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Speeches/Documents

Title: The united front in cultural work

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Description: This speech was delivered by Comrade Mao Zedong at a conference of cultural and educational workers of the Shensi-Kansu-Ningsia Border Region.

The purpose of all our work is the overthrow of Japanese imperialism. Like Hitler, Japanese imperialism is approaching its doom.

But we must continue our efforts, for only so can we achieve its final overthrow. In our work the war comes first, then production, then cultural work. An army without culture is a dull-witted army, and a dull-witted army cannot defeat the enemy.

The culture of the Liberated Areas already has its progressive side, but it still has a backward side. The Liberated Areas already have a new culture, a people's culture, but a good many vestiges of feudalism survive. Among the 1,500,000 people of the Shensi-Kansu-Ningsia Border Region there are more than 1,000,000 illiterates, there are 2,000 practitioners of witchcraft, and the broad masses are still under the influence of superstition. These are enemies inside the minds of the people. It is often more difficult to combat the enemies inside people's minds than to fight Japanese imperialism. We must call on the masses to arise in struggle against their own illiteracy, superstitions and unhygienic habits. For this struggle a broad united front is indispensable. And this united front has to be particularly broad in a place like the Shensi-Kansu-Ningsia Border Region, which has a sparse population, poor communications and a low cultural base to start from and in addition is fighting a war. Hence, in our education we must have not only regular primary and secondary schools but also scattered, irregular village schools, newspaper-reading groups and literacy classes. Not only must we have schools of the modern type but we must also utilize and transform the old-style village schools.

In the arts, we must have not only modern drama but also the Shensi opera and the yangko dance. Not only must we have new Shensi operas and new yangko dances, but we must also utilize and gradually transform the old opera companies and the old yangko troupes, which comprise 90 per cent of all yangko troupes. This approach is even more necessary in the field of medicine. In the Shensi-Kansu-Ningsia Border Region the human and animal mortality rates are both very high, and at the same time many people still believe in witchcraft. In such circumstances, to rely solely on modern doctors is no solution. Of course, modern doctors have advantages over doctors of the old type, but if they do not concern themselves with the sufferings of the people, do not train doctors for the people, do not unite with the thousand and more doctors and veterinarians of the old type in the Border Region and do not help them to make progress, then they will actually be helping the witch doctors and showing indifference to the high human and animal mortality rates. There are two principles for the united front: the first is to unite, and the second is to criticize, educate and transform. In the united front, capitulationism is wrong, and so is sectarianism with its exclusiveness and contempt for others.

Our task is to unite with all intellectuals, artists and doctors of the old type who can be useful, to help them, convert them and transform them. In order to transform them, we must first unite with them. If we do it properly, they will welcome our help.

Our culture is a people's culture; our cultural workers must serve the people with great enthusiasm and devotion, and they must link themselves with the masses, not divorce themselves from the masses.

In order to do so, they must act in accordance with the needs and wishes of the masses. All work done for the masses must start from their needs and not from the desire of any individual, however well-intentioned. It often happens that objectively the masses need a certain change, but subjectively they are not yet conscious of the need, not yet willing or determined to make the change. In such cases, we should wait patiently. We should not make the change until, through our work, most of the masses have become conscious of the need and are willing and determined to carry it out. Otherwise we shall isolate ourselves from the masses. Unless they are conscious and willing, any kind of work that requires their participation will turn out to be a mere formality and will fail. The saying "Haste does not bring success" does not mean that we should not make haste, but that we should not be impetuous; impetuosity leads only to failure.

This is true in any kind of work, and particularly in the cultural and educational work the aim of which is to transform the thinking of the masses. There are two principles here: one is the actual needs of the masses rather than what we fancy they need, and the other is the wishes of the masses, who must make up their own minds instead of our making up their minds for them.