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Speeches/Documents

Title: The party's mass line must be followed in suppressing counter-revolutionaries

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The Writings of Mao Zedong, 1949-1976: September 1945 - December 1955
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Description: Instructions added by Comrade Mao Zedong when he revised the draft resolution of the Third National Conference on Public Security

1. The movement to suppress counter-revolutionaries now going on throughout the country is a great, intense and complex struggle. The line for this work that has proved effective everywhere is the Party's mass line. This means leadership by Party committees, mobilization of the entire Party membership, mobilization of the masses, participation by the democratic parties and by personages from all circles, unified planning, unified action, strict examination of the lists of persons to be arrested or executed, attention to tactics in different phases of the struggle, widespread propaganda and education (holding various kinds of conferences, cadre meetings, forums and mass rallies at all of which victims can bring their accusations and evidence of crimes can be displayed, and making propaganda through films, lantern-slides, stage performances, newspapers, pamphlets and leaflets in order to make the movement known to every household and individual), a break with the practice of working behind closed doors and being secretive, and determined opposition to the deviation of rashness. Wherever this line is completely adhered to, the work is completely correct. Wherever this line is not adhered to, the work is wrong. Wherever this line is adhered to generally but not completely, the work is generally but not completely correct. We believe this line for the work is a guarantee for deepening the struggle to suppress counter-revolutionaries and for achieving full success. In the days ahead it is essential to adhere completely to this line in suppressing counter-revolutionaries. What is most important here is strictly to examine the lists of persons to be arrested or executed and to do a good job of widespread propaganda and education. Do both well and mistakes will be avoided.

2. The number of counter-revolutionaries to be killed must be kept within certain proportions. The principle to follow here is that those who owe blood debts or are guilty of other extremely serious crimes and have to be executed to assuage the people's anger and those who have caused extremely serious harm to the national interest must be unhesitatingly sentenced to death and executed without delay. As for those whose crimes deserve capital punishment but who owe no blood debts and are not bitterly hated by the people or who have done serious but not extremely serious harm to the national interest, the policy to follow is to hand down the death sentence, grant a two-year reprieve and subject them to forced labour to see how they behave. In addition, it must be explicitly stipulated that in cases where it is marginal whether to

make an arrest, under no circumstances should there be an arrest and that to act otherwise would be a mistake, and that in cases where it is marginal whether to execute, under no circumstances should there be an execution and that to act otherwise would be a mistake.

3. To prevent "Left" deviations in the heat of the movement to suppress counter-revolutionaries, it has been decided that as of June 1, in all localities across the country, including those places where very few executions have so far been carried out, the power to sanction arrests shall without exception revert to the prefectural authorities and the power to sanction executions shall without exception revert to the provincial authorities, who shall send representatives to deal with such cases in places remote from the provincial capital. No locality is to ask for modification of this decision.

4. As of now it is necessary to start a planned screening of counter-revolutionaries hidden in the "middle layer" and the "inner layer". In accordance with the directive of the Central Committee it has been decided that a preliminary screening in the form of rectification will be conducted this summer and autumn among all the personnel who have been retained since liberation and among the intellectuals recently drawn into our work. The aim is to size up the situation and deal with a number of conspicuous cases. The procedure to follow is to study documents on the suppression of counter-revolutionaries, call on those among the above-mentioned personnel and intellectuals (not all of them) whose records are questionable to adopt a sincere and honest attitude, give a clear account of their history and make a clean breast of what they have hitherto kept to themselves. This campaign to "clear oneself" must be put in charge of the leading member of the organization concerned; the voluntary principle must be applied and coercion must not be used. For each organization the duration should be short, not drawn out. The tactics to adopt are to win over the many and isolate the few, in preparation for a further screening in the winter. This screening must first be conducted in the leading organs, the public security organs and other sensitive departments, and then the experience gained should be popularized. During such screening in government departments, schools and factories, it is necessary to have non-Party people sit on the committees in charge of this work so as to avoid having Party members act in isolation.

5. In the current great struggle to suppress counter-revolutionaries public security committees must be organized among the masses everywhere. Such committees should be elected by the people in every township in the countryside and in every department and organization, school, factory and neighbourhood in the cities. The number of committee members may be as small as three and as large as eleven and must include reliable non-Party patriots so as to make the committee a united front type of organization for safeguarding public security. Under the leadership of the government and public security organs at the basic level, such committees have the responsibility of assisting the people's government in eliminating counter-revolutionaries, guarding against traitors and spies and safeguarding our national and public security. Their establishment must proceed in a well-guided way in those rural areas

where the agrarian reform has been completed or in cities where the work of suppressing counter-revolutionaries is well under way, so as to prevent bad elements from seizing the opportunity to worm their way in.

Resolutions of the Third National Conference on Public Security (May 15, 1951)

Source: *Wansui* (1969), p. 506, and *Xuanji*, V, pp. 39-41. This is a combined representation of these two sources. Available English Translations: *JPRS, Miscellany, I*, pp. 9-10; and *SW, V*, pp. 50-52.

The Third National Conference on Public Security Work was held in May 1951. For more on this conference see K. Lieberthal (1976), pp. 54-55. Excerpts from the resolutions of this conference published in Wansui (1969) are, in many instances, similar to the article "The Mass Line of the Party Must Be Implemented in the Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries" in Xuanji, V, which is cited as "several passages from directives written by Comrade Mao Zedong at the passing of resolutions of the Third National Conference on Public Security Work." We have therefore combined the two sources and noted differences between the two texts. Since the texts overlap each other in an intricate fashion at some points, we have eliminated the paragraph divisions in both (which are indicated in Xuanji by numeral headings) and, instead, indicated overlapping segments in our notes.

The large number of prisoners who are to be sentenced to prison terms constitutes a considerable labor force. In order to reform them, to solve the difficulties of prisons, and in order not to let the counterrevolutionaries serving prison terms be fed without working for it, we must immediately take steps to organize the work of reforming people through labor ¹.

After this nationwide campaign for the suppression of counterrevolutionaries, the activities of secret agents and spies who have not yet been detected will be hidden even more deeply from view. Accordingly, public security departments must proceed to carry out even more systematic investigation work and educate the masses of the people to pay overall attention to the work of safeguarding [our nation] against the traitors. ²

With regard to the number of executions of counterrevolutionaries, it must be kept within a certain proportion [of those arrested]. The principle here is ³for those who have committed [crimes] involving taking human lives, or other most serious crimes for which a punishment short of the death penalty would not pacify the people's wrath, as well as for those who have most seriously injured the national interest, it is necessary that we resolutely impose the death penalty and swiftly carry out the execution. As for those who have not committed [crimes] involving taking human lives [or have committed crimes that] have not greatly aroused the people's wrath, and those who, though they have seriously injured the national interest though not to the utmost degree, but who still deserve to be sentenced to death, we should adopt the policy of sentencing them to death but staying the execution for two years and forcing them to engage in labor, [with the final judgment to be made on the basis of] how they behave in the future. [This policy applies] especially to those counterrevolutionaries who ought to be sentenced to death and who have been flushed out from [the ranks of] the Communist Party, from within the People's Government system, the People's Liberation Army system, the cultural and educational circles, the industrial and commercial circles, the religious circles, the democratic parties, and the people's organizations. ⁴In general, we should, as a matter of principle, carry out executions in about ten to twenty per cent [of the cases]. In the remaining eighty to ninety per cent [we should] adopt the policy of imposing the death penalty but staying the executions, and forcing [these counterrevolutionaries] to engage in labor and see how they behave. Only in this way can we gain the sympathy of society, avoid committing mistakes on our part regarding this question, and divide and destroy our enemies. This will be helpful in the thorough destruction of the counterrevolutionary forces; furthermore, this will preserve a large labor force that will be beneficial to the nation's production and construction. ⁵In addition it should be clearly stipulated that if there is a choice as to whether or not a person should be arrested, then that person should definitely not be arrested. To arrest [such a person] would be to make a mistake. If there is a choice as to whether or not a person should be

executed, then that person should definitely not be executed. To execute [such a person] would be to make a mistake. ⁶

The movement for the suppression of counterrevolutionaries now being carried on throughout the entire country is a great, intense, and complicated struggle. The line for [our] work that has already been carried out effectively everywhere in the country is the Party's mass line. This is simply: ⁷ leadership by the Party committee; mobilization of the entire Party and of the masses; drawing on the participation of people from the democratic parties and the various circles [in society]; unified planning and unified action; strict examination of the lists of arrests and executions; paying attention to the strategy of struggle in each period; extensively carrying out the work of propaganda and education (holding all types of representative meetings, cadre meetings, forums, and mass meetings; and at these meetings, letting the plaintiffs voice their grievances and exhibit evidence of the crimes, and using films, slide shows, drama and songs, newspapers, pamphlets and leaflets, doing propaganda so that every household and every person understands and knows [what the situation is]) ⁸ smashing closed-doorism ⁹ and mysticism; and steadfastly opposing the tendency to do work crudely and hastily. Wherever work is done in complete conformity to this line it is entirely correct. Wherever work is not done in conformity to this line it is totally incorrect. Where work is done in general conformity with this line, but not completely so, it is correct in the main but not completely correct. We believe that [following] this line in our work will serve to guarantee the continuous deepening of the work of suppressing the counterrevolutionaries and the achievement of complete victory. From now on we must follow this work line completely in the work of suppressing the counterrevolutionaries. The most important thing is to vigorously examine the lists of arrests and executions ¹⁰ and to do a good job of carrying out propaganda and education extensively. When we fulfill these two requirements, we will be able to avoid making mistakes. ¹¹

In order to prevent a "Left" deviation from occurring in the midst of the high tide of the campaign to suppress counterrevolutionaries, it has been resolved that as of June 1 in all localities throughout the country, including those places where to date only a very few people have been executed, the power to warrant arrests will, without exception, revert to the level of the [special] district [Party] Committee and the special [district] commissioner's office, and the power to warrant executions will, also without exception, revert to the provincial level. As for cases where [a crime has been committed] far from where the provincial [authorities] are located, the provincial [authorities] will dispatch representatives to handle [these cases]. No locality may demand a reversal of these decisions. ¹²

As to counterrevolutionary elements in the "middle layer" and the "inner layer," ¹³ from now on we must proceed to investigate [these problems] in a planned way. It has been decided that in accord with the directives of the Central Committee, during this summer and autumn we will use the form of rectification to carry out a general preliminary investigation of personnel who have been retained [since Liberation] and intellectuals who have been recently recruited. The purpose is to clarify the situation and to dispose of the most outstanding problems. The methods are to study the documents [relating to] the suppression of counterrevolutionaries, to appeal to those who have problems among the personnel who have been retained and to recently recruited intellectuals (not all of them) to adopt an attitude of sincerity and honesty in order to give a clean account of their past and make a clean breast of their hidden problems. Such a confession movement must be put under the charge of the [unit] leaders; [we must] adopt the principle of voluntary [action], and [we must] apply no coercion. In each unit the duration [of the movement] should be short; don't stretch it out. The strategy is to win over the majority and isolate the minority in preparation for further investigation, which would come in the winter. Investigation must first be conducted in the leading organs, the public security organs, and other vital departments, so as to acquire experience that can be popularized. In carrying out this type of investigation work in the government system and in schools and factories, we must have non-Party people participate in the committees responsible for the investigation work in order to avoid [a situation where] the Communist Party members are doing the work in isolation. ¹⁴

Everywhere in the country, in this great struggle to suppress counterrevolutionaries, there must be widespread organizing of public security and defense committees among the masses. These committees should be organized by popular elections with the *xiang* as the unit in the countryside, and in the cities, with the [governmental and Party] organs, schools, factories, and neighborhoods as units. There should be at least three and at most eleven members in each committee. [The committees] must absorb the participation of reliable patriotic people from outside the Party and become United Front organizations for public security and defense. These committees will follow the leadership of the

basic-level government and public security organs and will bear the responsibility for helping the People's Government liquidate counterrevolutionaries, guard against traitors and spies, ¹⁵protect the country, and for public order and security. In the countryside, after the completion of land reform, ¹⁶and in the cities, after the work of suppressing counterrevolutionaries has been developed, such committees should be organized, under [strong] leadership, in order to prevent bad people from taking advantage of the situation to infiltrate them.

Notes

1 This paragraph appears only in Wansui (1969).

2 This paragraph appears only in Wansui (1969).

3 This passage, from the beginning of the paragraph to this point, appears only in Xuanji.

4 See text Sept. 21, 1949, note 1, and text Oct. 1, 1949, note 3.

5 The preceding passage, starting with "[This policy applies]" and up to this point, appears only in Wansui (1969).

6 This last section of the paragraph is an integral part of section (2) in Xuanji but is separated from the foregoing segments in Wansui (1969)

7 The phrases "is the Party's mass line" and "This is simply" are missing in Wansui (1969). The "mass line" (qunzhong luxian) method of leadership is the cardinal principle of leading the masses while also relying on the masses. It is a crucial concept in understanding Mao's political philosophy. It defines that all correct leadership stems from the masses and goes to the masses (i.e., is applied among the masses). In practice it stipulates that the leadership must first organize the ideas and opinions gathered from the masses (albeit that they are scattered and unsystematic), then turn these into systematic ideas through studying them, and then do education and propaganda work among the masses so as to transform these ideas into ones that can be generally and popularly held by the masses themselves, and for the masses to then put the ideas thus inculcated by the leadership into action themselves. These ideas can then be tested for correctness in the crucible of practical application, and whether or not the ideas of the leadership are vindicated will depend on how usable they are for the masses. For the basic definitions of this method, see Mao's article "Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership" (Xuanji, III, pp. 117-122), where Mao called it "the Marxist theory of knowledge." For a thorough discussion of the mass line concept and practice, see J. Lewis (1963) and E. Hammond (Jan. 1978). 8. This passage in parentheses appears only in Xuanji. 9. See text June 6, 1950(1), note 8. 10. Here we followed the "Wansui" version. The Xuanji version has "lists of death sentences passed." 11. This paragraph appears as the first in Xuanji and the last in Wansui (1969). 12. This paragraph appears only in Xuanji. 13. See text Feb. 18, 1951, note 4. 14. This paragraph also appears only in Xuanji. 15. See text Jan. 17, 1951, note 1. 16. See text Feb. 18, 1951, note 2.