

THE WORKING CLASS SHOULD RAISE ITS POLITICAL AWARENESS

August 25, 1949

Has the political status of the Shanghai workers undergone any change since liberation? Yes, it has, and the change is absolutely fundamental, because they are no longer members of an exploited class but members of a leading class. Anyone who does not understand this fact will make mistakes. Some people say, “But aren’t the workers still wage earners as before?” They should know that there is no exploitation in the state-owned enterprises, where the workers have become masters of their own destiny, and although workers in privately owned enterprises are still subject to capitalist exploitation, they are members of the leading class in New China. Times have changed, and so has the status of the working class. The aim of our struggle should therefore shift from the overthrow of imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism to the consolidation of our own state power, the expansion of production and support for the front. The vast majority of workers have come to recognize these changes, but there are still some who have not. That is why we should repeatedly make things clear to them.

We are going through a period of war and enemy blockade. Nationwide victory, however, is now a foregone conclusion—and it will not be long in coming. The blockade may create some difficulties for us, but it will impel us to become self-reliant sooner. Of course, while we should not lose sight of the future, we should not close our eyes to the present situation either. We still have to wipe out the remaining enemy forces. The blockade has created difficulties for us in the procurement of raw materials, in the marketing of our goods, and in transportation. As it is, most of our cotton comes from central and north China, our coal from north China and our grain from central and northeast China. Because of the shortage of railway

Excerpt from a speech made at an enlarged meeting of the preparatory committee for the founding of the Shanghai Municipal Federation of Trade Unions. At the time, Comrade Chen Yun was Chairman of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions. The speech was first published in *People’s Daily* on August 30, 1949.

cars and big ships, the need to defend the carriers against air attacks and the impossibility of daytime transport, we are not receiving our supplies on time. This, together with a limited market, has caused many of our factories to operate below capacity, and some are even on the point of closing down.

Should we be discouraged by these difficulties? No. We should recognize that compared to the ones we've faced over the last two decades of struggle, they are nothing very serious. They can be overcome quickly if we face them squarely. The point is that we have to be mentally prepared to do so. As far as the workers are concerned, they should be prepared for the possibility of a wage cut. Generally speaking, wages in Shanghai have not been high. Shortly after the city was liberated, workers were earning an average of only 250 kg. of rice per month. Yet some of them were highly satisfied with that amount and said the revolution had succeeded. If that were so, the aim of our revolution would have been quite modest. The ultimate aim of our revolution is the realization of communism, under which the principle of "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs" is applied. But comrades, when we are marching and come to a high mountain, don't we make a detour around it? We are now faced with a similar situation, and as an expediency, we have to go around the mountain before continuing our advance. For instance, it will be difficult to maintain production in those factories that contributed to the lopsided development of old Shanghai. The workers there may lose their jobs temporarily. As for the other factories, we should do our best to help them and not let them close down. Some people may say that since they will have to close down sooner or later, they might as well do so at once. But that is an irresponsible attitude. For the workers, employment, whatever the hardship involved, is always better than unemployment. In those factories that are certain to close, workers, trade unions and capitalists should consult together and find ways to help those who will lose their jobs to weather the hard times. Comrades in trade unions should be prepared for the coming difficulties and help the government surmount them. In Harbin during 1946, the first year after its liberation, the workers received an average monthly wage of less than 100 kg. of grain, consisting of one-third each of corn, millet and sorghum. They gritted their teeth and endured the hardship, and six months later, when they had defeated the enemy's attempts at disruption, their average monthly wage rose to 125 kg. When Shenyang was liberated last year,²⁴ the average monthly wage of workers in heavy industry there was as much as 150 *fen* (one *fen* being the equivalent of 1.25 kg. of grain), and accident insurance began to be introduced in workplaces.²⁷ This proves that once we have overcome the difficulties, the life of the workers will improve year by year.

How long will this hard period last? That will depend on three factors. First, the length of time it will take to liberate all of China. The sooner the War of Liberation ends, the sooner we shall be able to reduce our military spending and use the money saved for productive undertakings. At present, however, we have to allocate funds for the war, because nothing can be accomplished without complete military victory. Second, the quality of our government work. In the midst of tremendous hardships, we should endeavour to maintain production and minimize difficulties. Our People's Government will certainly do its utmost in this regard. Third, the political awareness of the working class. Will the masses of workers stand with us and think of ways to get through these hard times, or will they lose heart and complain? If it is the latter, our difficulties will multiply. Comrades in the Federation of Trade Unions should organize the workers to discuss how we can maintain and increase production notwithstanding the present circumstances. You should ask the workers to think about what the Kuomintang did for them during all the twenty-two years of its rule. Let them give us a few years and they will see who can make their lives better.

What should be our approach to the privately owned factories? Private capital being an indispensable component of China's new-democratic economy, workers in privately owned factories should try to raise productivity and increase production. Doesn't this mean helping the capitalists to make money? Yes, but considering the interests of the country as a whole, which is better—to produce more or produce less? To produce more, of course. The workers should be encouraged to judge things from the point of view of the overall interest, not just their own individual interest. Workers in a private factory are entitled to demand that both labour and capital benefit from its operation and that the capitalists respect the democratic rights of the workers and abide by the laws and decrees of the people's government. At the same time, the workers have the duty to fulfil production plans, comply with the contracts drawn up with the capitalists and observe government laws and decrees regarding the protection of private enterprises. We should not only make sure that the workers enjoy all their rights, but also urge them to fulfil their duties. Although urging them to fulfil their duties is harder, we must do it all the same.

The working class should raise its political awareness. The Shanghai workers have a revolutionary tradition, but hidden among them are a small number of enemy agents. For their own ulterior motives, these agents make excessive economic demands and emphasize limited and immediate goals, as if they were the most capable representatives of the workers' interests. We should expose their plots and tell all our fellow workers that any claim to

represent their interests has to be supported by facts, not just empty talk. No enemy agent can escape from our hands. It's not hard to arrest such people. But what's more important is to get the workers better organized and explain matters to those who, because they don't have much political awareness, unquestioningly believe the arguments of any Wang or Zhang who comes along. It is necessary to organize more study classes and lectures to help them clearly distinguish between friend and foe and between right and wrong.

To sum up, we should squarely face the current difficulties in production. There is no doubt that all these difficulties can be overcome, provided the working class and the government work together to find the right means.