

Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party Circular Transmitting the East China Bureau's Telegram on the Definition of “Local Tyrants”

Date: 19 November 1949

Circular from the Central Committee

To all responsible comrades:

We are hereby forwarding to you the East China Bureau's telegram of 15 November, replying to the Party Committee of the Southern Anhui region [1] concerning the question of what constitutes a “local tyrant” (eba). Please circulate it to your subordinate organizations and ensure that they take note of its contents.

Central Committee, 19 November

Telegram from the East China Bureau

To Zeng and Huang [2], all provincial Party committees, all regional Party committees, the Nanjing Municipal Party Committee, and the Shandong Sub-bureau; copy to the Central Committee:

We have received your telegram of the 15th. You and the Southern Anhui region have both sent telegrams inquiring about the definition of a “local tyrant.” We hereby reply as follows:

(1) Generally speaking, local tyrants are the dominant elements of the landlord class who hold positions of power. However, not every landlord who belongs to the ruling faction is necessarily a local tyrant. This is because some have not held power for long enough to have had the opportunity to act tyrannically and arbitrarily. Alternatively, factional struggles among the ruling landlords may compel some of them to adopt a hypocritical façade in order to win over the masses while opposing rival factions. There may also be other specific circumstances. Conversely, an individual landlord tyrant who is deeply hated by the masses may have belonged to the ruling faction yesterday but no longer belong to it today.

Therefore, in determining who is or is not a local tyrant, who should or should not be targeted, and who should be targeted first or later, we must proceed from the concrete circumstances, the individuals concerned, and the specific facts—especially the demands of the masses and the objectives of the struggle. We must not proceed from abstract definitions.

(2) The resolution adopted by the Central Committee at the Second Plenary Session of the Seventh Central Committee states that “opposing local tyrants means opposing the ruling faction of the landlord class.” The provisions concerning local tyrants in Chapter 24, Section 15, of the Central Committee's draft regulations on the classification and treatment of the various social classes in land reform are consistent with this principle.

These specific classifications and provisions concerning local tyrants are intended to ensure that policy is formulated correctly and leadership is exercised appropriately. They facilitate the division

and isolation of the enemy and the defeat of its members one by one. They also prevent the category of local tyrants from being extended to their henchmen or to ordinary landlords, which would broaden the scope of attacks excessively and place the masses in an unfavorable position.

(3) Local tyrants differ in the severity of their misdeeds, in whether those misdeeds were committed before or after liberation, in their influence on the masses, and in the attitudes the masses hold toward them. All these factors must be taken into account.

Furthermore, the severity of a local tyrant's wrongdoing should not be judged solely by the rank of the position he held. It should instead be assessed according to the breadth and depth of his crimes. The purpose is to adopt different methods of struggle for different targets, thereby avoiding confusion, preventing adverse effects on the masses, and ensuring that the masses are not left isolated.

(4) In addition, some cadres in Southern Anhui have proposed that "suppressing bandits means opposing local tyrants," arguing that both campaigns are directed against the ruling faction of the landlord class.

We believe that, in areas where bandits are present, local tyrants often collude with them; some even directly command and instigate bandit activities. This assessment is correct. However, not every local tyrant necessarily colludes with bandits, and many areas have local tyrants but no bandits.

Nevertheless, opposing local tyrants and suppressing bandits are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Eliminating bandits deprives local tyrants of their means of support and diminishes their influence. Eliminating local tyrants, in turn, deprives bandits of their social base and sources of support.

At the same time, in areas where banditry is rampant, the principal focus should be on suppressing bandits. In areas where there are no bandits or only a small number, the principal focus should be on opposing local tyrants.

In short, all decisions must be based on the time, place, and specific conditions, as well as the urgent demands of the masses. They must not be based on empty, abstract concepts.

East China Bureau, day xu, month 9 [戌删; the original date notation appears abbreviated or corrupted]

Notes

[1] This should read Northern Anhui region (皖北区), rather than Southern Anhui region (皖南区).

[2] "Zeng and Huang" refers to Zeng Xisheng and Huang Yan.