

2 The consolidation of power, 1949–53

3 Mao and the Party



Fig. 1 Mao Zedong announces the creation of the People's Republic of China, 1 October 1949. The group behind him includes Zhou Enlai, Lin Biao and Liu Shaoqi

In this chapter you will learn about:

- the ideology and leadership of Mao Zedong
- the role of the Communist Party in the new government
- the importance of mass Party membership in consolidating support for the regime
- the part played by mass campaigns against corruption and the bourgeoisie in consolidating the regime.

At a ceremony on 1 October 1949, from a reviewing stand on top of the Gate of Heavenly Peace (Tiananmen), Beijing (once the entrance to the imperial palace), Mao Zedong announced the founding of the People's Republic of China. Shortly afterwards, both the new government and the Communist Party would take over the buildings to the left and right of the Forbidden City, while the residential area to the south would be demolished to make way for Tiananmen Square.

■ The ideology and leadership of Mao Zedong Mao and Marxism

By 1949 Mao had established himself as the leader of the Chinese Communist Party. In the 28 years since he had joined the Party as a young activist he had developed his own, distinctive brand of revolutionary Communism. Over the years there had been many debates and divisions within the Party over ideological issues but, on many of the key issues, Mao's thinking had proved to be much more relevant to the situation in China than that of other leading Communists. This was largely because the leadership of the CPC in its early years had been in the hands of men who had been trained in revolutionary theory and practice in the Soviet Union. These '28 Bolsheviks', as they

were known, followed orthodox Marxist theory which emphasised the importance of the industrial workers – the **proletariat** – in the revolutionary class struggle that would lead eventually to a communist society. Their priorities, therefore, were to build a Communist Party membership in the cities among the workers in factories, transport industries and mines. Mao, on the other hand, argued that industrial workers were such a small minority in Chinese society – only 1 per cent of the population in the early 1920s – that they could never form the basis for a mass revolutionary party. Moreover, the Communist Party was driven out of the cities by Chiang Kai-shek's forces after 1927. Mao believed that China's peasants, mostly poor and exploited by the wealthy landlords, had the potential to become a revolutionary force. All that was needed for this to happen, in Mao's view, was for the Communist Party to work closely with the peasants and provide them with revolutionary leadership. Mao's strategy of concentrating on the rural areas proved to be the only realistic course of action open to the CPC in the 1930s and 1940s; it ensured first the survival of the Communist Party and later its eventual victory. It also helped to ensure that Mao emerged from the various power struggles within the CPC as the Chairman, and leading theorist, of the Party.

Key term

Proletariat: according to Marx, the working classes.

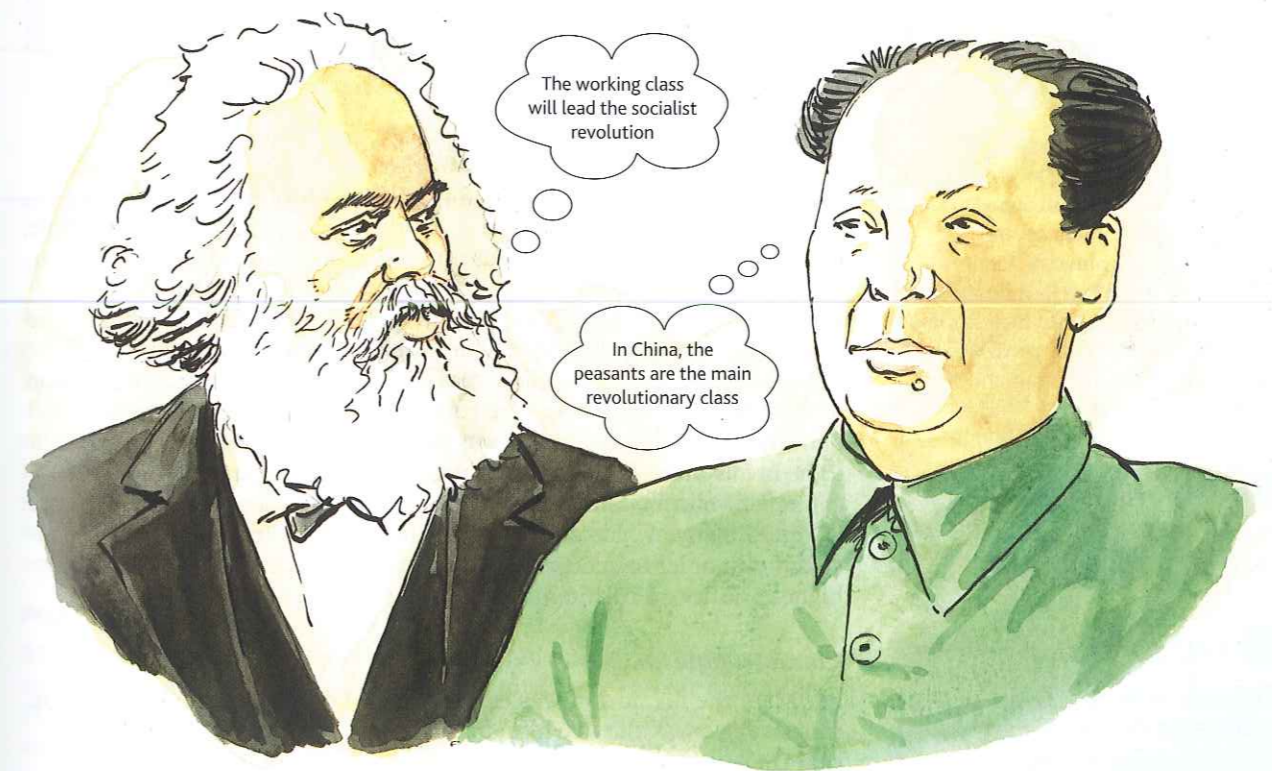


Fig. 2 Marx and Mao

Mao's position as Chairman of the Party was largely due to his role as the leading theorist. Mao Zedong Thought had become the official doctrine of the Communist Party. In government after 1949, Mao was not involved in the day-to-day making and implementing of policy. This he left to other leading Communists. He saw his role as being to lead and keep alive an ideological debate within the Party over the underlying principles on which policy should be based – what Mao referred to as the 'general line'. By dominating the ideological debate and periodically purging those people who were seen to be deviating

from the correct ideological path, Mao sought to control the Party and the government.

Mao Zedong Thought was a set of ideas that changed and adapted over time. Much of his ideology was based on Marxism but he adapted Marxism to Chinese conditions and added some ideas that were very much his own. The most important of these ideas were self-reliance, continuing revolution, class struggle, learning from the people and mass mobilisation.

Self-reliance

Mao was a Chinese nationalist as well as a revolutionary Communist. He shared with the Guomindang the desire for China to be restored as a powerful, independent nation because he had been deeply affected by China's humiliation at the hands of the Western powers and Japan during his youth. The revolution was fought to liberate China from foreign control as much as to free the people from **feudal landlords**. Once in power, Mao was determined that China should not be reliant on foreign powers. Although the communist government sought aid and advice from the Soviet Union in the 1950s, Mao was never comfortable with this unequal relationship and there were continuing divisions in the Communist Party over the extent to which China should follow the example of the Soviet Union in developing its economy.

Continuing revolution

For Mao, the revolution did not end when the Communist Party took power in 1949. Indeed, in many ways, the revolution was only just beginning. This was partly because, in the early years of communist rule, the class enemies – the landlords and the bourgeoisie – still owned most of the property in China and still largely controlled the economy. Mao also believed that commitment to the revolution's aims and values came largely through actual involvement in the revolutionary process itself; those who participated in violence against landlords and the confiscation of their property were more likely to fight to prevent a return to the old ways. Mao believed that it was essential for each new generation to be involved in revolutionary struggle, both to prevent the threat of a counter-revolution and to ensure their continuing support for the regime. Whereas many of Mao's colleagues believed that China needed political stability in order to achieve economic development, he always placed a higher priority on maintaining the revolutionary zeal of the masses.

Class struggle

For Mao, the revolution was essentially a class struggle and continuing this struggle was the key to maintaining the revolution. He believed that there was a danger that the Communist Party itself, once established in power, could become a new ruling class that could exploit the people in ways similar to the old ruling class. In power, communist officials would enjoy the benefits of rank and privilege that would detach them from the people they were supposed to serve. He therefore believed that the Communist Party needed to be periodically rectified, as had happened for the first time in the Yan'an Rectification campaign of 1942. During these campaigns, Party officials were subjected to **struggle meetings** at which they faced public criticism and were forced to make self-criticisms, after which many were made to undergo re-education by attending indoctrination meetings and working in the fields with the peasants.

Key terms

Feudal landlords: landlords in China had enormous power over their tenants (peasant farmers) through the collection of rents. Although this relationship was not 'feudal' in the European sense of the word (i.e. where peasants are bound in law to their lord), it became common practice for Communists in China to describe the landlord-tenant relationship as feudal in the sense that it was exploitative, unequal and outdated.

Struggle meetings: these were a method of putting anyone suspected of being in opposition to the regime under severe psychological pressure. Victims were forced to listen while their colleagues recounted their 'crimes' and were expected themselves to make full confessions and self-criticisms.

Cross-reference

For more information on the bourgeoisie, look back at page 22.

Exploring the detail

The Yan'an Rectification campaign

In this campaign Mao consolidated his leadership of the Party by forcing members, even at the most senior levels, to confess their past errors (of thought) and make a public statement of the correctness of Mao Zedong Thought. Many members suspected of 'errors' were publicly humiliated; some were tortured to confess their crimes, as a result of which a number died or committed suicide.



团结起来 争取更大的胜利

Fig. 3 A Chinese propaganda poster showing Chairman Mao's leadership. The slogan reads 'Unite all to obtain greater victories'

Learning from the people

Mao believed that the Communist Party should be embedded in the people; the Party should listen to the concerns of the people and learn from them. He also argued that the masses should participate in discussions on policy. In Mao's eyes, the people should act as a check on the power of the Communist Party, ensuring that its rule did not become dictatorial and unjust. Mao was determined that the Chinese Communist Party should not follow the example of the Soviet Union where the Communist Party behaved in a commandist way, issuing orders but not listening to the people's concerns.

Mass mobilisation

Mao argued that the Communist Party's main task in government was to mobilise the people in mass campaigns to achieve specific objectives. He had a firm faith in the essential goodness of the people and believed that China's millions, once mobilised and enthused with revolutionary zeal, could achieve anything. Mass mobilisation might be used, therefore, to carry out major works such as the building of dams or roads, the cultivation of areas not previously used for farming or even major industrial projects. Mao did not believe that managers and experts were the key to economic advance. Nor did he accept that people needed to be offered extra money to persuade them to work harder. Once the Party had convinced the people of the superiority of Socialism, he believed that people would willingly work harder for the greater common good.

Mao was the Chairman of the Communist Party and its chief ideologist. In a party as large as the Communist Party, however, it was perhaps inevitable that not every leading figure was in total agreement with Mao.

Exploring the detail

The Soviet model for economic development

As the USSR was the first country to adopt a communist system, Communists in other countries looked to the USSR as a model for their own development. From 1928, under Stalin's ruthless leadership, the USSR had embarked on a series of Five Year Plans that transformed it from a mainly agricultural society to a major industrial power. The plans placed a high priority on the development of 'heavy' industries such as iron and steel production, engineering and energy production. At the same time, peasant farmers were forced to abandon their small private plots and join large collective farms.

Activity

Revision exercise

Summarise the main ideas in Mao Zedong Thought under the following headings: Self-reliance; Continuing revolution; Class struggle; The role of the peasants; The role of the Party; Mass mobilisation.

There had been splits and divisions before the Communist Party came to power in 1949, and there would be many disagreements and debates once it was the Party of government. Mao sometimes experienced difficulty in getting his ideas accepted. In these circumstances he needed to fall back on another key aspect of his personality – his flexibility. For Mao, the key to his earlier successes had been his ability to work out what course of action would be best suited to a particular set of circumstances. Sometimes this led him to make tactical alliances with groups that could be useful to him. In the struggle against the Japanese he was prepared to cooperate with the Guomindang and even the landlords in order to build a United Front. Once the Japanese had been defeated, the priority changed and Mao concentrated on defeating the Guomindang in order to win power. He used the same tactical flexibility in his dealings with his own party. If one group of leading Communists were reluctant to follow his ideas, he turned to others, or even groups outside the Party, to get his way. For Mao, his ideological goals were fixed; tactics, however, were fluid.

The role of the Communist Party in the new government

The challenges facing the new government in 1949

In 1949, China's economy and its people were exhausted after years of war and conflict. China had been through decades of internal conflict culminating in the Civil War of 1946–9. In addition to this there had been eight years of war against the Japanese occupation. These years of conflict had left a damaging legacy for the new government:

- As peasants had been taken away from their farms to fight in these wars, agricultural production had fallen and food shortages were a serious problem in urban areas. Industrial production had also fallen.
- The nationalist Guomindang government had left a legacy of soaring inflation and the financial situation had been made worse by Guomindang officials taking all of China's reserves of foreign currency with them when they fled to Taiwan.
- Internationally, the communist victory had created a rift between China and the Western powers; cut off from trade and contact with the West, China's only source of foreign assistance was the Soviet Union.
- Internally, the new government was not yet in full control of all areas of China, particularly the outlying provinces and semi-autonomous regions. No government since 1911 had succeeded in breaking down the power of local warlords or overcoming China's deep social and ethnic divisions. If the new government were to succeed in its aim of transforming Chinese society, it would need to build a new sense of national unity in which the diverse elements of Chinese society were brought into line with the new political direction of the State.

In the short-term, the priority for the new government was to stabilise the economic and political situation and extend its control. It did this in a number of ways:

- Inflation was brought under control through strict regulation of the economy; public expenditure was cut, taxes were raised and a new currency – the renminbi – was introduced.
- The property of Guomindang supporters who had fled to Taiwan was confiscated by the State.
- All foreign assets in China, apart from those of the Soviet Union, were confiscated.

Did you know?

Ethnic groups

Most Chinese refer to themselves as 'Han' Chinese to distinguish them from other ethnic groups in China. Other minority ethnic groups in China include Manchus, Mongols, Uighurs and Tibetans.

Activity

Preparing a presentation

'In view of the scale of the problems facing the new communist government after 1949, the cautious approach taken by Mao was the only realistic policy.' Divide the class into two groups. One group should prepare a presentation in support of this proposition and the other should prepare a presentation giving an alternative point of view.

Exploring the detail

Political parties in China

The more important of these non-communist parties included the Revolutionary Committee of the China Guomindang (which had broken away from the main GMD), the China Democratic League, the China Democratic National Construction Association, China Peasants' and Workers' Democratic Party and the China Zhi Gong Dang. These, and other parties, are still in existence and participate in China's political structures. However, they were subjected to persecution during the purges of the 1950s and 1960s.

- The banks, gas and electricity supply and transport industries were nationalised.
- In three 'reunification' campaigns in 1950 and 1951, the PLA established central government control in three regions: Xizang (Tibet), Xinjiang and Guangdong.
- A new system of government was established in which the dominant position of the Communist Party was legitimised.

Although many of these measures were radical in themselves, the general tone of the new government's approach in its early years was one of caution. Mao made clear that the ultimate aim of the regime was to build a communist society in China but, according to Marxist-Leninist theory, China was not yet at the stage of development when Communism was possible. In order to develop agriculture and industry, Mao recognised that the communist regime would need the support of the 'national bourgeoisie' – the factory owners, businessmen and the intelligentsia. It was the educated middle classes who provided the personnel for government officials and factory managers. Therefore, Mao tried to build the new regime on a broad foundation and pursued policies that would not alienate potential middle-class supporters. For example, shareholders and owners of enterprises that were nationalised were given compensation as long as they were willing to cooperate with the regime. He was also prepared to tolerate the existence of other political parties: 14 parties (excluding the CPC) participated in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in September 1949. However, these parties were only tolerated as long as they did not threaten the CPC's grip on power.

In pursuing these policies, Mao was continuing and building on the 'general line' which, under his leadership, the CPC had been following in Yan'an since 1936. Under this policy, which Mao sometimes referred to as a United Front policy, he invited the national bourgeoisie and landlords to participate in building a new China under the leadership of the CPC.

A 'people's democratic dictatorship'

All the experience the Chinese people have accumulated through several decades teaches us to enforce the people's democratic dictatorship; that is, to deprive the reactionaries of the right to speak and let the people alone have that right. Who are the people? At the present stage in China, they are the working class, the peasantry, the urban petty bourgeoisie, and the national bourgeoisie. These classes, led by the working class and the Communist Party, unite to form their own State and elect their own government. Democracy is practised within the ranks of the people, who enjoy the right of free speech, assembly, association and so on. The right to vote belongs only to the people, not to the reactionaries. The combination of these two aspects, democracy for the people and dictatorship over the reactionaries, is the people's democratic dictatorship.

1

*Mao Zedong on the people's democratic dictatorship, 1949.
From Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*

The new system of government for the People's Republic of China contained three separate but parallel strands:

- The State bureaucracy at national, regional and local levels.
- The Communist Party at national, regional and local levels.
- The People's Liberation Army.

Exploring the detail

The 'New Democracy'

Mao referred to the system of government established in 1949 as the 'New Democracy'. It was based on the system he had adopted in Yan'an between 1936 and 1945. This system was based on the belief that China was not yet ready for a fully fledged socialist system and that a transition stage was needed to bridge the gap between China's old, semi-feudal system and the eventual establishment of a socialist system. As the working class (proletariat) were not sufficiently large or strong to rule alone, they would have to do so in coalition with other classes, which in China comprised the peasants, the petty bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie. These four classes constituted the 'people' and only the people could participate in the political life of the PRC and be granted any political rights. Other classes were called the 'five black categories': 'reactionary elements', 'feudal elements', 'lackeys of imperialism', 'bureaucratic capitalists' and 'enemies of the people'. These groups were classified as non-people, lacking any political rights but nevertheless subject to the laws of the State. They were to be repressed, punished or reformed.

Cross-reference

See page 49 for more on Zhou Enlai.

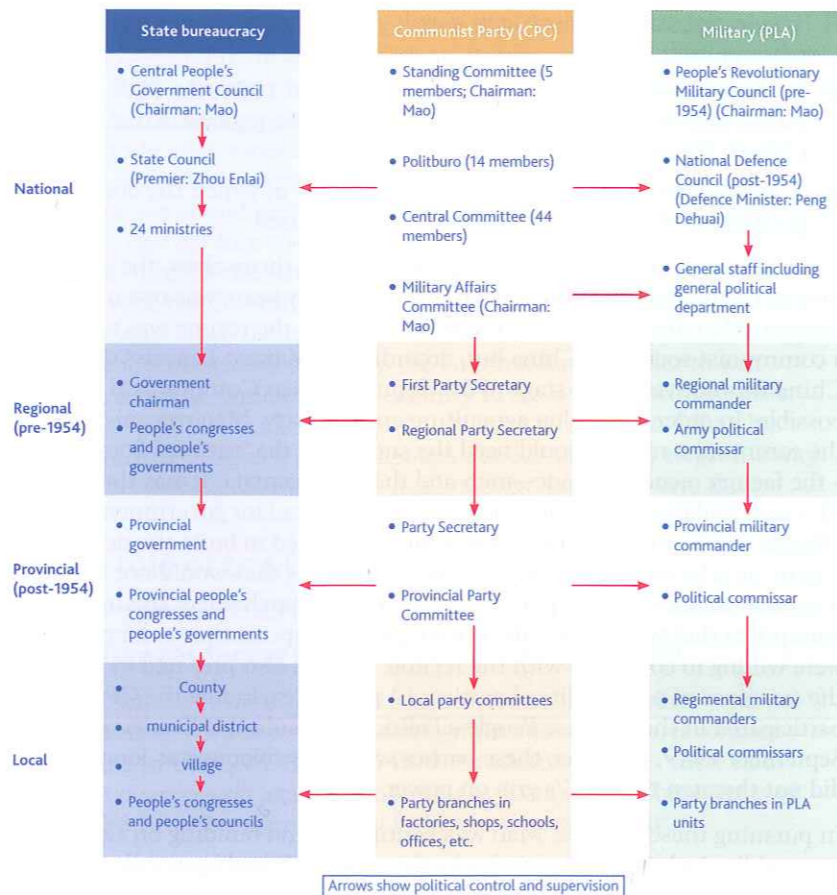


Fig. 4 Communist political control over the People's Republic of China

Figure 4 shows that the Communist Party was at the heart of the government structure in the new PRC. Leading members of the Party held all of the key posts in both the government and the PLA. All the important debates about policy and all the key decisions were taken by the Party's Standing Committee, itself a select group taken from the larger Politburo. At the apex of the whole structure stood Chairman Mao.

Below the level of central government, the Communist Party dominated the government of the provinces and local administration in towns and villages. Gao Gang, a Politburo member, was the provincial governor in Manchuria, a job he combined with being Party Chairman and military commander in the same area. Deng Xiaoping in the south-west, Peng Dehuai in the north-west and Lin Biao in the central southern region all combined political and military commands.

Key profile

Deng Xiaoping

The son of a peasant from Sichuan, Deng Xiaoping (1904–97) joined the CPC while he was in France in the 1920s on a work-study programme. He also studied in Moscow in 1926–7. He was a veteran of the Long March, a long-standing ally of Mao and served as a military leader in the PLA during the Civil War. By the 1950s he was recognised as a leading figure in the CPC hierarchy and became the Party's General Secretary in 1957.

Activity

Talking point

'Mao's system of government was more dictatorship than democracy and the people had no influence at all.' Discuss whether you agree or disagree with this view.

Key term

Cadres: people who had been fully indoctrinated in Party ideology and methods and were given leading roles at local level in administration and political education.

Exploring the detail

Elite vanguard party

The Russian revolutionary leader Lenin established the Bolshevik Party (later known as the Communist Party) as one that restricted its membership to those workers and intellectuals who had achieved a high level of 'revolutionary consciousness' i.e. commitment to the revolutionary cause. He argued that the revolutionary party needed to be disciplined and dedicated and that it alone could provide the leadership needed to carry through a successful revolution. The revolutionary party, therefore, would be in the 'vanguard' of the revolutionary movement.

In theory there were representative assemblies within this structure that brought a democratic element to the constitution. A Political Consultative Conference was held in 1949 to formally establish the new republic. Within the Party structure there was the national Party Congress that brought together representatives from Party branches from all over the country to debate policy issues and make decisions. However, this Congress met infrequently. After 1949, the next Congress was not called until 1956. Even when Congresses did meet, they merely agreed the policies that had already been decided by the Politburo.

Mass Party membership

Membership of the CPC stood at 4,448,000 in October 1949. By December 1950 this had increased to 5,821,604. In a country of about 500 million people, therefore, Party membership was very much the preserve of a small minority. Following the Leninist concept of an elite vanguard party, membership of the CPC was restricted to those who could demonstrate their commitment and ideological correctness. Within the larger membership there was an even more select group of Party **cadres**.



Fig. 5 Mao Zedong with members of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Committee, June 1950

Party cadres permeated all levels of government and administration, the legal system, schools and colleges and the PLA. Through them the CPC was able to ensure that both the governmental system and the armed forces were operating strictly in accordance with the political direction of the State. The CPC established branches in all aspects of national life such as factories, shops, schools, offices, neighbourhoods and PLA units. CPC members also took leading roles in various mass organisations including trades unions, the All-China Federation of Democratic Youth and the All-China Federation of Women. At a local level there were many 'mass autonomous organisations' through which the CPC sought to involve 'the masses' in its efforts to transform society. Urban neighbourhood committees, public security committees and people's mediation committees took on responsibility for matters of public health, policing and the resolution of disputes, all under the watchful eyes of the CPC and its cadres. These mass organisations channelled the energies of the Chinese people and encouraged a sense of participation in building a new and better society, but their activities were closely scrutinised and directed by the Communist Party.

At the base of the governmental pyramid in the new China was the *danwei* or work unit. Every employed Chinese citizen living in an urban area belonged to a work unit; those who did not work came under the supervision of a residents' committee. The work units, led by Party cadres, controlled the allocation of housing, grain, cooking oil and cloth. The work unit also issued permits to travel, marry, enter the army or university and change employment.

Party cadres enjoyed a privileged lifestyle compared to that of ordinary Chinese citizens. For those who had 'joined the revolution', the CPC functioned as a kind of family unit. In return for absolute loyalty to the head of the family, the Party provided for its members. Under a system known as the 'iron rice-bowl', party and government officials, employees of State-run enterprises and military personnel were guaranteed employment and an income for life.

The role of the People's Liberation Army

By 1950, the People's Liberation Army had become an enormous military force. With 5 million men under its command and its efforts to build a new air force and navy, spending on the PLA accounted for over 41 per cent of the total State budget. It was clear to China's communist rulers that, if China were to be able to afford to spend money on economic development, expenditure on the armed forces would need to be reduced. It was also necessary to release men from military service so that they could engage in productive work. Therefore, in 1950 it was decided to begin a partial demobilisation of the PLA, which resulted in a reduction in size to some 3.5 million men by 1953. Even after these cuts, however, the PLA still received 800,000 new conscripts every year, each man serving for three years. This meant that the PLA was still the largest army in the world. It also meant that millions of young Chinese men passed through the PLA's ranks, emerging after three years having been trained in warfare and indoctrinated in the ideology of the Communist Party.

The PLA occupied a special place in the mythology of the Chinese communist revolution. In the struggles against the Japanese and later against the Guomindang, the PLA's soldier-heroes had come to epitomise the revolutionary virtues cultivated by Mao: discipline, self-sacrifice, endurance and perseverance against overwhelming odds. These were

the virtues that Mao wished to instil in the Chinese population at large and PLA troops were held up as role models for others to emulate. These virtues were again demonstrated by Chinese troops during the Korean War (1950–3) when 'volunteer' units of the PLA fought against American, British and other international forces. The endurance and heroism of Chinese troops in Korea was celebrated by a number of films, plays and works of literature.

As well as having a propaganda value, the PLA could be put to more practical uses in China itself. As all military units had political commissars embedded with them, PLA troops were thoroughly well indoctrinated in communist ideology. Part of their role in the countryside was to pass on that communist ideology to the peasants. They were also put to work on many public works projects such as rebuilding bridges, roads and railways that had been damaged in the wars. Some demobilised PLA units were actually restructured for this new role. The First Field Army, based in Xinjiang, became the Production and Construction Army with the task of developing untapped mineral resources and agricultural land.

Mass campaigns against corruption and the bourgeoisie

Repression and terror were key weapons in the CPC's struggle to control the population of China after the formation of the People's Republic in 1949. At first Mao pursued a cautious policy in order to build and maintain a broad coalition of support. By the end of 1950, however, the outbreak of the Korean War engendered both a heightened sense of national unity and a feeling that China's revolution was under threat from both internal and external forces. This atmosphere, which was deliberately encouraged by Mao and the CPC, was used to justify more extreme measures against 'counter-revolutionary elements' and thus allowed Mao to move faster in his efforts to establish a dictatorship.

The machinery of repression used by the State included propaganda campaigns to isolate and shame the chosen targets, the police, the courts (although these were increasingly replaced by Communist Party committees), imprisonment and executions. A large network of forced labour camps (known as *lao-gai*, meaning 'reform through labour') was set up, much as had been done in the Soviet Union under Stalin. Under Mao's direction, repression and terror in China involved the whole population, using the same methods as those employed in the public health campaigns and land reform. A nationwide network of work units, street and neighbourhood committees was established to assist the CPC in its efforts not only to identify and punish all those suspected of counter-revolutionary crimes but also to exert control over the whole population.

By the summer of 1951, all Chinese citizens over the age of 15 had to acquire official residence permits from the police and obtain permission if they wished to move to another area. Every citizen came under the scrutiny of their neighbours and workmates and people were encouraged to inform on each other. Prostitution was virtually stamped out by 1953 through the work of street committees in placing brothels



Fig. 6 Mao Zedong delivers a speech at a workers', peasants' and soldiers' conference, September 1950

Activity

Thinking point

- By what means did the CPC control the following at all levels?
 - The system of government.
 - Chinese society.

A spider diagram showing the connections between the CPC and the system of government could help to clarify this.
- How did the CPC ensure continuing loyalty and commitment from its members?

Activity

Source analysis

Go to www.iisg.nl/~landsberger and find the section showing PLA propaganda posters.

- What image(s) of PLA soldiers are being presented in these posters?
- Using the posters and the information in this book, show how the PLA was used as a role model for civilians in the new communist China.

Exploring the detail

Labour camps

With advice from Russian experts, the regime established the *lao-gai* as prisons. Perhaps millions of Chinese were sent to these camps, which were often in harsh environments, for hard physical labour in the fields or mines. Harry Wu and Carolyn Wakeman (*Bitter Winds*, 1994) have estimated that there were over 1,000 camps by the late 1960s, whereas Chang and Halliday (*Mao: The Unknown Story*, 2006) have estimated that as many as 27 million people were either executed, committed suicide or worked to death in the camps.

Activity

Thinking point

What had been gained and what had been lost by Chinese citizens as a result of Mao's attempts to tighten communist control over Chinese society?

under surveillance; many prostitutes and their pimps were sent to 're-education' centres as punishment. Similarly, drug dealing and addiction was clamped down on; dealers were shot, addicts had their supply of drugs withdrawn and their families were made responsible for their future behaviour. Tobacco production was placed under a government monopoly and the population was encouraged to smoke cigarettes. Through ruthlessness and careful organisation, much of the crime that had plagued China's cities in the years before 1949 was stamped out and, in the process, the Communist Party increased its control over Chinese society.

There were four mass campaigns in the years 1950–2 through which Mao and the CPC pressed down on Chinese society.

The Resist America and Aid Korea campaign

After China and the USA become involved in the armed conflict in Korea in October 1950, foreigners in general and Americans in particular became identified as enemies of the PRC. Westerners who stayed in China became the targets of persecution. Many foreigners, including missionaries, were arrested and charged with being spies. Christian churches were forcibly closed, their property seized and priests and nuns expelled from the country. By the end of 1950, most foreigners, except those from the Soviet Union, had left China and the country once again became closed to Western influences. The campaign also targeted those Chinese suspected of spying for foreign powers. Any institution that had Western links, such as businesses, universities and churches, came under suspicion. Police searches led to the confiscation of radios and weapons kept at home, while mass rallies were organised to draw ordinary Chinese citizens into the growing frenzy of suspicion.

The Suppression of Counter-revolutionaries campaign

Launched in October 1950 and lasting for over a year, this campaign focused on the internal threats to the Chinese revolution. The definition of 'counter-revolutionary' included anyone who had had links with the GMD regime as well as 'bandits' (those in criminal gangs) and members of religious sects. With such a wide-ranging list of targets, large numbers of Chinese were denounced, investigated and punished. In Shanghai, for example, the authorities claimed to have uncovered evidence against 40,000 people; in Guangdong 52,620 'bandits' and 89,701 other criminals were caught, resulting in 28,332 people being executed in less than a year. Many of the executions were carried out in public to have maximum impact. Mao ordered his police chief to send reports on the progress of the campaign directly to him and he tried to exercise close control over the level of executions.

If we are weak and indecisive and excessively indulgent of evil people, it will bring disaster.

2

Chairman Mao, January 1951. From *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*

Persons who have to be executed to assuage the people's anger must be put to death for this purpose.

3

Chairman Mao, June 1952. From *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*

Key term

Assuage: Verb meaning 'to satisfy' or 'to make less intense'.

Activity

Source analysis

Study Sources 2, 3 and 4. What can we learn from these sources about the political value of violence in China in the early 1950s?

Cross-reference

See page 38 for more on the Yan'an Rectification campaign.

Mao intended most of the population – children and adults alike – to witness violence and killing. His aim was to scare and brutalise the entire population in a way that went much further than either Stalin or Hitler, who largely kept their foulest crimes out of sight.

4

Adapted from Jung Chang and J. Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story*, 2006

The Three-Antis campaign

This campaign was started in Manchuria in late 1951 and was then extended to the rest of the country. Its targets were corruption, waste and obstructionist bureaucracy and those in the firing line were managers, State officials and Party members. As with earlier campaigns, it involved mass meetings at which officials and managers were denounced, investigations by Party committees and the eventual humiliation of those found guilty. Following the methods used in 1942 in the Yan'an Rectification campaign, Party members were forced to subject themselves to self-criticism and face group pressure to 'rectify' their errors of thought or deed. The campaign succeeded in rooting out many of the corrupt practices which had been the norm in Chinese business and public administration, such as bribery and influence. Party members were given a sharp reminder of the dangers of independent thought.

The Five-Antis campaign

Launched in January 1952, this campaign was directed against the bourgeoisie. Its targets were bribery, tax evasion, the theft of State property, cheating on government contracts and economic espionage. Workers' organisations were enlisted by the Party to investigate their employers' business affairs. Group criticism sessions were organised for employers either to confess their own crimes or to denounce others. Mass meetings, of which there were 3,000 in February 1952 in Shanghai alone, were the scenes for public denunciations. Those found guilty faced enormous fines, the confiscation of their property and being sent to labour camps. Although executions were not a major feature of either the Three-Antis or the Five-Antis campaigns, many of those denounced committed suicide. It has been estimated that as many as 2 to 3 million took their own lives rather than face further humiliation.

The party's all-round intrusion into people's lives was the very point of the process known as 'thought reform'. Mao wanted not only external discipline, but the total subjection of all thoughts, large or small. Every week a meeting for 'thought examination' was held for those 'in the revolution'. Everyone had to criticise themselves for incorrect thoughts and be subjected to the criticism of others. The meetings tended to be dominated by self-righteous and petty-minded people, who used them to vent their envy and frustration. Meetings were an important means of communist control. They left people no free time and eliminated private thoughts.

5

Adapted from Jung Chang, *Wild Swans*, 1992

In the first four years after the communist victory in 1949, the Communist Party firmly entrenched itself as the governing party in the new People's Republic of China. At all levels and in all provinces

Activity

Talking point

'By 1953, China was well on the way to becoming a totalitarian regime.' Organise a class debate on this issue by dividing the class into two groups, one to speak in support of the proposition and the other to oppose it.

and regions (except Taiwan), the Communist Party established a firm grip on the government of China. Through the many mass campaigns the experience of participating in revolutionary activity was extended from the countryside to the cities and into all areas of Chinese life. In this way many more people than the relatively small CPC membership became committed to revolutionary struggle and the survival of the communist regime. Those who were not committed were repressed and terrorised to such effect that all signs of opposition had been eradicated.

Mao and the purges of the CPC: the purge of Gao Gang and Rao Shushi, 1953

In late 1953, Mao began the first major purge of leading CPC figures since the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949. The background to this purge was the launch of a Five Year Plan for the development of Chinese industry in 1953, which will be explored in more detail in Section 3. The decision to begin economic planning started a debate within the leading ranks of the Communist Party over the pace of the economic changes that the plan would bring about.

Gao Gang had become the leading CPC official in Manchuria in 1949, holding all four senior posts within the government, the Communist Party and the PLA in the region. With such a strong power base he was regarded as one of the CPC's rising stars and, in 1952, he became head of the Central Planning Commission which had responsibility for directing the First Five Year Plan. In the debate over the pace of change, Gao took the side of Mao and criticised Zhou Enlai and Liu Shaoqi for their more cautious approach. Believing that he had Mao's backing, and with the support of Rao Shushi (the CPC leader in the Shanghai region), Gao attempted to usurp the position of Zhou Enlai and become Vice-Chairman of the CPC. Alerted to Gao's intrigues by Deng Xiaoping (a leading figure in the CPC), Mao used the December 1953 meeting of the Politburo to accuse Gao and Rao of attempting to build independent kingdoms in their regions and of 'underground activities'. Early in 1954, Gao committed suicide rather than face humiliation and disgrace; Rao was arrested and died in prison some 20 years later.

Key profiles

Gao Gang

One of the few communist leaders with little formal education, Gao Gang (1902–54) was virtually illiterate but proved himself to be an effective organiser. After joining the CPC in 1926, he was the local Party leader in Shanxi province before the arrival of the Long March. During the Civil War, he was in charge of planning the economic recovery of Manchuria and with this experience he rose to become head of the Central Planning Commission in 1952.

Rao Shushi

Rao (1903–75) joined the CPC in 1925 and worked first as a youth organiser and then as a trades union organiser in Shanghai. During the Civil War, Rao was the political commissar of the Shandong Field Army. After 1949, he became governor of the East China (Shanghai) region and rose in 1953 to become minister in charge of the Party's organisation department.

Zhou Enlai

Zhou Enlai (1898–1976) was the son of a minor civil servant from Jiangsu province. He rose to become one of the leading figures in the government of the Chinese People's Republic. After a university education in Japan, Zhou returned to China and was involved in the May 4th Movement in 1919. He was sent to France in the early 1920s on a work-study programme for Chinese students and helped to found the European branch of the Chinese Communist Party in Paris. Returning to China, he became a political commissar at the Whampoa Military Academy in 1925. In the early 1930s, Zhou often sided with the official leadership of the Party against Mao but, after Mao's victory in the leadership struggle, Zhou 'made a religion of loyalty to Mao' for the rest of his life. An effective administrator, and with personal experience of living in Europe, Zhou became Prime Minister in the new government with a particular interest in relations with foreign powers. In Chinese politics he was regarded as a voice of reason and pragmatism within the Communist Party.

This episode demonstrated once again to the CPC's leading cadres that there were limits to the scope for debate within the Communist Party. Mao's position had been further strengthened whereas Zhou Enlai and Liu Shaoqi had been given a reminder that, in contrast to Mao, they were expendable.



Fig. 7 Chairman Mao, with other leading communists, at a meeting to draft a new constitution for the PRC in March 1954

Cross-reference

For more on Liu Shaoqi, see pages 34 and 99–101.

For more on Deng Xiaoping, see pages 42 and 99–101.

Cross-reference

For details on the purge of Peng Dehuai, see pages 86–7.

A closer look

Mao and the purges of the Communist Party

Mao had purged political opponents from the Party leadership on earlier occasions – for example, during the Yan'an years – and he would purge other opponents in the future. There would be another purge (of Peng Dehuai) in 1959. Mao would also engage in a long power struggle with Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping in the early 1960s, which would culminate in the Cultural Revolution of 1966. Purging opponents became a regular and necessary method by which Mao exercised his dominance over the Party.

Summary questions

- 1 How successful was the Communist Party in establishing its control over the lives of ordinary Chinese citizens in the years from 1949 to 1953?
- 2 How successful was Mao in dealing with challenges to his authority from within the Communist Party?

4

Reforming China

In this chapter you will learn about:

- the process of land reform and how this affected Chinese peasants
- how the Chinese revolution changed the role and status of women
- the progress made in establishing a system of universal education in China
- the progress made in improving public health.



Fig. 1 A propaganda poster, 'New books for the State farm', reflecting educational and propagandist work by the Communists among the peasants

As the train approached Chengdu in the early afternoon, [my mother] found herself increasingly looking forward to a new life there. She was twenty-two. At the same age, some twenty years before, her mother had been living as a virtual prisoner in Manchuria in a house belonging to her absent warlord 'husband', under the watchful eyes of his servants; she was the plaything and the property of men. My mother, at least, was an independent human being. Whatever her misery, she was sure it bore no comparison with the plight of her mother as a woman in old China. She told herself she had a lot to thank the Chinese Revolution for.

1

From Jung Chang, *Wild Swans*, 1992

As a young revolutionary student in 1919, Mao had concluded that in order to change China it was necessary to change society. To change society it was necessary to change the system and to change the system it was essential to take power. In 1949, with power in his grasp, Mao Zedong began to attempt to change many aspects of Chinese society.

The Chinese People's Political Consultative Committee, which had met in September 1949, drew up a Common Programme for China setting out an agenda for political, economic and social change. Article 5 of the programme guaranteed to all, except 'political reactionaries', the rights of freedom of thought, speech, publication, assembly, association, correspondence, the person, domicile, movement, religious belief and the freedom to hold processions and demonstrations. The programme promised economic change through land reform and the development of heavy industry. Social change was highlighted in two key clauses: the promise of equal rights for women and an end to their lives of 'bondage', and the emphasis on the need for universal, free education.