

to the commanders. What we need is rather the opposite, that is to make the armies less attached to their commanders so that warlordism, which is a course to contemporary China, may in time be removed.

The above are but some observations of the significance Wang An-shih's reforms have for China in the present age, and the reasons why we devote this special number to a study of this great statesman of yore.

## Wang An-shih And His Time

By LIN YU (林幽)

IN contrast with the Latin proverb that about the dead there is nothing but good, the Chinese say that the time to pronounce the last word of a man's character is after his death (蓋棺論定). But of Wang An-shih for centuries after his death no one seemed able to give a final appraisal on his achievements. He is one of the historical figures, if not the figure, about whom people have held most widely divergent views. Some called him a mean little man, others proclaimed him one of the greatest statesmen China has ever produced. It is not the purpose of this article to settle such a century-old controversy, but to place him in the social background of his time in an effort to give a clearer understanding of the man and the origin of his reforms.

Golden means might have been the axiom of the Chinese in their personal conduct, but in the constitution of the government and the formulation of policies, Chinese history is replete with extremes, trying to escape Scylla only to fall into Charybdis. So it was that the Sung dynasty tried to avoid the pitfall of the Tang dynasty. Tang Tai-Chung boasted that he had won his throne on horseback (馬上得天下) and the constitution of the government in the Tang dynasty partook of a military character. China was divided into "Routes", each route with a military governor ruling supreme. It was these military governors who finally caused the downfall of the Tang dynasty. Sung Tai Chu, coming after the five short dynasties that followed the Tang and himself a general, who fished his throne out of the muddled water of the troublous times, fully realized the danger of such a system and proceeded, quite logically, to relieve his ablest generals of the command of troops, to centralize the picked troops in the capital, so that his descendents might not suffer the fate of the latter emperors of the Tan dynasty. He achieved his object, but he also got something which he did not bargain for. The national defence of the Sung dynasty against foreign aggression was weak. Several attempts at conquering Liao (the Kitans) ended in failure with the result that the government agreed to pay yearly a handsome sum and offer a huge quantity of silk to the Kitans. Also because of the weak national defence, the Hsi Hsia waxed strong and caused a good deal of frontier troubles, which proved another drain upon the national coffer. To make the matter worse, there were the practice of offering sacrifices to the Heaven, Taishan, etc. and the practice of making generous gifts, running into thousands of millions of cash, at each offering of sacrifice. The emoluments to members of the royal house amounting also to thousands of millions of cash each year helped further to exhaust the national treasury. So at the time of Jen Tsung, of the Sung dynasty, when Wang An-shih was serving as a

petty official here and there, the national treasury was all but bankrupt.

Not only were the state finances in a very precarious position, but also the people, especially the farmers, were hardly better off. At the beginning of the Tang dynasty, there was the nationalization of land. The government claiming ownership of the land parcelled out the farms to individual farmers when they became of age, and took back each farm at the death or old age of its tiller. Later this system decayed and private ownership set in. Because of the internecine warfare and troubled conditions, the taxes increased by leaps and bounds. Farmers suffered, while shrewd merchants profited by lending money to the farmers at exorbitant rates. Although the conscription of labor to serve the state was abolished in the Tang dynasty in lieu of a tax levied upon each individual liable to forced labor, yet the forced labor under another name was forced upon the helpless populace in the latter part of Tang dynasty and continued to the time of Sung. The early Sung emperors did nothing to remove such social evils, but were content with merely lessening the heavy taxation of the people, and even this did not prove a lasting thing, as the people were actually groaning under the burden of heavy taxation. In the words of Ssu-ma Kwang: "Once the crops failed, the farmers have to borrow money from the rich at 100 per cent interest [for a period from the sowing time till harvest], if the next harvest were no good, debts will be increased. Before all the taxes are paid, whatever earnings they had are gone, before the grains leave the field, and before the cloths leave the loom, they all already belong to others. They feed upon the bran and have not enough, they wear the coarsest materials and can hardly cover their whole bodies. All this, simply because they have been tilling the ground for generations, and do not know of any other way of making a living, do they stick to the farms."

Things were certainly desperate, and something had to be done to save the situation, lest the people and the government should both go bankrupt. Such was the situation when the new emperor, Shen Tsung, ascended the throne, and such was the situation that Wang An-shih was called upon to save in the capacity of a prime minister.

In order to assist the agricultural population, Wang An-shih instituted several innovations for the government. Chief among them were loans made to the farmers from the time of sowing to harvest at 20 per cent interest, making the government buy the surplus agricultural products to keep the price up at the time of abundance and sell them at the time of scarcity to keep the price down, and turning the government, in a measure, into

importing and exporting houses at different localities so that the products of one place might be exported and consumed in another place to the benefit of both the consumers and producers. All these projects were chiefly to relieve the stress of the people and incidentally to open up another source of national revenue. They also produced the effect of breaking up the privileged position of the traders and thereby aroused their opposition. The conscription of labor was done away with and was substituted by a tax. For the good of the farmers, irrigation systems were built. To even the burden of the farm tax, farms were squared and graded according to their fertility.

To strength the national defence, the yearly shift of the garrison posts of the different armies and the rotation of the command of the troops, two measures taken by the first Sung emperor to prevent the generals from turning the armies into personal tools, were abolished. The commanders were given a chance to establish personal contacts with their soldiers and made responsible for training them into more dependable troops. A system of local militia, known as *paochia* was instituted, and the people who were willing might also feed the horses provided by the government for mutual benefits. In time of peace the farmers who cared for the horses might use them, but in time of war the horses would be taken by the government for war purposes.

All these reforms may look harmless and even necessary in our eyes but they were disquieting to his contemporaries, for they, the scholar-officials, were rudely shaken out of their easy-going path of following traditions. In order to understand the nature of the opposition and the forces that worked against the new premier, it would be necessary to consider here briefly the traditional Chinese political philosophy.

These traditions, unlike the oscillating dynastic policies, permeated the Chinese political world through the ages, dating back from the three ancient dynasties and coming down right to the Ching dynasty. Since the Chinese emperor was the Son of Heaven, he was responsible to heaven alone. However, the political genius of ancient China was not to be so easily snubbed, it invented the *vox populi, vox Dei* (天聽自我民聽) principle. In Confucius' time this principle was transformed into the paternalistic conception of the government. These two basic Chinese political principles worked out in a number of practical colloraries in the time of Han, and were handed down from dynasty to dynasty as the inviolable traditions of the Chinese government till the close of last century. One of them was to tax the people as little as possible. The reason for this is self-evident and requires no explanation, but it must be said here that it was coupled with the scholar's disdain for money, or money-making. The need of money to run the government was admitted, but it was admitted as a necessary evil. Any increase of taxation was always opposed by the officials as "disturbing the people", something to be abhorred. This leads us to the second basic principle of Chinese politics, the *laissez faire* policy. Any state enterprise involving the conscription of labor was always strongly opposed by the officials as another instance of "disturbing the

people". Closely akin to the scholar's disdain for money was his abhorrence of undue emphasis on military strength. The maintenance of an army was regarded also as a necessary evil, something to be tolerated but never to be glorified. The reverence and aping after for the past must be put down as another force that permeated the Chinese politics. Though it might have no connection with the *vox populi, vox Dei* principle or the paternalistic conception of government, it is something distinctly Confucian, and Confucianism ruled supreme in China from Han to Ching dynasties. But how were the court and the emperor to know if the Heaven was pleased or not? Very simple. Any natural calamity ranging from a locust pest to an earthquake, or even an unusual natural phenomenon such as the appearance of a comet, clearly indicated Heaven's displeasure, and it was time for the emperor to issue edicts requesting the people to point out his mistakes!

In face of these traditions, Wang An-shih's reforms to enrich the national coffer and to develop a strong and efficient army with large reserves were radical indeed. They gave a big jar to the political continuity of China. Hence the scholar-officials who filled the ranks of the old party were dead against him. In this connection, a word of their petty cliques and intrigues, for which the Sung dynasty was notorious, may not be out of place. Such a sad state of affairs was brought about by the emperors. The royal house of the Sung dynasty, remembering how it itself obtained the throne, must have felt the danger of any official getting too influential, like Damocles and his sword, hence it encouraged the censor, whose duty was to keep a close watch on the court officials and to report their faults, when found, to the throne. Also, during the time of the five dynasties there was hardly any sense of honor or loyalty among the officials, naturally the early Sung emperors tried to discourage that, and the pendulum swung to the other extreme. The scholar-officials became over meticulous in their conduct, despising and criticising others who failed to measure up to their own standards, and so petty strifes cliques were formed, and intrigues abounded. Such was the court Wang An-shih had to manage, if he hoped to put through his reforms.

The emperor fortunately, was in favor of him, and in old China that decided everything. Nevertheless, a man of a less strong personality might have thrown up the job in face of the strong opposition and resistance coming from the agents who were supposed to carry out his reforms. But Wang An-shih was not to be so daunted. He carried the battle into the heart of his enemies' camp, with his three "not enough's": "Natural calamities are not enough to frighten us, public opinion is not enough to cow us, our ancestors were not good enough for us to follow." All these were unthinkable to his contemporaries, but he had, as always, facts and reasons to defend his case, and no one could gainsay him.

The battle did not end with mere declarations. From the very beginning both Wang An-shih and his opponents were appealing to "the ways of the kings of old" (先王之法), though they seemed to be using the same phrase with different connotations. By it Wang An-

shih meant to go back to ancient China, and there is no doubt that his attempt at making the farms square smacks of the ancient *chingtien* system. His opponents seemed to have meant by the phrase the ways of the kings only a few generations back. At any rate, Premier Wang set about giving new interpretations of the classics, and reformed the competitive examination system so that the candidates would not be "composing poems in time of national emergency," but writing essays finding solutions for the pressing problems of the day. By allying himself with the influential families and by this reformed system of competitive examination, Wang An-shih gradually built up his "new party". It must be pointed out to his credit that he did not resort to the mean tactics of sending his opponents to the distant places like criminals, a practice quite common among both the new and old parties after Wang's time. The officials who opposed him were demoted in rank and given "good positions" in the provinces. In other words, he dealt with his opponents gently but firmly.

On the other hand, his opponents fought and defeated him with one of the tools he so much scorned at. It happened that there was a drought. One of his enemies painted a pitiable picture of the famine refugees and presented it to the emperor, and it was suggested that the new regime, displeasing to the gods, was responsible for the drought, which in turn was responsible for the suffering of the innocent folks. That was, of course, a ruse, but the emperor's faith in the new regime was shaken. He issued edicts cancelling the reforms and it rained! When the leaders of the new party succeeded in convincing the emperor of the folly of abolishing the reforms, he then re-instituted them, only the opposition was so strong that he had to remove Wang from the premiership, though it was awarded to him again on the following year.

Wang An-shih's strong conviction of the workability of his reforms was born of experience. He was, at the age of 27, appointed magistrate of Chin District (Ningpo). For

four years during his tenure of office, he tried out the schemes of granting government loans to the farmers and of building dykes for irrigation purposes, etc. After his term of magistracy, he served as an official and even as a judge at different places. In 1058, at the age of 36, he presented a memorial to Emperor Jen Tsung on the state affairs and the necessity of reforms, but without any result. Two years later he memorialized the emperor once more and with the same result. With the ascension of the new emperor, Shen Tsung, to the throne in 1068, the career of Wang An-shih took a bright turn. In the first year of Shen Chung's reign Wang was invited to discuss the state affairs with him, and in the following year was made prime minister, a post which enabled him to carry out reforms. He remained in that post for about seven years with the brief exception of less than one year in 1074-75 as already mentioned. When he was finally relieved of his duty in 1076, his reforms were carried on by his supporters. In 1080, he was honored with the title Ching Kuo Kung (荆國公). Born in 1021 in Linch'uan, Kiangsi, he died at the age of 66 in 1086, to see in that last year of his life most of his reforms abolished by the Empress Dowager and the new prime minister.

Wang An-shih was one of the most misunderstood persons in the Chinese history. Even Chu Hsi, the great commentators of the Chinese classics criticized him, with the full force of traditional political philosophy, for devoting his talent and energy to improve the government finances and the fighting strength of the troops! However, towering above such misunderstandings emerged the man, a stark realist, original, courageous, eloquent, self-confident, and with the pugnacity of a bulldog. Great statesman as he was, equally great was he as a man of letters. His contemporaries often denied him statesmanship, but none ever denied the literary excellence of his writing. As a statesman he is again coming to his own. The greatest tribute to him was paid by Liang Chi-chao, who painted a full length portrait of him as Carlyle did of Cromwell.

## Wang An-shih's Reform Measures

(Contributed)

THE rise of Wang An-shih to power dated from 1069, that is, the second year of Shen Tsung's (神宗) reign. From then to 1076 he succeeded in putting his ideas into concrete form in a number of measures which were known as New Laws. These measures were designed to meet the present needs of the day, which were threefold, namely financial reconstruction, national defence, and educational reform. In the following a brief outline will be given of the measures proposed by him:\*

### I. Economic Reforms.

(a) The Agricultural Loans Measure or "The Grain Sprout Money Measure." (青苗法). In the times of the Sung dynasty, the farmers were dependent upon the money-

lenders for loans and as a rule, exorbitant interest was charged by the latter for the money lent. It was with the main object of relieving the rural people of this burden that the Agricultural Loans Measure was framed.

Briefly put, the scheme comprised the conversion of the stores of grain in the government granaries into a capital fund, which was to be available for distribution to the people at the rate of two per cent per month or twenty-four per cent per annum. These loans were to be distributed in the spring and to be repaid in the summer and autumn. The rate of interest charged seems enormous to us now, but it was a very much lower rate than what was charged by the monopolists, against whom the measure was directed.

(b) The Public Services Act (募役法). The main idea of this act which is known in Chinese as "Mu Yu Fa" was that certain services which had hitherto been rendered by the people to the officials as part of their obligation to the

\*For the analyses of some of the reform measures, and also for many quotations used in this article, the writer is indebted to Dr. H. R. Williamson, author of "Wang An-shih," published by Probsthain, London.