

A NEW YOUNG MAN ARRIVES AT THE ORGANIZATION DEPARTMENT

From the time of victory in 1949, Mao worried that the revolutionary fervor of party members would wane, that they would lose touch with the people and become authoritarian bureaucrats. In 1956–57 he launched a campaign to expose the party to the criticism of intellectuals under the slogan “Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom.” Although most intellectuals were cautious at first, once criticism started to pour forth, it soon became a torrent. At this point Mao and other party leaders abruptly changed the policy of toleration and launched an attack on the critics for harboring rightist ideology.

The following excerpt is from a story by the young writer, Wang Meng (b. 1934), published in People’s Literature in 1956. During the “Hundred Flowers” period, it was widely discussed. Wang’s mockery of this one sleepy and inefficient party office earned the praise of many who were troubled by bureaucratic abuses, but it also elicited considerable hostility from officials unaccustomed to this manner of criticism. During the anti-rightist phase, Wang Meng was criticized for sentimentality and despondency, traits said to be characteristic of bourgeois intellectuals with few ties to the masses. Labeled a rightist, Wang Meng was sent off to the far northwest, living in a Uighur village until he was rehabilitated in 1978. He served as minister of culture from 1986 until dismissed in 1989 after the Tiananmen crackdown.

The fourth day that Lin Zhen [the new young party member] was at the district headquarters, he went to the Donghua Gunny Sack Factory to look into the conditions of party recruitment work during the first quarter of the year. Before going, he looked over the relevant documents and read a small volume entitled “How to Carry Out an Investigation Study.” He repeatedly asked Han

Changxin for advice and carefully and elaborately wrote out an outline for himself. Then he mounted the bicycle supplied to him and rapidly rode out toward the gunny sack factory.

The guard at the factory entrance, as soon as he heard Lin was a party committee cadre, did not even ask him to sign his name but trustingly invited him to go on in. He walked through a large

empty yard, past a huge open storage bin filled with hemp and a building which rumbled with the sound of machinery. Then, rather nervously, he knocked at the door of Wang Qingchuan, the factory director and concurrent party branch secretary. Receiving a reply of "Come in," he entered slowly, fearing that if he moved quickly he would display his lack of experience. He saw a fat-faced, thick-necked, short man playing chess with a slick-haired humpback. The short comrade lifted his head, playing with a chess piece, and after asking Lin whom he wanted to see, impatiently waved his hand and said, "Go over to the branch party office in the adjoining building and ask for Wei Heming; he's the organization committee member." Then he lowered his head once more and continued with the chess game.

Lin Zhen found the ruddy-faced Wei Heming and began questioning from his outline, "In the first quarter of the year how many persons did you recruit?"

"One and a half," Wei replied harshly and abruptly.

"What's this 'half'?"

"One person was passed, but the district committee has already delayed two months in approving him."

Lin Zhen took out a notebook and noted this down. Then he continued, "How was the recruitment work carried out? What experiences did you have?"

"The procedure was the same as before—as laid down in the party constitution."

Lin Zhen looked at the person sitting opposite him. Why were his remarks as dry as week-old bread? Wei leaned his cheek on his hand and looked away as if he were thinking of something else.

"What were the results of your recruitment work?" Lin asked.

"I just told you," Wei replied, in a manner which showed he hoped to end the discussion quickly.

Lin Zhen did not know what to ask next. He had spent a whole afternoon preparing an outline

and now after talking for five minutes he had used it all up. He was quite embarrassed.

At this moment the door was pushed open by a forceful hand. The short comrade came in and snapped at Wei, "Do you know what was in that letter that just came?"

Wei dully nodded his head. The short comrade paced back and forth and then, standing with legs apart in the middle of the floor, said, "You've got to think of a way out! The question of quality was raised last year. How is it you have to wait until the contractor writes a letter to the ministry of textiles? It is shameful if in the high tide of socialism our production cannot gradually be raised!"

Wei Heming coldly looked at the short man's face and said, "Who are you talking about?"

"I am talking about all of you!" The short man waved his hand, including Lin Zhen in his gesture.

Wei Heming was trying to keep his anger under control and looked quite frightening. His face turned even redder and standing up he asked, "And you? You don't have any responsibility?"

"Naturally I am responsible." The short comrade calmed down. "I am responsible to the higher levels. No matter how they deal with me, I've got to take it. You are responsible to me. After all, who made you production chief? Be careful. . . ." Finishing, he looked threateningly at Wei Heming and then left.

Wei sat down, opened up all the buttons on his cotton jacket and took a deep breath. When Lin Zhen asked who that man was, Wei sarcastically replied, "You don't know him? He's the factory director, Wang Qingchuan."

Then Wei told Lin in detail all about Wang Qingchuan. Originally, Wang worked in some central ministry but as punishment for some involvement with a woman, he was assigned to this factory as deputy factory manager in 1951. In 1953 the factory manager was assigned elsewhere and Wang was promoted to that position. He never did anything but run around in circles, hide in his office, sign papers, and play chess. Every month at the union meeting, the party branch

meeting, and the youth league meeting he would make a speech criticizing the workers for not carrying out mass competition well, for their indifference to quality, for their economistic ideology. . . . Wei had not finished when Wang pushed open the door again. Looking at the watch on his left wrist he ordered: "Inform all responsible persons in the party, league, union, and administrative departments that there will be a meeting at 12:10 in the factory manager's office." Then, slamming the door, he left.

Wei Heming mumbled, "You see what sort of a person he is?"

Lin said, "Don't keep these complaints to yourself. Criticize him, tell the higher levels about all this. They cannot possibly condone this sort of factory manager."

Wei smiled and asked Lin, "Old Lin, you're new here, aren't you?"

"Old Lin" reddened.

Wei explained, "Criticism doesn't work. He generally does not join in such meetings; so where are you going to criticize him? If by chance he does join in and you express your views, he says, 'It's fine to put forth opinions, but you've got to have a firm grip on essentials and consider the time and place. Now we should not take up precious time put aside for discussing national tasks by giving vent to personal opinions.' Fine. So instead of taking up 'valuable time,' I went around to see him myself, and we have argued ourselves into this present situation."

"And how about informing the higher levels?"

"In 1954 I wrote letters to the ministry of textile industry and the district party headquarters. A man named Zhang from the ministry and Old Han from your office came around once to investigate. The conclusion of the investigation was that 'Bureaucratism is comparatively serious but most important is the manner of carrying out work; the tasks have been basically completed. It's only a question of shortcomings in the manner of completing them.' Afterwards Wang was criticized once, and they got hold of me to encourage the spirit of criticism from bot-

tom to top, and that was the end of it. Wang was better for about a month. Then, he got nephritis. After he was cured he said he had become sick because of his hard work, and he became as he is now."

"Tell the upper levels again."

"Hmph. I don't know how many times I've talked with Han Changxin, but Old Han doesn't take any notice. On the contrary he lectures me on respect for authority and strengthening unity. Maybe I shouldn't think this, but I'm afraid we may have to wait until Wang embezzles funds or rapes a woman before the upper levels take any notice."

When Lin left the factory and mounted his bike again, the wheels turned round much more slowly than they had on his way to the factory. He frowned deeply. The first step in his work was filled with difficulties, but he also felt a kind of challenge—this was the time to show one's fighting spirit! He thought and thought, until his bike strayed into the express lane and he was stopped and scolded by a policeman.

After finishing lunch, Lin Zhen could not wait to go off to Han Changxin to report on the situation. Han was wearily leaning on the sofa, his big form looking heavy and clumsy. He took a box of matches out of his pocket and, choosing one stick, began picking his teeth.

While Lin poured forth a disconnected account of what he had seen and heard at the Gunny Sack Factory, Han tapped his toe on the floor and kept saying, "Yes, I know." Afterwards, he patted Lin on the shoulder and cheerily said, "If you didn't understand conditions the first time out, it's not important. The next time will be better."

"But I understand the situation regarding Wang Qingchuan," said Lin, opening his notebook.

Han closed the notebook and told him, "Right, I've known about this situation for a long time. The year before last the district committee told me to settle it, so I severely criticized him, pointing out his shortcomings. We talked for at least three or four hours. . . ."

"But there weren't any results. Wei Heming said he was only better for one month."

"Even one month is something. Moreover, it certainly was not for only one month. Wei's ideology is questionable if as soon as he meets anyone he starts to tell all about his superior's faults. . . ."

"Well, was what he said true or not?"

"It's hard to say. Naturally this ought to be solved. I've talked it over with the district committee assistant secretary, Comrade Li Zongqin."

"And what did the assistant secretary think?"

"He agreed with me that the problem of Wang Qingchuan ought to be solved and can be solved. . . . Only, you shouldn't go diving into it just like that."

"Do you mean me?"

"Yes. This is the first time you've gone to a factory, and you don't understand the entire situation. Your job isn't to solve the problem of Wang; in fact, to speak frankly, a more experienced cadre is needed for his problem. Besides, it isn't that we haven't considered the affair. . . . If you go jumping into this business, you won't get out for three months. Are you completely familiar with the first quarter's summary on party building? The upper levels are anxious to receive our report!"

Lin Zhen was silent. Han patted him on the shoulder again. "Don't be upset. There are three thousand party members in our district and a hundred-and-some-odd branches. Do you think you can know all of their problems as soon as you arrive?" He yawned, the pockmarks on his tired face standing out redly. "Ahhhh—I'd better take my afternoon nap."

"Then how should I go about investigating party recruitment work again?" Lin asked hopelessly.

Then Han Changxin again rose to pat his shoulder, but Lin involuntarily moved away. Han self-confidently said, "Tomorrow we will go together; I'll help you investigate. How about that?" Then he took Lin off with him to the dormitory.

The next day, Lin Zhen was very interested to see how Han would go about investigating con-

ditions. Three years earlier when he was in the Beijing Normal School, he had gone off to observe teaching in practice. The teacher stood in front and lectured while Lin and the students listened. This time, Lin adopted the same attitude; opening his notebook, he prepared to note down carefully Han's *modus operandi*.

Han asked Wei Heming, "How many party members did you recruit?"

"One and a half."

"Not 'one and a half,' but two. I'm inquiring about your recruitment work, not about whether the district committee has approved them or not." Having corrected him, Han continued, "How did these two men complete their production quota?"

"Very well. One exceeded his by seven percent and the other by four percent. The factory wall newspaper shows. . . ."

When he started to talk about production conditions, Wei seemed to take on a little more life, but Han interrupted him, "What shortcomings do they have?"

Wei thought for some time and then vaguely mentioned some defects. Han made him give some examples. After this Han again asked him about the party activists' completion of their quarter's production tasks, seeking figures and concrete examples. But when the manner in which advanced workers overcame difficulties and developed innovations came up, he showed no interest.

After they returned, Han quickly scribbled off a hand-written draft "Summary of Conditions Regarding Recruitment Work at the Gunny Sack Factory" whose details were as follows: ". . . During this quarter (January–March 1956) the gunny sack factory branch office basically carried through a positive and careful plan of recruiting new party members. In party building work it achieved definite results. Newly approved party members Zhu and Fan received the glorious encouragement of becoming Communist party members, strengthened their outlook as owners of their own tools, and in the first quarter exceeded their heavy production quotas by seven percent and four percent respectively. The great mass of positive workers within the party factory

branch were influenced by the good example set by Zhu and Fan, and were stimulated by their decision to achieve acceptance into the party. They developed their positive attitude and creativity and magnificently completed or exceeded their production quotas for the quarter. . . ." (Below was a series of figures and concrete examples.) "This proves: 1. party building work not only does not interfere with production work, but in fact greatly stimulates it. Any work method which uses as a pretext the urgency of production work to disregard party building is mistaken. 2. . . . But at the same time it must be pointed out that party building work in the gunny sack factory still has certain shortcomings . . . such as. . ."

Lin Zhen held the sheet of fine paper on which the "Summary of Conditions" was written and read it over and over. There was an instant when he doubted whether he had been to the gunny sack factory or whether the last time he had gone to the factory with Han he had fallen asleep. Why was it there were so many things he absolutely could not recall? He suspiciously asked Han, "What is the basis for all this?"

"Wei Heming's report that day."

"The production results were due to their party building work?" Lin began to stammer.

Han shook out the crease in his trousers and said, "Naturally."

"No, Wei didn't say that last time. They were able to raise production, but perhaps it was due to expanding competition, perhaps because the Youth League established a supervision post, but not necessarily because of the achievements of party building work. . . ."

"Naturally, I don't deny that. Various factors all worked together. You cannot split them apart metaphysically in an analysis and say this is a result of X and that is a result of Y."

"Then if we were writing a summary of rat catching work during the first quarter could we also use these figures and examples?"

Han smiled broadly at Lin's inexperience and said, "You have to be somewhat flexible. . . ."

"How do you know their production tasks were heavy?"

"Do you think there could be any factory now with light tasks?"

Lin was dumfounded. . . .

Not long afterwards, Lin Zhen was the target of severe criticism in a party small group meeting. The situation developed as follows. During one of Lin's visits to the gunny sack factory, Wei Heming told him that because the quality standard set for the quarter had not been met, Wang Qingchuan had fiercely lectured the workers. The workers had their own views on this, and Wei planned to call a discussion group together, collect these views, and pass them on to the higher authorities. Lin approved of this method and thought that in this way the "ripening of conditions" could be hastened. Three days later Wang came into the district committee in a blind rage, looking for the assistant secretary, Li Zongqin. He complained that Wei Heming—with the support of Lin Zhen—had formed a faction to carry out anti-leadership activities and moreover, that the workers in the discussion group Wei directed were all suspect because of their backgrounds. . . . And at the very end, he requested that his own resignation be accepted. Li criticized a few of Wang's shortcomings and agreed to prevent Wei from convening his discussion group again. "As for Lin Zhen," he said to Wang, "we will give him some much deserved instruction."

In the criticism meeting, Han analyzed: "Comrade Lin Zhen did not discuss the issue with the leadership but on his own responsibility agreed to Wei's calling of a discussion group. This, to begin with, is a kind of unorganized, undisciplined behavior. . . ."

Lin refused to concede and said, "Not requesting permission from the leadership was an error. But I do not understand why we not only fail to investigate spontaneously the views of the masses but on the contrary prevent the lower levels from putting forth their views!"

"Who says we won't investigate?" Han raised one leg. "We are completely in control of the situation at the gunny sack factory. . . ."

"In control but making no effort to solve the problem; that's what's so painful! The party con-

stitution says that party members must struggle against anything that works against the interests of the party. . . .” Lin Zhen’s face paled.

Experienced Liu Shiwu began to make his statement. He always made a point of entering at a discussion’s most crucial point.

“Comrade Lin Zhen’s enthusiasm is very praiseworthy, but for him to lecture the organization department cadres on the party constitution after having been here only a month is a little presumptuous. Lin believes that, by supporting criticism from the bottom up, he is doing a very fine thing, and his motive is no doubt very noble. But criticism from the bottom up must be initiated by the leadership. For example, let’s ask Comrade Lin to think about the following: First, isn’t it true that Wei Heming has a personal grudge against Wang Qingchuan? It would be very difficult to say otherwise. Then, for Wei so eagerly to call a discussion group together may have had a personal objective, couldn’t it? I think that’s not entirely impossible. Second, were there people in the discussion group whose backgrounds are in doubt and who may have ulterior motives? We’ve also

got to consider that point. Third, can the convening of that kind of a meeting give the masses the impression that Wang is on the verge of being punished and thereby lead to confusion all around? And so on. As to Lin Zhen’s ideological condition, I want to put forward very frankly a guess: a young man easily idealizes life; he believes life should be a certain way and then demands that it be that way. Those who do party work must consider the objective facts and whether life can be that way. Young people also easily overestimate themselves and aspire to too much. As soon as they go to a new work post they want to struggle against every shortcoming and be a ‘Nastya’ type of hero. This is a valuable and lofty idea but it is also a kind of vanity. . . .”

Lin Zhen wavered for a moment as if he had received a blow. He bit down tightly on his lower lip to hold in his anger and pain. Screwing up his courage, he asked again: “But what about Wang Qingchuan? . . .”

Liu Shiwu jerked his head up and interrupted, “Tomorrow I will have a talk with him. You are not the only one with principles.”