



MAO TSE-TUNG

**ON STRENGTHENING
THE PARTY COMMITTEE
SYSTEM**

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This pamphlet contains two articles by Comrade Mao Tse-tung: "On Strengthening the Party Committee System" and "Methods of Work of Party Committees".

"On Strengthening the Party Committee System" was a decision drafted by Comrade Mao Tse-tung for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. In his "Report on the Amendments to the Party Constitution" delivered at the Party's Eighth National Congress on September 16, 1956, Comrade Teng Hsiao-ping described the significance of this document as follows:

For a long time the tradition in our Party has been that decisions on important questions are made by a collective of the Party, and not by any individual. Although violations of the principle of collective leadership occurred in our Party from time to time, yet once discovered they were criticized and corrected by the Central Committee of the Party. The decision by the Central Committee in September 1948 on strengthening the Party committee system played an especially great role in strengthening collective leadership in the Party. . . . This decision was put into practice throughout the Party and is still in force. . . . The significance of this decision is that it summed up the Party's successful experience in the conscientious practice of collective leadership, urged those organizations which had made collective leadership merely nominal to correct their mistake and extended the scope of the application of collective leadership.

"Methods of Work of Party Committees" was part of Comrade Mao Tse-tung's concluding speech at the Second Plenary Session of the Seventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China.

Committee for the Publication of
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ON STRENGTHENING THE PARTY COMMITTEE SYSTEM

September 20, 1948

The Party committee system is an important Party institution for ensuring collective leadership and preventing any individual from monopolizing the conduct of affairs. It has recently been found that in some (of course not all) leading bodies it is the habitual practice for one individual to monopolize the conduct of affairs and decide important problems. Solutions to important problems are decided not by Party committee meetings but by one individual, and membership in the Party committee has become nominal. Differences of opinion among committee members cannot be resolved and are left unresolved for a long time. Members of the Party committee maintain only formal, not real, unity among themselves. This situation must be changed. From now on, a sound system of Party committee meetings must be instituted in all leading bodies, from the bureaus of the Central Committee to the prefectural Party committees; from the Party committees of the fronts to the Party committees of brigades and military areas (sub-commissions of the Revolutionary Military Commission or leading groups); and the leading Party members' groups in government bodies, people's organizations, the news agency and the newspaper offices. All

important problems (of course, not the unimportant, trivial problems, or problems whose solutions have already been decided after discussion at meetings and need only be carried out) must be submitted to the committee for discussion, and the committee members present should express their views fully and reach definite decisions which should then be carried out by the members concerned. The same procedure should be followed by Party committees below the prefectural and brigade levels. In the higher leading bodies there should also be meetings of the leading cadres in the departments (for example, the propaganda department and the organizational department), commissions (for example, the labour, women's and youth commissions), schools (for example, Party schools) and offices (for example, the research offices). Of course, we must see to it that the meetings are not too long or too frequent and they must not get bogged down in discussion of petty matters lest the work be hindered. On important problems which are complicated and on which opinions differ, there must, in addition, be personal consultations before the meeting to enable the members to think things over, lest decisions by the meeting become a mere formality or no decision can be reached. Party committee meetings must be divided into two categories, standing committee meetings and plenary sessions, and the two should not be confused. Furthermore, we must take care that neither collective leadership nor personal responsibility is overemphasized to the neglect of the other. In the army, the person in command has the right to make emergency decisions during battle and when circumstances require.

METHODS OF WORK OF PARTY COMMITTEES

March 13, 1949

1. The secretary of a Party committee must be good at being a "squad leader". A Party committee has ten to twenty members; it is like a squad in the army, and the secretary is like the "squad leader". It is indeed not easy to lead this squad well. Each bureau or sub-bureau of the Central Committee now leads a vast area and shoulders very heavy responsibilities. To lead means not only to decide general and specific policies but also to devise correct methods of work. Even with correct general and specific policies, troubles may still arise if methods of work are neglected. To fulfil its task of exercising leadership, a Party committee must rely on its "squad members" and enable them to play their parts to the full. To be a good "squad leader", the secretary should study hard and investigate thoroughly. A secretary or deputy secretary will find it difficult to direct his "squad" well if he does not take care to do propaganda and organizational work among his own "squad members", is not good at handling his relations with committee members or does not study how to run meetings successfully. If the "squad members" do not march in step, they can never expect to lead tens of millions of people in fighting and construction. Of course, the relation between the secretary and the committee members is one in

which the minority must obey the majority, so it is different from the relation between a squad leader and his men. Here we speak only by way of analogy.

2. Place problems on the table. This should be done not only by the "squad leader" but by the committee members too. Do not talk behind people's backs. Whenever problems arise, call a meeting, place the problems on the table for discussion, take some decisions and the problems will be solved. If problems exist and are not placed on the table, they will remain unsolved for a long time and even drag on for years. The "squad leader" and the committee members should be tolerant and understanding in their relations with each other. Nothing is more important than mutual tolerance, understanding, support and friendship between the secretary and the committee members, between the Central Committee and its bureaus and between the bureaus and the area Party committees. In the past this point received little attention, but since the Seventh Party Congress much progress has been made in this respect and the ties of friendship and unity have been greatly strengthened. We should continue to pay constant attention to this point in the future.

3. "Exchange information." This means that members of a Party committee should keep each other informed and exchange views on matters that have come to their attention. This is of great importance in achieving a common language. Some fail to do so and, like the people described by Lao Tzu, "do not visit each other all their lives, though the crowing of their cocks and the barking of their dogs are within hearing of each other".¹ The result is that they lack a common language. In the past some of our high-ranking cadres did not have a common language even on basic theoretical problems of Marxism-Leninism, because they had not studied

enough. There is more of a common language in the Party today, but the problem has not yet been fully solved. For instance, in the land reform there is still some difference in the understanding of what is meant by "middle peasants" and "rich peasants".

4. Ask your subordinates about matters you don't understand or don't know, and do not lightly express your approval or disapproval. Some documents, after having been drafted, are withheld from circulation for a time because certain questions in them need to be clarified and it is necessary to consult the lower levels first. We should never pretend to know what we don't know, we should "not feel ashamed to ask and learn from people below"² and we should listen carefully to the views of the cadres at the lower levels. Be a pupil before you become a teacher; learn from the cadres at the lower levels before you issue orders. In handling problems, this should be the practice of all bureaus of the Central Committee and Party committees of the fronts, except in military emergencies or when the facts of the matter are already clear. To do this will not lower one's prestige, but can only raise it. Since our decisions incorporate the correct views of the cadres at the lower levels, the latter will naturally support them. What the cadres at the lower levels say may or may not be correct; we must analyse it. We must heed the correct views and act upon them. The reason why the leadership of the Central Committee is correct is chiefly that it synthesizes the material, reports and correct views coming from different localities. It would be difficult for the Central Committee to issue correct orders if the localities did not provide material and put forward opinions. Listen also to the mistaken views from below; it is wrong not to listen to them at all. Such views, however, are not to be acted upon but to be criticized.

5. Learn to "play the piano". In playing the piano all ten fingers are in motion; it won't do to move some fingers only and not others. But if all ten fingers press down at once, there is no melody. To produce good music, the ten fingers should move rhythmically and in co-ordination. A Party committee should keep a firm grasp on its central task and at the same time, around the central task, it should unfold the work in other fields. At present, we have to take care of many fields; we must look after the work in all the areas, armed units and departments, and not give all our attention to a few problems, to the exclusion of others. Wherever there is a problem, we must put our finger on it, and this is a method we must master. Some play the piano well and some badly, and there is a great difference in the melodies they produce. Members of Party committees must learn to "play the piano" well.

6. "Grasp firmly." That is to say, the Party committee must not merely "grasp", but must "grasp firmly", its main tasks. One can get a grip on something only when it is grasped firmly, without the slightest slackening. Not to grasp firmly is not to grasp at all. Naturally, one cannot get a grip on something with an open hand. When the hand is clenched as if grasping something but is not clenched tightly, there is still no grip. Some of our comrades do grasp the main tasks, but their grasp is not firm and so they cannot make a success of their work. It will not do to have no grasp at all, nor will it do if the grasp is not firm.

7. "Have a head for figures." That is to say, we must attend to the quantitative aspect of a situation or problem and make a basic quantitative analysis. Every quality manifests itself in a certain quantity, and without quantity there can be no quality. To this day many of our comrades still do not understand that they must attend to the quantitative aspect of

things — the basic statistics, the main percentages and the quantitative limits that determine the qualities of things. They have no “figures” in their heads and as a result cannot help making mistakes. For instance, in carrying out the land reform it is essential to have such figures as the percentages of landlords, rich peasants, middle peasants and poor peasants among the population and the amount of land owned by each group, because only on this basis can we formulate correct policies. Whom to call a rich peasant, whom a well-to-do middle peasant, and how much income derived from exploitation makes a person a rich peasant as distinct from a well-to-do middle peasant — in all these cases too, the quantitative limits must be ascertained. In all mass movements we must make a basic investigation and analysis of the number of active supporters, opponents and neutrals and must not decide problems subjectively and without basis.

8. “Notice to Reassure the Public.” Notice of meetings should be given beforehand; this is like issuing a “Notice to Reassure the Public”, so that everybody will know what is going to be discussed and what problems are to be solved and can make timely preparations. In some places, meetings of cadres are called without first preparing reports and draft resolutions, and only when people have arrived for the meeting are makeshifts improvised; this is just like the saying, “Troops and horses have arrived, but food and fodder are not ready”, and that is no good. Don’t call a meeting in a hurry if the preparations are not completed.

9. “Fewer and better troops and simpler administration.” Talks, speeches, articles and resolutions should all be concise and to the point. Meetings also should not go on too long.

10. Pay attention to uniting and working with comrades who differ with you. This should be borne in mind both in

the localities and in the army. It also applies to relations with people outside the Party. We have come together from every corner of the country and should be good at uniting in our work not only with comrades who hold the same views as we but also with those who hold different views. There are some among us who have made very serious mistakes; we should not be prejudiced against them but should be ready to work with them.

11. Guard against arrogance. For anyone in a leading position, this is a matter of principle and an important condition for maintaining unity. Even those who have made no serious mistakes and have achieved very great success in their work should not be arrogant. Celebration of the birthdays of Party leaders is forbidden. Naming places, streets and enterprises after Party leaders is likewise forbidden. We must keep to our style of plain living and hard work and put a stop to flattery and exaggerated praise.

12. Draw two lines of distinction. First, between revolution and counter-revolution, between Yen-an and Sian.³ Some do not understand that they must draw this line of distinction. For example, when they combat bureaucracy, they speak of Yen-an as though "nothing is right" there and fail to make a comparison and distinguish between the bureaucracy in Yen-an and the bureaucracy in Sian. This is fundamentally wrong. Secondly, within the revolutionary ranks, it is necessary to make a clear distinction between right and wrong, between achievements and shortcomings and to make clear which of the two is primary and which secondary. For instance, do the achievements amount to 30 per cent or to 70 per cent of the whole? It will not do either to understate or to overstate. We must have a fundamental evaluation of a person's work and establish whether his achievements amount to 30 per cent

and his mistakes to 70 per cent, or vice versa. If his achievements amount to 70 per cent of the whole, then his work should in the main be approved. It would be entirely wrong to describe work in which the achievements are primary as work in which the mistakes are primary. In our approach to problems we must not forget to draw these two lines of distinction, between revolution and counter-revolution and between achievements and shortcomings. We shall be able to handle things well if we bear these two distinctions in mind; otherwise we shall confuse the nature of the problems. To draw these distinctions well, careful study and analysis are of course necessary. Our attitude towards every person and every matter should be one of analysis and study.

The members of the Political Bureau and I personally feel that only by using the above methods can Party committees do their work well. In addition to conducting Party congresses well, it is most important for the Party committees at all levels to perform their work of leadership well. We must make efforts to study and perfect the methods of work so as to raise further the Party committees' level of leadership.

NOTES

¹ The quotation is from *Lao Tzu*, Chapter LXXX.

² The quotation is from the *Confucian Analects*, Book V, "Kungyeh Chang".

³ Yen'an was the headquarters of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China from January 1937 to March 1947; Sian was the centre of the reactionary rule of the Kuomintang in northwestern China. Comrade Mao Tse-tung cited the two cities as symbols of revolution and counter-revolution.

