How To Be a Good Communist

By Liu Shaoqi

Comrades! In order to become the most faithful and best pupils of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin, we need to carry on cultivation in all aspects in the course of the long and great revolutionary struggle of the proletariat and the masses of the people. We need to carry on cultivation in the theories of Marxism-Leninism and in applying such theories in practice; cultivation in revolutionary strategy and tactics; cultivation in studying and dealing with various problems according to the standpoint and methods of Marxism-Leninism; cultivation in ideology and moral character; cultivation in Party unity, inner-Party struggle, and discipline; cultivation in hard work and in the style of work; cultivation in being skillful in dealing with different kinds of people and in associating with the masses of the people; and cultivation in various kinds of scientific knowledge, etc. We are all Communist Party members and so we have a general cultivation in common. But there exists a wide discrepancy today between our Party members. Wide discrepancy exists among us in the level of political consciousness, in work, in position, in cultural level, in experience of struggle, and in social origin. Therefore, in addition to cultivation in general we also need special cultivation for different groups and for individual comrades.

Accordingly, there should be different kinds of methods and forms of cultivation. For example, many of our comrades keep a diary in order to have a daily check on their work and thoughts or they write down on small posters their personal defects and what they hope to achieve and paste them up where they work or live, together with the photographs of persons they look up to, and ask comrades for criticism and supervision. In ancient China, there were many methods of cultivation. There was Zeng Ze who said: “I reflect on myself three times a day.” The Book of Odes has it that one should cultivate
oneself “as a lapidary cuts and files, carves and polishes.” Another method was “to
examine oneself by self-reflection” and to “write down some mottoes on the right hand
side of one's desk” or “on one's girdle” as daily reminders of rules of personal conduct.
The Chinese scholars of the Confucian school had a number of methods for the
cultivation of their body and mind. Every religion has various methods and forms of
cultivation of its own. The “investigation of things, the extension of knowledge,
sincerity of thought, the rectification of the heart, the cultivation of the person, the
regulation of the family, the ordering well of the state and the making tranquil of the
whole kingdom” as set forth in The Great Learning also means the same. All this shows
that in achieving one's progress one must make serious and energetic efforts to carry on
self-cultivation and study. However, many of these methods and forms cannot be
adopted by us because most of them are idealistic, formalistic, abstract, and divorced
from social practice. These scholars and religious believers exaggerate the function of
subjective initiative, thinking that so long as they keep their general “good intentions”
and are devoted to silent prayer they will be able to change the existing state of affairs,
change society, and change themselves under conditions separated from social and
revolutionary practice. This is, of course, absurd. We cannot cultivate ourselves in this
way. We are materialists and our cultivation cannot be separated from practice.

What is important to us is that we must not under any circumstances isolate ourselves
from the revolutionary struggles of different kinds of people and in different forms at a
given moment and that we must, moreover, sum up historical revolutionary experience
and learn humbly from this and put it into practice. That is to say, we must undertake
self-cultivation and steel ourselves in the course of our own practice, basing ourselves
on the experiences of past revolutionary practice, on the present concrete situation and
on new experiences. Our self-cultivation and steeling are for no other purpose than that
of revolutionary practice. That is to say, we must modestly try to understand the
standpoint, the method and the spirit of Marxism-Leninism, and understand how Marx,
Engels, Lenin and Stalin dealt with people. And having understood these, we should
immediately apply them to our own practice, i.e., in our own lives, words, deeds, and
work. Moreover, we should stick to them and unreservedly correct and purge everything in our ideology that runs counter to them, thereby strengthening our own proletarian and Communist ideology and qualities. That is to say, we must modestly listen to the opinions and criticisms of our comrades and of the masses, carefully study the practical problems in our lives and in our work and carefully sum up our experiences and the lessons we have learned so as to find an orientation for our own work. In addition, on the basis of all these, we must judge whether we have a correct understanding of Marxism-Leninism and whether we have correctly applied the method of Marxism-Leninism, found out our own shortcomings and mistakes and corrected them. At the same time, we must find out in what respects specific conclusions of Marxism-Leninism need to be supplemented, enriched and developed on the basis of well-digested new experiences. That is to say, we must combine the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism with the concrete practice of the revolution.

These should be the methods of self-cultivation of us Communist Party members. That is to say, we must use the methods of Marxism-Leninism to cultivate ourselves. This kind of cultivation is entirely different from other kinds of cultivation which are idealistic and are divorced from social practice.

In this connection, we cannot but oppose certain idle talk and mechanicalism on the question of cultivation and steeling.

First of all, we must oppose and resolutely eliminate one of the biggest evils bequeathed to us by the education and learning in the old society—the separation of theory from practice. In the course of education and study in the old society many people thought that it was unnecessary or even impossible to act upon what they had learned. Despite the fact that they read over and over again books by ancient sages they did things the sages would have been loath to do. Despite the fact that in everything they wrote or said they preached righteousness and morality they acted like out-and-out robbers and harlots in everything they did. Some “high-ranking officials” issued orders for the reading of
the *Four Books* and the *Five Classics*, yet in their everyday administrative work they ruthlessly extorted exorbitant requisitions, ran amuck with corruption and killing, and did everything against righteousness and morality. Some people read the *Three People's Principles* over and over again and could recite the *Will of Dr. Sun Yat-sen*, yet they oppressed the people, opposed the nations who treated us on an equal footing, and went so far as to compromise with or surrender to the national enemy. Once a scholar of the old school told me himself that the only maxim of Confucius that he could observe was: “To him food can never be too dainty; minced meat can never be too fine,” adding that all the rest of the teachings of Confucius he could not observe and had never proposed to observe. Then why did they still want to carry on educational work and study the teachings of the sages? Apart from utilizing them for window-dressing purposes, their objects were: 1) to make use of these teachings to oppress the exploited and to make use of righteousness and morality for the purpose of hoodwinking and suppressing the culturally backward people; 2) to attempt thereby to secure better government jobs, make money and achieve fame, and reflect credit on their parents. Apart from these objects, their actions were not restricted by the sages' teachings. This was the attitude and return of the “men of letters” and “scholars” of the old society to the sages they “worshiped.” Of course we Communist Party members cannot adopt such an attitude in studying Marxism-Leninism and the excellent and useful teachings bequeathed to us by our ancient sages. We must live up to what we say. We are honest and pure and we cannot deceive ourselves, the people, or our forefathers. This is an outstanding characteristic as well as a great merit of us Communist Party members.

What is the most fundamental and common duty of us Communist Party members? As everybody knows, it is to establish Communism, to transform the present world into a Communist world. Is a Communist world good or not? We all know that it is very good. In such a world there will be no exploiters, oppressors, landlords, capitalists, imperialists, or fascists. There will be no oppressed and exploited people, no darkness, ignorance, backwardness, etc. In such a society all human beings will become unselfish and intelligent Communists with a high level of culture and technique. The spirit of
mutual assistance and mutual love will prevail among mankind. There will be no such irrational things as mutual deception, mutual antagonism, mutual slaughter and war, etc. Such a society will, of course, be the best, the most beautiful, and the most advanced society in the history of mankind. Who will say that such a society is not good? Here the question arises: Can Communist society be brought about? Our answer is “yes.” About this the whole theory of Marxism-Leninism offers a scientific explanation that leaves no room for doubt. It further explains that as the ultimate result of the class struggle of mankind, such a society will inevitably be brought about. The victory of Socialism in the U.S.S.R. has also given us factual proof. Our duty is, therefore, to bring about at an early date this Communist society, the realization of which is inevitable in the history of mankind.

This is one aspect. This is our ideal.

But we should understand the other aspect, that is, in spite of the fact that Communism can and must be realized it is still confronted by powerful enemies that must be thoroughly and finally defeated in every respect before Communism can be realized. Thus, the cause of Communism is a long, bitter, arduous but victorious process of struggle. Without such a struggle there can be no Communism.

Comrades! If you only possess great and lofty ideals but not the spirit of “searching for the truth from concrete facts” and do not carry on genuinely practical work, you are not a good Communist Party member. You can only be a dreamer, a prattler, or a pedant. If on the contrary, you only do practical work but do not possess the great and lofty ideals of Communism, you are not a good Communist, but a common careerist. A good Communist Party member is one who combines the great and lofty ideals of Communism with practical work and the spirit of searching for the truth from concrete facts.
The Communist ideal is beautiful while the existing capitalist world is ugly. It is precisely because of its ugliness that the overwhelming majority of the people want to change it and cannot but change it. In changing the world we cannot divorce ourselves from reality, or disregard reality; nor can we escape from reality or surrender to the ugly reality. We must adapt ourselves to reality, understand reality, seek to live and develop in reality, struggle against the ugly reality and transform reality in order to realize our ideals.


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But such can never be the case with the proletarian revolution and with the Communist Party. The proletarian revolution is a revolution to abolish all exploitation, oppression and classes. The Communist Party represents the proletariat which is itself exploited but does not exploit others and which can therefore carry the revolution through to the end finally abolish all exploitation and sweep away all the corruption and rottenness in human society. For a philosophy that emphasizes constant change, I tend to find communists themselves to be extremely black and white. Political events to them often boil down to "this versus that," as if there couldn't possibly be another explanation. What about common sense? Perhaps some things are merely meant to be issues of general human, emotional interest rather than cold and calculated this-versus-that politics? If you're always looking for an excuse to bring communism into things, aside from being rather arrogant, you're also basically acting like a pretentious literary critic, always looking for extended metaphors that are so beyond annoying that it's just laughable. Just because a character was wearing a red hat, that doesn't necessarily mean anything, so to speak. We Communists are the most advanced revolutionaries in modern history; to day the changing of society and the world rests upon us and we are the driving force in this change. It is by unremitting struggle against counter-revolutionaries that we Communists change society and the world, and at the same time ourselves. But such can never be the case with the proletarian revolution and with the Communist Party. The proletarian revolution is a revolution to abolish all exploitation, oppression and classes. The Communist Party represents the proletariat which is itself exploited but does not exploit others and which can therefore carry the revolution through to the end finally abolish all exploitation and sweep away all the corruption and rottenness in human society.