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TWO MILLIONS

Po Yi-po, Minister of Finance and one of the chief dignitaries of the Peking Government, has written an arresting article in the Cominform Journal of September 26. He gives an estimate of the number of their opponents executed by the Chinese Communists. Revolutions are not made with rosewater; people like Fouquier-Tinville did not express any hypocritical dislike of bloodshed; Lenin and the Bolsheviks publicised their use of terror in order to cow the opposition. But Governments are usually reticent about the precise number of people they have killed: even the Nazis did not like the statistics to be known. Countries at war may boast of the armies they have destroyed, but this is the destruction of foreign enemies, not of their own subjects. Who has ever before made a statement, in print and on cool consideration, like this of Po Yi-po?

In the past three years we have liquidated more than two million bandits. Bandits are non-existent in China now, and the social order has become stable as never before.

"Bandit" means anybody who possessed a little land ("the landlord class," says Po, has been "eliminated") or who was disliked by the Communists. This is the first public admission by a member of the Chinese Government that the Communists have killed, by execution and not in battle or as the consequences of civil war, 2,000,000 of their subjects. Since Tamburlaine, what Government would have gloried in it? Clearly the Chinese Communists are great hunters of men. This statement is made in a city which is not only the administrative capital of China but is the New Jerusalem for many fanatics and some idealists throughout Asia; and it comes at the moment when a Communist "peace" conference is being held in the same city, part of whose show is the parade through the streets of Buddhist monks with doves of peace in their hands. How will it be received by the outside world, and what will future British visitors invited to Peking say to their hosts? Perhaps the Chinese have doubts. The New China News Agency in reporting the article left out Po's figures, but they were broadcast by Peking radio, and appear in the Cominform Journal. "The social order has become stable as never before," says Po. "As never before" is the right phrase. The Nazis in their extinction of the Jews and the Russian Communists in their slaughter of their opponents took far longer.

Two Million

A number of readers have written about the interpretation to be placed on the statement by Po Yi-po, the Chinese Communist leader, on the "liquidation" of two million "bandits." His statement, as we quoted it, was taken from an official Communist source, the organ of the Cominform, published in Bucarest in English. To this Po Yi-po contributed a very long article on "Great Achievements of the People's Republic of China." Here the paragraph ran:

In the past three years, we have liquidated more than two million bandits. Bandits are non-existent in China now, and the social order has become stable as never before.

Several readers write to challenge the assumption that "liquidation" here means extermination. It is compatible, they argue, with the kind of self-improvement conducted in the labour camps, or even with the simple life of dispossessed landlords at home. Po Yi-po's pronouncement was, however, also given over the Peking official radio. Here it took the following form:

In the past three years we have liquidated more than two million bandits and controlled a large number of counter-revolutionary secret agents. Now the bandits are all dead. An unprecedented security in social order is prevalent.

That is a pretty definite assertion. A distinction is drawn between "liquidation" and "control"; the "liquidated" are now "all dead." It is interesting that the New China News Agency in transmitting Po's pronouncement left out his figures. Perhaps they were thought to be too horrifying. One reader, who is concerned about the effect on trade of the disclosure of what the Chinese Communists say about themselves, says he "cannot remember one mass public execution since the new regime came to power." His knowledge of the Chinese revolution must be extremely limited, or his memory very short. If he will turn back to the newspapers of twelve months ago he will find abundant evidence. Two or three typical figures may be recalled. The Deputy Governor of the province of Canton announced that in the nine months October, 1950, to August, 1951, there had been 28,322 executions in that province. An official report to the Kwangtung Provincial Assembly gave a total of 28,000 executed. In Nanking about five hundred death sentences were reported; mid-December figures for Shanghai gave 2,019 as executed; and so on. There is no question whatever about the reign of terror that existed all over China in 1951. Why British apologists for the excesses of the revolution should be more squeamish than Po Yi-po is baffling.