

## CHAPTER 20

### The Sino-Soviet War Brings Increased Oppression

THERE HAD BEEN ideological differences between China and Russia for some time when, in 1969, confrontation flared up on the border and, at Chenpahao island in China's northeast, heavy fighting broke out. Russia had one of the most powerful armies in the world and in terms of strategy, training, or any other aspect it outmatched China, so Tibetans had high expectations of the outcome. Of course no one likes war, and especially for us Buddhists the hope of gaining anything from armed conflict is totally unwarranted, but the Chinese were perpetrating unbearable cruelty on the Tibetans after successfully occupying our country unopposed by the international community, and with no other means to prevent our being wiped out altogether, we were desperate.

It goes without saying that the outbreak of war meant greater oppression for ordinary people on both sides: Mao Zedong's slogan for the crisis was, "Dig deep tunnels, stockpile grain all over, the enemy shall not pass!" and after that grain became even more tightly controlled than before, and people everywhere had to dig underground tunnels and shelters for war preparedness. In most places in China the soil has a high clay content, allowing for tunnels to be easily dug without the risk of collapse or, unless they are extremely deep, water seepage, and because of that the Communist guerrillas were able to dig tunnels during the war of resistance and inflict defeats on the Japanese. But Tibetan soil is different, and at least in the Lhasa area it is mixed with gravel and sand, a composition that does not allow for the digging of tunnels like those in China; if you dig deeper than one or two yards your hole fills with water, which makes things even more difficult. The Chinese government, however, paid no heed whatsoever to soil composition, and under the rubric of "Four Unities," "unity of planning, unity

of command, unity of action, and unity of pace,” they made people in Tibet dig tunnels like everyone else, causing great misery.

In the case of Lhasa city, the hardship imposed on the people differed greatly according to the disposition of the neighborhood committee leaders. For example, our Banak-shöl leaders regarded the digging of tunnels as a matter of appearances only, and were satisfied with having the “class enemies” dig under vegetable gardens and patches of vacant land in the neighborhood, without causing much harm to people’s dwellings or livelihood. In the Shöl neighborhood committee, by contrast, they imposed great hardship by having both ordinary people and “class enemies” work many days without payment digging tunnels at the foot of the Potala palace, and used large amounts of explosives in doing so, and because of those explosions cracks opened in the palace walls, which have had to be repaired recently. In the Kamdong Tro-khang neighborhood committee in east Lhasa, they had the “class enemies” dig a kind of burrow running underneath the houses, with a central entrance passage, for which many people had to move out of their houses, and most houses lying along the route of the tunnel were damaged. The “class enemies” were conscripted to work on that continuously for several months, which prevented them from earning their living, and constantly working in muddy water seriously affected their health.

Once the tunnels were dug, they held air-raid drills, signaled without warning by sirens in the TMD compound, when everyone had to take shelter. We had to behave strictly according to the organization and code of discipline enforced by our neighborhood committee or work cooperative, and were told that any infringement of this code of discipline would be treated as a military matter. Those drills were sprung on us in the middle of the night on several occasions. Since there were strict orders for everyone to participate, even the bedridden and women in advanced stages of pregnancy had to go into the shelters. It was winter as well as being night, it was wet inside the tunnels, and we had to remain there for about two hours at a time, so many people became ill as a result. But gradually, the Sino-Soviet border war that had raised our hopes was heard of no more.

Not long after, in January 1970, a group of military commanders including the TMD commander, Zeng Yongya, TMD political commissar, Ren Rong, a few leaders of the central government Tibet Work Committee who had survived the purges of the Cultural Revolution, and leaders of the two factions established the Tripartite Revolutionary Committee (*Phyogs gsum mnyam sbrel gsar brje u yon lhan khang*). When the leaders selected their preferred appointees to head the organization, it was believed that most of

them favored Ren Rong for the top post, but in any case that appointment was seen as a potential cause of fresh unrest. However, when the committee was inaugurated, it was General Zeng Yongya, the candidate supported by the Gyenlok faction, who was appointed leader by the central government, which surprised everyone. In fact, this was a maneuver by Prime Minister Zhou Enlai, the head of the central government's Cultural Revolution Subcommittee, intended to prevent the Gyenlok, who had suffered setbacks like the military assault, from feeling excluded and starting more trouble. Once the revolutionary committee had been established and the organizational strength of the two factions had naturally dissipated, Zeng Yongya was appointed elsewhere in mainland China and Ren Rong took over.

Gradually, so-called "military representatives" were sent to all government offices, factories, and people's organizations to look into the cases of murder, as well as "beating, smashing, and looting," allegedly committed during the years of turmoil, and those judged responsible were withdrawn from their positions and detained in groups called "reeducation classes" where they faced investigation and castigation. One group was sent to the Kongpo-Powo region, where they were detained for several months and subjected to such an unrelenting inquisition that the more sensitive among them could not bear it and committed suicide. Meanwhile, the Chinese central government issued a new ordinance, as will be described.