

December 13, 1978

**Ye Jianying's Speech at the Closing Session of the
CCP Central Work Conference**

Citation:

"Ye Jianying's Speech at the Closing Session of the CCP Central Work Conference",
December 13, 1978, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Hubei Provincial Archives SZ1-4-791.
Translated by Caixia Lu. <https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/121691>

Summary:

Ye Jianying reflects on the "Fascist dictatorship perpetuated by Lin Biao and the Gang of Four."

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from MacArthur Foundation

Original Language:

Chinese

Contents:

Translation - English

SPEECH AT THE CLOSING SESSION OF THE CCP CENTRAL COMMITTEE WORK
CONFERENCE

(13 December 1978)

Ye Jianying

Comrades:

Comrade Huo Guofeng and Comrade Deng Xiaoping had made very good speeches during the conference and I fully agree with their points. I have also read the briefs of the various subgroups and there were many good views. I am using them as material for study, so that I can learn from our comrades.

This meeting has been a very good and successful one and everyone unanimously agreed that we should shift the emphasis of the whole Party's work to socialist modernization. The conference, in its entire process, restored and promoted the Party's mass line and system of democratic centralism, as well as the work practice of seeking truth from facts. Everyone spoke freely and fully participated in the discussions to resolve some important historical issues and practical concerns that the whole Party and the people nationwide shared. They also engaged in criticism and some comrades who had made mistakes also engaged in varying degrees of self-criticism. This is a sign that our Party is thriving. Our comrades say that the spirit of democracy seen during this conference was something that our Party had not had for years and I concur. The democratic spirit seen in this conference is indeed a good beginning and sets an example for the future. We must keep this going and carry it forward, as well as ensure that this is promoted throughout the Party and nationwide

Our country is now at an important historical turning point. The international circumstances are very much in our favor and most countries in the world are hoping for a strong China so as to prevent the Soviet revisionists from launching a war of invasion. This is favorable to our acquisition of advanced technologies from overseas in order to accelerate the development of the four modernizations. Domestically, with the crushing of the Gang of Four, our people have never been more spirited and united, and they are impatient for the country to achieve socialist modernization soon. This is the basic guarantee of success for our cause. We should not waste the opportunity to make full use of these favorable international and domestic circumstances and start working on our country's socialist modernization as soon as possible.

In order to accomplish the overall mission in this new period, we must study and resolve a series of important issues. Let me now share some views.

To ensure the smooth progress of our socialist modernization, we must first have a good leadership, particularly a good leadership team in the Central Committee. The greatest lesson from the Cultural Revolution was that the leadership of this movement, the Central Cultural Revolution Group, was in the hands of a group of traitors, spies, ambitious schemers, double-dealing counterrevolutionaries and usurpers. They called on people to "kick the Party Committees aside to make revolution" and wreaked havoc on the Party Committees almost everywhere from the Central Politburo to the provinces, prefectures, and most places at the grassroots level. The various levels of leadership in the military were also thrown into a state of great confusion. They used the power that they had usurped to run a Fascist dictatorship and persecute the cadres and the masses, leaving a sea of injustice, wrongful allegations and spurious cases in their wake. They ousted many veteran cadres, accused large numbers of cadres and the masses of being capitalist roaders

and counterrevolutionaries, and engaged in merciless persecution. All in all, hundreds of millions of people, equivalent to one-ninth of the population, were implicated or persecuted. This was an extremely bitter lesson. It taught us the negative lesson that we must fully see the importance of picking good leaders and truly know how to select the right people, judge them by their merits and put them in suitable positions. This is easier said than done. It is impossible for any single individual to know how to select the right people, judge them by their merits and put them in suitable positions because everyone has their limitations. We can only rely on the Party to do this, and this is only possible if there is a robust system of democratic centralism within the Party and the country. Otherwise, why would we need the Party in our revolution and why would we need to rely on the classes and the masses, as well as democratic centralism and the mass line? Hence, the issue of leadership is a very important one, but it is not an isolated issue. It cannot be resolved in deviation from the principle of our Party's development.

To build a good leadership team, we have to pay attention to some of the existing problems afflicting our cadres. Most of our cadres are good, but because of the Fascist dictatorship perpetuated by Lin Biao and the Gang of Four during the Great Cultural Revolution, some cadres still feel fearful and are reluctant to speak up when they encounter problems. They tiptoe around the contradictions that emerge, push everything upward to their superiors, are quick to pass the buck and avoid declaring their stand and taking any responsibility. There were also a very small number of people who sought to trim their sails to the wind or were opportunistic patron-seekers. For the sake of securing their own positions, they clean forgot about Party principles and the people's interests. We must strengthen our education of comrades who engage in these undesirable practices and harbor impure thoughts in order to help them correct themselves.

Toward the cadres, Lin Biao and the Gang of Four implemented the policy of "those who submit will prosper and those who resist shall perish." Those who followed them were promoted and those who did not were ousted. Their influence was such that many cadres could not move up and down freely but could only move up but not down, and even normal appointments and dismissals as well as promotions and demotions were being treated as something very strange. This is an extremely abnormal phenomenon in the life of our Party and country, and we must resolutely overcome it.

Due to the influence of Lin Biao and the Gang of Four, the situation of bureaucratism among our cadres and in our organs has become much more serious over the years, and it is now a sore point within our ranks. In order to achieve socialist modernization, we must race against time and do solid work. How could we possibly do so with that sort of bureaucratic working style? This would cause important work to be delayed. We will absolutely forbid bureaucrats from turning our state organs into bureaucratic organizations. Bureaucratism hurts our Party's relationship with the masses, cuts us off from them and sparks the people's discontent, and greatly hurts our cause. It is the great enemy of the Party, country and the people, as well as the great enemy of our progress toward socialist modernization. We must launch a tireless war against bureaucratism.

The people are the masters of our country. Our cadres, irrespective of their position, are the people's servants. The relationship between our cadres and the people is one between a servant and a master. Our cadres must be impartial and selfless, and they must always think of the people and be sympathetic to their suffering. They must listen to the views of the masses, and they absolutely must not ride roughshod over them, throw their weight around or lord it over others like kings and tyrants. There are two lines from Lu Xun's poem that we should use as our motto: With an insouciant frown, I face a thousand accusing fingers. Bowing my head, I serve the children like a willing ox."

We must pay great attention to the cultivation of successors for our revolutionary cause. Our veteran cadres and comrades have fought north and south across the country for China's revolutionary cause for more than half a century. Now they are all in their twilight years, and no man can defy the law of nature. A revolutionary cause always needs its successors, and the training and nurturing of a great pool of successors is one very important strategic task that currently confronts the whole Party and country. We must keep infusing new blood into our ranks and elect them to leadership positions at various levels. These cadres must be bold enough to stand by the truth and correct mistakes, be full of fighting spirit, have a decent working style, and be open and upright. They must be pragmatic and dare to speak their mind, and they must not be someone who seeks personal gain in an opportunistic manner nor a two-faced character who sits on the fence and bends with the wind. These cadres must be able to embrace the spirit of democracy and be courageous enough to engage in self-criticism; they must be good at uniting their comrades and not see themselves as high officials who can lord it over the masses. They must be keen to learn and be open-minded, and be determined in carrying out the revolutionary cause. They must be scientific-minded and embrace the spirit of seeking truth from facts, and they must have the bold aspirations of helping the country achieve socialist modernization. They must resolve to never become mediocre, conservative and complacent people with nary an accomplishment. Given the historical lesson in which Lin Biao and the Gang of Four tried to usurp Party power and the needs of the country in becoming a socialist modern power, we must stress the qualities that our cadres should possess.

The power grab by Lin Biao and the Gang of Four also reminds us that when appointing cadres, especially when appointing team leaders, we cannot afford to lower our guard, listen to one side, make decisions on the basis of likes and dislikes or believe in the superiority of our own opinions. The various regions, locales and units must show no indulgence toward nor tolerate any cadres who are no good and must decisively replace them. We must never again allow villains to usurp the leadership and our organizations at various levels must learn to choose our cadres well. Our leading cadres at various levels must not only know themselves well, but should also have the wisdom to know others well. This wisdom does not simply fall from the sky, and it is not innate in our minds; it results from the tests of actual practice and examination by the masses. We must put Party and state leaders under the scrutiny of Party members and the masses, and the appointment and dismissal of cadres should embrace the spirit of democracy and follow the mass line. The masses have the right to elect and dismiss their servants. Leading cadres should unite the comrades around them, and team leaders should also be good at uniting their teams to carry out the Party's line and policies, and do their work well.

Currently, we have achieved great results in uncovering the factionist forces of the Gang of Four nationwide. The final work must be done properly to ensure that we end well what we had started well. For the minority of the regions, departments and work units that had fallen behind in the movement, the Party Committees at the higher level must strengthen their leadership and conscientiously and check on them and monitor their progress instead of letting things slide or leaving things unsettled. We must consolidate our leadership at various levels well through this movement.

In order to achieve socialist modernization, we must also earnestly implement the system of democratic centralism. It is only by fully promoting democracy that we can motivate the cadres and the masses to show their initiative and pool the wisdom and efforts of all to the fullest extent possible in the development of socialism. It is only by fully promoting democracy that we can maximize opportunities for the able and quickly discover outstanding talent in our Party and put them in positions of leadership. It is only by fully promoting democracy that we can secure the rights of the cadres and masses at large to scrutinize and criticize our leaders, and in turn, and thus be able to promptly discover and expose double-dealing, ambitious schemers such as Lin Biao and the Gang of Four, consolidate our political power and provide a realistic guarantee for our socialist modernization cause! This brings to mind

something Lenin had said, that victorious socialism must achieve complete democracy, without which it cannot consolidate its victory.

Lin Biao and the Gang of Four obscured the difference between proletarian democracy and capitalist democracy and created the misperception that implementing democracy meant the reinstating of capitalism. They disseminated all sorts of bizarre arguments on the issue of democracy and confused the thinking of some of our comrades, thus causing them to be very jittery at the mention of democracy, as they were afraid of deviating from the dictatorship of the proletariat. What they did not know was that the dictatorship of the proletariat also meant the democracy of the proletariat, which is the most extensive and concrete form of democracy in human history. That is because it only resists dictatorship by the exploitative classes and guaranteed unprecedented democratic rights for all others. We must educate our cadres and our masses to purge the pernicious influence of Lin Biao and the Gang of Four, uphold the system of democratic centralism in the Party and uphold the system of the people's democracy in the state. To the proletarian and laboring masses, democracy in capitalist countries is a farce in some of the most fundamental aspects, but to the capitalist classes, it is real. We oppose capitalist democracy not because we reject democracy but because we want to implement democracy that provides a material guarantee for most of our people and masses. Lin Biao and the Gang of Four created confusion on the issue of democracy not because they wanted to oppose capitalist democracy, but because they wanted to rob the proletarian and laboring masses of their democratic rights and trample on the Party's system of democratic centralism. We must never ever fall for the tricks of such feudalistic Fascists again. We must fully promote the Party's democracy and the people's democracy and create a strong democratic atmosphere in the whole Party and the whole country, and strive for a lively political situation that encourages both centralism and democracy, both discipline and freedom, and both unity of purpose and individual ease of mind.

A leading cadre must be able promote democracy, and democratic practice in this sense means the practice of criticism and self-criticism. The Central Politburo has already discussed Comrade Hua Guofeng's closing speech at this conference. As the Chairman and leader of our Party, Comrade Hua Guofeng actively took the responsibility for the issue of the "two whatevers" and spoke candidly and sincerely in this conference, which deeply moved us. Comrade Hua Guofeng has set an example for everyone on this matter. I would also like to briefly mention Comrade Xi Zhongxun here. Our comrades have probably read in the newspapers a letter that a local cadre from the Huiyang District in Guangdong had written to Comrade Xi Zhongxun and his reply. Comrade Xi Zhongxun, who is unafraid of listening to harsh views, encouraging of others to speak up, and courageous enough to engage in self-criticism, has shown rare spirit that is worthy of emulation by all our cadres. We have some cadres who constantly talk about criticism and self-criticism, as well as humility and prudence. But their faces drop at the slightest hint of a pointed comment. We only know how to criticize others but never ourselves, and it is like a tiger's rear that no one dares to touch. We should encourage such people to properly read Comrade Xi Zhongxun's letter of reply, and learn well the story of "Lord Ye Who Professed to Love Dragons" (i.e. someone who pretends to love what he or she really fears).

In his speech this time round, Comrade Hua Guofeng also asked that comrades stop referring to "Chairman Hua of the Central Committee" when talking about the Central Committee and avoid references to "Wise Leader" when talking about him. Instead, he proposed that we should refer to each other as "Comrades". This view of Chairman Hua's is very important, not only because he had shown the virtue of humility as a leader (and leaders must possess the virtue of humility), but also because he had with his words, fully indicated that our Party life is now back to normal and back to what it should have been. Comrade Hua Guofeng's views echo that of Comrade Mao Zedong, who had stressed the same thing many times, and it was a pity that we did not implement it then. During the period of the Great Cultural

Revolution, when Lin Biao and the Gang of Four were in control, it was compulsory to refer to Comrade Mao Zedong as the great leader and great mentor at all times. This situation was not at all the norm of Party life. Marx, Engels and Lenin had all opposed such adulation (missing text) and not even Stalin went to such an extent. This totally went against the views of Chairman Mao. I am very happy that Comrade Hua Guofeng is now faithfully carrying out Comrade Mao Zedong's views and this shows that Comrade Hua Guofeng is undoubtedly a good student of Comrade Mao Zedong.

To build a socialist modern power, we must strengthen the socialist legal system. Our socialist legal system has not been very soundly developed since the founding of the nation. Lin Biao and the Gang of Four were able to do as they wished precisely by taking advantage of this loophole of ours. They dismantled the public security organs, the public prosecution and the people's courts and trampled on the socialist legal system.

They imposed a Fascist dictatorship on the broad masses and cadres under the pretense of reinforcing the dictatorship of the proletariat, and they could search the homes of anyone and arrest anybody they wished. All they had to do was to point the finger at someone and the person would land in jail. There was no security whatsoever for the cadres and masses at large. Countless people lost their lives as a result of such persecution. This was a lesson written in blood.

Lin Biao and the Gang of Four gave us a negative lesson written in blood, and made us realize that a country must have a legal system. This sort of legal system must have stability and continuity and it is formulated by the people, and represents the greatest interests of the socialist and proletarian dictatorship, and not the will of any leader or individual. The prosecutors and the courts must be faithful to the legal system and the truth in their work, and they must maintain their independence in order to fulfill their sacred duty. We must have a big pool of fearless prosecutors and judges who are not afraid to sacrifice themselves in the line of duty. Only then can we preserve the revolutionary dignity of our socialist legal system. We must ensure that everyone is equal in the eyes of the people's own laws and not allow anyone to have the special privilege of being above the law. Our Party, our country and our people have suffered too terribly due to the special power held by Lin Biao and the Gang of Four. From now on, we must mobilize the strength of the whole Party, military and people to bitterly fight anyone who seeks to hold special privilege.

In order to truly protect the people's democratic rights and reinforce our political power, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress must immediately work to amend and properly draft our country's civil and criminal laws, marriage law and the various economic laws, etc. They must work to refine our legal system as soon as possible and thoroughly review all unjust, wrongful and spurious cases, and not leave loose ends hanging. The retrials should generally avoid having the original people handling the cases to preside over the new proceedings. Only then can we do this in a reasonable and adequate manner and satisfy the wishes of the whole Party and the people. If the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress does not take up the responsibility of drafting the laws and improving the socialist legal system as soon as possible, then it would be a committee in name with an empty title and no real power, and a lot of dead wood. Then I would have failed in my duties as the Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress and let the whole Party and the people of our country down.

Veteran comrades like us who had spent most of our time in the past fighting wars and engaging in political work are unfamiliar or relatively unfamiliar with the various knowledge or laws concerning the development of socialist modernization. Due to the damage inflicted by Lin Biao and the Gang of Four on the educational front, the knowledge acquired by our young people is also very inadequate. To fulfill the needs of modernization, we must learn, and we have to master cutting-edge scientific knowledge, understand the laws of modernization and follow objective rules in our

work. We must develop on a scientific basis and vigorously promote a diligent attitude toward learning, seriously study Marxism, Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, and we must also strive to learn scientific technologies and modern economic management. We must learn from the cutting-edge experiences of the other countries and learn from our people nationwide and from the skilled experts. We must learn from people who know the ropes, and strive to become the expert in the shortest time possible. Otherwise, we will lose our say in achieving modernization.

We must link closely theory with practice in our learning and this is a fine tradition that has always been promoted by our Party, and we must uphold it. Lenin had said that theory must become practice and that theory must be encouraged, improved and examined by practice. Practice is the sole criterion for testing truth, and this is a fundamental theory of Leninism, and it is beyond doubt.

Diligent study and the liberation of the mind are two interrelated aspects. The more we study, the more knowledge we would gain, and the easier it would become to liberate our minds. Achieving socialist modernization is not just about significantly raising social production, but it also entails a deep social revolution of everything from the economic fundamentals to top-level design. Do our comrades have full mental preparation for such a revolution? It seems that many of us are still not fully prepared. Comrade Hua Guofeng had said, we have to open our minds a bit more, be bolder, come up with more solutions, and go a little faster. However, some comrades are still “fearful of wolves ahead and tigers behind” (i.e. to be fear-ridden), dare not leave the beaten track, and are afraid of being accused of reinstating capitalism and of others “grabbing pigtails, striking with sticks, putting hats” (i.e. seizing on their mistakes, making groundless accusations, and sticking labels on them), and they are afraid of losing their positions. If that is the case, why are they not afraid that manual production methods from two millennia ago would continue to flourish and that China would become poor and backward? Why are they not afraid that the Chinese people would not consent to the status quo?

Lin Biao and the Gang of Four exercised feudalism under the guise of socialism. They pretended to oppose capitalism with socialism, but in reality, they were using feudalism to oppose socialism. They stuck the bourgeoisie and capitalist label on any one who disagreed with them, and confused our thinking until we could no longer tell what feudalism, capitalism and true socialism were. China experienced two millennia of feudalism, and capitalism had never been fully developed in our country. The development of socialism took place in a semi-feudal and semi-colonial society. Hence, an important task in the liberation of the mind is to be attentive to overcoming the remaining influence of feudalism. Lenin had said that we must not just promote scientific socialist thought but also democratic thought. We must overcome the various superstitions perpetuated by feudalism, and free our minds from the shackles. Our comrades should firmly remember Comrade Mao Zedong’s teachings on the dialectical relationship between matter and spirit, how matter becomes spirit and vice versa. So long as we are able to free our minds, we would be able to promote the development of production and make important contributions toward accelerating socialist modernization.

Our Party does have a tradition of diligent study. Many comrades had no prior experience in fighting a war, but they learnt how to do so in practice. They had no initial knowledge of how to build political power but they too learnt how to do so in practice. Now, we are facing a new Long March in our progress toward modernization, and there are many new things that we need to learn, especially the objective laws of socialist economic development and scientific economic management. We can only lead production well if we master these. Will this be difficult? Yes, it is indeed not easy. But, as long as we study hard, and strongly promote the spirit of learning in the whole Party, we would definitely be able to understand what we had not understood before, and acquire capabilities that we did not have before.

Comrades, this Central Committee work conference of ours is coming to an end. We will next be convening the Third Plenary Session. Let us build upon the robust and lively spirit of democracy seen at this meeting, unite the whole Party, and work hard to build our country into a great socialist modern power under the leadership of the Central Committee with Chairman Hua at the helm.