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**DEMOCRATIC TRADITION
OF THE
CHINESE PEOPLE'S
LIBERATION ARMY**

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A fundamental criterion for distinguishing a revolutionary army led by the proletariat from all counter-revolutionary armies led by the reactionary ruling classes, as far as internal relations are concerned, is whether there is democracy in the army. It is common knowledge that all armies are instruments of dictatorship. Counter-revolutionary armies of the reactionary ruling classes are instruments of dictatorship over the masses of the people, while a proletarian revolutionary army is an instrument of dictatorship over the counter-revolutionaries. Since they represent the interests of a handful of people, all counter-revolutionary armies of the reactionary ruling classes are hostile to the masses, who comprise over 90 per cent of the population. Therefore, they do not dare to practise democracy within their ranks. By contrast, a revolutionary army led by the proletariat is a people's army which safeguards the interests of the workers, peasants and other sections of the working people who comprise over 90 per cent of the population. Therefore — except for exercising a dictatorship over the counter-revolutionaries — it establishes equal and democratic relations with the masses of the people; within its own ranks, it can and must work in accordance with democratic centralism. In other words, it can and must practise democracy under centralized leadership and exercise highly unified and centralized leadership on the basis of democracy.

A fundamental characteristic distinguishing the Chinese People's Liberation Army founded by Comrade

Mao Tse-tung from all the old-type armies is that within its ranks this army carries out the mass line and practises democracy under the guidance of its leadership in three principal fields, the political, the economic and the military. This is one of Comrade Mao Tse-tung's great creations in army building, and his great contribution both to Marxist-Leninist military theory and to the world proletarian revolution and the national-liberation movement.

Why has the Chinese People's Liberation Army been able to create so many miracles on this planet and write so many miraculous pages in military history? Why has it been able to overcome all difficulties instead of being beaten by them, to vanquish all its enemies instead of being overpowered by them? Where has it got this driving force? The fundamental answer lies in the fact that our army is a genuine people's army led by the political party of the proletariat and armed with Marxism-Leninism and Mao Tse-tung's thinking, and that the wars we wage are just wars for the liberation of the people, genuine people's wars conducted by relying on the people's own strength. Taking this as our point of departure, we have broken thoroughly with the old military traditions of all the old-type armies. We have not only firmly set ourselves the aim of wholeheartedly serving the people, established absolute leadership by the Party over the army and introduced revolutionary political work, but we have also completely shattered the obsolete idea that since an army is meant for military combat and must obey orders, it cannot practise democracy. We have created the first army in history which genuinely practises democracy and belongs to the people.

In the initial stage of the building of our army, Comrade Mao Tse-tung put forward the brilliant idea that "in China the army needs democracy as much as the people do".¹ This idea has been steadily enriched in the course of long practice* of army building and of fighting and has developed into a whole set of democratic traditions of a people's army, the content of which is the practice of democracy in three main fields — the political, the economic and the military. In the period of the Third Revolutionary Civil War, Comrade Mao Tse-tung summed up the experience of the movement for democracy in our army. He pointed out:

The policy for political work in our army units is fully to arouse the masses of soldiers, the commanders and all working personnel in order to achieve, through a democratic movement under centralized leadership, three major objectives, namely, a high degree of political unity, an improvement in living conditions and a higher level of military technique and tactics.²

In line with these instructions of Comrade Mao Tse-tung, we have practised the fullest democracy in the army and applied the mass line by trusting the masses in all cases and relying on them in all matters. This has given us such great strength as no reactionary troops can possess.

Throughout history all troops of the reactionary ruling classes have been instruments of violence for suppressing

¹ "The Struggle in the Ching-kang Mountains", *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. I, English edition, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1965, p. 83.

² "The Democratic Movement in the Army", *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. IV, Eng. ed., F.L.P., Peking, 1961, p. 191.

the people and privileged forces trampling on them. In army-civilian relations, the anti-popular class nature of this kind of army is reflected in antagonism between the army and the people; and in the matter of internal relations within the armed forces, it is reflected in antagonism between the officers and the men. These antagonistic relationships make inevitable a policy which oppresses the men and keeps them in ignorance. They determine the advocacy of absolute obedience by the lower to the higher ranks, by the soldiers to the officers, without any reasoning why. They determine the inability of this kind of army to practise democracy, its fear of it and its intolerance towards it. In order to maintain military discipline it frequently resorts to the brutal methods of beating and berating the men and even executing them. Therefore, fundamentally speaking, the antagonism between the army and the people and between the officers and men is universally found, without exception, in all reactionary ruling-class armies.

Although a number of measures and systems of a somewhat democratic nature were adopted by certain revolutionary armed forces of the oppressed classes before the army led by the proletariat came into being, yet these measures and systems, restricted as they were by historical conditions and the class limitations of these forces, inevitably developed along spontaneous, fragmentary and incomplete lines.

From its very inception Comrade Mao Tse-tung's ideas on establishing a new type of people's armed forces helped the Chinese People's Liberation Army to make the relationship between the army and people fundamentally different from the antagonistic relationship that had existed for thousands of years between the reac-

tionary army and the people. Our army is composed of the sons of the people, it is a servant of the people and it is the people's instrument for achieving their own liberation. It serves the people heart and soul, cherishes the most trifling thing that belongs to the masses, and does not take anything from them however insignificant it may be. Though it carries a gun, it does not oppress the people. Nor does it claim to be the people's benefactor because it has performed outstanding military exploits. That is why our army receives the wholehearted support and help of the people wherever it goes. This supreme unity between the army and the people forms a steel wall of defence that no force can breach.

Comrade Mao Tse-tung's ideas on establishing a new type of people's armed forces have helped the Chinese People's Liberation Army to eliminate completely the antagonistic relationship between officers and men and between superiors and subordinates which plague all the old-type armies, and to create in the army a vigorous and lively political situation in which there is both centralism and democracy, discipline and freedom, and unity of will and personal ease of mind.

Doing things and solving problems by the method of democracy under centralized leadership has become a glorious and deep-rooted tradition and a system; it has become a widespread habit in the daily life of our soldiers and officers at all levels. Democracy is practised in work and training and on the battlefield, in the companies,¹ the army headquarters and the military schools. In all matters, from the formulation of policies and combat plans to routine work, criticism and commendations, there

¹The basic combat units in the army — *Tr.*

is, as a rule, ample deliberation and discussion before a decision or action is taken. It can be stated that there is democracy everywhere, at all times and at all levels in our army. This greatly enhances the consciousness of the masses and gives their initiative fuller play. Everyone feels he is master in the house. Therefore, in our army "everybody consciously attends to things and everything is attended to", and "everything that is good is sure to be praised and everything bad is sure to be exposed". All our armymen observe discipline and obey orders consciously and voluntarily; they have truly become a highly centralized combat collective. This explains why our army has become invincible and ever triumphant, a fully united army in which everybody uses his brains and contributes his energy, fearing no hardship, dauntless before death, and daring and courageous in fighting the enemy.

Comrade Mao Tse-tung's ideas on army building were not easily and smoothly implemented. Inevitably, so unprecedented an event as the founding of a proletarian revolutionary army in China came up against bourgeois thinking on military affairs and the resistance of conventional notions and habits of every kind. Indeed, from the very first day of the founding of our army, people infected with the habits of the old type of army and those clinging to bourgeois thinking on military affairs have stubbornly opposed Comrade Mao Tse-tung's line on army building. While opposing the strengthening of absolute Party leadership over the army, they have used every kind of reason and pretext for opposing the movement for democracy and resisting the mass line. Clearly, the system of democracy and the democratic tradition, characteristic of a revolutionary army of the proletariat,

cannot possibly be established, and still less be consolidated and developed, unless this influence of bourgeois military thinking is repeatedly knocked down and the resistance of conventional notions and habits overcome. Whether to uphold democracy and the mass line or not — this has always been an important aspect of our struggle to implement Comrade Mao Tse-tung's ideas on army building and to oppose bourgeois thinking on the question, a struggle between two lines on army building. The system of democracy and the democratic tradition of the Chinese People's Liberation Army have been affirmed, consolidated, and developed step by step and perfected in the course of continuous struggle against bourgeois military ideas.

The Chinese People's Liberation Army has accumulated a rich store of experience and scored great achievements in practising democracy and carrying forward the mass line for 38 years. To rely on the people, on the soldiers, on democracy and on the mass line — this is the essence of Comrade Mao Tse-tung's great thinking on people's war and a people's army, this is the priceless tradition by which our army, over the past decades, grew from small beginnings into a mighty force, and, fighting against odds, defeated one powerful enemy after another and won victory after victory. The summing up of our basic experience in this field so as to continue and carry forward this priceless tradition still better will make us invincible.

The most essential elements, the most basic experience, in the democratic tradition of our army, a tradition which has been developed and perfected in the course of its 38-year history, can be summed up in the following eight points:

I. Whether democracy should be practised in the army is by no means a question of method but of standpoint and basic attitude; in the final analysis, it is a question of whether one respects the masses, trusts them and relies on them.

As early as 1938 when Comrade Mao Tse-tung summed up the experience of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army and the Eighth Route Army in this respect, he pointed out:

Many people think that it is wrong methods that make for strained relations between officers and men and between the army and the people, but I always tell them that it is a question of basic attitude (or basic principle) of having respect for the soldiers and the people. It is from this attitude that the various policies, methods and forms ensue. If we depart from this attitude, then the policies, methods and forms will certainly be wrong, and the relations between officers and men and between the army and the people are bound to be unsatisfactory. Our three major principles for the army's political work are, first, unity between officers and men; second, unity between the army and the people; and third, the disintegration of the enemy forces. To apply these principles effectively, we must start with this basic attitude of respect for the soldiers and the people, and of respect for the human dignity of prisoners of war once they have laid down their arms.¹

Comrade Mao Tse-tung's instructions on this point are still very much alive for us today. He re-emphasized this

¹ "On Protracted War", *Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-tung*, Eng. ed., F.L.P., Peking, 1963, pp. 260-61.

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idea in his instructions on the five qualifications for successors to the proletarian revolution. He taught us that anyone without a firm belief in the masses and without a good democratic style of work is unqualified to be a revolutionary successor. In fact, the line of demarcation between a proletarian revolutionary and a bourgeois revolutionary is whether one treats the masses of the people with respect, trusts them and relies on them.

This is a matter of basic attitude primarily because it involves the question of how to understand and what attitude to adopt towards the role of the masses in history. Marxism-Leninism always regards the masses as the makers of history, the motive force in creating world history. At the time of the founding of the First International, Marx and Engels put forward the clear slogan: "The emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself."¹ The same point is also well put in *The Internationale*: "No saviours from on high deliver, no trust have we in prince or peer . . . and to all give a happier lot, each at his forge must do his duty. . . ."

Applying this idea to revolutionary war, Comrade Mao Tse-tung clearly pointed out: "For the revolutionary war is a war of the masses; it can be waged only by mobilizing the masses and relying on them,"² "the army and the people are the foundation of victory."³ The history

¹ "Marx and Engels to A. Bebel, W. Liebknecht, W. Bracke and Others" ("Circular Letter"), *Selected Works*, Vol. II, Eng. ed., Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1958, p. 485.

² "Be Concerned with the Well-Being of the Masses, Pay Attention to Methods of Work", *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. I, Eng. ed., F.L.P., Peking, 1965, p. 147.

³ "On Protracted War", *Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-tung*, Eng. ed., F.L.P., Peking, 1963, p. 257.

of the decades of war fought by the People's Liberation Army under the direct leadership and command of Comrade Mao Tse-tung is one of a people's war, of revolutionary war by the masses. Basically, the army's political work lies in educating and mobilizing armed masses. Once a revolutionary is alienated from the broad masses of the people and the rank-and-file soldiers, he is bound to become isolated and to be defeated in struggle, even if he has three heads and six arms. Clearly, if anyone puts himself above the masses, regards himself as the hero, the overlord, and views the masses of the people and the rank-and-file soldiers as puppets, as the "rabble", he inevitably cuts himself off from the masses and has contempt for them. He cannot possibly treat the masses as equals, and consequently fears democracy and is unwilling to put it into effect.

This is a matter of basic attitude also because it involves the question of how to understand and how to approach the source of knowledge. Comrade Mao Tse-tung has always maintained that the masses are the doers and that all knowledge, without exception, comes from the masses, from their activities in class struggle, in the struggle for production, and in scientific experiment.

It has to be understood that the masses are the real heroes, while we ourselves are often childish and ignorant, and unless this point is understood even the most rudimentary knowledge cannot be acquired.¹

Fighting a battle is the same. The broad masses of soldiers and commanders at the basic levels are direct par-

¹ Mao Tse-tung, *Preface and Postscript to "Rural Surveys"*, Eng. ed., F.L.P., Peking, 1962, p. 3.

ticipants in the front-line battles and have real knowledge of part of the actual situation; therefore, they are usually able to envisage the problems that may arise in each specific battle in a way that conforms more closely to reality, and it is easier for them to devise practical ways and means of solving these problems. The leading organs and cadres are only processing plants; their task is to go deeply into the actual situation, gather the opinions and experience of the masses, process and work on them and then popularize and carry them through among the masses. This is the mass line. In this way, work can be done well and battles fought well. This is a truth we have repeatedly proved in the wars over the past decades. Obviously, anyone who does not understand and does not want to see this point, anyone who does not believe in the wisdom and capability of the masses and regards himself the number one authority in the world, will never have a democratic style of work.

This is a matter of basic attitude because it involves the question of the class feeling with which one approaches the masses. Comrade Mao Tse-tung always teaches us that if a revolutionary cadre is to be really integrated with the masses, speak their language and win their confidence, he must be full of warmth towards the masses and the soldiers, regard them as closest comrades-in-arms, make friends with them, know them intimately and love them from the bottom of his heart. Our army, from the commanders to the men, is closely knit together and democracy is invigorated and extended precisely because of the identity of class feeling. As for enemy troops who have laid down their arms, they must be regarded as class brothers who were oppressed and deceived; only thus can the Party's policy towards cap-

tives be faithfully carried out and the work of winning them over and educating them done well. Obviously, those who lack proletarian ideas and feelings find it impossible to genuinely respect the human dignity of the soldiers, the people and the enemy troops who have laid down their arms. Naturally, it is out of the question for them to be able to practise a democratic style of work.

II. The "three main rules of discipline and eight points for attention",¹ which base the strict discipline of the people's army on its democratic relations with the people, are a powerful weapon for promoting internal unity in the army and the unity of the army and the people and for disintegrating the enemy forces.

Comrade Mao Tse-tung has always taught us that the Chinese People's Liberation Army is powerful because all its members are self-disciplined, are united and fight together not in the private interests of a few individuals or a small clique, but for the liberation of the masses of the people, for national liberation and for the liberation of mankind. Standing firmly on the side of the people, its sole aim is to serve them wholeheartedly.

In the earliest days of the Red Army, Comrade Mao Tse-tung personally formulated the "three main rules of discipline and eight points for attention". The aim behind the creation of the proletarian revolutionary army

¹The three main rules of discipline are: Obey orders in all your actions; do not take a single needle or piece of thread from the masses; and turn in everything captured. The eight points for attention are: Speak politely; pay fairly for what you buy; return everything you borrow; pay for anything you damage; do not hit or swear at people; do not damage crops; do not take liberties with women; and do not ill-treat captives.

is embodied in these rules which tackle concrete problems encountered most frequently in the internal relations within the army and in the relations between it and the people. The most common "trifles" are dealt with as matters of political principle. In this way, warlord influences of the old type of army, such as bullying people and maltreating captives, were completely eliminated from the Red Army, which firmly established a revolutionary democratic tradition of unity between the army and the people and unity between officers and men, and a correct policy of winning over officers and men of the enemy troops and treating captives with leniency.

With the carrying out of the "three main rules of discipline and eight points for attention", and in the course of daily contact with the army and through their own experience the people completely changed their old conception of an army. The change was from fearing the troops to loving them, from regarding soldiers as "most terrible people" to regarding them as "most beloved people", from fearing or refusing to serve in the army to competing and taking the lead in joining it, from the idea that "good men never become soldiers" to the idea that "good men must become soldiers". In the past decades our army has proved in practice that by earnestly carrying out the "three main rules of discipline and eight points for attention", it can maintain the true nature of a people's army at all times and in all its actions, and can at all times be invincible.

By carrying out the "three main rules of discipline and eight points for attention", we have gained the best results in disintegrating enemy troops and reforming captives. Our army's lenient policy towards captives and the democratic life within our army provide a strik-

ing contrast to all reactionary armies and are in themselves most convincing. When junior officers and rank-and-file members of any reactionary army come in contact with this reality, the lying anti-Communist propaganda they have been stuffed with is recognized for what it is and class consciousness is quickly aroused in most of the ordinary soldiers of working people's origin. The influence of our correct policy and democracy and our education of the captives made millions of Kuomintang soldiers turn their guns against Chiang Kai-shek, and resulted in many combat heroes coming forward from among those soldiers liberated during the revolutionary civil wars. These also induced large groups of enemy troops to lay down their arms, so that officers and men of the enemy forces, trained by the imperialists and reactionaries, changed into forces opposing their policies of aggression and war; this happened during the War of Resistance Against Japan, during the War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea, and during our counter-attack in self-defence along the Sino-Indian border.

The "three main rules of discipline and eight points for attention" consist of only 61 Chinese characters and mostly deal with the most ordinary and common things, such as speaking politely and paying fairly for what you buy. Of course, all this is meaningless to people filled with the notions of the old army, and those whose heads are crammed full of foreign doctrines cannot see the use of such "country bumpkin" talk. They do not understand that these very common rules shine with the brilliance of creative Marxism-Leninism and, in concrete terms, embody the essential idea in the building of a proletarian revolutionary army. Some people regard

these 61 Chinese characters as very simple. How easy it is to carry out these rules, they think. But in fact they fail to understand that these rules cannot be carried out at all unless there is the spirit of wholehearted service to the people and a thoroughly revolutionary world outlook. No bourgeois army, no army which does not really take Marxism-Leninism as its guide, will ever be able to carry them out.

III. The prerequisite and the basis of all democratic life and the movement for democracy are the strengthening of political and ideological education, the raising of proletarian consciousness and the practice of widespread political democracy.

The democratic movement in our army has always started from the establishment of equal political status and a democratic relationship between officers and men. This is seen in the fact that though there is a division of responsibility between the officers and men, respect is shown for each other's dignity. All are class brothers who have come to work for the revolution and who regard wholehearted service to the people as their sole aim. In the interests of the revolution, everybody has the right to learn, to investigate, and to carry out the Party's policies, the right to make positive proposals in accordance with them, and the right to combat any thinking or action which run counter to them. In the interests of the people, officers and men may supervise and criticize one another. Officers have obligations to think harder, to offer more ideas and to shoulder more responsibility. But they have no privileges of any kind. They are duty-bound to welcome proper criticism from the soldiers and have absolutely no right to reject it.

Naturally, they are not allowed to suppress criticism or take revenge on account of it. This is the only way to tap the masses' creative ability and enhance their sense of responsibility to the maximum, so that they will boldly and aptly pose problems, express opinions and criticize shortcomings and, prompted by love and care for the leading organizations and leading members, they will play the role of supervisors over them. This is the only way to heighten the enthusiasm of the broad masses of commanders and soldiers and strengthen the army's combat ability.

The raising of the proletarian political consciousness of the officers and men is the ideological basis for exercising democracy in the three main fields. As early as 1929, in the resolution "On Correcting Mistaken Ideas in the Party", written for the Ninth Party Congress of the Fourth Army of the Red Army, Comrade Mao Tse-tung stressed the need to intensify the political training of both officers and men, raise their political level through education, bring democracy into full play and organize collective life correctly in accordance with democratic centralism. This was necessary, he said, in order to oppose and correct all unfavourable tendencies. In summing up the experience of the new type of ideological education movement in the army during the period of the Third Revolutionary Civil War, he pointed out:

The correct unfolding of the movement for pouring out grievances (the wrongs done to the labouring people by the old society and by the reactionaries) and the three check-ups (on class origin, performance of duty and will to fight) greatly heightened the political consciousness of commanders and fighters throughout