

SPEECH AT THE JOINT CONFERENCE ON WATER CONSERVATION IN THE LIBERATED AREAS

November 8, 1949

Honourable Delegates and Comrades,

This joint conference on water conservation in the Liberated Areas is a very important gathering. Present are water conservation specialists and other personnel long engaged in this work. Filled with great enthusiasm, all the participants are ready to contribute more to the country and the people. This promises an infinitely bright future for water conservation in China.

Everybody knows that ours has been a backward agricultural country long plundered and exploited by imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism. Agriculture and the handicraft industry made up about 90 per cent of our national economy. In recent years, the reactionary Kuomintang regime damaged the rural economy even more and ruined construction projects of all types. In particular, its perverse use of water bodies as defence works for reactionary military purposes brought about large-scale destruction of river control, afforestation, water storage and other anti-drought and anti-flood facilities. With the exception of those in the old Liberated Areas, almost all the bridges, culverts and dykes in the country were deliberately destroyed by the Kuomintang reactionaries prior to the arrival of our People's Liberation Army. As a result, there have been serious droughts and floods across the country this year. Preliminary statistics show that more than 100 million mu⁸⁶ of cultivated land were struck by such calamities in north, east, central, northeast and northwest China, and the resultant reduction of grain output was estimated at 7.15 billion kilogrammes (including 15 million kilogrammes of cotton

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from the Northwest, which were calculated as the equivalent of 150 million kilogrammes of lesser grains). What appalling figures these are! Our cadres in charge of water conservation, comrades in the Party and government organizations and in the army as well as other sections of the population in the areas concerned did their utmost to protect embankments against flood waters this summer. When the Guantai section of the Huanghe River dyke²⁸⁴ was in danger during the summer flood period, leading members of the Huanghe River Water Conservation Committee and all the engineering personnel in charge of that section together with the local people worked for 25 straight days and nights, finally averting disaster. In other areas there were people, including cadres, who laid down their lives or sacrificed their homes and other property in order to protect threatened dykes. Their heroic deeds were indeed too many to enumerate. Today, combating droughts and floods and building water conservation projects are urgently demanded by people throughout the country. How to meet these demands, that is, how to conquer droughts and floods to benefit farm production and how to best exploit the available hydraulic resources and achieve the greatest results in water conservation in order to help develop agriculture, industry and transport — this is precisely the main item on this conference's agenda.

To realize the above objective, we must work hard and do the following in a planned way:

1. Accomplish flood control, drain inundated fields and dig irrigation networks. These tasks are the most urgent. In flood control work, priority should be given to reinforcing dangerous dyke sections while routine repairs should also be done on other sections. In this way, we hope to eliminate or at least reduce the possibility of flooding next year. Draining fields that are still inundated should be completed in preparation for next spring's ploughing. Where funds and technology are available, all possible effort should be made to dig channels, sink wells and build other irrigation projects so as to prevent possible droughts and increase agricultural production next year. When conditions permit, we should also actively prepare for trial building, at selected points, of larger water conservation projects for permanent use.

2. Dredge canals, irrigation channels and harbours to facilitate navigation and farmland irrigation. This will help promote trade and general economic growth.

3. Utilize the hydraulic resources available to develop industry. We must take active and planned measures to resume and redouble our effort in this connection in order to make our agricultural country an industrial one.

4. Be practical and realistic, and undertake projects commensurate with our capability. On the one hand, we should construct projects in the right order of priority and in light of actual conditions, considering the availability of human and financial resources, technical competence and the existing technical data. On the other hand, surveys and investigations should be made and plans for permanent control of the various river systems worked out so that actual construction can be gradually started once conditions permit.

5. Build our country by the use of technology and carry out our projects by relying on the masses. Experience suggests that for every project we must make the best use of technology, mobilize and rely on the masses, integrate the effort of the technical personnel and that of the masses, make the projects serve production needs, and provide the masses with technical instruction and guidance. Improving our technical competence by drawing on the renovative efforts of the masses is a necessary condition for completing each project. It is also the best way to pool the wisdom of the technicians and the masses.

6. Define a division of work between the water conservation departments and the agricultural, forestry and transport departments, and effectively co-ordinate the activities of all. To avoid wasting human, material and financial resources, hydraulic and water conservation projects on the major river systems should be undertaken in an organized and systematic way and with unified planning and management.

7. Unify planning and guidance. There should be unified planning for water conservation within one and the same river system so that its water can be put to the most rational and efficient use. This is how to carry out water conservation. It is wrong to act on one's own, selfishly scramble for more water or shift one's problem onto others.

Honourable delegates and comrades! Water conservation is an important and yet difficult task in developing our new-democratic economy. To do a good job in this sphere, we must mobilize all forces and overcome all difficulties in the spirit of responsibility to the country and the people. We hope that the scourge of floods and famine will

be banished from China in the not too distant future once its hydraulic resources and water conservation possibilities are fully utilized, and we hope that this will help our country become prosperous and developed.