

LIU SHAO-CHI

**HOW TO BE
A GOOD COMMUNIST**

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Comrades!

The question I shall discuss is how members of the Communist Party should cultivate and temper themselves. It may not be unprofitable to the building and consolidation of the Party to take up this question at the present time.

I. WHY COMMUNISTS MUST UNDERTAKE SELF-CULTIVATION

Why must Communists undertake to cultivate themselves?

In order to live, man must wage a struggle against nature and make use of nature to produce material values. At all times and under all conditions, his production of material things is social in character. It follows that when men engage in production at any stage of social development, they have to enter into certain relations of production with one another. In their ceaseless struggle against nature, men ceaselessly change nature and simultaneously change themselves and their mutual relations. Men themselves, their social relations, their forms of social organization and their consciousness change and progress continuously in the long struggle which as social beings they wage against nature. In ancient times, man's mode of life, social organization and consciousness were all different from what they are today, and in the future they will again be different.

Mankind and human society are in process of historical development. When human society reached a certain historical stage, classes and class struggle emerged. Every member of a class society exists as a member of a given class and lives in given conditions of class struggle. Man's social being determines his consciousness. In class society the ideology of the members of each class reflects a different class position and different class interests. The class struggle constantly goes on among these classes with their different positions, interests and ideologies. Thus it is not only in the struggle against nature but in the struggle of social classes that men change nature, change society and at the same time change themselves.

Marx and Engels said:

Both for the production on a mass scale of this communist consciousness, and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, a *revolution*; this revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class *overthrowing* it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew.¹

That is to say, the proletariat must consciously go through long periods of social revolutionary struggles and, in such struggles, change society and change itself.

We should therefore see ourselves as in need of change and capable of being changed. We should not look upon

¹ *The German Ideology*, International Publishers, New York, 1947, p. 69.

ourselves as immutable, perfect and sacrosanct, as persons who need not and cannot be changed. When we pose the task of remoulding ourselves in social struggle, we are not demeaning ourselves; the objective laws of social development demand it. Unless we do so, we cannot make progress, nor fulfil the task of changing society.

We Communists are the most advanced revolutionaries in modern history; today the changing of society and the world rests upon us and we are the driving force in this change. It is by unremitting struggle against counter-revolutionaries and reformists that we Communists change society and the world, and at the same time change ourselves.

When we say that Communists must remould themselves by waging struggles in every sphere against the counter-revolutionaries and reformists, we mean that it is through such struggles that they must seek to make progress, and must enhance their revolutionary quality and ability. An immature revolutionary has to go through a long process of revolutionary tempering and self-cultivation, a long process of remoulding, before he can become a mature and seasoned revolutionary who can grasp and skilfully apply the laws of revolution. For in the first place a comparatively immature revolutionary, born and bred in the old society, carries with him remnants of the various ideologies of that society (including its prejudices, habits and traditions), and in the second he has not been through a long period of revolutionary activity. Therefore he does not yet have a really thorough understanding of the enemy, of ourselves or of the laws of social development and revolutionary struggle. In order to change this state of affairs, besides learning from past revolutionary experience (the practice

of our predecessors), he must himself participate in contemporary revolutionary practice, and in this revolutionary practice and the struggle against all kinds of counter-revolutionaries and reformists, he must bring his conscious activity into full play and work hard at study and self-cultivation. Only so can he gradually acquire deeper experience and knowledge of the laws of social development and revolutionary struggle, acquire a really thorough understanding of the enemy and ourselves, discover and correct his wrong ideas, habits and prejudices, and thus raise the level of his political consciousness, cultivate his revolutionary qualities and improve his revolutionary methods.

Hence, in order to remould himself and raise his own level, a revolutionary must take part in revolutionary practice from which he must on no account isolate himself. He cannot do so, moreover, without subjective effort, without self-cultivation and study, in the course of practice. Otherwise, it will still be impossible for him to make progress.

For example, several Communists take part in a revolutionary mass struggle together and engage in revolutionary practice under roughly the same circumstances and conditions. It is possible that the effect of the struggle on these Party members will not be at all uniform. Some will make very rapid progress and some who used to lag behind will even forge ahead of others. Other Party members will advance very slowly. Still others will waver in the struggle, and instead of being pushed forward by revolutionary practice will fall behind. Why?

Or take another example. Many members of our Party were on the Long March; it was a severe process of tempering for them, and the overwhelming majority made

very great progress indeed. But the Long March had the opposite effect on certain individuals in the Party. After having been on the Long March they began to shrink before such arduous struggles, and some of them even planned to back out or run away and later, succumbing to outside allurements, actually deserted the revolutionary ranks. Many Party members took part in the Long March together, and yet its impact and results varied very greatly. Again, why?

Basically speaking, these phenomena are reflections in our revolutionary ranks of the class struggle in society. Our Party members differ in quality because they differ in social background and have come under different social influences. They differ in their attitude, stand and comprehension in relation to revolutionary practice, and consequently they develop in different directions in the course of revolutionary practice. This can clearly be seen in your Institute as well. You all receive the same education and training here, and yet because you differ in quality and experience, in degree of effort and self-cultivation, you may obtain different or even contrary results. Hence, subjective effort and self-cultivation in the course of revolutionary struggle are absolutely essential, indeed indispensable, for a revolutionary in remoulding himself and raising his own level.

Whether he joined the revolution long ago or recently, every Communist who wants to become a good, politically mature revolutionary must undergo a long period of tempering in revolutionary struggle, must steel himself in mass revolutionary struggles and all kinds of difficulties and hardships, must sum up the experience gained through practice, make great efforts in self-cultivation, raise his ideological level, heighten his ability

and never lose his sense of what is new. For only thus can he turn himself into a politically staunch revolutionary of high quality.

Confucius said, "At fifteen, my mind was bent on learning. At thirty, I could think for myself. At forty, I was no longer perplexed. At fifty, I knew the decree of Heaven. At sixty, my ear was attuned to the truth. At seventy, I can follow my heart's desire, without transgressing what is right."¹ Here the feudal philosopher was referring to his own process of self-cultivation; he did not consider himself to have been born a "sage".

Mencius, another feudal philosopher, said that no one had fulfilled "a great mission" and played a role in history without first undergoing a hard process of tempering, a process which "exercises his mind with suffering and toughens his sinews and bones with toil, exposes his body to hunger, subjects him to extreme poverty, thwarts his undertakings, and thereby stimulates his mind, tempers his character and adds to his capacities".² Still more so must Communists give attention to tempering and cultivating themselves in revolutionary struggles, since they have the historically unprecedented "great mission" of changing the world.

Our Communist self-cultivation is the kind essential to proletarian revolutionaries. It must not be divorced from revolutionary practice or from the actual revolutionary movements of the labouring masses, and especially of the proletarian masses.

¹ From the *Confucian Analects*, "Wei Cheng". Confucius lived from B.C. 551 to B.C. 478.

² From *Mencius*, Book VI, "Kao Tzu", Part II. Mencius lived from B.C. 372 to B.C. 289.

Comrade Mao Tse-tung has said:

Discover the truth through practice; and again through practice verify and develop the truth. Start from perceptual knowledge and actively develop it into rational knowledge; then start from rational knowledge and actively guide revolutionary practice to change both the subjective and the objective world. Practice, knowledge, again practice, and again knowledge. This form repeats itself in endless cycles, and with each cycle the content of practice and knowledge rises to a higher level. Such is the whole of the dialectical materialist theory of knowledge, and such is the dialectical materialist theory of the unity of knowing and doing.¹

Our Party members should temper themselves and intensify their self-cultivation not only in the hardships, difficulties and reverses of revolutionary practice, but also in the course of smooth, successful and victorious revolutionary practice. Some members of our Party cannot withstand the plaudits of success and victory; they let victories turn their heads, become brazen, arrogant and bureaucratic and may even vacillate, degenerate and become corrupted, completely losing their original revolutionary quality. Individual instances of this kind are not uncommon among our Party members. The existence of such a phenomenon in the Party calls for our comrades' sharp attention.

In past ages, before proletarian revolutionaries appeared on the scene, practically all revolutionaries became corrupted and degenerated with the achievement of

¹ "On Practice", *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. I.

victory. They lost their original revolutionary spirit and became obstacles to the further development of the revolution. In the past hundred years of China's history, or to speak of more recent times, in the past fifty years, we have seen that many bourgeois and petty-bourgeois revolutionaries became corrupted and degenerated after gaining some success and climbing to power. This was determined by the class basis of revolutionaries in the past and by the nature of earlier revolutions. Before the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia, all revolutions throughout history invariably ended in the supersession of the rule of one exploiting class by that of another. Thus, once they themselves became the ruling class, these revolutionaries lost their revolutionary quality and turned around to oppress the exploited masses; this was an inexorable law.

But such can never be the case with the proletarian revolution and with the Communist Party. The proletarian revolution is a revolution to abolish all exploitation, oppression and classes. The Communist Party represents the proletariat which is itself exploited but does not exploit others, and it can therefore carry the revolution through to the end, finally abolish all exploitation and sweep away all the corruption and rotteness in human society. The proletariat is able to build a strictly organized and disciplined party and set up a centralized and at the same time democratic state apparatus; and through the Party and this state apparatus, it is able to lead the masses of the people in waging unrelenting struggle against all corruption and rotteness and in ceaselessly weeding out of the Party and the state organs all those elements that have become corrupt and degenerate (whatever high office they may hold), thereby preserving

the purity of the Party and the state apparatus. This outstanding feature of the proletarian revolution and of the proletarian revolutionary party did not and could not exist in earlier revolutions and revolutionary parties. Members of our Party must be clear on this point, and — particularly when the revolution is successful and victorious and when they themselves enjoy the ever greater confidence and support of the masses — they must sharpen their vigilance, intensify their self-cultivation in proletarian ideology and always preserve their pure proletarian revolutionary character so that they will not fall into the rut of earlier revolutionaries who degenerated in the hour of success.

Tempering and self-cultivation in revolutionary practice and tempering and self-cultivation in proletarian ideology are important for every Communist, especially after the seizure of political power. The Communist Party did not drop from heaven but was born out of Chinese society. Every member of the Communist Party has come from this society, is living in it today and is constantly exposed to all its evils. It is not surprising then that Communists, whether they are of proletarian or non-proletarian origin and whether they are old or new members of the Party, should carry with them to a greater or lesser extent the thinking and habits of the old society. In order to preserve our purity as vanguard fighters of the proletariat and to enhance our revolutionary quality and working ability, it is essential for every Communist to work hard to temper and cultivate himself in every respect.

These are the reasons why Communists must undertake self-cultivation. I shall now discuss the criteria for Communist self-cultivation.

II. BE WORTHY PUPILS OF MARX AND LENIN

The Constitution of our Party stipulates that membership is open to any person who accepts the Programme and Constitution of the Party, pays membership dues and works in one of the Party organizations. No one can be a Party member unless he fulfils these requirements. But no Communist should rest content with being a Party member who merely fulfils the minimum requirements; as laid down in the Party Constitution, he should strive to make progress, ceaselessly raise the level of his political consciousness and diligently study Marxism-Leninism. In tempering and cultivating ourselves we should take as our model the words and deeds, the work and qualities of the great founders of Marxism-Leninism, as manifested throughout their lives.

Engels said of Marx:

. . . Marx was before all else a revolutionist. His real mission in life was to contribute, in one way or another, to the overthrow of capitalist society and of the state institutions which it had brought into being, to contribute to the liberation of the modern proletariat, which *he* was the first to make conscious of its own position and its needs, conscious of the conditions of its emancipation. Fighting was his element. And he fought with a passion, a tenacity and a success such as few could rival.¹

¹“Speech at the Graveside of Karl Marx”, *Selected Works of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels*, Eng. ed., Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1958, Vol. II, p. 168.

Engels also said of Marx:

None of us has that *breadth of vision* with which he, whenever it was necessary to act quickly, did the right thing and tackled the decisive issue.¹

Stalin said concerning the necessity of our learning from the example of Lenin:

Remember, love and study Ilyich, our teacher, our leader.

Fight and defeat our enemies, home and foreign — in the way that Ilyich taught us.

Build the new society, the new way of life, the new culture — in the way that Ilyich taught us.

Never refuse to do the little things, for from little things are built the big things — that is one of Ilyich's important behests.²

On another occasion Stalin said:

The electors, the people, must demand that their deputies should remain equal to their tasks, that in their work they should not sink to the level of political philistines, that in their posts they should remain political figures of the Lenin type, that as public figures they should be as clear and definite as Lenin was, that they should be as fearless in battle and as merciless towards the enemies of the people as Lenin was, that they should be free from all panic, from any

¹ Letter to J. P. Becker, October 15, 1884. Quoted from *Frederick Engels* by Yelena Stepanova, Eng. ed., Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, p. 221.

² "To Rabochaya Gazeta", J. V. Stalin, *Works*, Eng. ed., Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1954, Vol. VII, p. 15.

semblance of panic, when things begin to get complicated and some danger or other looms on the horizon, that they should be as free from all semblance of panic as Lenin was, that they should be as wise and deliberate in deciding complex problems requiring a comprehensive orientation and a comprehensive weighing of all pros and cons as Lenin was, that they should be as upright and honest as Lenin was, that they should love their people as Lenin did.¹

These are concise characterizations of Marx by Engels and of Lenin by Stalin. That is how all members of our Party should learn from the thinking and qualities of Marx and Lenin and strive to be their worthy pupils.

Some say that the thinking and qualities of such great revolutionary geniuses as the founders of Marxism-Leninism cannot be acquired and that it is impossible to raise one's thinking and qualities to their high level. They regard the founders of Marxism-Leninism as born geniuses, as mysterious beings. Is such a view correct? I think not.

True enough, the average Party comrade is far from possessing the great gifts and profound scientific knowledge of the founders of Marxism-Leninism, and most of our comrades cannot attain their deep and broad erudition in the theory of proletarian revolution. But it is perfectly possible for our comrades to grasp the theory and method of Marxism-Leninism, cultivate the style of Marx and Lenin in work and struggle, constantly heighten their revolutionary quality and become statesmen of the

¹ J. V. Stalin, *Speech Delivered at a Meeting of Voters of the Stalin Electoral Area, Moscow*, Eng. ed., Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1945, pp. 12-13.

type of Marx and Lenin, if they really have the will, take a really conscious and consistent stand as vanguard fighters of the proletariat, really acquire the communist world outlook, never isolate themselves from the current great and deep revolutionary movement of the proletariat and all the labouring masses, and exert themselves in study, self-tempering and self-cultivation.

There is a saying of Mencius', "Everybody can be a Yao or a Shun."¹ I think that was well said. Every Communist should keep his feet on the ground, seek the truth from the facts, work hard at tempering himself, work conscientiously at self-cultivation and do his best steadily to improve his own thinking and quality. He should not regard the thinking and qualities of such great revolutionaries as the founders of Marxism-Leninism as beyond his reach, give up and be afraid to advance. For if he does so, he will become a "political philistine", a piece of "rotten wood that cannot be carved".

We should of course adopt a correct attitude towards learning from the qualities of the founders of Marxism-Leninism and towards learning Marxism-Leninism itself. Otherwise it is impossible to learn well, if at all. In fact, there are different kinds of people in our ranks with different attitudes towards such learning.

There are people who, when studying Marx and Lenin, fail to get to the essence of Marxism-Leninism, but only learn its terms and phrases superficially. Although they read Marxist-Leninist literature, they are unable to use its principles and conclusions as a guide to action and apply them to concrete, practical problems in real life.

¹Yao and Shun were legendary kings of ancient China renowned for their benevolence and wisdom.

They are content to learn isolated principles and conclusions by rote, and even style themselves "the genuine" Marxist-Leninists; but they are certainly not genuine Marxist-Leninists and their actions and methods are diametrically opposed to Marxism-Leninism.

We have had not a few people of this type in the Chinese Communist Party. We had certain representatives of dogmatism at one time who were even worse. These people knew absolutely nothing about Marxism-Leninism and could only babble Marxist-Leninist phraseology, and yet they regarded themselves as "China's Marx" or "China's Lenin", posed as such in the Party and had the impudence to require that our Party members should revere them as Marx and Lenin are revered, support them as "the leaders" and accord them loyalty and devotion. They went so far as to appoint themselves "the leaders" without being chosen, climbed into positions of authority, issued orders to the Party like patriarchs, tried to lecture our Party, abused everything in the Party, wilfully attacked and punished our Party members and pushed them around. Those people had no sincere desire to study Marxism-Leninism or fight for the realization of communism — they were just careerists in the Party, termites in the communist movement. Such people were bound to be opposed and eventually unmasked and discarded by the rank and file. And indeed they were discarded by our Party members. But can we say with full confidence that no such people will reappear in our Party? No, we cannot yet say so.

Then there are people of exactly the opposite kind. They see themselves above all as pupils of the founders of Marxism-Leninism, conscientiously study the theory and method of Marxism-Leninism and strive to grasp its