

MATERIALIST DIALECTICS HELPS FIGHTERS MAKE IDEOLOGICAL PROGRESS

Chen Chin-yuan

The political and ideological work in a P.L.A. company is to advance the ideological progress of the fighters. It is to arm them with the thought of Mao Tse-tung, continuously to consolidate and expand the proletarian ideology and overcome all sorts of non-proletarian ideologies. In this way Mao Tse-tung's thought will take firm root in the minds of the fighters, and the backward comrades will be turned into advanced comrades and the already advanced comrades into even more advanced ones. To do this work well, one must first of all have a revolutionary spirit of enterprise and sense of duty: always having in mind the cause of the Party, the building of the company and the steeling of the fighters into life-long revolutionaries. Apart from this, one must also have a correct way of thinking and a correct

Chen Chin-yuan, political instructor of the Red Ninth Company of a P.L.A. unit at the time when he wrote this article, is now deputy-head of a regimental political department.

method of work, i.e., a grasp of materialist dialectics. We have learned from experience that whenever we try and apply dialectics in our work, we achieve good results, and whenever we fall victim to metaphysics and subjective one-sidedness, we find ourselves in a fix — no matter how hard we work, we cannot gain the anticipated results. In this article I will relate some of our experiences in applying materialist dialectics to help the advanced as well as the backward comrades.

MAKE A CORRECT ANALYSIS OF THE BACKWARD COMRADES

In the past we took too gloomy a view of the backward comrades. Consciously or unconsciously, we treated them indifferently and were rather over-critical. As a result they lost confidence in themselves and the other comrades also lacked confidence in being able to help their progress. What was the reason for all this? It was mainly because we failed to make a basic analysis of them with the method of one dividing itself into two, exaggerating their shortcomings and taking them too seriously and regarding them as not lending themselves to correction. The shortcomings which were secondary we looked upon as something primary and the minor questions as the essential ones. Therefore we did not believe they could make progress.

There is a fighter in Squad One who constantly blundered in the first days of his service. Once he

was assigned as a sham enemy in a night searching exercise. When the comrades set about combing him out, he was not to be seen anywhere. They searched and searched until the small hours and still they could not see a soul. It turned out he had long returned to the barracks to sleep. His repeated blunders made him cut a very poor figure in the eyes of the comrades and they stopped expecting him to have any strong points at all. He was subjected to constant criticisms, sometimes too without grounds. Consequently his relations with the other comrades were getting more and more strained. To help this fighter we got together the core members in the squad to make a basic analysis of his case by the method of one dividing itself into two. We first asked everyone to point out all his shortcomings and good points and then went on to analyse their nature. This made the core members see that his good points were the essential factors in him and the shortcomings non-essential. As their minds became clearer through such analysis they had a different opinion of this fighter and the other comrades in the squad also took a new attitude towards him. They repeatedly spoke of his good points and often praised him for them. As to his shortcomings, they used the method of "crushing the enemy one by one", fighting an "annihilation campaign" against one of them at a time. Thus encouraged and helped, this fighter became very enthusiastic and has improved remarkably.

We gather from this example that we must have a basic analysis of our fighters. All the fighters' thinking can be divided into two aspects: they have positive factors as well as passive factors, strong points as well as weak points. But these two aspects are never equal in proportion. Generally speaking, the positive factors are always the essential, main aspect. Compared with the advanced comrades, the backward comrades have more weak points and their progress is slower. But it does not follow that the passive factors constitute what are essential in them or are their main aspect. The overwhelming majority of our fighters are of worker or peasant origin. Their personal interests are fundamentally identical with those of the revolution. All of them are eager to improve themselves and become Chairman Mao's good fighters. The old ideologies and old habits which have contaminated them can be gradually eliminated through self-remoulding.

Having made a basic analysis of the backward comrades, one will be able to have a deep class feeling towards them and have great confidence in their progress. Without such an analysis and looking at things in a subjective and one-sided way, one is bound to exaggerate their shortcomings out of all proportion and take the non-essential, transient, passive phenomena as something essential, fall a prey to inactivity and pessimism, and lose the impetus to help them.

To make a basic analysis of the backward comrades will also help these comrades to have a correct appraisal of themselves. Disheartened by their own shortcomings, these comrades often take a one-sided view of themselves and lack the confidence to make progress. Not infrequently when the leadership shows trust in these backward comrades, they become more sure of themselves, more enthusiastic and make greater progress, while when the leadership does not trust them they get more dispirited, less energetic and their progress is even slower. The fluctuations in the morale of these comrades in the process of their advancement often have a lot to do with the attitude and method of work we adopt towards them.

ENCOURAGING BACKWARD COMRADES TO DEVELOP THEIR OWN INITIATIVE IN IDEOLOGICAL REMOULDING

Chairman Mao says that materialist dialectics holds that **“external causes are the condition of change and internal causes are the basis of change, and that external causes become operative through internal causes”**. The most important thing in helping the backward comrades is to induce them to seek “battles” in their own minds, to remould themselves of their own accord. Only by fighting such “battles” on their own initiative, can the proletarian ideology in their minds vanquish the non-proletarian ideologies and can the backward turn into the advanced. If they do not fight such

“battles” against themselves and just face the “battles” launched by others against them, then not only will such “battles” be lost, but the result will be a deadlock in the relations between the comrades, making a nice mess of the whole thing.

On the other hand, external causes also play an important part in the development of things. The help given by the leadership and comrades has a great influence on the changing of a backward comrade. Under no circumstances should we overemphasize the role of the internal causes to the exclusion of that of the external causes in order to shirk our duty or slacken our efforts to help the backward comrades. But to be sure, the external causes can become operative only through the internal causes. In helping these comrades, we must tackle their problems from the political angle, find out what is troubling them most, encourage them to fight the ideological struggle to eradicate bourgeois ideas and foster proletarian ones, and raise their political consciousness. The political instructor is the commander on the political and ideological front in a company. Our battlefield is in the minds of our fighters. Our task is to help them win the battle of eradicating bourgeois ideas and fostering proletarian ones. The better and more to the point our work, the more effective this battle and the greater their progress. If we do not work hard or use an incorrect method, we will be of little help in their mental battle.

In helping the backward comrades to fight the ideological battle, we must firmly grasp the fundamental point, the remoulding of their world outlook. That means we must do all we can to instil little by little the thought of Mao Tse-tung into the minds of these comrades. We must help them learn and apply Chairman Mao's works in a living way, with the view to solving the principal problems troubling them. We should encourage them when they study Chairman Mao's works. We should praise them if they try to apply what they have learnt. We should help them sum up their experience if they can apply the teachings well. We should encourage them to link theory with practice, to put special emphasis on applying it and continuously to use Mao Tse-tung's thought to criticize and repudiate their non-proletarian ideas. This way, the thought of Mao Tse-tung will step by step take root and become predominant in their minds, and they will be enabled to turn from the backward into the advanced. There is a fighter in Squad Four who had quite a few shortcomings. When he first studied Chairman Mao's works, he did not link them with his thinking. He said one thing and did quite the other. He also talked about the theory of one dividing itself into two. But he was aware only of his own good points and could see nothing but bad in others. As a result he could not get along well with the comrades in the squad. Once I saw him studying an article expounding this theory and asked him how he liked it. He said,

"This theory of Chairman Mao's is easy to understand. Let me try to explain it." I answered, "Very well. Use this theory to analyse your own ideas and tell me what you think tomorrow." This suggestion pleased him and he put down all his strong points on a paper and wanted to tell me about them. But on second thoughts he sensed there was something wrong. "The political instructor told me to use this method to analyse my ideology," he thought. "If I only talk about my good points and say nothing about my shortcomings, that would be one-sidedness. It won't do!" After an ideological struggle he made an all-round analysis of himself, bringing out all his shortcomings as well as good points. I heard him out and praised him by saying, "Fine! You've applied what you've learnt." He was pleased. Later, he further applied this theory and managed to find out the good points of all the comrades in the squad and eight points on which he was not as good as others. He overcame these flaws in his work one by one and made great progress. He said with conviction, "In studying the theory of one dividing itself into two, one must learn how to divide, and what's even more important, how to struggle. To be able to divide, one must see clearly the advanced and backward aspects in one's thinking. To be able to struggle, one must overcome one's backward ideas with Mao Tse-tung's thought and make continuous progress."

In helping the backward comrades fight "battles" in their own minds, we must take the characteristics of each of them into consideration. Some have more problems, some have less. Some can see things quickly and some cannot. Thus it is necessary to analyse concretely people's differences and discriminate between the cases. It will never do to regard them as exactly the same. If we do not deal with each case on its merits and just boil sorghum and rice in one pot, the result will be a mess, with the former undercooked and the latter overcooked.

In helping the backward comrades, it is also necessary to pay full attention to relying on the core members, mobilizing the masses and turning the company into a red school, thus creating good opportunities for the less advanced comrades to change. That is to say, a fine atmosphere should be created in the company, in which everyone studies diligently Chairman Mao's works, puts politics in the fore in all his activities and adheres to principles in dealing with problems. The problems and shortcomings of one should be the concern of all, and everywhere there should be hands outstretched warmly towards the comrades who need help. In such a red school they will surely be trained into staunch red successors. If we do not fully rely on the core members, mobilize the masses and make everyone take part in doing ideological work, we won't be able to produce effective results in our transforming of them from the backward into the advanced.

**THE CHANGING FROM THE BACKWARD INTO
THE ADVANCED IS A PROCESS OF REPEATED
STRUGGLE**

To change from the backward into the advanced is not a simple matter. It is always a process of a protracted, arduous ideological struggle. To build up proletarian ideology, one has to eliminate the non-proletarian ideologies; to cultivate a hard-working style, one has to get rid of slackness; and to foster the materialist and dialectic points of view, one has to repudiate metaphysical viewpoints. Though the old ideas and habits of these backward comrades do not constitute the main aspect in their character, they were not formed just in one day. Some of their shortcomings were formed long ago and have struck deep roots. It is quite a difficult job to eliminate old ideas and habits and foster new ideas and habits. Take marching for instance, it is everyday life in the army. But for those comrades who would take a trolley-bus for a very short distance before they joined the army, it is certainly no small matter for them to cover one hundred *li* in a single night. This sudden change will as sure as death push them into a hard-fought ideological struggle. It is not surprising if some of them cannot stand up to the effort, complain a bit and even lag behind. Only through repeated battles with difficulties and through tempering in practice, can they acquire the spirit of fearing neither hardship nor fatigue. In the past we did not have

a sufficient understanding of the protractedness and arduousness of this change, unduly sought hasty successes and wanted them to correct all their shortcomings and become first-class fighters overnight. Like an over-hasty cook who continuously adds fuel to the fire regardless of whether the rice in the pot can stand the heat or not, we achieved hardly anything for all our good intentions and the backward comrades became even more disheartened.

The change from the backward into the advanced is a process of quantitative change into qualitative change. Rapid improvements, the leap, can take place only after the change has reached a certain degree. At the beginning of their change the backward comrades cannot possibly see things as clearly as the advanced ones or treat problems as correctly. There may often be inconsistency between their thinking and action. Some comrades merely follow others in doing certain things, because of lack of sufficient political awareness. Some comrades have raised their political understanding, but their action still lags behind their thinking. Though these changes in the backward comrades are not so obvious, they are signs of progress. Taking these rudiments of progress as the points of breakthrough in their change, we must do painstaking and meticulous work among them and enthusiastically help them make further progress. We should not say they have an "impure motive" when they do something which, though good, is based on insufficient

understanding. What we should do is to help them raise the level of their understanding. With regard to those comrades who have raised their political awareness but whose action still lags behind their understanding, we should not accuse them of "inconsistency between words and deeds" either, but should encourage them to let correct thinking guide their actions and to change surely and steadily into the advanced. If we act in a manner contrary to this we will not be able to give them a timely and effective push on the road of progress.

Generally speaking, the backward comrades will experience some setbacks in the course of their progress. There will be ups and downs in their mood. This is normal; without several reverses the question of which will win — the new ideas and habits or the old ideas and habits — cannot be completely resolved and the thought of Mao Tse-tung cannot really strike root in their minds. Only by admitting and recognizing these reversals and studying the reason behind them and grasping the law of man's ideological changes, can we reduce the reverses to the minimum. A fighter in Squad Six had retained some old habits and loved to quarrel with others. The first time he had a squabble with his squad leader, I made allowances for the fact that he was young and naive and had a talk with him. He made a self-criticism and I thought the question well settled. Not long afterwards, however, he had another quarrel with some other comrade and did not

even want to go to do his drill. I criticized him and he promised with great determination to correct this shortcoming. Then again after a few days he fell out with another comrade and got so worked up that he didn't even take his meal but went straight out to buy biscuit in the street without asking for leave first. Why did this fighter repeat this mistake time and again? After a careful analysis, we finally found out the reason for his strange behaviour. On the one hand, his old weakness had not been thoroughly eliminated; his old habits stuck to him. On the other, he wanted to be good and so was very upset after each of his outbursts of temper. Thus, as in a tug-of-war, two forces in his mind pulled very hard against each other. Sometimes the first force had the upper hand and sometimes the second force gained ascendancy. Hence the repeated outbursts and self-criticisms. Since then, with this characteristic of his in mind I helped him learn and apply Chairman Mao's works in a living way, continuously helping him ideologically and developing his class consciousness so that a fundamental change could be brought about in him. At the same time I asked the others to encourage him and not to give him any opportunity to lose his temper again. After a fairly long period of effort this fighter gradually overcame this shortcoming.

Experience teaches us that the ideological remoulding of the fighters is very complicated and that we should avoid oversimplification in our

understanding and work. We must grasp firmly the work of helping the backward comrades, and persist in it to the very end. We must fight a "protracted war" and should not expect everything to be set to right once and for all. In the beginning, we must encourage them to fight valiantly against their old ideas. We must urge them to continue the battle when they have gained a victory and ask them not to relax when progressive ideas gain an upper hand in their minds. We must encourage and teach them not to lose heart when the negative factors gain ascendancy. Under all circumstances we should treat the backward comrades in accordance with the theory of one dividing itself into two. We should not think them fully remoulded because they have made some progress. Neither should we lose confidence in them because they are suffering some setback. We must unremittently encourage them to conscientiously revolutionize their ideology.

**APPLY THE METHOD OF ONE DIVIDING
ITSELF INTO TWO TO THE ADVANCED
COMRADES TO MAKE THEM EVEN MORE
ADVANCED**

The advanced and the backward are the unity of opposites and are relative and interchangeable. The backward can turn into the advanced and the advanced can become even more advanced or can become backward. That is why we must also judge the advanced comrades from the aspect of

one dividing itself into two so that we can aid them in becoming even more advanced and prevent them from slipping into backwardness. We fell into two kinds of one-sidedness in the past in our treatment of the advanced comrades. The first was that we thought them to be perfect and failed to notice their weak points. The second was that we did not believe they were really progressive and could not see their progressiveness because of a single shortcoming. Why did we commit such errors? It is mainly due to our lack of the viewpoint of one dividing itself into two.

The advanced comrades have more strong points and their class consciousness is comparatively higher. However, they also have non-proletarian ideas and shortcomings. What is more, they can easily get conceited and slacken their ideological remoulding. They may forget the fundamental things while trying to keep their reputation. We must have both their weak as well as good points in mind and should not show special favours for them and overlook their shortcomings. We should educate them to treat themselves in accordance with the principle of one dividing itself into two and to foster the concept of uninterrupted revolution. We should take our responsibility seriously and set a strict standard for them and help them overcome their weak points. We must ask them to pay closer attention to the study of Chairman Mao's works, devote more time to this study, understand them more deeply and apply them better. In helping them to overcome their weak

points, we should grasp the fundamental issues. If we often pick on them for their minor, personal shortcomings, they will become timid and overcautious and unable to concentrate their attention on the main ones.

In actual practice we once had another kind of one-sidedness, *i.e.*, demanding the advanced fighters to be absolutely perfect. We got alarmed when we discovered that they had this or that shortcoming. This one-sidedness was particularly conspicuous in our treatment of those who were formerly backward. We often wrote off their entire record because of one single mistake and thus dampened their enthusiasm. When Comrade Liu Kuo-liang first came to our company, he was widely known for his excessive fastidiousness. Later he worked hard on Chairman Mao's works and applied them in a living way. He changed much of his outlook and became an advanced fighter. He had outstanding merits but still retained some shortcomings. Some comrades looked only at his shortcomings and said discouraging things about him. Once he rushed into the company office without getting permission first and on seeing that there were cadres there he left again. Some comrades commented, "See? Still the same old way!" For some time this fighter became quite disheartened. We talked to these comrades and made them see that Liu Kuo-liang's shortcomings constituted only "one finger out of ten" while his strong points constituted nine fingers, and that because he had shortcomings we should not by

any means ignore his progressiveness, which was basic in him. It is of course right to set a strict standard for the advanced fighters, but this strictness should be a feasible, rational one, not one beyond reasonable limits. We should make a concrete analysis of their shortcomings, but we should not make the error of treating the trifles as questions of principle, accidental errors as deep-seated ones, practical difficulties as ideological problems. Only when we handle things this way can their enthusiasm be brought into play and their weak points be overcome.

In helping the advanced become even more advanced, we should pay close attention not only to their weak points but also the progressive factors in them, we should help them to develop these progressive factors and make them all the more prominent. When they have developed their progressive qualities and raised the red banner of Mao Tse-tung's thought even higher, their initiative in overcoming the negative factors in themselves and the strength to overcome them will also have increased. With proletarian ideology as a mirror, we can distinguish the non-proletarian ideologies clearly and with materialist dialectics as a yardstick, we can identify metaphysical thinking clearly. If we neglect what is progressive in them and focus our attention only on their unsatisfactory side, the advanced fighters may very well get confused, lose their bearings and become timid and overcautious. They will not be able to further develop their strong points, to create anything new or to make

progress. There was such an instance in our company. An advanced comrade summed up his experience on how to guide military training with Mao Tse-tung's thought at the beginning of last year. He was asked to relate his experience in the various other companies and was warmly received everywhere. Some comrades, with the best of intentions, held that the most important thing was to take a firm attitude towards the shortcomings of an advanced comrade. They neglected to bring into account his spirit of hard work and creativeness and were very critical of his personal faults. As a result, this comrade centred his attention on the correction of these faults and failed to bring his good aspects into full play. For some time he made little progress. From this lesson we learn that while we should help the advanced comrades overcome their shortcomings, we should at the same time develop their good points, and that we should also teach the advanced comrades to greatly develop their progressive characteristics, bring out positively their revolutionary creativeness and strive to make further progress, as well as overcoming their shortcomings. Thus an energetic campaign develops to emulate the advanced, learn from, catch up with and overtake them, everyone works even harder on Chairman Mao's works and the positive factors are brought into fuller play.

I understand that to apply materialist dialectics to change the backward into the advanced and to make the advanced even more advanced is a process of continual studying, practising, and the

raising of the level of understanding. What I have done in this respect is far from enough. I am determined to do better in the future in studying and applying Chairman Mao's works in a living way and in revolutionizing my own ideology, and I will do my best to increase the dialectical thinking in my mind and reduce the metaphysical thinking and improve my work for the ideological remoulding of the fighters.

(Originally published in the *Liberation Army Daily*, January 10, 1966)