

understood better than he? Rumour has it so. In any case, Fei was given a place on various government boards and committees. But he was kept out of the villages, which in the past he had studied so intensely.

IT IS now almost five years since the Communists established their rule over the Chinese mainland. Everywhere they initiated their régime by distributing land to landless and poor peasants. The beneficiaries of this policy formed a corps of political activists that enabled the Communists to establish tight control over the villages. But power for some does not mean welfare for all. In his essays of 1947-48 Fei stated that the redistribution of the land would benefit the new landholders only if they could keep a larger share of their crop than they had done under conditions of tenancy. Did this happen after the Communists came to power? At the very beginning, it may have. The Communist land tax was probably lower than the rent ordinarily asked by the landlords. In this respect then, former tenants and part-tenants profited immediately. But, for obvious reasons, a change from rent payments to tax payments brought no relief to those peasants who already were owners, and in Nationalist China about 24 per cent of all peasants were half-owners, and about 46 per cent owned all the land they tilled. Furthermore, the new Communist

régime soon imposed new burdens, especially the purchase of grain at low prices fixed by the government, and these fell on all peasants, no matter what their former proprietary position had been. From the scattered information at hand, and especially from the denunciations and exhortations in official directives, it seems that the peasants are by no means content with their new situation, and that a perpetual agrarian problem may well plague the régime, as it has in Russia.

While all this has been happening, Fei has been living in Communist China. His position is high, his voice low. If he reads the foreign press, which as a prominent official he may be able to do, he must have some thoughtful moments. What, one wonders, were his reactions to the United Nations survey of 1953 which showed that, in Japan's villages, consumption had surpassed the pre-war level by some 25 per cent—and this as a result of a land reform imposed by General MacArthur! It is not likely we shall ever have an answer to this question, or others. Fei stopped writing to his friends immediately after the Communists seized power; and his statements since that time do not necessarily express his innermost feelings. But having known him personally, I consider it more than likely that in the depth of his heart he comprehends fully the tragedy which has overwhelmed him and his country.

Karl A. Wittfogel

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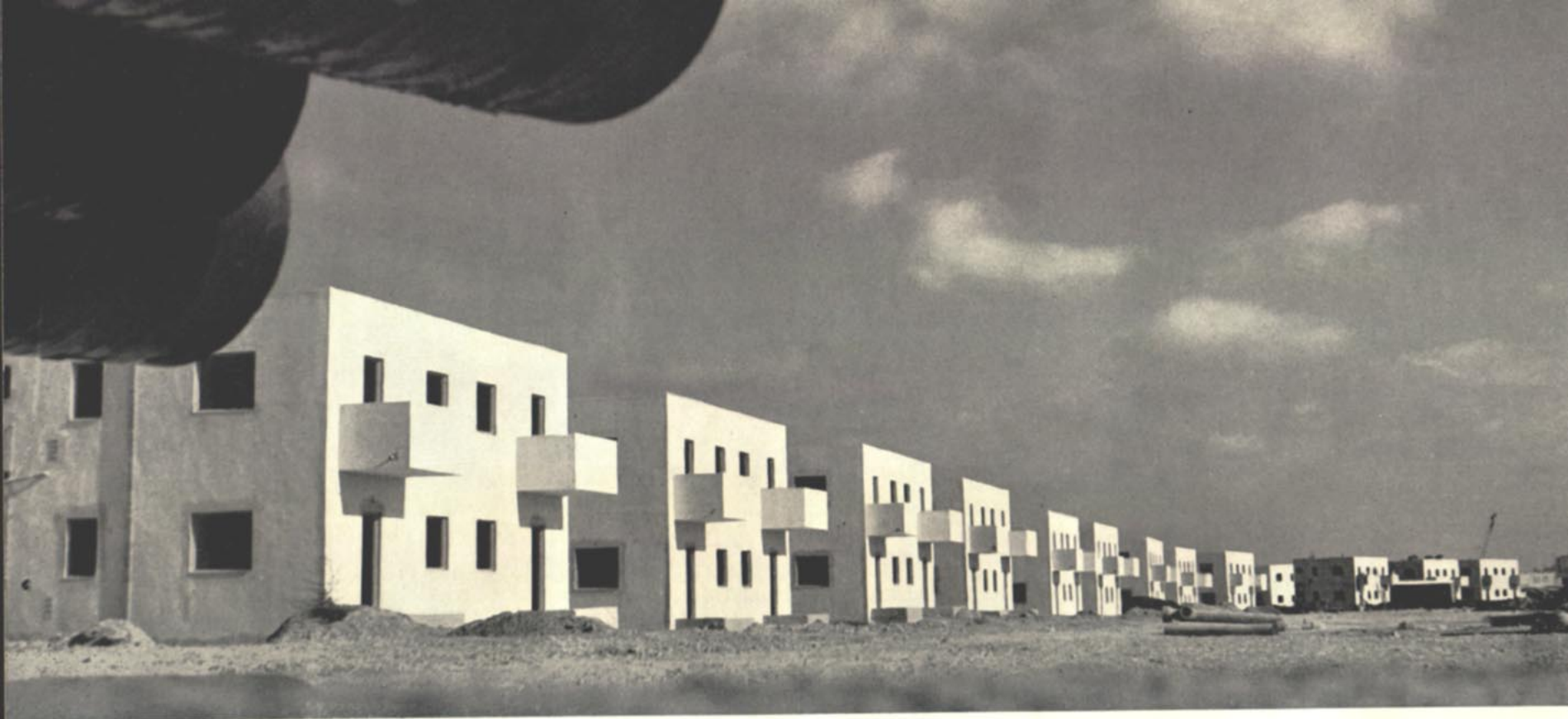
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publie en Janvier notamment

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