

SPEECH DELIVERED AT THE THIRD
PEOPLE'S REPRESENTATIVE
CONFERENCE OF BEIJING

February 28, 1951

Chairman and fellow representatives,

Permit me to convey my warm greetings and congratulations to the Third People's Representative Conference of Beijing.

We are very grateful to you and the people of the capital for the tremendous assistance you have given to the various departments of the Central People's Government by enabling them to settle down and work here for more than a year. This has caused, however, certain difficulties for the people of the capital, the most evident being the housing shortage. Many people have already spoken to us of this, and we feel that the government should solve this problem gradually in co-operation with the people. I understand that you have already discussed this question here. That is fine. I am sure that it will be solved in time.

The Third People's Representative Conference of Beijing has an even broader democratic base than the previous two conferences. The number of representatives has increased. Eighty-three per cent have been elected by the people, 17 per cent invited, after due consultation, to participate, and only 3 per cent of the total are government representatives. Elections have been made possible by the experience gained during the past two years and the previous two conferences and because the people have become truly acquainted with their political representatives. Each state-owned factory and enterprise, each university and college forms an electoral unit that directly elects its representatives at a meeting of voters. Representatives of peasants

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living in the suburbs, of industrial and commercial circles, youth and women, and the various city districts are elected at voters' representative conferences. Secret balloting takes place only in colleges and universities, where the voters are all literate and experienced in voting. Elsewhere the voting is by a show of hands after the list of candidates has been discussed. I think such elections are perfectly correct and necessary, for in this way the organizational basis of the people's representative conference — the main organization of people's democratic power in Beijing — has been broadened, the conference's links with the masses have been strengthened, and its structure is better than before. If the present conference discusses and solves more problems for the people, and the municipal government council and the consultative committee elected by it faithfully carry out its resolutions, we can predict the conference's prestige will rise. It will have taken a big step in building the people's democratic power. This deserves our congratulations.

I think people's representative conferences should be convened in this manner not only in Beijing but wherever conditions are ripe.²⁴ In cities where the people are fairly well organized and in villages where agrarian reform has been completed and the people there can choose their own representatives, they should immediately be allowed to elect their representatives to people's conferences at all levels by direct or indirect vote. As to the form of voting, this may also, in general, follow the example set by Beijing.

Speaking of elections, people tend to remember the old slogan of "universal, equal, direct and secret balloting". In the past, under the reactionary dictatorial regime of Chiang Kai-shek, this slogan, raised to oppose the dictatorship of Chiang Kai-shek, undoubtedly had a progressive significance, but immediate realization of this slogan under the new-democratic state power today is not quite suited to actual conditions among the Chinese people; therefore this slogan cannot be fully adopted. The greater majority of the Chinese people, mainly the labouring masses, are still illiterate, they have had no electoral experience and their interest and enthusiasm in voting are still insufficiently developed. If we, under such conditions, register all the voters, mechanically draw up constituencies, and elect delegates to the people's representative conferences at all levels by secret and direct vote in proportion to the size of population, such elections, judging by experience in certain areas in the past, would be a mere formality. They would only cause unnecessary inconveniences to the

people and dampen their enthusiasm; they would not give the conferences a more popular character. Therefore, we cannot use this means to make the present people's power more democratic and more closely tied to the people. Such formal elections are valued by old-type bourgeois democrats, for they can control the elections and install a bourgeois dictatorship in the name of people's representatives. But we advocate new democracy. Our primary concern in elections is not formality but substance, that is, to make it possible for the people, mainly the working people, to elect as their representatives the people they really want and for their delegates to truthfully convey to the government their opinions and demands. If the elections can truly achieve this, we shall not have to go into too detailed consideration of their form, but shall, as far as possible, adopt forms that are familiar and convenient to the masses. This form of election in Beijing proved to be convenient to the people and, therefore, can be adopted at present. Elections by "universal, equal, direct and secret balloting" are not feasible and therefore it is not advisable to hold them in China under present conditions. Such an electoral procedure can be put into practice in its final and perfect form only after much preparatory work has been done and after the bulk of the Chinese people have become experienced in voting and, on the whole, become literate. In the near future we have to content ourselves with completing all the preparatory work step by step in accordance with the actual conditions of the majority of the Chinese people and gradually carry out more universal, equal, direct or indirect voting by a show of hands. The representatives elected by the people to the people's representative conferences at all levels should be required to maintain constant and close ties with their electorate, convey the demands and opinions of the people to the government and at the same time explain to the people the policies of the government and the resolutions of the people's representative conferences. The people's governments and consultative committees at all levels should establish special and competent organs to deal appropriately with every demand raised by the people, reply to their letters and make themselves easily accessible to the people. In this way the people's governments will be closely linked with the people and will serve them in a practical way, while the broad masses will be able to manage their own and state affairs through the conferences and governments. This is what we can gradually achieve in the near future and this will vastly extend the representative character of our people's conferences and governments.

The system of people's representative conferences and people's congresses is our basic state system. It is the best basic organizational form of people's democratic power. China practises the system of people's representative conferences and congresses. The conferences are at present exercising the functions and powers of congresses; in the near future they will be transformed directly into people's congresses. In accordance with the Common Programme,¹² the laws and decrees of the Central People's Government and the actual possibilities of the various areas, the people's governments at all levels, all democratic parties and all the democratic classes should make every effort to set up people's representative conferences at different levels actually and not just formally, so that they may establish, both politically and organizationally, broader and closer relations with the masses of the democratic classes, gradually perfect their form, and in the course of the next few years be transformed into people's congresses fully capable of exercising political power on behalf of the people. Thus, supported by this system — the system of people's representative conferences and people's congresses at all levels — which has proved most effective, all the people will rally around the people's governments at all levels under the leadership of the Central People's Government and form a great united force to carry out the urgent tasks of construction and national defence. There will be no difficulties we cannot overcome and no tasks we cannot fulfill. This system of conferences and congresses, formulated by Chairman Mao Zedong, which is thoroughly suited to the present conditions in China, will ensure our country and our people lasting victories.

The new-democratic system of people's representative conferences and people's congresses has proved and will be further proved by history to be infinitely superior to any of the old democratic parliamentary systems. As far as the people are concerned, it is ten thousand times more democratic.

In order to build such a system in our country and quickly make it an orderly, regular and stable system governing the entire state structure from below, the people's governments at all levels must, in accordance with the decrees and organizational regulations of the Central People's Government, regularly convene people's representative conferences. Experience in various areas has shown that in large cities these conferences should be held no fewer than three times a year, in small and medium-sized cities four times a year, in provinces at least once a year, in counties at least twice a year, while districts

and townships may convene them according to regulations. I said “at least”, which means, of course, that they may be convened more frequently. Experience further demonstrates that in cities with a population exceeding 100,000, urban and suburban district people’s representative conferences should be called to deal with many concrete questions that are important to the people but often difficult for city conferences and governments to solve and thus have to be left to the district conferences and governments. In order to ensure that people’s representative conferences at all levels be held regularly, the people’s governments at various levels should instruct the civil affairs departments to supervise governments at lower levels and should set specific dates for these governments to submit reports on the work of such conferences. This is necessary because certain government officials are not very keen on holding conferences. They are accustomed to allowing a small group to monopolize all the work and are unaccustomed to consulting with the people’s representatives. They consider the convening of people’s representative conferences “troublesome” and avoid them under the pretext of being “overburdened with work” or having “no questions to be discussed”. It is necessary that such people be supervised by organizations at a higher level; otherwise they will not convene the people’s representative conferences at fixed dates. Those who fail to convene people’s representative conferences as scheduled without adequate reasons should be criticized or even punished. Should the reason for postponement be found valid, it is necessary to ask the people’s government at a higher level for approval. In this way we can ensure the holding of people’s representative conferences at all levels regularly and on schedule. The experience of various localities has shown that the conferences bring good results. Most conferences held in the past have been successful and have benefited the various circles. Only a few have been unsuccessful or only moderately successful, but even this had its advantage — shortcomings in the work of local governments as well as bureaucratism on the part of government functionaries are exposed. This will draw the attention of higher authorities to establish effective control over such functionaries and give them further education, thus enabling these places to make a fresh start in their work. Hence, whether or not there are questions to discuss, the conferences must be held on schedule. When there is “too much work to do”, the holding of conferences becomes still more imperative, helping to mobilize a greater number of people and rally the activists among the people to carry out the work satisfac-

torily. Barring certain emergencies necessitating a temporary change in our usual practice and temporary postponement of the convening of the conferences, it is imperative that this important system be strictly adhered to and that these conferences of people's representatives at all levels be convened on schedule, so that the conferences (or, in the areas where land reform is being carried out, the conferences of peasants' representatives) may be the pivot of the work and activities of the people's governments at all levels. The people's governments should report their work and activities to these conferences, answer their questions and open themselves to investigation. Important work and activities should first be discussed and decided by these conferences and then carried out by concerted effort.

In addition, I should like to draw your attention to the fact that democratization of the organs of the people's political power in Beijing has proceeded under military control. Some people think that democracy should not, or cannot, be put into practice under military control. In other words, a country under wartime conditions cannot practise democracy. These people are entirely wrong in considering that military control by the People's Liberation Army and the practice and development of the people's democratic power are absolutely opposite and incompatible to each other. China remains under wartime conditions, for in some places actual war is still going on. The country as a whole is under military control. Nevertheless, we are everywhere putting real democracy into practice, holding people's representative conferences at all levels on schedule. And we are going to hold elections for the conferences. We shall present national and local policies to the people and their representative conferences for full discussion and decision. Neither war nor military control has hindered the people from practising democracy. Conversely, the practice of democracy by the people has not hindered the waging of the war or the exercise of military control. On the contrary, they help and strengthen each other. Why? Because our military control is a people's military control and the People's Liberation Army is itself a people's army. To the enemies and the reactionaries military control by the People's Liberation Army stands as a merciless and open military dictatorship, but to the people it means democracy among them. Military control not only does not cause any restrictions or inconveniences to the people, but protects and frees them from the oppression and bondage of the old regime, brings them great benefits, inspires them to stand up as masters of their own and the state's

destiny and to manage their own and state affairs. In his article “On the People’s Democratic Dictatorship” Chairman Mao Zedong said, “The people’s democratic dictatorship has two aspects — democracy for the people and dictatorship over the reactionaries.” The military control exercised by the People’s Liberation Army is the primary form of the people’s democratic dictatorship. It forcibly suppresses the reactionaries, defends the people in every way, encourages and helps them to convoke people’s representative conferences and establish people’s governments at all levels and, as circumstances ripen, gradually hands over power to these governments. When counter-revolution has been rooted out, land reform has been completed, the majority of the people are organized and the people’s representative conferences and people’s governments at all levels fully execute their duties, military control will become unnecessary and its full power will pass naturally to the people’s governments. Thus our military control not only does not hinder the convening of people’s representative conferences but takes as one of its main tasks the convening of such conferences and the establishment of people’s governments. For this reason it is wrong to put off the convening of people’s representative conferences under the pretext of the existence of military control or wartime conditions.

Economic development has already become the central task of our country and our people, but this new-democratic economic development must be guided and defended by a new-democratic power. Without new democracy there will be no new-democratic economy — an economy comprising five sectors under the leadership of the socialist state-owned economy.²⁷ This is also an outstanding distinction between our new-democratic revolution and past bourgeois revolutions. Before the time of bourgeois revolution, i.e., before the establishment of the government of the bourgeoisie, a capitalist economy already existed and was being developed, but a new-democratic economy, led by the socialist state-owned economy, can be organized and developed only after the establishment of new-democratic government under the leadership of the working class. The establishment of new-democratic government, the development of the people’s democratic power and democratization of our country are inseparable from the development of a new-democratic economy and of a people’s economy and the industrialization of our country. Without democratization of the country and development of the new-democratic political power it would be impossible to ensure develop-

ment of the new-democratic economy and industrialization of the country. In other words, development of the new-democratic economy and industrialization of the country will greatly strengthen and consolidate the basis of new-democratic political power. Hence our basic slogan: For democratization and for industrialization! In this country democratization and industrialization are inseparable.

Long live a free, prosperous and powerful New China!

Long live the state system of people's representative conferences and people's congresses!