

## CHAPTER 30

### “Socialist Transformation”

IN 1974, WHILE a campaign called “Cleaning Up Class Categories” (*Gral rim dpung khag gtsang bsher*) was being carried out in official organizations like government departments, schools, and factories all over Tibet, ordinary people had to participate in a campaign called “Socialist Transformation” (*sPyi tshogs ring lugs kyi bsgyur bkod*). This involved ascertaining the class categorization of citizens on the basis of their former income, and further collectivizing and cooperativizing economic and productive activity. It appeared gentler than the other political campaigns, for there were no slogans calling for the assault and downfall of offenders, but in reality, although less visible, it was no less aggressive. It caused dissension within households and destroyed trust even between parents and children, resulting in a state of mutual suspicion.

After the Democratic Reform of 1959, people all over Tibet were divided into many different class categories on the basis of their former income. In Lhasa, there were six categories: former ruling class, ruling class deputies, big traders, middle traders, small traders, and the poor. Later on, those who suffered during the Cultural Revolution had been given other labels such as “spirit monster,” even if they belonged to the poor class category, and categorized politically on an individual basis, which further distanced people from one another within the Tibetan community. Although nearly twenty years had passed since the introduction of all these labels to facilitate official control of the population, they were still considered temporary and had yet to be fixed definitively.

Thus, for the recategorization carried out under the Socialist Transformation campaign, people had to give proof of their status in the interest of their own future prospects, and if the individual concerned was not present

at the relevant meeting a decision would be taken on the advice of the local subcommittee to which the individual belonged, and no appeal would be heard. Thus, the campaign began with a general meeting calling on all those concerned to attend. Normally, political meetings were attended by the leading officials and activists, and the "class enemies" under the control of the "proletarian dictatorship," while ordinary people regarded them as a burden to be avoided as much as possible; those who did come sat out of the way in the corner or at the back, where they could not be seen, and it was extremely difficult to get everyone there on time. But the meetings during that campaign were better attended than ever; everyone arrived on time and did their best to get a seat near the front. This was because of the announcement at the initial meeting that each person had to make their own claim, and it was said that even people who had not showed up for compulsory labor or political meetings since 1959, while their children or relatives covered for them, came to those meetings in person.

As for the procedure for ascertaining class categories: in our case, the Banak-shöl area [neighborhood committee] was composed of 18 local subcommittees, arranged into three groups of six subcommittees each for meetings led by the officials running the campaign and a few representatives from the neighborhood committee. First, every citizen was called on to give a detailed account of their assets and livelihood prior to the imposition of Communist rule, so, for example, those who were traders had to say how much capital they had, what kind of business they did, and what fixed assets such as property, vehicles, or production tools they had. Then the total value was estimated, and if it exceeded 5,000 *yuan* they were considered "capital investors" and were classified as either "big" or "middle" traders according to their assets. All members of families formerly in government service were categorized as "ruling class," whether or not they were the head of the household, while in other cases only the leading members were considered family representatives and categorized that way. Thus, because of the fear of being saddled with "ruling class" status, there were many disputes in each subcommittee, even among close-knit families, over who should take responsibility as head of the household, with mothers putting responsibility on their daughters and sons and daughters-in-law putting responsibility on their parents, and so on. The most prominent such cases were said to have occurred among the members of the Gyantsé Tsongkhang and Tsona Tsongkhang families under the Tromsi-khang neighborhood committee.

In the case of my own family, we were considered a "ruling class" household that had participated in the uprising. Before that, my uncle the

chief secretary, my elder brother the palace steward, and I had been in government service; thus although I was not the head of the household, it went without saying that I was categorized as a member of the "ruling class." My elder sister Losang Chönyi-la had been arrested during the uprising and imprisoned, and since her release had been included among the "ruling class" for the purposes of compulsory labor and political meetings, but as she had previously been a nun at Tsamkhung Gönpa and had less standing than the other children and no particular responsibility in household affairs, we hoped that she might be reclassified under the slightly less onerous category of "ruling class offspring" (*mNga' bdag bu phrug*). However, as the purpose of that campaign was to maximize the "class enemy" label in order to facilitate the oppression of the Tibetan population, my sister remained in the "ruling class" category and continued to suffer the torment of "labor and thought reform."

Anyway, during the Socialist Reform campaign Lhasa citizens were divided into nine class categories:

1. All former government servants, lay and monastic, were "ruling class" (*mNga' bdag*).
2. Those who had served in the palace or Shöl bursaries, or as the stewards, bursars, or estate managers of local governors and noble families, were "ruling class deputies" (*mNga' tshab*).
3. Those who had owned fixed or liquid assets in excess of 5,000 *yuan* were "capital investors" (*Tshong las ma rtse can*).

These three were the actual target of the so-called "Dictatorship of the Proletariat."

4. Traders with assets worth less than that amount were "middle traders" (*Tshong 'bring*).
5. Self-employed people such as artisans were "workers" (*Ngal rtsol pa*).
6. Oracles, fortune-tellers, and religious mendicants were "religious workers" (*Chos las pa*).
7. Beggars, pimps, prostitutes, and so on were "vagrants" (*Mi 'khyams*). These four categories were also required to do "reform," but were called "those to be won over through education."
8. Stall holders with very little capital were "petty traders" (*Tshong pa nyi tshé ba*).
9. Former servants and wage laborers were "poor citizens" (*Grong mi dbul phongs*). These two alone were regarded as supporters or suitable allies of the Communist Party.

In addition to these categories, there were also "ruling class offspring," which meant that a total of 70 percent of the city's population were given labels that qualified them for condemnation and servitude. Once these had been entered on their residence papers, members of the targeted "ruling class," "ruling class deputy," and "capital investor" categories had to undergo "comparative assessment" of their performance of "labor and thought reform" at the six combined subcommittee meetings, and subjected to struggle accordingly. At first, individuals had to give a detailed account of their own achievements or failings in "thought reform"; they were then challenged, criticized, or refuted by the "masses" and assessed on their performance in regard to three points: whether they had obeyed the laws, whether their attitude to reform was correct, and whether they had committed fresh offenses. This was recorded in their personal file.

At that time I was summoned from the power station work camp in Tölung to a comparative assessment meeting in Lhasa. The group of "class enemies" who had been assessed before me had been accused of some trifling infractions, exaggerated ones at that, and undergone interrogation and struggle every night for four or five days before their cases were decided, so I prepared myself to face several days of inquisition and accusation. The meeting to assess my case was attended by about fifty people, including a female official called Yangdzom. Unlike in the struggle meetings of the past, I did not have to stand bent over and was allowed to sit on the ground, but during the interrogation they cursed and shouted at me no end, just like before. I made a short address to the meeting, saying that I recognized that my earlier way of life had been mistaken, and that with heartfelt gratitude to the Communist Party for giving me the opportunity to make a new man of myself I was sincerely engaging in "labor and thought reform," and that the people's criticisms of whatever faults and errors I had not recognized so far would help me to fully reform my outlook. At that, some people in the crowd called out that I made it sound like I had committed no errors at all in "reform," and if that were so there would have been no point in summoning me to this meeting, that I was not speaking honestly, and many other things.

The specific accusation against me came from a woman activist from the neighborhood committee called Tséring Lha-mo. Sometime earlier, when "class enemies" from all over Lhasa had been summoned to do unpaid labor on the construction of an ornamental pool in the "Lhasa Cultural Palace," she had been our supervisor, and because at that time I had carried earth and rock together with a "hatted reactionary" under the same

neighborhood committee called Kunsang Rikdzin-la, and we had spoken together, she pressed me to confess whatever false rumors and bad talk we had indulged in. I replied that we had just been chatting and had not said a single word against the Party or the people's government, and that since Kunsang Rikdzin was here she should please ask him for herself, but without stopping to listen, she insisted that I was refusing to confess and that the assessment meeting would not be concluded until I did. She expected this to lead to several days of struggle against me, but the official Yangdzom told me to think about it carefully that night and give a clear account the next day, and with that the meeting came to an end.

The next day, expecting the matter to be taken further, I waited apprehensively to be called into the meeting, but I was not called and another "class enemy" went in for assessment. By that time, the campaign was being wound down, and as in all the Chinese campaigns, it was strict to begin with and more lax at the end. During One Smash and Three Antis, for example, people were executed even for small things at the beginning, but toward the end there were some more serious cases punished with imprisonment or "hatting" and compulsory labor. Anyway, not only did I get away with just one evening meeting of interrogation during comparative assessment, but because the only incident I had been involved in since my release from prison was preparing a plate of buttered *tsampa* one new year's day, the committee's assessment of my reform record put me in the group of those who had obeyed the laws. Nonetheless, for about six months following that campaign, all "class enemies" had to undergo a fresh imposition of strictures similar to those imposed on "hatted reactionaries" before the process of assessment was over.