

Analysis of the “leftist” problem of the Changsha peasant movement during the Great Revolution

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Abstract: As one of the most intense and typical peasant movement during the Great Revolution, the peasant movement in Changsha was a microcosm of the national peasant movement, and the study of the peasant movement in this region can provide a better understanding of the development of the peasant movement during the Great Revolution. This paper will take the peasant movement in Changsha during the Great Revolution as a case study, discuss the “leftist” problem of the peasant movement in Changsha during the Great Revolution, and on this basis, make a corresponding analysis of the reasons for the “leftist” behavior of the peasant movement in Changsha during the Great Revolution from the perspective of the Communist Party of China itself.

1. Introduction

The current academic research on the peasant movement in Changsha during the Great Revolution is relatively limited, and is mainly focused on macroscopic studies. For example, research on the peasant movement in Hunan province or a holistic study of the peasant movement of the Great Revolution, while research on the regional peasant movement in a small area is rare, and micro-local specialized party histories can better reflect the details of historical events. Therefore, the combination of macro and micro aspects of the history of the CPC can give the history of the Party a “freshness”. Academic research on the peasant movement during the Revolution has focused on the compilation of collections of data. The main ones are “The Peasant Movement in Changsha during the Great Revolution”, compiled by the Party History Office of the Changsha County CPC Committee and History Office of the CPC Changsha County Party Committee in 1989; “Changsha County Literary and Historical Materials - 2nd Series of the Peasant Movement in Changsha during the Great Revolution”, compiled by the Literary and Historical Materials Research Committee of the Changsha County Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in 1985. These two works are mainly a compilation of the original materials of the Changsha peasant movement during the Great Revolution, and the memoirs of the parties involved.

2. The “Leftist” Errors of the Changsha Peasant Movement during the Great Revolution

The beginnings of the worker and peasant movement in Changsha under the leadership of the Communist Party of China can be traced back to the founding of the Hunan Labor Union in November 1920, which was the beginning of a union between intellectuals and the workers and peasants influenced by the May 4th Movement. During the Great Revolution, the peasant movement in Changsha developed rapidly. During this period, the peasant movement launched by the Chinese Communists in Changsha achieved great success, but there were also undeniable “leftist” errors, and clarifying these problems will help us to learn the lessons of history more comprehensively and profoundly. As Changsha was one of the areas where the peasant movement was most intense during the Revolution, it is valuable to study the situation of the peasant movement in Changsha during this period.

The heightened peasant movement in Changsha during the Revolution powerfully combated the imperialist and feudal warlord forces in Changsha, promoted the development of the Northern Expedition and played a significant role in the development of the Hunan Revolution and the Chinese Revolution as a whole. But when the peasant movement developed into an unstoppable mass movement, we cannot deny that the problems of the “masses” were particularly prominent, such as “impulsiveness, impetuosity, lack of rationality, lack of judgment and judgmental spirit, and expansion of emotions” [1]. During this period, the errors were particularly prominent in several provinces where the development of the worker and peasant movement were relatively rapid. With the development of the worker and peasant movement in Changsha, the errors of the “leftist” in the movement became increasingly evident. In 1937 Liu Shaoqi wrote in a letter to Zhang Wentian: “Before 1927, we also committed the errors of ‘leftist’, especially in the worker movement, which I raised many times, we were criticized as opportunists. However, my opinion remains to this day, when the ‘leftist’ errors among the workers were serious in Changsha, Wuhan, Guangzhou and other cities” [2]. While we evaluate the major contribution of the worker and peasant movement during the Great Revolution to the development of the Chinese revolution, we also need to see the problems it had.

Some scholars believe that the failure of the Great Revolution was due not only to the rightist errors of the CPC Central Committee, but also to the “leftist” errors of the worker and peasant movement during the Revolution [3]. They believe that the “radical” and “excessive” behaviors of the peasant movement during the Great Revolution pushed some leftists or neutrals, such as the petty bourgeoisie, small landlords and revolutionary soldiers who were on the Northern Expedition, to the opposite side of the revolution, and this view is gradually accepted by historians. The “Attitudes Toward the Worker and Peasant Movement in Hunan”, adopted by the Politburo on May 25, 1927, clearly stated that a series of serious political problems had arisen due to the “leftist” behaviors of the poor peasants, “due to the ‘leftist’ behaviors of the poor peasants, such as the equal distribution of land and property, the arrest and fines of the landed gentry, the religious and moral revolution, the arrests and fines of the landed gentry, as well as the religious and moral revolutions concerning religion and morals, caused violent opposition from the petty bourgeois small landlords, especially the military” [4]. Many of the officers and soldiers of the Northern Expeditionary Army were of Hunan nationality, and most of the Second, Sixth, Eighth, Thirty-fifth, and Thirty-sixth Armies of the National Revolutionary Army were predominantly of Hunan nationality. The “leftist”

behaviors of the peasant movement towards the families and relatives of the Northern Expeditionary Army inevitably aroused the discontent of these officers and soldiers. In order to correct these “excessive” behaviors, the Kuomintang proposed and passed a bill to protect the officers and soldiers of the National Revolutionary Army at the 55th Executive Committee Meeting on April 28, 1927. The Central Committee Circulars No. 5 and No. 7 of the Peasant of documents also repeatedly issued circulars to correct the problem of the “leftist” in the peasant movement, which “concerns the future of the peasant movement, particularly for Hunan, Hubei and Jiangxi provinces, the ministry of peasants must guide the party groups of peasant associations at all levels, which must be effectively implemented without slackening!” [5]. These behaviors, such as “free arrest, wearing high hats, parading through the streets, dividing possessions equally, ordinary fines forbidding rice [from] leaving the border”, “ ‘moral campaigns’ such as the prohibition of smoking and drinking, and therefore also using coercive methods such as the eradication of tobacco”, “confiscation of property in the form of ‘average property’ and the writing of donations in the form of fines” [6]. What is more, “peasants banned from riding in sedan chairs”, “opposing the wearing of long gown” and “Fines for using old rituals for weddings and funerals” [7]. Yu Juanwu, former secretary of the Changsha Qingtai Township Branch of the Communist Party of China, recalled that there was also a struggle against “banning the breeding of chickens and ducks” [8].

The “leftist” behaviors of the Changsha peasant movement during the Great Revolution also included the phenomenon of overbroad crackdowns. In June 1927, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China issued “The Central Committee Circular No. 8 of the Peasant”, which stated that “no method or form of exclusion from the Party should be used in the peasant associations” [9]. In practice, however, peasant associations sometimes cracked down too hard on these party groups, for example, according to newspaper records of that time: “In the Huanghua City area of Changsha's Dongxiang Township, Liu Kaixiang and others organized the ‘Jiang hu Federation’, which assembled at the home of peasant Wang Tianguai of Fifty Township in District 16. The next day his family celebrated the occasion and ordered two tables to be set up for the feast. The matter was heard by the 16th District Agricultural Association, when the pickets were sent to disband, captured Liu Kaixiang and five others, two red flags of the party” [10]. The Changsha peasant movement also appeared to blindly deny tradition, according to newspaper records of that time: on May 14, 1927, the Changsha County Governor's Office wrote to the public law groups; set May 15 to burn the Confucius and Mencius Plaque in Changsha to purge the feudal relics, asking the public law groups to send representatives to participate [11]. Such a blatant rejection of Chinese tradition was bound to meet with strong resistance from some traditionally educated intellectuals and rural gentry, leading them to the opposite side of the revolution.

Obviously, the “leftist” errors of the peasant movement during the Great Revolution did exist and were proved to be wrong, and the “leftist” behavior in Changsha was probably typical of the whole country. However, since the peasant association had a high degree of prestige among the masses, few people dared to correct these mistakes seriously, so that they had even more far-reaching consequences.

3. Analysis of the Subjective Causes of the “Leftist” Tilt of the Changsha Peasant Movement

Apart from subjective reasons such as the Party's low theoretical level and infancy, which are

considered from the traditional historical point of view, and objective reasons such as the blindness of the mass movement. The fact that the number of Communist Party members and the development of Party organizations during the Great Revolution could not keep pace with the development of the peasant movement at a later stage, and that the CPC lacked absolute practical control over the peasant associations, were also two important factors that led to the emergence and development of "leftist" infantile behavior in the Changsha peasant movement during the Great Revolution, so much so that the CPC, even after discovering the problems, was still ineffective in dealing with the situation.

3.1 The Party development lags behind development of peasant movement

The development of the Party in Hunan during the Revolution was relatively fast compared to other provinces, but it was indeed far from adequate compared to the development of the peasant movement in Hunan, and we cannot deny the efforts of the CPC in this peasant movement. In the 1926 document of the Hunan Peasant Association, "The Present Strategy of the Peasant Movement in Hunan", the CPC already had a relatively deep understanding of the connection between the development of party organization and the peasant movement: "In the peasant movement, if we do not make efforts to develop the Party's organization, the result will be, on the one hand, the lack of the Party's leadership of the majority of the comrades, and on the other hand, the organization of the peasant associations will not be strong and the development of the peasant movement will not be rapid, and we may even have to incur some oppressions that can be avoided or should not be; on the other hand, because of the lack of Party members outside the peasant associations to provide support, the peasant associations will certainly be isolated in their actions" [12]. But according to the February 1927 "Plan for the Development of Organization Among the Peasants in the Hunan District of the Communist Party of China", "The number of our now organized peasant comrades, according to the January (i.e. January 1927 - author's note) count, is only seventeen hundred. While there are now two million organized peasants in Hunan, and ten million have risen up under the banner of the CPA. In this comparison, there are only one comrade out of a thousand" [13]. This was only half a year after the Northern Expeditionary Army entered Changsha, and the membership of the Hunan Peasant Associations grew from 60,000 to two million at that time, a rate of growth that had not been anticipated by the Communist Party of China at the time, and it was normal that the Party members and the Party organization were unable to exercise their full leadership of the Peasant Associations during this period of development. That is why in that document the Hunan District Committee proposed a rural party-building plan to meet the rapidly growing peasant movement in particular, which "called for the establishment of a branch in each peasant associations within two months, and one party member for every hundred members of the peasant association" [13].

The development of party membership and organization in Changsha was a relatively fast-moving one compared to the province, according to the "Hunan District Report" of May 1924, Changsha had 89 party members, including seven alternates [14], but was mainly engaged in industrial transport and urban mass work. Although by April or May 1927, the Changsha CPC grew to 979 members, and after the "Mari Incident", the Changsha Party still had 866 members after adjustments were made [15]. But this number was far from enough compared to the rapidly growing

peasant movement in Changsha, where more than 1,200 rural peasant associations with over 200,000 members were established around April 1927 [16].

Obviously, the development of the Party and the peasant movement during the Revolutionary period were incongruous, so much so that the documents of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China reflected the frustration with the Party's inability to do its part in the peasant movement: "The Party's organization among the peasants was not able in the past to do its leading role fairly well, and in many places, although it was able to have the struggle of hundreds of thousands of peasant masses, only a few comrades were active there, and [not] the Party organization is there to do its leadership role, and there are places that are organized by the Party but do not penetrate into the [masses], or are organized but do not work Therefore, everything that our Party does in the countryside [every time] feels like a lament of 'The survival of the regime is determined by man'" [17]. This made it impossible for the CPC to correct "leftist" errors in the peasant movement in a timely manner due to the limitations on the development of party members and party organizations, thus allowing "leftist" errors to develop deeply in the peasant movement.

3.2 The CPC lacks absolute leadership over peasant groups.

According to the traditional view of historians, the peasant movement during the Great Revolution developed rapidly under the leadership of the CPC, so the absolute leadership of the CPC in the peasant movement is beyond doubt. But during the Revolution it was the lack of absolute leadership of the Communist Party of China over the actual peasant movement that made it impossible to quickly correct these "leftist" errors, which the Central Committee had already noticed. One of the reasons for this was the imbalance between the number of party members and organizations and the number of peasant masses organized, as well as the lack of real control of the CPC over peasant association.

With regard to the leadership of the political groups in the peasant movement, we can see in August 1926 the publication of the "Provincial Government's Declaration on the Peasant Movement", and in the first point of this Manifesto it was emphasized that "the peasant associations are unrestrained and completely independent groups" [18]. Let's look at how the Hunan Peasants Association refuted the idea that "the association should be under the Party's command", "Read what the Premier said in the revolutionary government's manifesto for the peasant movement:Peasants wishing to achieve liberation from the above-mentioned oppressions should immediately form peasant associations, which shall be organized as completely independent bodies, free from all restraints" [19]. So during the Great Revolution the leadership of the Communist Party of China over peasant associations was lacking, at least theoretically, and this lack of theory in turn had a direct impact on the practical work of the Changsha peasant movement.

After the failure of the Great Revolution, the CPC Hunan Provincial Party Committee summarized the problems that had arisen before the Great Revolution by pointing out that "there was no penetration of the masses in the villages (rural peasants and township associations), For example, except for a few factories and trade union schools, the branches and the Party and League did not function, and therefore the Party's policy cannot reached the masses. Another example was that many mass struggles were mostly the individual activities of a few leaders, rather than the organized leadership of the Party" [20].

In June 1927, in the “Outline of the First Report of the Hunan Petition Delegation on the Chang Sha Incident”, it was mentioned that: “The Hunan peasant-labor movement started up too fast and inevitably had childish behaviors, so that the enemy took advantage of the situation to have his way, and the development of the Party was slower than that of the popular groups, so it lacked all leadership ability” [21]. Here is a more objective analysis of the subjective causes of the infantile behaviors of the peasant movement during the Great Revolution. It was precisely because the development of party members and party organizations, as mentioned above, lagged far behind the pace of development of the peasant movement, resulting in the lack of actual and absolute leadership of the CPC over the peasant groups and the spread of the “leftist” errors in the peasant movements.

The leadership of the Party in Changsha with regard to the peasant movement we can understand from the “Plan for Developing the Organization of the Party among the Peasants in the Hunan Region of the Communist Party of China” of February 16, 1927, the document pointed out the problem of the development of the peasant movement in Changsha, “only possessing the upper level, not being able to penetrate into the masses (For example, the local peasant associations, the district peasant associations are under our control; the district peasant associations have our comrades; the commune peasant associations have no one. Our orders can only go to the district, not to the township), was a bad phenomenon” [22]. And on April 15, 1927, Changsha County Party Branch published “The Party Department of Changsha County noticed the peasants for the Fifth District peasant Association dispute”, in which it was stated that “they (i.e. the Fifth District Agricultural Association of Hexi Township - the author's note) were deceived and exploited by the landed gentry, so much so that the peasant associations, which were supposed to be a family, almost fought each other. They summoned thousands of armed pickets, arrested the commissioner, and surrounded the county peasant associations demanding that the commissioner be shot” [23]. In this Changsha Fifth District Peasant Association dispute case, although the peasants are said to have been deceived by the landed gentry, the extent of the leadership of the Communist Party of China of the peasant association is something we can learn from it.

From the above analysis, it can be seen that during the Great Revolution, the Communist Party of China and the Kuomintang only played a leading and promoting role in the development of the peasant movement, sending a few members to mobilized the masses, established party organizations and peasant groups, but for many of these groups, they only remained in the leadership of the leaders of the peasant groups. These problems of the peasant movement during the Great Revolution are understandable for a party that was still in its infancy, and the experience of the peasant movement accumulated during this period provided valuable experience for the development of the peasant movement during the Agrarian Revolutionary War.

4. Conclusions

The peasant movement carried out by the Communist Party of China in the Changsha area during the Great Revolution was of profound historical significance. This article is intended to provide a deeper understanding of the local party history of Changsha during this period. During this period, the people of Changsha carried forward the revolutionary spirit of unyielding, self-improvement, hard struggle and fearless sacrifice, and carried out a vigorous peasant movement. But at the same time, we should also see the problems that arose in the course of this history, and

summarizing the experiences in this history is of great significance for the contemporary ruling of the Communist Party of China. After socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era, and the comprehensive deepening of reform has entered deep water area, it is all the more important for us to understand this period of history, to learn and carry forward the spirit of our revolutionary ancestors, and to work together to build China into a great modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious, and beautiful.

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