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# Out of Poverty

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“So, who brought who out of poverty?” [asks](#) Frank Dikötter about China’s economic rise.

The Dutch historian and author of four excellent books on Chinese history—*Mao’s Great Famine*; *The Tragedy of Liberation*; *The Cultural Revolution*; and *China After Mao*—Dikötter recently spoke at length with Peter Robinson, host of the Hoover Institution’s “Uncommon Knowledge” [podcast](#).

Calling it “conventional wisdom,” Robinson offers that “the number that I found over and over again was eight to 900 million people lifted out of poverty since Deng Xiaoping announce[d] his reforms in ’78.”

“That’s all propaganda,” declares Dr. Dikötter.

“The people in the countryside have lifted themselves out

of poverty.”

Even before Mao’s death in 1976, the Cultural Revolution ended and the “army, which was deployed in every farm, every factory, every office from 1968 onwards, that army goes back to the barracks and is purged in turn,” he explains. “People in the countryside realize there’s nobody there to supervise them. There’s nobody there to tell them, go and work in the collective fields.”

Mr. Robinson chimes in: “The boot is off their neck.”

“So,” Dikötter expounds “they start operating underground factories; they open black markets; they trade among themselves.”

Deng “merely [put] the stamp of approval on something that escapes them altogether, namely the drive of ordinary villagers to claim back the freedoms they had before 1949.

“Allow ordinary people to get on with it,” he says, “they will!”

“But this is not a party,” concludes Dikötter, “that will allow ordinary people to get on with it.”

This is Common Sense. I’m Paul Jacob.