

Title: Decision of the CCP Central Committee on the Policy of Application of the Death Sentence with a Two- Year Suspension to the Majority of Counterrevolutionaries.**Author: Mao Zedong****Date: May 8, 1951 1****Source:.** Xuanji, V, pp. 43-44. Available English Translation: SW, V, pp. 54-56.**Description:.** Two- Year Suspension of dead penalty

The Central Committee has made the following decision regarding the counterrevolutionaries purged from within the Communist Party, and from the People's Liberation Army, the People's Government system, educational, industrial, commercial, and religious circles, and from within the various democratic parties and the various people's organizations: 1 Those people whose crimes are not so serious as to warrant their execution ought to be sentenced to limited [prison] terms or to life imprisonment, or to be placed under supervision and surveillance; apart from these, among those elements who do deserve execution, only those who have committed crimes that involved taking people's lives, and those who have committed other serious crimes that have incurred the anger of the masses, such as in cases of raping many women or stealing large amounts of property, and those who have most seriously damaged the national interest, will be executed; as to the rest, we will adopt a uniform policy of sentencing them to death but giving them a two year reprieve, during which period they will be forced to take part in labor, and [final judgment will be made] on the basis of how they behave. 2 This policy is a policy of caution that will prevent mistakes. This policy can gain extensive support among a broad range of people in society. This policy can split the counterrevolutionary forces and thus facilitate the complete extermination of the counterrevolutionaries. In addition, this policy will conserve a lot of labor power and so facilitate the task of national reconstruction. Therefore, it is a correct policy. It is estimated that among the counterrevolutionaries who, as we have mentioned above, have been purged from within the Party, the government, the military, educational and economic circles and from the [people's] organizations, and who deserve to be executed, those who have committed crimes involving the taking of lives or other crimes that have aroused the anger of the masses and those who have most seriously damaged the national interest constitute only a very small minority, generally not exceeding ten or twenty per cent, while those who should be sentenced to death but [are to be] given a reprieve probably constitute eighty or ninety per cent, which means that eighty to ninety per cent of the capital offenders will be reprieved and not executed. These people are different from the bandit chiefs, incorrigible criminals, and local ruffians and petty tyrants in the rural areas, and from local tyrants, bandit leaders, incorrigible criminals, big chiefs among hoodlums, and the big bosses of secret societies, gangs and sects in the cities; they are also different from certain secret agents who have most severely damaged the national interest in that they have not committed crimes involving the taking of people's lives or other serious crimes that have aroused the deep hatred of the masses. 3 The degree to which they have damaged the national interest is serious, but it is still not the most serious. They have committed capital offenses, but the masses were not directly harmed. If we execute these people, it will not be easily understood by the masses and public figures, and society will not give us its full support; at the same time, a large amount of labor power will be lost, and the purpose of splitting the enemy forces will not be served, and, moreover, we might make mistakes on this problem. Thus, the Central Committee has decided to adopt, with regard to this type of people, a policy of sentencing them to death but giving them a reprieve, forcing them to take part in labor, and

[making the final judgment] on the basis of how they behave. If among these persons there are some who cannot be reformed and who continue to do bad deeds, we can still execute them later; the power to take action is in our hands. In disposing of counterrevolutionaries purged from within Party, government, military, educational, and economic circles, and from [people's] organizations, all local authorities are requested to handle matters in accordance with the above-stated principles. For the sake of being cautious, all [lower levels] should apply for the approval of the [authorities at the level of] the greater administrative regions or the military regions in handling all cases involving that very small minority of people whose death sentence ought to be carried out [in general constituting ten to twenty per cent of those who have committed capital crimes]. With regard to [handling cases] where important elements in the United Front 4 are involved, approval from the Central Committee must be solicited. In addition, with regard to the counterrevolutionaries in the rural areas, we must also execute only those whose execution is absolutely necessary to appease the hatred of the people and must not execute any person whose execution is not demanded by the people. Among these there will be some people to whom the policy of passing the death sentence but giving them a reprieve should also be applied. Those whose execution is demanded by the people, on the other hand, must be executed to quiet the people's anger and to promote production.

Notes

1. See text Sept. 21, 1949, note 1, and text Oct. 1, 1949, note 3.
2. This decision is reflected in the resolutions of the Third National Conference on Public Security, for which Mao wrote several paragraphs of instructions. See text May 15, 1951.
3. See text Jan. 17, 1951, note 1.
4. Mao is most likely referring to important members of the national bourgeoisie who may have engaged in counterrevolutionary activities of a sort in the past but whose cooperation was needed to consolidate the united front with the national bourgeoisie in general. See text March 12, 1950, this volume, note 3. For the nature of the "United Front" mentioned here, see text Feb. 18, 1951, note 13.