

Speech at the Supreme State Conference

28 January 1958

Today we shall talk about more general questions.

When I review the past seven or eight years, I see that this nation of ours has a great future. Especially in the past year you can see how the national spirit of our 600 million people has been raised to a level surpassing that of the past eight years. After the great airing of views, blooming and debating, our problems and tasks have been clarified: we shall catch up with Britain in about fifteen years; the publication of the Forty Point Programme for Agricultural Development has given great encouragement to the masses. Many things which we could not do before we can do now, and we have the confidence to do them: for example the extermination of the four pests, [1] for which the masses have great enthusiasm. As for me, I may not be able to catch rats, but I can have a go at catching flies and mosquitoes!

Anyway isn't it generally the flies and mosquitoes which attack us? ... In ancient times there actually was a man who wrote an essay advocating the extermination of rats. Now we are going to exterminate the four pests. For 4,000 years nobody - not even Confucius - made it their ambition to exterminate the four pests. Hangchow municipality is planning to exterminate the four pests in four years; some other places are planning to do it in two years, three years or five years. So there is great hope for the future development of our nation. There are no grounds for pessimism. Pessimism is wrong. When we criticize the pessimists we should not come to blows but reason with them. We must tell them that we really have great hope and not just a little hope. The stress here should be placed on the word 'great'. Or as the Japanese say [in speaking Chinese] we have 'great great hope' (laughter). [2]

Our nation is waking up, just like anybody waking from a night's sleep. We have overthrown the feudal system of many thousands of years and have awakened. We have changed the system of ownership; we have now gained victories in the Rectification Campaign as well as in the Anti-Rightist Campaign. Our country is both poor and blank. Those who are poor have nothing to call their own. Those who are blank are like a sheet of white paper. To be poor is fine because it makes you inclined to be revolutionary. With blank paper many things can be done. You can write on it or draw designs. Blank paper is best for writing on.

If we are to have drive, if we are to see to it that the Western world is left far behind, do we not have to rid ourselves of bourgeois ideology? If the West wanted to rid itself of bourgeois ideology, who knows how long it would take! If Dulles had the desire to get rid of bourgeois ways he would have to ask us to be his teachers (laughter).

Whenever we talk about it we say that our country has such an enormous population, it has such a vast territory, abundant resources, so many people, 4,000 years of history and culture ... we have bragged so much about this, yet we cannot compare with a country like Belgium. In short we are an outstanding people with a very long history, yet our steel output is so low. We only harvest 100+ catties of grain per mu [3] in the north and 300+ in the south; our literacy rate is so low. We cannot compare with Belgium on any of these counts. Yet we have great drive and we must catch up. We shall catch up with Britain within fifteen years.

These fifteen years depend on the first five. The first five depend on the first three, the first three on the first one, and the first year depends on the first month.

Now our enthusiasm has been aroused. Ours is an ardent nation, now swept by a burning tide. There is a good metaphor for this: our nation is like an atom ... When this atom's nucleus is

smashed the thermal energy released will have really tremendous power. We shall be able to do things which we could not do before. When our nation has this great energy we shall catch up with Britain in fifteen years; we shall produce forty million tons of steel annually - now we produce only just over five million tons; we shall have a generating capacity of 450,000 million kWh. of electricity - at present we can generate only 40,000 million kWh., which means increasing our capacity ten times, for which we must increase hydro-electric production and not only thermo-electric. We still have ten years to carry out the Forty-Point Programme for Agricultural Development [4], but it looks as if we shall not need ten years. Some people say five years, others three. It would seem that we can complete it in eight.

To reach those targets in the present situation we must have great drive. When I was in Shanghai a professor discussed with me the People's Daily editorial, 'Ride on the Wind and Break through the Waves'. He said that we must summon up our energy to swim upstream. What he meant was to swim from Shanghai to Szechwan. This needs hard work; it's not like swimming downstream. He was quite right. I really appreciate this man. He is a good man with a sense of what is right. Some people [5] criticize others for 'craving greatness and success, being impatient for quick results, despising the past and putting blind faith in the future'. What sort of craving for greatness and success? Is it the craving for greatness and success of the revolutionaries or of the reactionaries? Is it a subjectivist, formalistic craving for greatness and success or is it a realistic one? When in olden times people used to talk about 'good fortune as wide as the Eastern Ocean, long life as extensive as the Southern Mountains', this was craving greatness and success, and what was wrong with that? Being impatient for quick results is not so bad either! ...

As for despising the past, this is not to say that there was nothing good in the past. There were indeed good things in the past. But always to put so much stress on the past, every day thinking of Yü, T'ang, Wen Wang, Wu Wang, the Duke of Chou and Confucius - I don't believe in this way of looking at history ... I consider that human history advances. One generation is not as good as another -- people who went before are not as good as those who follow later ...

As for blind faith in the future, our aims are concerned with the future. We believe that to put trust in the future is quite right, though our trust should not be ...

There are two ways to give leadership. One is good, the other not so good. I do not mean that one is Dulles's way and one is ours, nor that one is the rightist way and the other ours. I mean that in building socialism there are two methods of leadership, two styles of work. On the question of cooperativization some people advocate more speed, others a more gradual approach. I believe that the former method is correct. It is better to strike while the iron is hot and to get it done in one go than to spin it out. For example, is it right to have a rectification campaign or not? It is right. To carry it out properly it is best to have a great airing of views and blooming ...

I stand for the theory of permanent revolution. Do not mistake this for Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. In making revolution one must strike while the iron is hot -- one revolution must follow another, the revolution must continually advance. The Hunanese often say, 'Straw sandals have no pattern -- they shape themselves in the making.' Trotsky believed that the socialist revolution should be launched even before the democratic revolution is complete. We are not like that. For example after the Liberation of 1949 came the Land Reform; as soon as this was completed there followed the mutual-aid teams, then the low-level cooperatives, then the high-level cooperatives. After seven years the cooperativization was completed and productive relationships were transformed; then came the Rectification. After Rectification was finished, before things had cooled down, then came the Technical Revolution. In the cases of Poland and Yugoslavia, democratic order had been established for seven or eight years, and then a rich peasantry emerged. It may not be necessary to establish a New Democratic government, but even so one must still unite all those forces which can be united.

It is possible to catch up with Britain in fifteen years. We must summon up our strength and swim vigorously upstream ...

Our strength must be aroused and not dissipated. If we have shortcomings or make mistakes, they can be put right by the method of great airing of views and blooming. We must not pour cold water. We are criticized for craving greatness and success. Well then, should we seek pettiness and failure? Should we value the past and despise the future? We must crave greatness and success. The people who say so are good people. We must indeed keep up our fighting spirit. 'The revolution has not yet been completed. Comrades must still bend every effort.' [6]

NOTES

1. At this time, and earlier, the 'four pests' which the entire population was mobilized to destroy included rats, flies, mosquitoes and sparrows. The following year, sparrows having been found to play a useful role in controlling insects, they were replaced on the list by bed-bugs.
2. 'Ta-ta yu'. Mao is here making fun of a characteristic peculiarity of Japanese speakers of Chinese, the repetition of the adjective or adverb.
3. The mu or mou is a traditional Chinese unit of area, about 0.15 acre.
4. Put forward by Mao in January 1956. For his speech at that time, see H. Carrère d'Encausse and S. Schram, *Marxism and Asia* (Allen Lane, 1969), pp. 291-3.
5. In [Talks at the Chengtu Conference](#), Mao identifies the culprit.
6. This is a quotation from Sun Yat-sen's political testament to his comrades of the Kuomintang.