

1953

Speeches/Documents

**Title:** Speech on the Youth League

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**Description:**

The problem of the Youth League's clamoring for independence [in its relationship] with the Party has long since passed. The problem at present is the League's lack of independent work, not its clamoring for independence.

The Youth League should coordinate [its work] with the central tasks of the Party, but while it coordinates [its work] with the central tasks of the Party it should have its own independent work and take into consideration the special needs of young people. In 1952, I talked with the comrades of the Central Committee of the League, and I brought up two topics for the League center to study; one was how the Party should lead the League in its work, and the other was how the League should go about its work. <sup>1</sup>[The question of] how to take into consideration the special characteristics of young people is implicit in both of these topics. All local Party committees report that they are satisfied with the work of the Youth League and that [they] are satisfied because [the League] coordinates [its efforts] with the central tasks of the Party. [But] here [I'd like to] bring up a point of dissatisfaction, which is that the work of the Youth League has not yet shaped itself to fit the special characteristics of young people and [thus has not] organized any independent activities. The leadership organs of both the Party and the League should learn how to lead the League in its work and do a good job of organizing and educating the broad masses of the young people and organizing them around the central tasks of the Party, taking into consideration the special characteristics of young people.

Under the leadership of the Party, the Youth League has actively participated in all areas of revolutionary work and has achieved very great results. Whether it be in the factories, in the rural areas, in the military, or in the schools, the revolutionary cause cannot succeed without young people. The young people of China are very disciplined; they have accomplished all the tasks that the Party has given them. Now, with the Korean conflict coming to an end and the conclusion of the land reform program, <sup>2</sup>the main thrust of our work within the country is right now shifting to socialist transformation and socialist construction. So we must learn. The Youth League must learn how to lead young people to work in conjunction with adults to do a good job in agriculture in the countryside, to do a good job in industry in the cities, to do a good job in studying in the schools, to do good work in the [government]

organs and, in the armed forces, to train the national defense forces well [so that they may] become a modernized army.

Young people between the ages of fourteen and twenty-five must study and must work. The period of youth, however, is a period of physical growth. It would be very dangerous not to pay attention to the physical development of young people. Young people need to study even more than adults do; they have to learn many things that adults have already learned. Nevertheless, the burden of study and work placed upon them must not be too heavy. Particularly with young people from fourteen to eighteen years of age, the intensity of their labor cannot be the same as that of adults. Young people have to play a bit more and have to

have a bit more recreation. They have to jump around a bit; otherwise they will be unhappy. Later on, they will fall in love and get married. In these respects they are different from adults.

Let me say a few words to young people. First, I wish them good health, second, I wish them well in their studies, and third, I wish them well in their work.

I propose that another hour be added to the sleeping time of students. [The standard] now is eight hours but in fact they only get six or seven hours, and there is a general feeling that they do not get enough sleep. Since educated youth easily suffer from nervous exhaustion, often they can't get to sleep and can't wake up. We must stipulate nine hours of sleeping time [for them]. We should issue an order; we needn't debate it, just make it obligatory. Young people must sleep well, and teachers should get enough sleep too. Revolution brings many good things, but it also brings one bad thing, which is that everybody is too active, too enthusiastic, to a point where they become worn out. Now we must ensure that everybody is in good health; we must ensure that workers, peasants, soldiers, students, and cadres are all in good health. Of course, being in good health doesn't necessarily mean that one will study well; studying [well] requires certain methods.

Right now, the hours lower middle school students spend in class are also somewhat too long. We can consider reducing them appropriately. Activists hold too many meetings; this too should be reduced. On the one hand there is study, on the other recreation, rest, and sleep; both aspects must be taken into full consideration. Young workers, young peasants, and young soldiers study as they work; for them, too, work and study [on the one hand] and recreation, rest, and sleep [on the other] must both be taken into full consideration.

Both ends must be firmly grasped. Studying and work must be firmly grasped, but sleep, rest, and recreation must be firmly grasped also. In the past we only took hold of one end firmly, and we didn't take a firm hold on the other end, or else didn't take hold of it at all. Now we must develop some [programs for] recreation; there must be time and facilities [for recreation]. At this end too, we must take a firm hold. The Central Committee of the Party has already decided to reduce the number of meetings and the time [required] for study; you must supervise the implementation [of this decision]. If there are people who don't carry it out, [an explanation] should be demanded of them.

In short, we must make young people healthy, good in their studies, and good at their work. Some leading comrades only want the young people to work and pay no attention to the physical [well-being] of young people. [In such cases] you can use this statement [of mine] to rebuff them; the reasoning behind it is very sound. It is simply to protect the younger generation so that they may grow up better. Our generation had a bad time of it [in that] adults didn't take [good] care of children. Big people had tables to eat at, the little people didn't. Kids had no right to speak in their homes, and if they cried, they got a slap across the face. Today, New China must change its policy and be considerate of young people and teenagers.

We must elect young cadres to serve as members of the League Central Committee. In the time of the Three Kingdoms, Cao Cao led a huge army south of the Yangtze River to attack the [kingdom of] Eastern Wu. At the time, Zhou Yu was a "Youth League member" and served as marshal of Wu. The old generals such as Cheng Pu would not accept his authority, but later they were persuaded to do so and he was made marshal anyway. Consequently they won a victory. <sup>3</sup> Yet now, when we want Zhou Yu's to be members of the League Central

Committee everybody is against it! Will it do to select only older people to be League Central Committee members and have too few young people [on it]? Naturally, we cannot go completely on this basis of age; we must consider ability as well. On the slate of candidates for the League Central Committee there were originally only nine people under thirty years of age. Now, after discussion by the Party Center, [this number] has been increased to more than sixty, which is still only a little more than one quarter [of the Committee]. Those over thirty years old still make up almost three-quarters, and some comrades still say this is too few. I say it is not too few. [As to] whether or not all these sixty-some young people are a hundred per cent suited to their positions, some comrades say that there is no certainty [about this]. We must trust young people fully; the overwhelming majority will be equal to their tasks. Some individuals may not be competent in their posts, but this is nothing to be afraid of; in the future they can be dropped in another election. Do things this way and the fundamental orientation will not be wrong. Young people are no weaker than we are. Older people have experience, and therefore are, of course, strong; their physiological capacities, however, are gradually deteriorating, their eyesight and hearing are no longer so sharp, and they are not as agile as young people are. This is a law of nature. We must persuade those comrades who disagree.

The Youth League must take into consideration the special characteristics of young people, must have work of its own [as an independent] organization, and at the same time must accept leadership from the Party committees at all levels. This isn't a new discovery; it has been so for a long time; Marxism has always said that this [should be so]. This is proceeding from reality. Young people are young people; if they weren't, why would we have to have a Youth League? Young people are different from adults; young women are also different from young men; and if we do not take these special characteristics into consideration we will become divorced from the masses. You now have nine million League members. If you do not take into consideration young people's special characteristics, perhaps only one million [of them] will support you, and eight million will not.

The work of the Youth League must take into account the [needs of the] majority, and at the same time it must pay attention to the advanced youth. Some advanced elements may not be thrilled about this; they demand that we be a bit stricter with all League members. This would not be so proper; we must persuade them of that. There are too many duties and too few rights stipulated in the draft constitution of the League. <sup>4</sup> It has to be made a little more lenient, so that the majority can follow [the rules]. The emphasis should be placed on the majority; we cannot focus on the minority. Your draft constitution for the League stipulates that [if a member] fails to take part in the activities of the organization for four months, then that person is considered to have automatically dropped out of the League. This is too severe. Even the Party Constitution stipulates six months; can't you also stipulate six months? Things that can't be done or things that can be done by only one million [members] and not by [the other] eight million should not be stipulated in the League constitution. Principles must be carried out in a flexible way. There is a gap between what ought to be and what actually is. Provisions of certain laws will require a few more years before they can actually be implemented. For instance, many of the provisions in the marriage law are programmatic in nature, and it will take at least three five-year plans to implement them thoroughly. <sup>5</sup> The provision "do not slander people behind their backs" is correct in principle, but it is unnecessary to write it into the League constitution. The struggle against liberalism is a protracted one; there is still a lot of liberalism within the Party itself. Actually, it is impossible to forbid people to curse you even once behind your back. We must not make our circle too small; the main thing is that the boundaries between the enemy and ourselves must be distinct.

Prestige is built up gradually. In the past, there were some people inside the armed forces who made up jingles to malign people. We neither prohibited nor investigated [the practice], and yet the army did not fall apart. We just took hold of some of the major [issues], such as the Three Main Rules of Discipline and the Eight Great Points for Attention, and the troops slowly got onto the right track. <sup>6</sup> For the masses to truly respect their leaders, they must come to understand them through revolutionary practice. Trust comes only through true understanding. Right now the prestige of the League Center is already rather high. Some people still don't respect it, but they will slowly come to respect it. When a young person first steps onto the stage his prestige isn't high, [but] don't be anxious, it's impossible not to receive a bit of criticism and a bit of scolding. There are "small broadcasts" because the "big broadcast" is not well-developed. <sup>7</sup> As long as the democratic [way of] life is fully [established] and [people's] scabs are exposed openly, then, even if people were allowed to [make their] "small broadcasts," they would [turn around and] say that they didn't have the time and that they had to rest. However, there will always be problems, and we mustn't think that everything can be solved at once. There are [problems] now and there will be in the future as well.

The general task of the Party during the period of transition is to basically achieve socialist industrialization and the socialist transformation of agriculture, handicraft industries, and capitalist industry and commerce over the course of three five-year plans.<sup>8</sup> Three five-year plans means fifteen years. Every year is a small step, and every five years is a big step. Three big steps will just about do it. To achieve something basically is not the same as achieving it completely. To say [that we will] achieve [these things] basically is to be cautious in what we say; it is always better to be a bit cautious in matters of this world.

At present, Chinese agriculture is mainly an individual economy, and it must undergo socialist transformation step by step. In developing the mutual aid and cooperativization campaign in agriculture, we must uphold the principle of voluntary [participation]. If we don't develop [the campaign we] will [end up] following the capitalist road; that would be a Right deviation. However, it won't do to be too fierce in developing it either, that would be a "Left" deviation. It must be carried out with preparation and according to a schedule. Historically, we have refrained from fighting battles for which we were not prepared and which we were not sure [we could win]; we didn't [even] fight battles for which we were prepared but about which we were not sure [we could win]. In the past when we fought Chiang Kai-shek, at first some people committed the error of subjectivism. Later, through the rectification [campaign we] got rid of subjectivism and we won.<sup>9</sup> Now we are fighting the battle of socialism, and we want to accomplish socialist industrialization and the socialist transformation of agriculture, handicraft industries, and capitalist industry and commerce. This is the general task of the people of the whole country. As to how the Youth League should carry out this general task, you should make appropriate provisions on the basis of the special characteristics of young people.

## Notes

1 We have no published record of this discussion. However, it is very likely that Mao was referring here to discussions that may have preceded the issuing of the CPC Central Committee's approval of the resolutions of the Second Meeting of the Central Committee of the New Democratic Youth League. This approval was published on Jan. 4, 1952.

2 The armistice that concluded the Korean War was signed at Panmunjon on July 27, 1953. For the land reform, see text Feb. 18, 1951, note 2.

3 Cao Cao ( 155-220 A.D.), was a statesman, military strategist, and literary figure of the Three Kingdoms period (220-280). He amassed great military power through the suppression of the "Yellow Turban" bandits in the waning years of the Han dynasty, and in 196 A.D. he moved the Han emperor, Xiandi, within his own sphere of influence at Xudu. With that, Cao began to issue decrees in Emperor Xiandi's name and progressively aggrandized his own power at the expense of other feudal warlords. By defeating Yuan Shao at the Battle of Guandu (199) he unified political control along the Yellow River basin. In 208 he was appointed chief minister to the emperor and marched southward across the Yangtze River against the forces of the Eastern Wu. In the same year, he was soundly defeated at the Battle of Chibi by the coalition of the forces of Eastern Wu and Shu Han. Cao was later made prince of Wei by the emperor. In 220, the year Cao Cao died, his son, Cao Pi, who succeeded him as the prince of Wei, abolished the Han dynasty and made himself Emperor Wendi of the Wei dynasty. Cao Cao was posthumously enthroned as Emperor Wudi.

Zhou Yu ( 175-210) was a young military strategist of the same period of the Kingdom of Wu. He was a friend of Sun Ce, the first Prince of Eastern Wu, and rose quickly to the rank of general at the age of twenty-four. Later he became marshal of the vanguard forces of the Eastern Wu. Before the battle of Chibi, he advocated the forming of the coalition with the forces of Shu-Han against the advice of many other generals, and was made marshal for the entire defensive campaign. Zhou Yu, though he led such a short life, is one of the best-known romantic figures in Chinese history and literature.

Cheng Pu was an old general of the Eastern Wu forces who had been serving the rulers of the Eastern Wu beginning with the father of Sun Ce. He was the main dissident when Zhou Yu presented his strategy for the defense against the forces of Wei in 208 A.D., and he was only won over to Zhou's side later. This episode was very dramatically described in hui 43-45 of the classical novel *San guo yanyi* (The Romance of the Three Kingdoms).

4. The constitution of the Chinese New Democratic Youth League remained in draft form until it was adopted at the Ninth National Congress of the League ( June 29, 1964), by which time the name of the League had been changed (see source note). The issues to which Mao refers in this passage are dealt with in Chapter 1, Article 6, of the League constitution (reprinted in T. Chen [ 1967], pp. 166-178). It is apparent from the 1964 version that Mao's suggestions were adopted.

5. The Marriage Law of the PRC was promulgated in April 1950. See RMSC ( 1951), section "Shen," p. 1.

6. In 1928 Mao laid down the Three Rules of Discipline and Six Points for Attention for the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army in Jinggangshan, emphasizing the cultivation of congenial relations and mutual respect between the soldiers and the civilian populace. Later, slight revisions and adaptations were made. The list was standardized in 1947 as the Three Main Rules of Discipline and Eight Great Points for Attention. They include: (1) Obey orders in all actions; (2) Not a single needle or a single piece of thread is to be taken from the masses; (3) Everything captured must be turned in; and (a) Speak politely; (b) Pay a fair price for whatever you buy; (c) Return everything you borrow; (d) Pay for all damages; (e) Do not hit people or swear at people; (f) Do not damage crops; (g) Do not take any liberties with women; (h) Do not ill-treat captives.

7. By "small broadcast," Mao refers to the practice of spreading unofficial, and sometimes malicious, rumors concerning a person. Mao is saying that this practice exists only because the official channels of information are not always up to date and accurate and are unable to overcome rumors and personal slandering.

8. See text June 15, 1953, note 1. For dating of the five-year plans, see text Feb. 10, 1953, note 2. Here Mao was referring to the "general line" during the period of transition; see text June 15, 1953, and specifically note 1.

9. Mao is here referring to the major CPC rectification campaign in Yanan in 1942. The main targets of that rectification campaign were "against subjectivism, to rectify the style of studying; against sectarianism, to rectify the Party's work-style; and against eight-legged stereotyped Party writing, to rectify the Party's literary style." For more on this rectification campaign, see M. Selden (1971), pp. 188-210, 212-216, 269-275. See text Aug. 12, 1953 (1), note 24.

### **Remark**

According to the Xuanji source, this was Mao's talk at a reception given for the members of the Presidium of the Second National Congress of the Chinese New Democratic Youth League (NDYL). The title of this speech in Xuanji is "Qingniantuan de gongzuo yao zhaogu qingnian de tedian" (The Youth League Must Take into Consideration the Special Characteristics of the Young People in Its Work).

The formation of the N.Y. was proposed at the Central Committee of the CPC in October 1946. After two years of experimentation, the First Congress of the NDYL was held in April 1949, and the Youth League was formally established. Its purpose was to educate progressive young people to coordinate their work and lives with the goals of the construction of the PRC and, after 1949, to bring about socialism on the basis of the gradual transformation of new democracy to socialism. (See RMSC [1951] "shu" section, pp. 14-17.) In May 1957, at the third League congress, the name was changed to the Chinese Communist Youth League. In fact, however, this name had also been adopted by the Chinese Communist Youth League which was formed in Europe in 1925. (In 1922, the Socialist Youth League was formed, heralding the formation of the European branch of the CPC, and its name was changed to the Chinese Communist Youth League in 1925.) See also text Feb. 18, 1951, note 8.