

1953

Speeches/Documents

Title: Resolve the Problem of the "Five Excesses"

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Date: March 19, 1953 **Source:** the writings of Mao zedong pg. 335-338

Description: According to this source, this article was an intra-Party directive drafted by Mao and issued by the Central Committee of the CPC. The problem of the "Five Excesses" was first raised publicly in an RMRB editorial, June 6, 1953.

(1) In the work of our Party and government organizations in the rural areas there exist some serious problems of being divorced from the peasant masses and of violating the interest of the peasants and the activists among them. These constitute the so-called problem of the "Five Excesses." The "Five Excesses" refer to an excess of assignments; an excess of meetings and training courses; an excess of documents, reports, and statistical forms; an excess of organizations; and an excess of extra duties for activists. These problems have existed for a long time, and the Center, at one time, had issued directives regarding some of these problems, requesting that the Party committees at the various levels pay attention to these problems and solve them. However, not only have they not been solved, they have even become aggravated. The reason for this is that the problem has never been systematically raised as a whole. In particular, the most significant [reason for this is that] the struggle against decentralizationism ¹ and bureaucratism has not been launched in the organs of Party and government leadership at the five levels of the Center, the greater [administrative] regions, the provinces (municipalities), the special districts, and the *xian*. This is because the "Five Excesses" that exist in the districts and the *xiang* are basically not generated in the districts and *xiang* themselves but at the higher levels. [The "Five Excesses"] stem from the existence of serious decentralizationism and bureaucratism in the organs of Party and government leadership at the *xian* level and above. In some cases they are products that were left behind from the revolutionary war and the period of land reform ² and that have not been changed up to now. In 1953, therefore, in carrying out the Center's directives with regard to opposing bureaucratism, commandism, and violation of law and order, ³ we must pay attention to overcoming bureaucratism and decentralizationism in the leadership organs, and alter those institutions and methods that were necessary in the past but are no longer necessary now. Only in this way can the problem be solved. In the leadership organs at the various levels, on the problem of assigning tasks, on the problem of calling meetings and organizing training courses, on the problem of issuing documents and statistical forms and requesting reports from the lower levels, on the problem of regulating the forms of district and *xian* organizations, and on the problem of using the activists in the rural areas, from now on it is up to the comrades in major positions of responsibility in Party committees and in governments at the levels of *xian* and above to establish appropriate regulations in accordance with practicable conditions. In some cases the Center should set out unified regulations. In the past, many work departments in the Party, government, and people's organizations at all levels had independently assigned tasks to the lower levels; arbitrarily convened meetings or held training [sessions] for lower-level personnel and the activists in the countryside; issued floods of documents, charts, and lists; or casually demanded reports from the lower levels and the rural [units]; all these bad institutions and bad methods must be resolutely abolished and should be replaced by institutions and methods for which there is leadership, that are unified, and that fit the circumstances. As for the many kinds of committees that exist in each *xiang* in the countryside and the excess of extra duties for activists, hindering production and causing people to be divorced from the masses, they should also be resolutely but gradually altered.

(2) [Regarding this problem in the] various related departments in the Party, government, and people's organizations at the Center level, the comrades in charge of the Organization Department of the Central Committee, the Central People's Government's Administration Council, and its three subsidiary committees—the Finance and Economics Committee, the Culture and Education Committee, and the Political and Judicial Affairs Committee—are respectively held responsible by the Central Committee for rapidly clearing up the various things that in the past have caused the problems of the "Five Excesses," for formulating appropriate institutions and methods [for dealing with these problems], and for reporting to the Central Committee.

(3) [Regarding this problem in] the various greater [administrative] regions and provinces and municipalities, the comrades in charge of the various bureaus of the Central Committee, the subbureaus, the provincial and municipal [Party] committees, and the administrative organs at the corresponding levels should assume the responsibility of clearing up the problems of the "Five Excesses," formulate for themselves their own method of solving them, and report to the Central Committee. In order to achieve this goal, we request that each bureau of the Central Committee, subbureau, and provincial and municipal [Party] committee send out an investigation team specifically to acquaint itself with the problems of the "Five Excesses" and to investigate the situation in one or two districts or *xiang* under its jurisdiction (in the cities they should investigate one or two districts or neighborhoods) and use [the results] as reference material for solving the problems.

(4) As for the problem of the "Five Excesses" at the special district and *xian* levels, it is up to the provincial [Party] committees to bear the responsibility of giving guidance in resolving them.

(5) Agricultural production is the predominant work in the countryside. In the countryside all other types of work revolve around agricultural production and serve its interests. All so-called work assignments and work methods that may hinder the peasants from carrying out production must be avoided. At the moment, agriculture in our country is basically still a scattered small-scale peasant economy operated with old-fashioned implements. This is vastly different from the mechanized, collectivized agriculture of the Soviet Union. Therefore in our country during the current period of transition, it is still impossible for us to put into effect unified and planned production in agriculture, except on the state farms; ⁴ nor is it possible to interfere too much with the peasants. We can still only use [our] pricing policy ⁵ and necessary and practicable economic and political work to direct agricultural production and coordinate it with industry so that it can be absorbed into the national economic plan. Any so-called agricultural "planning" and rural "assignments" that go beyond these limits will necessarily be impracticable and will necessarily incite the opposition of the peasants and cause our Party to be divorced from the peasant masses, who make up eighty per cent of the population of the entire country. This is very dangerous. The so-called problem of the "Five Excesses" in the work of the districts and the *xiang* is in large measure the expression of this type of excessive interference with the peasants. (The other part is the product of the necessities of the revolutionary war and the land reform and has been handed down [since then].) It has already aroused the dissatisfaction of the peasants, and so it must be changed.

Notes

1 The term "decentralizationism" has been used to translate the Chinese term *fensan zhuyi* which elsewhere has been variously translated as "decentralism" (as in SW, V), or "dispersionism," or "excessive decentralization." "Decentralizationism" preserves the

connotation of Mao's usage here. Mao refers, by this term, to the practice of decentralized and uncoordinated decision-making at the various levels of the Party apparatus, a practice that in his view had become by habit an operational principle. When we translate the term as dispersionism, as in text Mar. 21, 1955, we do so because we detect there an escalation in Mao's misgivings concerning the phenomenon, and because he seems to be describing not merely uncoordinated decision-making, but deliberate and malicious undermining of the interests of the whole by individual parts of a collective acting to their own advantage at the expense of others.

2. See text Feb. 18, 1951, note 2.

3. See text Jan. 5, 1953.

4. State farms were relatively large-scale agricultural enterprises managed directly by the state. Their establishment was explained in Article 20 of the (Twelve-Year) National Program for Agricultural Development, 1956-1967, published in Jan. 1956 (also known as the Forty Articles). The purposes of the state farms were: (1) to produce agricultural livestock products, industrial raw materials, and commodity grain directly for the state; (2) to train cadres and technicians for agricultural mechanization; and (3) to demonstrate to the peasants the advantage of collectivization (cooperativization) and large-scale mechanization. In addition, state farms provided occupations for young people and demobilized military personnel and were important to the cultivation of previously uncultivated land, particularly in border regions. State farms were usually large units of 5,000 to 10,000 mu each. They were also characterized by extensive cultivation and reclaimed-land areas, and a regulated wage or remuneration system. By and large, they were concentrated in north, northeast, and northwest China. The more heavily mechanized state farms were usually directly controlled by the Center through the Agricultural Exploration Department (nongken bu) of the State Council. Less heavily mechanized state farms were often managed by state authorities at the provincial or regional level. Although by 1962 there were close to 2,500 state farms throughout the country that together occupied about 5 per cent of the arable territory, the development of state farm enterprises had not been economically rewarding since the late 1950s and early 1960s, and in general the development of the enterprises as a whole was suspended. See J. Prybyla (1978), pp. 57-59.

5. The pricing policy to which Mao refers is the policy in which the state pays a higher price for an agricultural product for which it has a demand and thus stimulates its production and pays a lower price for products whose production it does not wish to encourage. An alternative policy is to simply assign tasks to different producers regardless of the conditions of demand and then to effect a balanced distribution of income across the board. This was not endorsed by Mao, who considered it ultraleftist

Remark

This document, like the previous one, reflects Mao's support for focusing on production and deemphasizing class struggle in the countryside at this time. It also demonstrates Mao's detailed knowledge of the work-style of the Party and government organizations in the rural areas and stands as one of his first analyses of bureaucratism and its consequences during the stage of socialism. See C. Bettelheim (1978), pp. 62-64, 71-77, for an analysis that links bureaucratism to administrative processes, i.e., reports and meetings, developed by administrative organizations in order to compensate for the lack of knowledge that they need to execute their responsibilities. Bettelheim argues that this knowledge is possessed by production units that have, however, been deprived of their decision-making responsibilities, and when the two are united, that is, when decision-making coincides with possession of knowledge, the basis for bureaucratism will be eliminated.