



Mao Tse-tung

**THE ORIENTATION
OF THE YOUTH MOVEMENT**

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THE ORIENTATION OF THE YOUTH MOVEMENT[□]

May 4, 1939

Today is the twentieth anniversary of the May 4th Movement, and the youth of Yen-an are all gathered here for this commemoration meeting. I shall therefore take the occasion to speak on some questions concerning the orientation of the youth movement in China.

First, May 4 has now been designated as China's Youth Day,[□] and rightly so. Twenty years have elapsed since the May 4th Movement, yet it is only this year that the day has been designated as the national Youth Day, and this is a most significant fact. For it indicates that the Chinese people's democratic revolution against imperialism and feudalism will soon reach a turning point. This revolution encountered repeated failures over several decades, but now there must be a change, a change towards victory and not another failure. The Chinese revolution is now going forward, forward to victory. The repeated failures of the past cannot and must not be allowed to recur, and they must be turned into victory. But has the change already taken place? No. It has not, nor have we yet won victory. But victory can be won. It is precisely in the present War of Resistance Against Japan that we are striving to reach the turning point from failure to victory. The May 4th Movement was directed against a government of national betrayal, a government which conspired with imperialism and sold out the interests of the nation, a government which oppressed the people. Was it not necessary to oppose such a government? If it was not, then the May 4th Movement was simply a mistake. It is obvious that such a government must be opposed, that a government of national betrayal must be overthrown. Just consider, long before the

* This speech was delivered by Comrade Mao Tse-tung at a mass meeting of youth in Yen-an to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the May 4th Movement. It represented a development in his ideas on the question of the Chinese revolution.

May 4th Movement Dr. Sun Yat-sen was already a rebel against the government of his day; he opposed and overthrew the Ching government. Was he right in doing so? In my opinion he was quite right. For the government he opposed did not resist imperialism but conspired with it, and was not a revolutionary government but one that suppressed the revolution. The May 4th Movement was a revolutionary movement precisely because it opposed a government of national betrayal. The youth of China should see the May 4th Movement in this light. Today, when the whole nation has militantly risen to resist Japan, we are determined to defeat Japanese imperialism, and we shall not tolerate any traitors or allow the revolution to fail again, for we have taken warning from its failures in the past.

With few exceptions, the whole youth of China is awakened and determined to win, and this is reflected in the designation of May 4th as Youth Day. We are advancing along the road to victory and, provided the whole people make a concerted effort, the Chinese revolution will definitely triumph through the War of Resistance.

Secondly, what is the Chinese revolution directed against? What are the targets of the revolution? As everybody knows, imperialism is one target and feudalism the other. What are the targets of the revolution at this moment? One is Japanese imperialism, and the other the Chinese collaborators. To make our revolution we must overthrow Japanese imperialism and the Chinese traitors. Who are the makers of the revolution? What is its main force? The common people of China. The motive forces of the revolution are the proletariat, the peasantry and all members of other classes who are willing to oppose imperialism and feudalism; these are the revolutionary forces opposing imperialism and feudalism. But who, among so many, are the basic force, the backbone of the revolution? The workers and the peasants, forming 90 per cent of the country's population. What is the nature of the Chinese revolution? What kind of revolution are we making today? Today we are making a bourgeois-democratic revolution, and nothing we do goes beyond its scope. By and large, we should not destroy the bourgeois system of private property for the present; what we want to destroy is imperialism and feudalism. This is what we mean by the bourgeois-democratic revolution. But its accomplishment is already beyond the capacity of the bourgeoisie and must depend on the efforts of the proletariat and the broad masses of the people. What is the goal of this revolution? To overthrow imperialism and feudalism and to establish a people's democratic republic. A people's

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democratic republic means a republic based on the revolutionary Three People's Principles. It will be different both from the semi-colonial and semi-feudal state of the present and from the socialist system of the future. Capitalists have no place in a socialist society, but they should still be allowed in a people's democracy. Will there always be a place for capitalists in China? No, definitely not in the future. This is true not only of China but of the whole world. In the future no country, whether it be Britain, the United States, France, Japan, Germany, or Italy, will have any place for capitalists, and China will be no exception. The Soviet Union is a country which has already established socialism, and beyond all doubt the whole world will follow its example. China will certainly go over to socialism in the future; that is an irresistible law. But at the present stage our task is not to put socialism into practice, but to destroy imperialism and feudalism, change China's present semi-colonial and semi-feudal status, and establish people's democracy. This is what the youth of the whole country must strive for.

Thirdly, what are the lessons of the Chinese revolution? This question is also an important one for our youth to understand. Strictly speaking, China's bourgeois-democratic revolution against imperialism and feudalism was begun by Dr. Sun Yat-sen and has been going on for more than fifty years; as for foreign capitalist aggression against China, it has been going on for almost a hundred years. During that century, there was first the Opium War against British aggression, then came the War of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, then the Sino-Japanese War of 1894, the Reform Movement of 1898, the Yi Ho Tuan Movement, the Revolution of 1911, the May 4th Movement, the Northern Expedition, and the war waged by the Red Army -- although these struggles differed from each other, their common purpose was to repel foreign enemies or change existing

conditions. However, it was only with Dr. Sun Yat-sen that a more or less clearly defined bourgeois-democratic revolution began. In the last fifty years the revolution started by Dr. Sun Yat-sen has had both its successes and its failures. Was not the Revolution of 1911 a success? Didn't it send the emperor packing? Yet it was a failure in the sense that while it sent the emperor packing, it left China under imperialist and feudal oppression, so that the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal revolutionary task remained unaccomplished. What was the aim of the May 4th Movement? Its aim likewise was to overthrow imperialism and feudalism, but it, too, failed, and China still remained under the rule

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of imperialism and feudalism. The same is true of the revolution known as the Northern Expedition; it scored successes, but it too failed. From the time the Kuomintang turned against the Communist Party,^[2] China again fell under the domination of imperialism and feudalism. The inevitable result was the ten years' war waged by the Red Army. But these ten years of struggle fulfilled the revolutionary task only in parts of China and not in the country as a whole. If we are to sum up the revolution during the past decades, we may say that it has won only temporary and partial victories and not permanent and nationwide victory. As Dr. Sun Yat-sen said "The revolution is not yet completed, all my comrades must struggle on." The question now is: Why, after decades of struggle, has the Chinese revolution not yet attained its goal? What are the reasons? I think there are two: first, the enemy forces have been too strong; second, our own forces have been too weak. Because one side was strong and the other side weak, the revolution did not succeed. In saying that the enemy forces have been too strong, we mean that the forces of imperialism (the primary factor) and of feudalism have been too strong. In saying that our own forces have been too weak, we mean weak in the military, political, economic and cultural fields; but our weaknesses and our consequent failure to fulfil the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal task are chiefly due to the fact that the labouring people, the workers and peasants, constituting 90 per cent of the population, have not yet been mobilized. If we are to sum up the experience of the revolution of the past decades, we may say that the people throughout the country have not been fully mobilized and that the reactionaries have invariably opposed and sabotaged such mobilization. Only by mobilizing and organizing the workers and peasants, who comprise 90 per cent of the population, is it possible to overthrow imperialism and feudalism. Dr. Sun Yat-sen said in his Testament:

For forty years I have devoted myself to the cause of the national revolution with the aim of winning freedom and equality for China. My experiences during these forty years have firmly convinced me that to achieve this aim we must arouse the masses of the people and unite in a common struggle with those nations of the world which treat us as equals.

It is now more than ten years since Dr. Sun died, and if we add these on, the total is over fifty years. What is the lesson of the revolution

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during these years? Fundamentally, it is, "arouse the masses of the people". You should carefully study this lesson, and so should all China's youth. They must know that only by mobilizing the masses of workers and peasants, who form 90 per cent of the population, can we defeat imperialism and feudalism. Unless we mobilize the workers and peasants of the whole country, it will be impossible for us to defeat Japan and build a new China.

Fourthly, to return to the youth movement. On this very day twenty years ago there occurred in China the great historical event known as the May 4th Movement, in which the students participated; it was a movement of tremendous significance. What role have China's young people played since the May 4th Movement? In a way they have played a vanguard role -- a fact recognized by everybody except the die-hards. What is a vanguard role? It means taking the lead and marching in the forefront of the revolutionary ranks. In the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal ranks of the Chinese people, there is a contingent composed of the country's young intellectuals and students. It is a contingent of considerable size and, even if the many who have given their lives are not included, it now numbers several million. It is an army on one of the fronts against imperialism and feudalism, and an important army too. But this army is not enough; we cannot defeat the enemy by relying on it alone, for when all is said and done it is not the main force. What then is the main force? The workers and peasants. Our young intellectuals and students must go among the workers and peasants, who make up 90 per cent of the population, and mobilize and organize them. Without this main force of workers and peasants, we cannot win the fight against imperialism and feudalism, we cannot win it by relying only on the contingent of young intellectuals and students. Therefore, the young intellectuals and students throughout the country must unite with the broad masses of workers and peasants and become one with them, and only then can a mighty force be created. A force of hundreds of millions of people! Only with this huge force can the enemy's strongholds be taken and his last fortresses smashed. In assessing the youth movement of the past from this viewpoint, we should call attention to a wrong tendency. In the youth movement of the last few decades, a section of the young people have been unwilling to unite with the workers and peasants and have opposed their movements; this is a counter-current in the youth movement. In fact, these people are not at all bright in their refusal to unite with the masses who make up

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90 per cent of the population and in going so far as to oppose them outright. Is this a good tendency? I think not, because in opposing the workers and peasants they are in fact opposing the revolution; that is why we say it is a counter-current in the youth movement. A youth movement of that kind would come to no good. A few days ago I wrote a short article in which I noted:

In the final analysis, the dividing line between revolutionary intellectuals and non-revolutionary or counter-revolutionary intellectuals is whether or not they are willing to integrate themselves with the workers and peasants and actually do so.

Here I advanced a criterion which I regard as the only valid one. How should we judge whether a youth is a revolutionary? How can we tell? There can only be one criterion, namely, whether or not he is willing to integrate himself with the broad masses of workers and peasants and does so in practice. If he is willing to do so and actually does so, he is a revolutionary; otherwise he is a non-revolutionary or a counter-revolutionary. If today he integrates himself with the masses of workers and peasants, then today he is a revolutionary; if tomorrow he ceases to do so or turns round to oppress the common people, then he becomes a non-revolutionary or a counter-revolutionary. Some young people talk glibly about their belief in the Three People's Principles or in Marxism, but this does not prove anything. Doesn't Hitler profess belief in "socialism"? Twenty years ago even Mussolini was a "socialist"! And what does their "socialism" amount to?

Fascism! Didn't Chen Tu-hsiu once "believe" in Marxism? What did he do later? He went over to the counter-revolution. Didn't Chang Kuo-tao "believe" in Marxism? Where is he now? He has run away and landed in the mire. Some people style themselves "followers of the Three People's Principles" or even old stalwarts of these Principles; but what have they done? It turns out that their Principle of Nationalism means conspiring with imperialism, that their Principle of Democracy means oppressing the common people, and that their Principle of People's Livelihood means sucking the people's blood. They affirm the Three People's Principles with their lips but deny them in their hearts. So when we assess a person and judge whether he is a true or false adherent of the Three People's Principles, whether he is a true or false Marxist, we need only find out how he stands in relation to the broad masses of workers and peasants, and then we shall know him for what he is. This is the only criterion, there is

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no other. I hope that the youth of our country will never allow themselves to be carried away by this sinister counter-current but will clearly recognize the workers and peasants as their friends and march forward to a bright future.

Fifthly, the present War of Resistance Against Japan marks a new stage -- the greatest, most dynamic and most vigorous stage -- in the Chinese revolution. In this stage the youth shoulder tremendous responsibilities. Our revolutionary movement has gone through many stages of struggle in the last decades, but at no stage has it been so broad as in the present War of Resistance. When we maintain that the Chinese revolution now has features distinguishing it from the revolution in the past and that it will make the turn from failure to victory, we mean that the masses of the Chinese people have made progress, of which the progress of the youth is a clear proof. Hence the anti-Japanese war must and certainly will triumph. As everybody knows, the basic policy in this war is the Anti-Japanese National United Front, whose aim it is to overthrow Japanese imperialism and the Chinese collaborators, transform the old China into a new China, and liberate the whole nation from its semi-colonial and semi-feudal status. The present lack of unity in the Chinese youth movement is a serious weakness. You should continue to strive for unity, because unity is strength. You must help the youth of the whole country to understand the present situation, to achieve unity and to resist Japan to the end.

Sixthly and lastly, I want to speak about the youth movement in Yen-an. It is the model for the youth movement throughout the country. The direction it is taking is in fact the orientation for the youth movement of the entire country. Why? Because it is the correct orientation. You see, in the matter of unity the youth of Yen-an have acquitted themselves well, indeed very well. The youth of Yen-an have achieved solidarity and unity. The young intellectuals and students, the young workers and peasants in Yen-an are all united. Large numbers of revolutionary youth from all over the country, and even from Chinese communities abroad, have come to study in Yen-an. Most of you attending this meeting today have come to Yen-an from thousands of miles away; whether your surname is Chang or Li, whether you are a man or a woman, a worker or a peasant, you are all of one mind. Should this not be regarded as a model for the whole country? The youth in Yen-an, besides being united among themselves, have integrated themselves with the masses of workers and peasants, and more than anything else this makes you a model for the whole country. What

have you been doing? You have been learning the theory of revolution and studying the principles and methods for resisting Japan and saving the nation. You have been carrying out the campaign for production and have reclaimed thousands of mou of waste land. Confucius never reclaimed land or tilled the soil. When he ran his school, he had quite a number of students, "seventy worthies and three thousand disciples" -- quite a flourishing school. But he had far fewer students than there are in Yen-an, and what is more, they would have disliked production campaigns. When a student asked him how to plough the fields, Confucius answered, "I don't know, I am not as good at that as a farmer." Confucius was next asked how to grow vegetables, and he answered, "I don't know, I am not as good at that as a vegetable gardener." In ancient times the youth of China who studied under a sage neither learned revolutionary theory nor took part in labour. Today, there is little revolutionary theory taught and there are no such things as production movements in the schools over vast regions of our country. It is only here in Yen-an and in the anti-Japanese base areas behind the enemy lines that the young people are fundamentally different; they are really the vanguard in resisting Japan and saving the nation because their political orientation and their methods of work are correct. That is why I say the youth movement in Yen-an is the model for the youth movement throughout the country.

Our meeting today is highly significant. I have said all I wanted. I hope you will all study the lessons of the Chinese revolution in the last fifty years, develop its good points and discard its mistakes, so that the youth will be at one with the people of the whole country and the revolution will make the turn from failure to victory. When the youth and the whole nation are mobilized, organized and united, Japanese imperialism will be overthrown. Each young person must shoulder his responsibility. You must each be different from before and resolve to unite the youth and organize the people of the whole country for the overthrow of Japanese imperialism and the transformation of the old China into a new China. This is what I expect of all of you.

NOTES

[1] May 4 was first adopted as China's Youth Day by the youth organization of the Shensi-Kansu-Ningsia Border Region. Under the pressure of the patriotic upsurge of the broad masses of young people, the Kuomintang government expressed its

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agreement. But it subsequently proclaimed March 29 as its own Youth Day (in commemoration of the revolutionary martyrs who died during an uprising at Canton in 1911) because, fearing that the youth would turn revolutionary, it regarded the decision to observe May 4 as dangerous. However, May 4 continued to be observed as Youth Day in the revolutionary base areas under the leadership of the Communist Party, and was officially proclaimed China's Youth Day by the Administrative Council of the Central People's Government in December 1949 after the founding of the People's Republic of China. [p. 241]

[2] "The Kuomintang turned against the Communist Party" here refers to the counter-revolutionary coups staged in 1927 by Chiang Kai-shek in Shanghai and Nanking and by Wang Ching-wei in Wuhan. [p. 244]
