily in East Tibet and most of the rebels hailed from there. What was not admitted, nor appreciated by the outside world, was that the "tribal" area involved two-thirds of Tibet and almost 80 per cent. of its population. In any case, a certain amount of anti-Chinese feeling had been in evidence in Central and West Tibet from 1952; this flared up into widespread opposition in 1958 and then armed revolt in 1959, making the uprising definitely national.

News of this at the time was hard to come by, for in addition to the formidable geographical isolation of Tibet, the Tibetans themselves felt that India and the outside world were not only unsympathetic to Tibet's cause (*vide* the cavalier treatment accorded the appeal and Manifesto of August 4, 1958, issued by leading Tibetan exiles, by India and the United Nations, who were among the recipients) but also unable or unwilling to take any action which would bring them into opposition to China.

But it seems the revolt ceased with dramatic suddenness, due not so much to successful repressive measures by the Chinese as to the breaking off of the struggle by the rebels for purposes of regrouping and recouping following on the escape of the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan Government and 13,000 refugees to India. Intense fighting had taken place in Lhasa for three days before the better equipped Chinese troops were able to bring order into the city. In a communiqué on the Rebellion in Tibet the Chinese authorities admitted that:

³¹ Dalai Lama's statement in Tezpur, India, April 18, 1959, *ibid.*, Document 17, pp. 192–193; Dalai Lama's Press conference, June 20, 1959, *ibid.*, Document 20, p. 201.

The Tibetan traitors have carried on their rebellious activities for quite a long time. . . . Since the Chinese People's Liberation Army entered Tibet and the Central People's Government and the Tibetan local government concluded the [17-Point] Agreement in 1951, they have been plotting to tear up this agreement and preparing for armed rebellion. . . . Beginning in May and June last year, on the instructions of the Tibetan local government and the reactionary clique of the upper social strata, the rebel bandits attacked the Chamdo, Dinching, Nag-chuka and Loka areas; they disrupted communications; plundered the people and engaged in rape, arson and murder; they attacked agencies and army units of the Central People's Government in those places. In the spirit of national unity the Central People's Government repeatedly enjoined the local government of Tibet to punish the rebels and maintain social order. But the local government of Tibet and the reactionary clique of the upper social strata took the magnanimity of the Central People's Government for a sign of weakness. . . . They therefore refused to do their duty to check the ravages of the rebel bandits, but instead actively stepped up their treacherous intrigues. After concentrating considerable counter-revolutionary armed forces in Lhasa they started their armed rebellion on March 10, openly scrapping the 17-Article Agreement. . . . At 10 a.m. on March 20 the troops of the Tibet Military Area Command of the Chinese People's Liberation Army were ordered to take punitive action against the clique of traitors who had committed these monstrous crimes. With the aid of patriotic Tibetan lamas and laymen the People's Liberation Army completely crushed the rebellion in the city of Lhasa in just over two days of fighting. Preliminary statistics show that by March 23 more than 4,000 rebel troops were taken prisoner. . . .³²

The Dalai Lama, on his arrival in India, claimed that over 10,000 Tibetans had been killed in the fighting in Lhasa (and about 90,000 throughout the whole revolt), and this slaughter, combined with the fact that Lhasa Tibetans are not as martial as the Khambas, probably accounted for the sudden termination of hostilities in the capital. It was an entirely different matter to stamp it out in the remote valleys and mountains of East and South-East Tibet. With the Dalai Lama, the members of his Government and many leading lamas and officials in India, and the increased military concentration on the main highway through Tibet and all open spaces, the rebels were forced to withdraw into those areas once again. Even accepting the Chinese figures of 4,000 prisoners at face value, and making a disproportionately large allowance for another 6,000 rebels having escaped to India (out of the 13,000 following the Dalai Lama to India only 3,000 were under thirty years of age and the majority of them were lamas and harmless refugees), and accepting, too, the Chinese figure of 20,000 rebels³³ (although there

³² "Communiqué on Rebellion in Tibet," New China News Agency, March 28, 1959, quoted in *Concerning the Question of Tibet*, pp. 4-9.

³³ *Ibid.* p. 10.

were more than that in the Loka area, south of Lhasa, alone) it means that 10,000 rebels are still at large inside Tibet.

In a private interview which I had with the Dalai Lama in Mussoorie, on August 20, 1959, he said that he had information of rebel groups fighting in the Litang area, in south-east Tibet, and in the Chamdo-Jyekundo area in north-east Tibet, numbering several thousands, although their activities were necessarily on a smaller scale because of lack of ammunition and because they could no longer replenish supplies from captured Chinese troops due "to a change in the types of Chinese arms and ammunition."

At his Press Conference, on June 20, the Dalai Lama also said, regarding conditions in Tibet:

Ever since my arrival in India I have been receiving almost every day sad and distressing news of the suffering and inhuman treatment of my people. I have heard almost daily, with a heavy heart, of their increasing agony and affliction, their harassment and persecution and of the terrible deportations and execution of innocent men. These have made me realise forcibly that the time has manifestly arrived when in the interests of my people and religion and to save them from the danger of near-annihilation, I must not keep silent any longer. . . .³⁴

Whether the staggering record of atrocities in Tibet is true or not it is still too early to state with assurance. The International Commission of Jurists is still collecting first-hand evidence in New Delhi through its Legal Inquiry Committee On Tibet; but in its preliminary report, the committee said it was satisfied that "with a full appreciation of the gravity of this accusation, that the evidence points at least to a *prima facie* case of genocide against the People's Republic of China." It added that: "The issue on the evidence submitted in this report is, to a large extent, who is telling the truth. On this issue, this proposal by the Dalai Lama [the committee was referring to his proposal to China to allow an impartial investigation] is of the utmost importance."³⁵

The Chairman of the International Commission of Jurists, Purshottam Trikamdass, personally informed me that he was satisfied with the evidence for eight cases of enforced sterilisation. But the widespread reports of mass sterilisation are puzzling and difficult to reconcile with the more easily established reports of mass deportations: if the Tibetans are being removed *en masse* to China, or remote parts of Tibet, why bother with enforced sterilisation? Certainly, there is sufficient evidence of this obtainable from Tibetans in India who, with their own means of access to information from inside Tibet through trusted family messengers, cannot get any details regarding members of their families.

³⁴ Dalai Lama's Press statement June 20, 1959: *The Question of Tibet and the Rule of Law*, Document 19, p. 196.

³⁵ *The Question of Tibet and the Rule of Law*, Introduction, Part II, pp. 18-19.

When they do get news it is to be told (as in the case of 70-year old Tsarong Shape, elder statesman of Tibet) that they are dead, after being forced to participate in forced labour.

Whether sufficient evidence will ever be gathered to satisfy unprejudiced observers it is difficult to say. The Chinese authorities have not yet given permission to the International Commission of Jurists to visit Tibet, and, after all, the evidence from Hungary is still being disputed in some quarters. But what is important in assessing the Tibetan situation is that the Tibetans themselves—and there are almost 50,000 of them in the borderlands of India, in touch with many others from all over Tibet—are convinced that their country and people are facing what the Dalai Lama termed “near-annihilation.” With that conviction, and the recent near-success of the revolt (the failure of which is attributed, by the Tibetans, to lack of arms rather than the superiority of the Chinese who were reduced to less than equal terms in the rarified 15,000 feet altitudes, by the destruction of roads, disrupted communications, food shortages and intense cold), the Tibetans are determined to do all in their power to oppose and, if the opportunity occurs, overthrow the Chinese.

The Chinese, for their part, state:

Tibet is an inalienable part of China. It belongs to the big family of the Chinese people, not to the handful of reactionaries, much less to the imperialists and foreign interventionists. The rebellion of the handful of Tibetan reactionaries and its suppression are wholly internal affairs of China which do not permit of any interference by foreigners. It is the firm and unalterable policy of the People's Republic of China to implement national regional autonomy in the Tibet area under the unified leadership of the Central People's Government and with the broad masses and patriotic people of all walks of life as the masters, to carry through democratic reforms under the unified leadership of the Central People's Government and to build a prosperous, Socialist new Tibet by relying on the fraternal unity and mutual assistance of the working people of all nationalities. . . .³⁶

It is the clash between these two unalterable convictions which has precipitated the recent series of border incidents with India, for as long as there are racial, religious and political sympathisers along the 2,000-mile frontier, so long will there be the possibility of help in some form, physical and otherwise, getting through to those Tibetans still in Tibet whose fighting spirit is high and whose conviction is that if only they can get arms they can do the same—and better—again.

Aberdeen.

December 1959.

³⁶ Resolution on the Question of Tibet, adopted on April 28, 1959, by the First Session of the Second National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, *Concerning the Question of Tibet*, p. 179.