

## Chinese peasants battle to save homes

BEIJING (AP) — Small, bloody land wars are breaking out in the Chinese countryside as local officials looking for quick profits push peasants off their land and sell it.

After the government split up Mao Tse-tung's communes in the early 1980s, it assigned small plots of land to each rural family for at least 20 years.

But as the rural economy develops, businessmen are shopping for land for stores, factories and other commercial ventures.

Technically, they cannot buy land — in socialist China, it belongs "to the whole people." But they are buying "land use rights" and evicting peasants who know no other life but farming and have no way to obtain new land or jobs.

Peasants from across China are traveling to Beijing to appeal to central authorities. Several peasants interviewed by The Associated Press reported being beaten or arrested by rural police. They told of mass brawls between peasants and police resulting in serious injuries.

Occasional articles in the official media confirm their stories and hint that the problem is becoming a major one.

The stories illustrate the absolute power local officials wield over peasants and the lack of a legal process.

They also undermine the common assumption that social instability is limited to China's cities and that the government need not worry about rural discontent.

"Deng Xiaoping doesn't care about us," one dispossessed peasant said after appealing in vain to authorities in Beijing. Like all those interviewed, he spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of punishment.

Deng is China's 87-year-old senior leader, and his policies have fostered the capitalist-minded pursuit of profits that is causing officials to sell off land.

A Chinese source told the story of a land war in the Longjin township, in southwestern China's Yunnan province. Two peasants from the township traveled to Bei-

jing and appealed in writing to central authorities for help.

Their statement, seen by the AP, said the fight began late last year, when the township Communist Party secretary told 1,000 families their land had been sold to a local businessman. He wanted to plant a commercial apple orchard.

The families were told they would get \$3.65 per mu, which is less than one-fortieth of an acre. Even in Longjin, where average family income is about \$55 a year, 20 yuan is not much.

When the businessman sent his workers to dig up the fields, the peasants fought them and people on both sides were injured, the statement said.

In late December, several villagers made the three-day train journey to Beijing and appealed to the State Land Administration Bureau. The low-level clerks who staff the bureau complaint office told them to go home, where they were promptly arrested as troublemakers.

Other villagers came to their rescue, attacked the police and

seized their guns and handcuffs.

The next day, police went to the village in strength and arrested 47 people. Again the villagers pooled their money and sent delegates to Beijing.

Officials at the land bureau sent them to the State Council, which sent them to the Agriculture Ministry, which passed them on to the Public Security Ministry.

No one tried to resolve the case. Another group of beleaguered peasants got the attention of the influential, state-run Peasants' Daily, but even then local officials refused to budge.

The paper recently carried a front-page report of the land war in Ninghe County near Tianjin, about 90 miles east of Beijing.

Eleven peasant families who had reclaimed a tract of wasteland were told last fall that their 20-year contract was being canceled in its seventh year. When police came to take the land by force in March, the peasants staged a sit-in and 11 were arrested.

## FBI, lawyers reach tentative settlement on racial bias claims

WASHINGTON (AP) — The FBI and lawyers for more than 300 black agents said Tuesday they have reached a tentative agreement to settle the agents' claims of racial bias.

Six black agents will be promoted to supervisory positions and will receive back pay under the agreement, and another 67 black agents will be given new positions or special training.

The settlement would head off a potential class-action lawsuit by the black agents. The FBI agreed that "disparities" in treatment between black and white agents existed in some areas of its personnel system, but it did not admit to racial discrimination.

"We certainly wouldn't acknowledge either intentional discrimination or discrimination as a result of adverse impact," Joe Davis, the FBI's general counsel, told a news conference. "We do see disparities."

The agreement caps a year of negotiations between the lawyers and the FBI. Blacks and Hispanics have complained for several years of job discrimination at the agency.

"This is a far-reaching settlement that will result in changes" in the FBI's personnel practices, David Shaffer, an attorney for the black agents, said at a separate news conference earlier in the day. "It should be a major step in giving (black Americans) more confidence in the FBI, or at least in its director."

FBI Director William S. Sessions became personally involved in the issue a year ago, when he held unprecedented

face-to-face meetings with unhappy black agents and agreed to open agency records in an effort to avert a lawsuit.

The six agents to be promoted will receive a total of about \$115,000 in back pay covering three years, Davis said. Other black agents will receive payments to make up the gap in some awards and bonuses they received that were too low.

The FBI also agreed to pay the black agents' legal fees and expenses, which were not specified.

As required by the agreement, the FBI is in the process of hiring outside consultants to recommend changes in its personnel procedures and to monitor compliance. The consultants will receive "millions of dollars," said Joseph Sellers, another lawyer for the black agents, who is with the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. He declined to specify the amount of the consultants' contracts.

"It's an expensive proposition," Davis said, adding, "Litigation is a lot more expensive."

Liz Cassell, a spokeswoman for the black agents, said she and other blacks were denied promotions on the basis of race. Some were unjustly fired or put on probation in reprisal for speaking out, she said.

"I am relieved that we've reached some sort of agreement. . . I think it's a moral victory for us," Cassell said.

A year ago, a special task force recommended discipline for 11 FBI supervisors and agents involved in a long-running racial harassment case.

## Court lifts stay, puts murderer to death

SAN QUENTIN, Calif. (AP) — Double murderer Robert Alton Harris was put to death in the gas chamber Tuesday after the U.S. Supreme Court lifted a dramatic last-minute stay that had blocked California's first execution in 25 years.

"You can be a king or a street sweeper, but everybody dances with the Grim Reaper," Harris said in a final statement, released after he was executed for the 1978 murders of two San Diego 16-year-old boys.

Harris, 39, died quietly at dawn after an extraordinary night of cross-country judicial duels between the U.S. Supreme Court and the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Following the filing of four stays by the 9th Circuit on Monday, frustrated justices in Washington voted 7-2 to order the appeals court not to issue any more stays without permission.

The dissenters — Justices John Paul Stevens

and Harry A. Blackmun — focused on the issue of the gas chamber as cruel and unusual punishment.

The last stay came after Harris was strapped

**You can be a king or a street sweeper, but everybody dances with the Grim Reaper.**

— Double murderer Robert Alton Harris

to the death seat.

Witnesses spent an uncomfortable 12 minutes watching Harris as he waited to die, smiling and nodding in the brightly lit green chamber.

A telephone rang with a reprieve about a minute before the execution was to start, said

prison spokesman Lt. Vernell Crittendon.

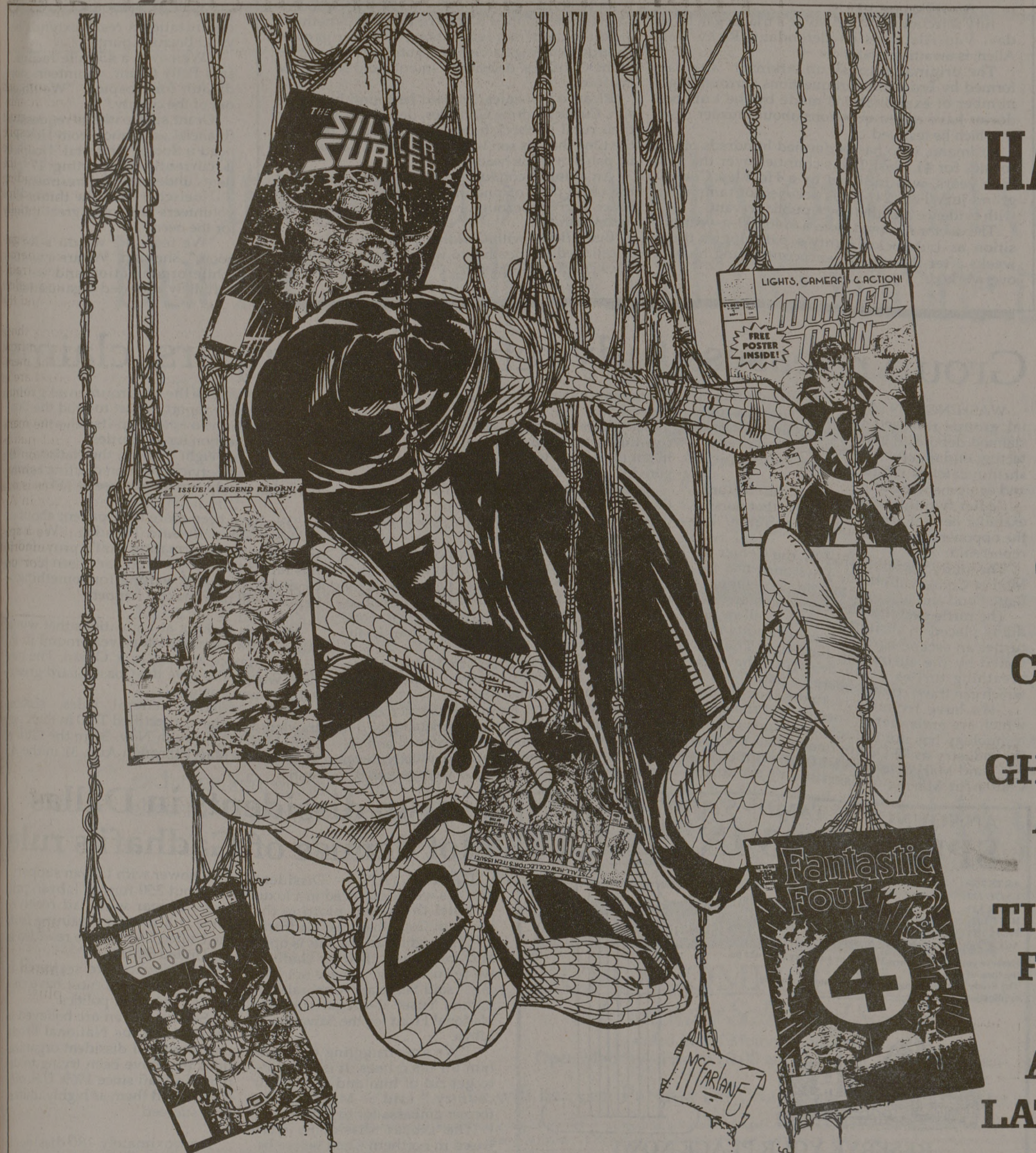
About two hours later, Harris was back in the metal chair. At one point, he looked at San Diego Police Det. Steven Baker, father of victim Michael Baker.

"He mouthed the words 'I'm sorry,'" Baker said later. On the day of the killings, it was Baker who arrested Harris for bank robbery without knowing his son was dead and Harris the killer. Outside San Quentin's gates Tuesday, Baker said he nodded back to Harris.

"He was probably sorry at the time, but that's 14 years too late," Baker said.

The gas was released at about 6:05 a.m., and shortly afterward Harris' head jerked from left to right before falling slowly to his chest. He appeared to be unconscious about 6:12 a.m. and was pronounced dead at 6:21 a.m.

In the witness chamber, Baker and his ex-wife, Sharron Mankins, showed little emotion as they watched their son's killer die.



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