

## The Chinese Communes

With the announcement in August 1958 of the formation of People's Communes, the Chinese Communist Party launched perhaps its most determined effort to change the pattern of traditional life in the Chinese countryside, since it came to power over nine years ago.

The question of what are people's communes may perhaps best be answered by describing the situation as it existed before their formation. Then the basic political unit in China was the township, within which there existed separately a number of agriculture producers' co-operatives (collective farms), credit organizations, supply and marketing organizations, local industrial establishments, and so forth. All such organizations worked to a greater or less extent without reference to one another, although their interests naturally met in a number of cases and they were subject to a higher direction, either within the township or county, which limited their freedom of action. In the commune, all these organizations, both economic and political, are united under one centralized direction known as the commune management. Since most communes have borders identical with those of the township, the change-over is quite simple: the township people's council automatically becomes the management committee of the commune, and the management of the various financial, commercial, agricultural and industrial organizations now become committees either within the commune or responsible to it. The Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party described the communes as "all-round management of agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, side-occupations and fishing, where industry, agriculture, commercial exchange, culture and education and military affairs merge into one".

It has been reported that 99 per cent of China's 500,000,000 peasants have now been organized into more than 28,000 communes, with an average population of from 5,000 to 10,000 households.

The Communes, therefore, represent a concentration of all the political and economic activities of the basic unit of government in China into one organization under party control. The advantages of concentrating and increasing party control in a country where the problem of assuring political authority over the mass of the population is of paramount importance are, of course, obvious. At the same time, the communes present other important advantages to the regime by permitting the authorities more freedom in distributing labour between the various economic activities — agricultural or industrial — of the communes. The production brigades and production teams, into which the labour potential of the communes is divided, work in conformity with a "labour control plan" which determines the priorities to be assigned to the various demands for labour.

What has attracted the attention of the West is not so much the communes themselves, as the social upheaval which they imply. It is also suspected that the formation of communes has been regarded with a good deal of apprehension in the Soviet Union and the Eastern European satellites. Mr. Khrushchev was reported as saying to Senator Humphrey that they were a "reactionary" institution. More recently Mr. Mikoyan is reported to have said in the United States that the Soviet Union had itself unsuccessfully experimented with the commune system. The Soviet Union may be coming