

Mao Zedong



Oppose Book Worship

OPPOSE BOOK WORSHIP

Selected Works of Mao, Volume VI

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I. NO INVESTIGATION, NO RIGHT TO SPEAK

Unless you have investigated a problem, you will be deprived of the right to speak on it. Isn't that too harsh? Not in the least. When you have not probed into a problem, into the present facts and its past history, and know nothing of its essentials, whatever you say about it will undoubtedly be nonsense. Talking nonsense solves no problems, as everyone knows, so why is it unjust to deprive you of the right to speak? Quite a few comrades always keep their eyes shut and talk nonsense, and for a Communist that is disgraceful. How can a Communist keep his eyes shut and talk nonsense?

It won't do!

It won't do!

You must investigate!

You must not talk nonsense!

II. TO INVESTIGATE A PROBLEM IS TO SOLVE IT

You can't solve a problem? Well, get down and investigate the present facts and its past history! When you have investigated the problem thoroughly, you will know how to solve it. Conclusions invariably come after investigation, and not before. Only a blockhead cudgels his brains on his own, or together with a group, to "find solution" or "evolve an idea" without making any investigation. It must be stressed that this cannot possibly lead to any effective solution or any good idea. In other words, he is bound to arrive at a wrong solution and a wrong idea.

There are not a few comrades doing inspection work, as well as guerrilla leaders and cadres newly in office, who like to make political pronouncements the moment they arrive at a place and who strut about, criticizing this and

condemning that when they have only seen the surface of things or minor details. Such purely subjective nonsensical talk is indeed detestable. These people are bound to make a mess of things, lose the confidence of the masses and prove incapable of solving any problem at all.

When they come across difficult problems, quite a number of people in leading positions simply heave a sigh without being able to solve them. They lose patience and ask to be transferred on the ground that they "have not the ability and cannot do the job"; These are cowards' words. Just get moving on your two legs, go the rounds of every section placed under your charge and "inquire into everything" [1] as Confucius did, and then you will be able to solve the problems, however little is your ability; for although your head may be empty before you go out of doors, it will be empty no longer when you return but will contain all sorts of material necessary for the solution of the problems, and that is how problems are solved. Must you go out of doors? Not necessarily. You can call a fact-finding meeting of people familiar with the situation in order to get at the source of what you call a difficult problem and come to know how it stands now, and then it will be easy to solve your difficult problem.

Investigation may be likened to the long months of pregnancy, and solving a problem to the day of birth. To investigate a problem is, indeed, to solve it.

III. OPPOSE BOOK WORSHIP

Whatever is written in a book is right — such is still the mentality of culturally backward Chinese peasants. Strangely enough, within the Communist Party there are also people who always say in a discussion, "Show me where it's written in the book." When we say that a directive of a higher organ of leadership is correct, that is not just because it comes from "a higher organ of leadership" but because its contents conform with both the objective and subjective circumstances of the struggle and meet its requirements. It is quite wrong to take a formalistic attitude and blindly carry out directives without discussing and examining them in the light of actual conditions simply because they come from a higher organ. It is the mischief done by this formalism which explains why the line and tactics of the Party do not take deeper root among the masses. To carry

out a directive of a higher organ blindly, and seemingly without any disagreement, is not really to carry it out but is the most artful way of opposing or sabotaging it.

The method of studying the social sciences exclusively from the book is likewise extremely dangerous and may even lead one onto the road of counter-revolution. Clear proof of this is provided by the fact that whole batches of Chinese Communists who confined themselves to books in their study of the social sciences have turned into counter-revolutionaries. When we say Marxism is correct, it is certainly not because Marx was a "prophet" but because his theory has been proved correct in our practice and in our struggle. We need Marxism in our struggle. In our acceptance of his theory no such formalisation of mystical notion as that of "prophecy" ever enters our minds. Many who have read Marxist books have become renegades from the revolution, whereas illiterate workers often grasp Marxism very well. Of course we should study Marxist books, but this study must be integrated with our country's actual conditions. We need books, but we must overcome book worship, which is divorced from the actual situation.

How can we overcome book worship? The only way is to investigate the actual situation.

IV. WITHOUT INVESTIGATING THE ACTUAL SITUATION, THERE IS
BOUND TO BE AN IDEALIST APPRAISAL OF CLASS FORCES AND AN
IDEALIST GUIDANCE IN WORK, RESULTING EITHER IN OPPORTUNISM
OR IN PUTSCHISM

Do you doubt this conclusion? Facts will force you to accept it. Just try and appraise the political situation or guide the struggle without making any investigation, and you will see whether or not such appraisal or guidance is groundless and idealist and whether or not it will lead to opportunist or

putschist errors. Certainly it will. This is not because of failure to make careful plans before taking action but because of failure to study the specific social situation carefully before making the plans, as often happens in our Red Army guerrilla units. Officers of the Li Kuei[2] type do not discriminate when they punish the men for offenses. As a result, the offenders feel they have been unfairly treated, many disputes ensue, and the leaders lose all prestige. Does this not happen frequently in the Red Army?

We must wipe out idealism and guard against all opportunist and putschist errors before we can succeed in winning over the masses and defeating the enemy. The only way to wipe out idealism is to make the effort and investigate the actual situation.

V. THE AIM OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INVESTIGATION IS TO ARRIVE AT A CORRECT APPRAISAL OF CLASS FORCES AND THEN TO FORMULATE CORRECT TACTICS FOR THE STRUGGLE

This is our answer to the question: Why do we have to investigate social and economic conditions? Accordingly, the object of our investigation is all the social classes and not fragmentary social phenomena. Of late, the comrades in the Fourth Army of the Red Army have generally given attention to the work of investigation, [3] but the method many of them employ is wrong. The results of their investigation are therefore as trivial as a grocer's accounts, or resemble the many strange tales a country bumpkin hears when he comes to town, or are like a distant view of a populous city from a mountain top. This kind of investigation is of little use and cannot achieve our main purpose. Our main purpose is to learn the political and economic situation of the various social classes. The outcome of our investigation should be a picture of the present situation of each class and the ups and downs of its development. For example, when we investigate the composition of the peasantry, not only must we know the number of owner-peasants, semi-owner peasants and tenant-peasants, who are differentiated according to tenancy relationships, but more especially we must know the number of rich peasants, middle peasants and poor peasants, who are differentiated according to class or stratum. When we investigate the

composition of the merchants, not only must we know the number in each trade, such as grain, clothing, medicinal herbs, etc., but more especially we must know the number of small merchants, middle merchants and big merchants. We should investigate not only the state of each trade, but more especially the class relations within it. We should investigate the relationships not only between the different trades but more especially between the different classes. Our chief method of investigation must be to dissect the different social classes, the ultimate purpose being to understand their interrelations, to arrive at a correct appraisal of class forces and then to formulate the correct tactics for the struggle, defining which classes constitute the main force in the revolutionary struggle, which classes are to be won over as allies and which classes are to be overthrown. This is our sole purpose.

What are the social classes requiring investigation?

They are:

The industrial proletariat

The handicraft workers

The farm labourers

The poor peasants

The urban poor

The lumpen-Proletariat

The master handicraftsmen

The small merchants

The middle peasants

The rich peasants

The landlords

The commercial bourgeoisie

The industrial bourgeoisie

In our investigation we should give attention to the state of all these classes or strata. Only the industrial proletariat and industrial bourgeoisie are absent in the areas where we are now working, and we constantly come across all the others. Our tactics of struggle are tactics in relation to all these classes and strata.

Another serious shortcoming in our past investigations has been the undue stress on the countryside to the neglect of the towns, so that many comrades have always been vague about our tactics towards the urban poor and the commercial bourgeoisie. The development of the struggle has enabled us to leave the mountains for the plains.^[4] We have descended physically, but we are still up in the mountains mentally. We must understand the towns as well as the countryside, or we shall be unable to meet the needs of the revolutionary struggle.

VI. VICTORY IN CHINA'S REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLE WILL DEPEND ON THE CHINESE COMRADES' UNDERSTANDING OF CHINESE CONDITIONS

The aim of our struggle is to attain socialism via the stage of democracy. In this task, the first step is to complete the democratic revolution by winning the majority of the working class and arousing the peasant masses and the urban poor for the overthrow of the landlord class, imperialism and the Kuomintang regime. The next step is to carry out the socialist revolution, which will follow on the development of this struggle. The fulfilment of this great revolutionary task is no simple or easy job and will depend entirely on correct and firm tactics on the part of the proletarian party. If its tactics of struggle are wrong, or irresolute and wavering, the revolution will certainly suffer temporary defeat. It must be borne in mind that the bourgeois parties, too, constantly discuss their

tactics of struggle. They are considering how to spread reformist influences among the working class so as to mislead it and turn it away from Communist Party leadership, how to get the rich peasants to put down the uprisings of the poor peasants and how to organize gangsters to suppress the revolutionary struggles. In a situation when the class struggle grows increasingly acute and is waged at close quarters, the proletariat has to depend for its victory entirely on the correct and firm tactics of struggle of its own party, the Communist Party. A Communist Party's correct and unswerving tactics of struggle can in no circumstance be created by a few people sitting in an office; they emerge in the course of mass struggle, that is, through actual experience. Therefore, we must at all times study social conditions and make practical investigations. Those comrades who are inflexible, conservative, formalistic and groundlessly optimistic think that the present tactics of struggle are perfect, that the "book of documents"^[5] of the Party's Sixth National Congress guarantees lasting victory, and that one can always be victorious merely by adhering to the established methods. These ideas are absolutely wrong and have nothing in common with the idea that Communists should create favourable new situations through struggle; they represent a purely conservative line. Unless it is completely discarded, this line will cause great losses to the revolution and do harm to these comrades themselves. There are obviously some comrades in our Red Army who are content to leave things as they are, who do not seek to understand anything thoroughly and are groundlessly optimistic, and they spread the fallacy that "this is proletarian". They eat their fill and sit dozing in their offices all day long without ever moving a step and going out among the masses to investigate. Whenever they open their mouths, their platitudes make people sick. To awaken these comrades we must raise our voices and cry out to them:

Change your conservative ideas without delay!

Replace them by progressive and militant Communist ideas!

Get into the struggle!

Go among the masses and investigate the facts!

VII. THE TECHNIQUE OF INVESTIGATION

1. Hold fact-finding meetings and undertake investigation through discussions.

This is the only way to get near the truth, the only way to draw conclusions. It is easy to commit mistakes if you do not hold fact-finding meetings for investigation through discussions but simply rely on one individual relating his own experience. You cannot possibly draw more or less correct conclusions at such meetings if you put questions casually instead of raising key-questions for discussion.

2. What kind of people should attend the fact-finding meetings?

They should be people well acquainted with social and economic conditions. As far as age is concerned, older people are best, because they are rich in experience and not only know what is going on but understand the causes and effects. Young people with experience of struggle should also be included, because they have progressive ideas and sharp eyes. As far as occupation is concerned, there should be workers, peasants, merchants, intellectuals, and occasionally soldiers, and sometimes even vagrants. Naturally, when a particular subject is being looked into, those who have nothing to do with it need not be present. For example, workers, peasants and students need not attend when commerce is the subject of investigation.

3. Which is better, a large fact-finding meeting or a small one?

That depends on the investigator's ability to conduct a meeting. If he is good at it, a meeting of as many as a dozen or even twenty or more people can be called. A large meeting has its advantages; from the answers you get fairly accurate statistics (e. g., in finding out the percentage of poor peasants in the total peasant population) and fairly correct conclusions (e.g., in finding out whether equal or differentiated land redistribution is better). Of course, it has its disadvantages too; unless you are skillful in conducting meetings, you will find it difficult to keep order. So the number of people attending a meeting depends on the competence of the investigator. However, the minimum is three, or otherwise the information obtained will be too limited to correspond to the real situation.

4. Prepare a detailed outline for the investigation.

A detailed outline' should be prepared beforehand, and the investigator should ask questions according to the outline, with those present at the meeting giving their answers. Any points which are unclear or doubtful should be put up for discussion. The detailed outline should include main subjects and sub-headings and also detailed items. For instance, taking commerce as a main subject, it can have such sub-headings as cloth, grain, other necessities and medicinal herbs; again, under cloth, there can be such detailed items as calico, homespun and silk and satin.

5. Personal participation.

Everyone with responsibility for giving leadership — from the chairman of the township government to the chairman of the central government, from the detachment leader to the commander-in-chief, from the secretary of a Party branch to the general secretary — must personally undertake investigation into the specific social and economic conditions and not merely rely on reading reports. For investigation and reading reports are two entirely different things.

6. Probe deeply.

Anyone new to investigation work should make one or two thorough investigations in order to gain full knowledge of a particular place (say, a village or a town) of a particular problem (say, the problem of grain or currency). Deep probing into a particular place or problem will make future investigation of other places or problems easier.

7. Make your own notes.

The investigator should not only preside at fact-finding meetings and give proper guidance to those present but should also make his own notes and record the results himself. To have others do it for him is no good.

NOTES

1. See Confucian Analects, Book III, "Pa Yi": "When Confucius entered the Ancestral Temple he inquired into everything."

2. Li Kuei was a hero in the well-known Chinese novel 'shui Hu Chuan' (Heroes of the Marshes) which describes the peasant war that occurred towards the end of the Northern Sung Dynasty (960-1127). He was simple, outspoken and very loyal to the revolutionary cause of the peasants, but crude and tactless.

3. Comrade Mao Tse-tung has always laid great stress on investigation, regarding social investigation as the most important task and the basis for defining policy in the work of leadership. The work of investigation was gradually developed in the Fourth Army of the Red Army on Comrade Mao Tsetung's initiative. He stipulated that social investigation should be a regular part of the work, and the Political Department of the Red Army prepared detailed forms covering such items as the state of the mass struggle, the condition of the reactionaries, the economic life of the people and the amount of land owned by each class in the rural areas. Wherever the Red Army went, it first made itself familiar with the class situation in the locality and then formulated slogans suited to the needs of the masses.

4. Here 'the mountains' are the Ching kang mountain area along the borders of Kiangsi and Hunan Provinces; the 'plains' are those in southern Kiangsi and western Fukien. In January 1929, comrade Mao Tse-tung led the main force of the Fourth Army of the Red Army down from the Ching kang Mountains to southern Kiangsi and western Fukien in order to set up two large revolutionary base areas.

5. The "Book of documents" consisted of the resolutions adopted at the Sixth National Congress of the Communist Party of China in July 1928, including the political resolution and the resolutions on the peasant question, the land question, the organization of political power, etc. Early in 1929 the Front Committee of the Fourth Army of the Red Army published these resolutions in book form for distribution to the Party organizations in the Red Army and to the local Party organizations.