

ON THE REMOULDING OF INTELLECTUALS

September 29, 1951

The Teachers' Study Sub-committee of Beijing University³⁵ and President Ma Yinchu³⁶ asked me to give them a talk. That being the case, it seemed to me that I should speak to people from other universities as well. So after consulting with the Ministry of Education, I also invited representatives of the teachers and students at other universities in Beijing and Tianjin to join us here today.

What kind of talk should I give you? A general political report? No, that might not meet your needs, since you are now engaged in ideological remoulding. Now that you are taking part in these study sessions, you should make up your minds to remould yourselves. Today I am going to talk to you about this question of remoulding.

I'll start with my own remoulding. I spent one year in a university after I graduated from senior middle school. But I didn't learn very much there because it was the time of the May 4th Movement.³⁷ I went to Japan, France and Germany to "study", but I never attended a university in those countries. So I am only a middle-level intellectual and feel a little nervous speaking before you high-level intellectuals and undergraduates. However, since I am an intellectual after all, I think that if I tell you something about my personal experience of ideological remoulding, it may be helpful to you and not just a waste of time.

The aim of your study session is to remould yourselves ideologically. That is a basic understanding which anyone who wants to join in it should have. Of course, it takes time to remould oneself well, and we would be impatient and unrealistic if we expected people to change their thinking overnight. Ideological remoulding has to be a gradual process. Take my own example. It's more than 30 years since

Excerpt from a speech delivered at a study session of teachers from colleges and universities in Beijing and Tianjin.

I participated in the May 4th Movement, but I am still working hard to remould myself, trying to make further progress. Some comrades may ask, "Now that you are the leader of our government, do you still need to study and remould yourself?" Yes, I do, because there are many things I don't know and many truths I don't fully understand. Only by studying and constantly deepening our understanding can we make progress. Although I have worked for the revolution for more than 30 years and have been a leader of various departments at different times, I have made a lot of mistakes and have consequently had many setbacks. Yet I was never disheartened, because I had revolutionary confidence and optimism to sustain me. I drew strength from the masses. Whenever we have made mistakes, the right approach is to make a self-criticism, find out why we made those mistakes and take action to correct them. We should be determined to do that. If we learn something from our mistakes, we may make fewer of them in future or even avoid them altogether. Of course, we can't expect to correct all our mistakes at once, and we may repeat the same ones. But sooner or later we can correct them. We shouldn't regard mistakes as baggage and carry them around with us; we should get rid of them. In addition, we should tell others about our mistakes and make self-criticisms. In this way, not only do we learn a lesson ourselves, but we help others to avoid similar mistakes, and it lets people know that one can still make progress so long as one recognizes one's mistakes and is ready to correct them. When a person has made a mistake, he should make a private self-examination. But what is more important is to go among the masses and learn from them. There are two reasons why people make mistakes. One is that we don't have a correct understanding of certain theories and principles; that's why we need to study progressive theories. The other reason is that what we believe doesn't correspond to reality and therefore doesn't work; that means we have to learn from the masses and try to gain new knowledge and understand more truths through practice. If we do a good job in these two respects, we shall gain confidence, do our work more smoothly and make few mistakes or none at all.

The reason I am saying this is to help make you comrades confident that so long as you resolve to remould yourselves, you can reach your goal no matter what your background was in the old society. Since most of you here have spent a long time in the old society, you have carried many old ideas with you, I assume, and it is impossible for

you to discard them all at once. Only by constantly struggling against them can you make progress.

Now I'd like to discuss some questions you may encounter in the course of your studies and my views on them.

I. THE QUESTION OF STANDPOINT

There is always the question of what our position should be in study and work. Not all of us approach problems from the standpoint of the working class. This is true not only for you but also for me. I have been a Communist Party member for several decades. Does that mean I have always had a distinct working-class standpoint? Not necessarily. I do when I am reading or writing articles, but when I earnestly examine whether I have maintained that standpoint in everything I have done, I find that I haven't. Indeed, I have a long way to go. A working-class position doesn't just drop from the skies, and you can't simply claim to have adopted it. It can only come from practice. And only practice can show whether you conform to it. For example, during the First Revolutionary Civil War, we organized the masses of Chinese people — mainly the workers, peasants, students and part of the armed forces — into a revolutionary movement, and the revolutionary drive spurred them on. Yet during the Wuhan period of 1927, when Chen Duxiu³⁸ was in the leadership, some Party members wavered and committed the error of Right opportunism by following him. This shows that, under the influence of the reactionary class, they couldn't take a firm working-class stand. Other such cases could be cited. So it is clear that it takes a long time to solve the problem of standpoint.

Most of our country's intellectuals come from landlord or bourgeois families, so we can't expect them to take the side of the working class all at once.

I myself am from a bankrupt feudal family. My ancestral home is in Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province. When my grandfather was appointed county magistrate of Huai'an in Jiangsu Province, we moved there. My family — a feudal, bureaucrat family with a house but no land — necessarily influenced my thinking. The influences of childhood find their expression in one's thinking and life style for a long time after.

The old ideas come out now and then without one's realizing it, whenever one talks or writes without thinking carefully.

This being the case, it is unreasonable to ask intellectuals to acquire a firm working-class stand all at once. It takes a while.

It is easiest for people to cultivate a sense of nationhood and hold a nationalist stand, loving their own country. The reason for this is that for more than a century China was a semi-colonial country suffering imperialist aggression. For instance, when I was very young, I read articles by Mr. Zhang Taiyan,³⁹ published in the *Journal of Chinese Culture*,⁴⁰ that aroused my sense of patriotism even though I couldn't understand them fully at the time. The despotic and traitorous actions of Yuan Shikai⁴¹ and the northern warlords⁶ after the founding of the Chinese Republic developed my patriotic thinking further and made me take an active part in protests against the Twenty-one Demands⁴² and the Sino-Japanese military pacts.⁴³ I think many people went through a process of that kind. It was a good beginning. It seems to me that intellectuals can make progress if they start from a sense of patriotism and nationalism.

Of course, the sense of patriotism involves certain dangers. If our nationalist stand develops into étatism⁴⁴ or a narrow nationalism that leads to aggression abroad and oppression of minority nationalities at home, we shall have gone astray. But this danger is not a major problem for Chinese intellectuals. China was a semi-colonial and semi-feudal country subjected to aggression, bullying and oppression by foreign countries, so it was natural for people's patriotism to be aroused first in the form of national resistance to foreign aggression. Given these conditions, the nationalism and patriotism of the majority of intellectuals could develop into a desire for national liberation and for serving the people. This transformation in their thinking has begun to take place and should be well received. Of course, we should guard against dangerous ideas that lead to étatism and narrow nationalism.

In China, étatism and communism appeared at the same time. Many of you present here, I imagine, experienced the May 4th Movement. As you all know, the Young China Society⁴⁵ was divided into two groups at the time, one represented by Comrades Li Dazhao⁴⁶ and Mao Zedong, and the other headed by Zeng Qi,⁴⁷ Li Huang⁴⁸ and Zuo Shunsheng.⁴⁹ The first group became Communists and the second became Etatists, tailed after the Kuomintang and accomplished nothing, because in semi-colonial China, circumstances did not permit

the rise of Kemalism,⁵⁰ as in Turkey. Narrow nationalism could not take hold; it appealed only to a handful of people, and not to the majority of intellectuals.

For more than a century imperialists, in collusion with the Chinese comprador and landlord classes, rode roughshod over the Chinese people and turned the country into a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. Chairman Mao says in his article "On the People's Democratic Dictatorship" that during that period many people with lofty ideals tried to find a way out for the Chinese people. Among them were Hong Xiuquan,⁵¹ Dr. Sun Yat-sen, who led the Revolution of 1911, and Yan Fu⁵² and Kang Youwei,⁵³ who launched reform movements. They all strove to push the country forward but failed. In China the feudal forces were not smashed, as they were by the revolution in France, and no movement arose like the Meiji Restoration in Japan.⁵⁴ Why? The reason is that, as you professors who recently took part in the agrarian reform¹⁰ found out, the feudal forces in China were too powerful, landlords and rich peasants constituting as much as 10 per cent of the rural population. Scattered everywhere across the land, they oppressed the poor peasants, and it was through them that the imperialists ruled China. In the national liberation movements of the past, people tried to follow the path of reform or the path of the old-type bourgeois revolution, but they failed, and finding themselves in a blind alley, they had to begin searching for a new way out.

We Chinese people awoke during World War I and, inspired by the October Revolution in Russia, we came to realize that we had to follow the path of the Russians. Dr. Sun Yat-sen raised the slogan "Learn from Russia", and it was on that basis that our First Great Revolution was organized and launched. During the revolution, many intellectuals who were nationalists acquired a better understanding of the people's stand and came to realize that they could save China and show their love for the nation only by taking that stand. The feudal economy fettered the productive forces of the vast rural areas; comprador forces hindered the development of national industry and commerce; and the Kuomintang reactionaries, a political force representing the landlord and comprador classes, oppressed the Chinese people with the support of the imperialists. That is why to win national liberation it was not enough to have a general sense of nationalism: we had to take the people's stand.

Did we take a firm people's stand as soon as we joined the Communist Party? I think that during the acute struggle against the enemy,

we did take the people's stand, resolutely fighting the landlord class, the comprador class and the Kuomintang reactionaries. But during the War of Resistance Against Japan, when our Party advocated alliance with the Kuomintang in the face of foreign aggression, some Party members failed to maintain a clear-cut people's stand. You can see from Hu Qiaomu's book *Thirty Years of the Communist Party of China* that at the early stage of the war Chairman Mao firmly believed that we should unite with the Kuomintang and at the same time struggle against it, and that we should push for a war of total resistance by the whole nation as opposed to a war of partial resistance without mass participation. This represented a firm people's stand. But some Party members recognized only the importance of making an alliance with the Kuomintang and not the importance of struggling against it. As a result, they accommodated themselves to it without maintaining a clear-cut people's stand. They made this mistake in 1938 in Wuhan. At that time they did make an alliance with the Kuomintang, but they didn't wage adequate struggle against it. Later on they recognized their mistake, corrected it and did a better job in Chongqing and Nanjing. This indicates that it is not so easy even for the Party leaders to take a firm people's stand all at once. I think everyone present here has read Chairman Mao's "Talk at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art". The writers and artists in Yan'an read a great deal and studied in the schools there. Nevertheless, many of them did not stand on the side of the people, and that is why Chairman Mao raised the question of stand first in that talk.

Now, the working class has its own ideas; so do the peasant class, the urban petty bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie. So long as there are different classes, there will be different positions. We now insist that all of us have a common position — the people's standpoint — that is, that we all think in terms of the supreme interest of the majority of the people.

It is more difficult to take the next step and change from the people's stand to the working-class stand. Why do we demand that intellectuals take this further step? Because the working class is the class that is most advanced and dedicated to the people and the nation. Its goal is to realize communism and convert the existing society into a classless one. Therein lies the greatness of the working class. The bourgeoisie has no desire to turn everyone into a capitalist. If it did, who would be the workers? And how would the capitalists accumulate capital? It was this idea that struck me so forcefully that I decided to

join the Communist Party. Later on I wrote some articles to disseminate this notion. Why is the working class the most advanced? Because it can transform everyone in the world into a worker and integrate physical labour with mental labour. The most essential feature of the working class and of the Communist Party is that they can lead the whole world to a society without classes and without the exploitation of man by man, a task that no other class or party can undertake.

There are three different views among intellectuals with regard to class stand. The first is: there are not many industrial workers in China, only three or four million of them, and besides, having grown up in the feudal society, they have been influenced to a certain extent by feudal thinking. That being the case, they cannot be very powerful, so how can they lead the whole country? The second is: a large proportion of Communist Party members are from peasant and intellectual backgrounds, so how can they represent the stand and views of the working class? They can only represent the thinking of the peasants and the petty bourgeoisie. The third is: by putting into practice the Party's slogans and policies after joining the Party, the intellectuals naturally do everything from the standpoint of the working class and represent its thinking. All three of these views are wrong.

We hold that while the working class is small and a part of it has been influenced by feudal thinking, it can form a force with inexhaustible power so long as it works hard, steps up production, learns from the experience of workers' movements in other countries and studies the advanced theories they have put forward. Being a new force, it is bound to grow stronger. All new forces start small and grow larger. We all grow from infancy, and the infant grows fastest. Therefore the working class has a bright future. Moreover, the working class can take the overall interest into account. Under its leadership, the development of industry and commerce will benefit the peasants, the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie as well as the working class itself. To accelerate the development of industry and commerce, the working class will see to it that the state controls the important means of production and will gradually lead the society to socialism. Only under the leadership of the working class can China industrialize, abolish classes and achieve communism in accordance with working-class thinking, the material conditions of the state and

ever-increasing productivity. We shouldn't ignore this most reliable, promising and unselfish class merely because it is small.

There are a good many Party members with peasant or petty-bourgeois backgrounds. Can they identify themselves with the stand of the working class? Yes, I think they can, after they have steeled themselves in struggle. The working class doesn't regard its standpoint as its own private property. On the contrary, it is happy to have people side with it so long as they sincerely accept its thinking. The Chinese working class also comes from the old society, but there is a difference between it and the intellectuals. The difference is that the working class has been tempered in modern large-scale production and is therefore advanced in its thinking and standpoint. So to remould themselves, intellectuals too should go through tempering and engage in study and practice. The reason intellectuals should go down to the countryside and into factories is precisely to learn the thinking and standpoint of the working class and other labouring people. This is true for intellectuals both inside and outside the Party. Mr. Liang Shuming⁵⁵ once said in a letter that he had used to believe the predominant thinking in the Party was that of peasants and the petty bourgeoisie, because while the Party leaders were intellectuals, many of the members were peasants. There is some truth in what he said. Some Party members are much under the influence of peasant or petty-bourgeois thinking in the beginning. But after they have undergone ideological remoulding, this kind of thinking will have less influence on them and working-class thinking will gradually come to have more. Mao Zedong Thought embodies the thinking of the Chinese working class. Volume I of the *Selected Works of Mao Zedong* is a great work representing that thinking.

Do Party members always take the position of the working class and act in conformity with its thinking? They may think they do, but they don't. As a matter of fact, whenever they make a mistake in their work or deviate from the Party's policies, they are departing from the working-class stand. This is very common. The reason we made Right or "Left" mistakes is either that we departed from the working-class stand by yielding to reactionaries or that we isolated the working class from the others. I have made many mistakes like this and I learned a great deal from them. It is no easy job to acquire a firm working-class stand; it takes a long period of trial and study and of tempering in struggle. Mao Zedong Thought is the compass for the revolution. But having a compass isn't enough: we must take

part in revolutionary practice. Chairman Mao has said time and again that other people's experience is not much help and that one has to gain one's own experience through blunders and setbacks in practice. One's own experience is the most precious. So Party members need to be tempered in practice for a long time.

Generally speaking, one moves progressively from the nationalist stand to the people's stand and finally to the working-class stand. We should push intellectuals to follow this progression, and we should try to keep them from making mistakes along the way. Thus we can help them to gradually change their stand.

II. THE QUESTION OF ATTITUDE

It is easy to tackle the question of attitude once we clearly understand the process of changing one's stand. Everyone takes a particular attitude towards every matter he comes across. Different stands lead to different attitudes.

In the world today classes still exist and there is still hostility among countries. The aggressive clique of imperialists wants to rule the world, and the U.S. imperialists in particular are trying hard to change the world into an American empire. The Chinese people have suffered enormously from the civil war launched by Chiang Kai-shek with the backing of the U.S. imperialists. Now those same imperialists are intruding into the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and into our province of Taiwan. On the other hand, after two world wars the people of the world have awakened, socialist countries and people's democracies have been established one after another, national liberation movements in the colonial and semi-colonial countries are growing and even the people in the imperialist countries are becoming aware of reality. The people of the world reject further exploitation and invasion by the imperialists; they reject the miseries of war and demand lasting peace. Thus the world is now divided into two camps. This is the inevitable outcome of international developments.

Faced with such a world situation, how can the Chinese people fail to declare their attitude? Of course, we should adopt a clear-cut attitude. The first thing to do is to draw a distinction between ourselves and our friends and the enemy. If you don't do that, how can you decide what attitude to take? Are you willing to side with the

enemy? In China there are still reactionaries and some remaining counter-revolutionaries who side with the enemy, and we shall wipe them out. How can persons who take the stand of the people and of patriotic nationalism not make known their position on this? While you are studying to remould your ideology, make sure that you always bear in mind the distinction between ourselves and our friends and the enemy. Internationally, the peoples of the world, including the American and Japanese peoples, are all our friends, and we should unite with them. We should also unite with the governments of colonial and semi-colonial countries that are still oppressed by the imperialists and persuade them to take a stand against war and in favour of peace, even if they are our friends only temporarily. We should win over all countries and governments that can be won over. It is also in the interest of the people if we can make some countries and governments remain neutral, even only temporarily or on one particular issue. We should understand very clearly that our only enemies are the U.S. imperialists and the reactionary governments of their allies and accomplices. We have friends all over the world. Some of them are only our temporary friends who share the same view with us on just one issue. If we follow this general policy, the people's forces will grow stronger. As for the attitude we should take towards our friends and enemies at home, that is clear to you all. Proceeding from the standpoint of the working class, we should first consolidate the alliance of workers and peasants and unite with the petty bourgeoisie, the national bourgeoisie and all other patriots. Our enemies are the reactionary classes represented by the remaining members of the Kuomintang clique and counter-revolutionaries. In the face of such a situation at home and abroad, is it possible for one to take a neutral attitude? I think it is almost impossible, especially so far as the domestic situation is concerned. For we have defeated our enemies, and the people are in power. How can one stand with the people and at the same time with Chiang Kai-shek? You can go and hide in Hong Kong for the time being, but sooner or later you have to declare your attitude.

We have always believed that a person should decide for himself what attitude to take. Let me give you an example to make this point clearer. Mr. Zhang Bolin,⁵⁶ in his later years, served the Kuomintang government as President of its Examination Yuan. After the liberation of Chongqing he came to realize that what he had done was wrong, and he regretted it. Later he returned to Beijing

and then went to Tianjin. In a sense he was my teacher, and we got along very well. Yet I never urged him to write something to declare his change of attitude. As time went on, he came to know more about New China and its superiority over the old China. He began to talk to me about certain things in New China that pleased him very much. Nevertheless, I still didn't ask him to write anything, because I thought that a person's progress could not be consolidated until he himself had recognized his past mistakes. I was looking forward to his further progress when he suddenly died of an illness. He wrote a deathbed testament, which you may have read in the news papers. It may be my fault that I didn't help him to raise his political consciousness as early as possible. If I had known that he was in such poor health and had lent him a helping hand earlier, he might have made more progress and thus won more forgiveness from the people. I regret that I didn't do so. Let me offer you another example: When he was in Europe, Weng Wenhao,⁵⁷ who everyone knows was a war criminal as announced by Xinhua News Agency, expressed his desire to return to New China rather than to go to the United States to become a professor. Accordingly, we welcomed him back. On his return, some of our friends suggested that he write a statement that would win him the people's pardon. Still, we thought it preferable not to force him to write such a statement but to have him do it voluntarily after his political consciousness had been gradually raised.

Generally speaking, there is no such thing as a neutral attitude, but it is possible for a person to waver or to have doubts for a time. We should allow people to take a wait-and-see attitude towards a new phenomenon and even to be sceptical about it for a while. To express some doubts about a thing doesn't mean you oppose it. But if a person does oppose New China, it means that he is hostile to it, and under no circumstances should we permit that. While a person is studying it is also allowable for him to conceive doubts about certain matters. That's because truth cannot always be accepted right away. We are not afraid of doubts, because we are convinced that through debate people will come to have a better understanding of truth. It's all right for people to simply observe for a time. Mr. Liang Shuming said to me when he first came to Beijing that he was just going to observe the situation for a while. We appreciated his frankness in this regard. Later we arranged for him to visit many places. On returning from each visit he had a better understanding of New China,

and he did make some progress, which we were happy to see. An observer is not just an onlooker: the former is active while the latter is passive.

Some people are sympathetic to the Chinese revolution, but do not make up their minds to join it. That's all right too. We are willing to wait patiently for them. Many people in Hong Kong have told us that they are in sympathy with New China but cannot return just now. We should be understanding and not urge them to do so, because we know they have difficulties both objectively and subjectively.