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Hua Guofeng's Speech at the Closing Session of the CCP Central Work Conference

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Summary:

Hua Guofeng reflects on the conclusion of the 1978 Central Committee Work Conference, and describes his policy of the "two whatevers," or the decision to uphold Mao Zedong's policies and instructions.

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Speech at the Closing Session of the Central Committee Work Conference
(13 December 1978)

Hua Guofeng

Comrades:

Comrade Deng Xiaoping and Comrade Ye Jianying had made important speeches earlier. I fully agree with their points.

Our present work conference, which began in November, has been in session for 34 days. Today, we are having the closing session, after which there will be two more days of discussions before the meeting comes to a victorious conclusion.

It is the unanimous view of our comrades in the Central Politburo and all comrades present that the principle of democratic centralism has been upheld throughout the conference, and we have managed to implement the method of "criticism-unity-criticism", fully embrace the spirit of democracy, enable everyone to speak freely and tap the collective wisdom. This conference has been a very good and successful one thanks to the common effort of all comrades in attendance. It achieved important outcomes in four areas: (missing text)

One, the unanimous endorsement of the Central Politburo's important strategic decision to shift the emphasis of the Party's work to socialist modernization from next January and the decision to end the large-scale nationwide mass movement to expose and criticize the Gang of Four by this year.

Two, the resolution of several more important questions concerning the thorough rehabilitation of the Tiananmen Incident and left over from the Cultural Revolution, as well as establishing guidelines and policies for the further resolution of such questions and ways to carry out effective ideological work on the masses.

Three, discussion and amendment of the two documents on agricultural issues and in-principle approval of the arrangements for the national economic plans over the next two years.

Four, deliberation and discussion of the Central Politburo's opinions on personnel issues and the choice of candidates for the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection.

This conference has further embraced the fine traditions and practices that were consistently advocated by Chairman Mao, that is to seek truth from facts, adopt the mass line approach, and engage in criticism and self-criticism. Everyone was able to emancipate their minds, speak up and voice their criticisms, including those directed at the work of the Central Committee. Some comrades had also engaged in varying degrees of self-criticism. In this conference attended by our senior cadres, we were able to create a lively atmosphere that simultaneously upheld centralism and democratic spirit as well as discipline and freedom, in which we showed unity of purpose while putting the individual mind at ease. Like what many comrades have said, this was something that we had not seen in many years of Party life. Practice will certainly prove that this Central Committee work conference will be seen as a very important meeting in the history of our Party and the journey of our new Long March.

I will mainly talk about one issue today, and that is on the "two whatevers" and whether practice is the sole criterion for testing truth. Comrades present at this

meeting take this issue very seriously and have shown great concern. They have initiated robust discussions, proposed various scenarios and raised many questions. On this issue, our comrades hope that this conference will make a clear distinction between right and wrong, so that we can reach a common understanding, strengthen unity, and reinforce and develop the favorable situation of stability and unity. I would like to make the following three points based on everyone's views:

The first point is on the issue of "two whatevers". In my speech at the Central Committee work conference held last March, I put special emphasis on the need for the whole party, especially our senior cadres, to pay particular attention to the issue of staunchly defending the great banner of Chairman Mao in the fight against the Gang of Four, departing from the premise of the complex situation that emerged soon after the Gang of Four was smashed and also taking into account the positive and negative experiences of defending the banner of revolutionary leaders in the history of the international communist movement. Guided by this thinking, I sought to defend all the policy decisions Chairman Mao had made and suppress all words and actions that tarnished his image. The intent then was that Chairman Mao's great image should absolutely be kept intact even as we gave a free hand to the masses to engage in the great struggle to expose and criticize the Gang of Four. This was an important issue that was constantly in my mind when the Gang of Four was first brought down. I later realized that the first statement had sounded too absolute and while the second statement was indeed something that we had to pay attention to, it was not clearly stated how we should do so. Back then, these two statements received less than thorough consideration and thinking about it now, I wished I had not proposed the "two whatevers". Before this, the People's Daily, Liberation Army Daily and the Red Flag had jointly published an editorial on 7 February entitled "Study the Documents Well and Grasp the Key Aspects". The theme of this editorial was on mobilizing the whole party, military and people to earnestly study the relevant documents, firmly grasp the ideological weapon and thoroughly expose and criticize the Gang of Four. But under the guidance of my thinking mentioned above, this editorial also talked about the "two whatevers", namely that we should resolutely defend whatever policy decisions Chairman Mao had made and to unswervingly follow whatever instructions he had given. The phrasing of the "two whatevers" here was even more absolute and inappropriate. Even though the interpretations of the "two whatevers" cited above are not quite the same, they have to varying extents limited everyone's thinking, and go against the realistic implementation of the Party's policies and stimulating thought within the Party. Although my words and that particular editorial were respectively read, discussed and approved by the Central Politburo, I ought to shoulder the main responsibility. I should engage in self-criticism on this issue and I welcome the criticisms of other comrades.

The second point is on the issue of the discussion on the criteria of truth, I wish to briefly talk about some of the circumstances related to this. Regarding the article published by the Guangming Daily on 11 May this year and reprinted by the People's Daily and the Liberation Army Daily on 12 May, which took the argument that practice was the sole criterion for testing truth, as I had just returned from a visit to North Korea and had many urgent matters to deal with, I did not have the opportunity to read it. Between June and July, a few colleagues from the Politburo Standing Committee successively shared with me what they heard about it. It was then that I realized there were some differing views on the article. The Politburo Standing Committee discussed this issue at a meeting and felt that the article had a good theme, but did not do any special study of it. Later on, there were more articles published in the newspapers as well as more domestic and external responses on the issue. Noting that the State Council's theoretical work conference had gone very well, Marshal Ye proposed that comrades involved in theory work also hold a theoretical work conference for everyone to air their different views, so as to reach a common understanding and resolve the issue through full democratic discussion. Fellow colleagues in the Politburo Standing Committee all supported the idea. As I hoped that all members of the Politburo Standing Committee would be home for the meeting to resolve the issue, the fact that Comrade Deng Xiaoping and some others were out

on visits meant that we could not hold the theoretical work conference ahead of the current Central Committee work conference. On 25 November this year, the Politburo Standing Committee met the chief comrades in charge of the Beijing Municipal Party Committee and the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League to hear their reports on the public response and the situation of big-character posters appearing on the Beijing streets after the rehabilitation of the Tiananmen Incident. When talking about this, the contacts said that with regard to some specific issues, we should adopt a realistic approach and follow the principle of "practice as the sole criterion for testing truth" in resolving them, adding that current discussion in the newspapers on the criteria for testing truth was a good one that showed vigorous thinking. Also, it could not be said that the articles were aimed at Chairman Mao or it would be difficult for people to speak up. However, one should be careful to keep a measured tone and note the consequences when talking about the issues. References to Chairman Mao would be impossible or inappropriate in some instances. The newspapers have to be quite careful, as one step out of line would turn truth into falsehood. This is the view of the Politburo Standing Committee.

The third point is on the issue of convening the theoretical work conference, I had earlier mentioned that on the question of whether practice was the sole criterion for testing truth, our comrades had proposed many scenarios, raised quite a few questions and expressed many critical views toward other comrades during this work conference, thus creating favorable conditions for convening the theoretical work conference. As there were many items on the agenda for discussion and limited time at this work conference, it was impossible to spend too much time on these issues. Our comrades in the Central Politburo are of the view that we should adopt Marshal Ye's suggestion to hold a special theoretical work conference after the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee to further resolve this issue once and for all. The Central Committee believes that with the spirit of this present Central Committee work conference and the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee serving as guidance, this issue will be satisfactorily resolved. The Central Committee hopes that colleagues on the theoretical front and in the Propaganda Department can further unite on the basis of distinguishing right from wrong and having a common understanding, closely follow the Central Committee's strategic planning and strive to do good propaganda and theory work as well as play a greater role in shifting the emphasis of the Party's work to socialist modernization

Comrades:

I would like to say a little more on the issue of strengthening the Party's unity and raising the standards of our leadership. The present circumstances are very favorable, but we have a rather laborious task ahead of us. The current line that the Central Committee adopts is that of maintaining stability and unity, stabilizing the situation, emancipating thinking, and marshaling all our energies to accelerate the pace of socialist modernization. There can be no four modernizations without stability and unity. In order to swiftly and smoothly shift the emphasis of the Party's work to socialist modernization, we must cherish, reinforce and develop the greatly advantageous circumstances at present, and we must insist on policies that can both solve problems and keep the situation stable. Regarding some important issues that currently require resolution, we must fully and meticulously conduct good ideological work on the masses both within and beyond the Party.

Under the new circumstances and given the new mission ahead, it is extremely important to strengthen our Party's unity and raise the standards of our leadership. The key to reinforcing the unity of our party, military and people of all ethnicities is to unite the leaders of the Party Committees at all levels. If these people do not march to a single tune, it is pointless to hope that they can lead millions of people to fight and to build. Party Committees at all levels must uphold the principles of democratic centralism, and collectively deliberate on the important issues in their internal affairs. On the issue of policy direction and Party line, they must uphold the principles and

distinguish right from wrong. They should not be too bothered by minor issues. The Party Committee Secretary and the committee members should achieve mutual understanding and be adept at fostering unity among various types of comrades, including those who had made mistakes, even those with serious mistakes as well as those who had mistakenly opposed them. Of course, comrades who had made mistakes should face them squarely and correct them, and they should brace up and work hard to make new positive contributions to the Party and the masses. The leadership should do more self-criticism when problems arise in their work or when deviation occurs, and they should take the initiative to delegate responsibility to their subordinates. In short, they must both uphold the principles and persist in fostering unity. Unity is strength and victory lies in unity.

The fundamental way to raise the leadership standards of the Party Committees at all levels is still to get our comrades in leadership positions to take the study of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought seriously. The busier we are, the more we should consciously make time to diligently read the works of Marx, Lenin and Chairman Mao, learn to apply the standpoints, perspectives and methods of dialectical and historical materialism, give serious thought to some of the issues, strive to perfectly and accurately grasp and comprehend the system of Mao Zedong Thought, uphold the revolutionary academic style of linking theory to practice, further emancipate our thinking and thoroughly purge the pernicious influence of the counter-revolutionary revisionism propagated by Lin Biao and the Gang of Four. The Party Committee leadership at various levels must take the lead in mastering science, technology and management, assiduously study the work under their charge, strive to be both socialist-minded and professionally competent, as well as pay attention to resolving the issues of a bloated structure, overstaffing, and low efficiency. They should also take the initiative to encourage the spirit of investigation by having frequent and in-depth engagements with reality and the masses, and by listening to the people's views and understanding their hardships, so as to overcome bureaucratism and subjectivism. They must take the lead in upholding and promoting the Party's good practices of seeking truth from facts, adopting the mass line approach and engaging in criticism and self-criticism while fully embracing the spirit of democracy and humbly listening to the views of their subordinates and the masses, whether they are positive, negative, correct or erroneous. They have to be adept at putting the right views together and combining these with local realities.

We should implement the Central Committee's line, approaches and policies correctly, and take the lead in promoting hard work, frugality and the revolutionary spirit of sharing weal and woe with the masses. We must oppose all forms of special treatment, correct unhealthy tendencies, and courageously resist all forms of behavior that violate Party discipline and the laws of the country. So long as we resolutely do so, the fine traditions and practices that Chairman Mao had cultivated in the Party would surely flourish, leadership standards in the Party Committees at various levels would improve by leaps and bounds and our great cause of realizing the four modernizations of socialism would certainly see significant development.

Comrades:

With the closing of this present Central Committee work conference, we will move on to convene the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee. The tasks of the session are to: One, discuss and approve the decision to shift the emphasis of the Party's work to socialist modernization from next January; Two, discuss and approve the two documents on agricultural issues and arrangements for the national economic plans for 1979 and 1980; Three, discussion of personnel issues and the election and setting up of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection. After discussion and deliberation among members of the Politburo Standing Committee and our societal comrades, we are proposing to elect Comrade Chen Yun as an additional member of the Central Committee Politburo, additional member of the Politburo Standing Committee and additional Vice Chairman of the Central

Committee, as well as to elect Comrades Deng Yingchao, Hu Yaobang and Wang Zhen as additional members of the Central Committee Politburo, with submission to the Third Plenary Session for discussion and approval. At the same time, we are proposing to elect nine members Comrades Huang Kecheng, Song Renqiong, Hu Qiaomu, Xi Zhongxun, Wang Renzhong, Han Guang, Chen Zaidao, Huang Huoqing and Zhou Hui as additional members of the 11th Central Committee, with submission to the Third Plenary Session for discussion and approval and the appointments to be presented to the 12th National Congress for retroactive recognition. The Third Plenary Session is expected to last for three days. The Central Committee Politburo is of the opinion that the spirit of this present work conference and the Third Plenary Session should be jointly expressed, with the specific means of expression to be decided when the Third Plenary Session ends. Comrades who are leaving earlier and not participating in the Third Plenary Session can take the speeches made by Vice Chairmen Ye Jianying and Deng Xiaoping today and my three speeches during this conference as reference for communicating the spirit of the conference to the Party Standing Committees in the various provinces, municipalities, autonomous regions and military regions, as well as the Party Committee Standing Committees or Leading Party Members' Groups in the various departments under the Central Committee. We will separately inform you what conference documents to take with you and what not to. Each major work unit may take a copy of the work conference brief, but as many of the situations and issues collected and reflected within are too wide-ranging and have yet to be verified by the Central Committee, please do not disseminate it. I hereby hope and request that you pay close attention to the strict adherence to party discipline from now on and keep party secrets close to your heart. Do not engage in activities such as rumormongering and disseminating handwritten manuscripts. Our cadres must pay special attention to this point.

There is one more thing that I wish to say to our comrades. The Central Committee practices collective leadership. I hope that the various regions and work units can henceforth stop addressing their requests for instructions or reports to the Central Committee to "Chairman Hua of the Central Committee". Instead, they should simply address it to the "Central Committee". It is hoped that central party, government and military organs can also stick to this format when issuing documents down the chain of command and address each other as "Comrades" instead of making references to "Wise Leader". I hope that to see more literary works praising our Party and the heroic deeds of our veteran revolutionaries, workers, peasants and soldiers instead of giving publicity to myself.

Comrades:

Our Party is great, our military is mighty, and our people are a great people. Our revolution is a great one and it is a great cause that we are pursuing. As early as 1969 [trans. note—the correct year should be 1956], our great leader Chairman Mao said that "in another 45 years, that is in 2001 as we enter the 21st century, China would undergo a dramatic change and become a powerful socialist industrial country and this is as it should be, because China has a land area of 9.6 million square kilometers and a population of 600 million people and she ought to make a greater contribution to humanity." Let our Party, our military and our people of all ethnicities unite closer together and raise Chairman Mao's great banner high. Let us fulfill his vision and last wish to turn our country into a socialist modern power within this century. Let us steel our resolves, overcome all difficulties, spare no effort, and forge ahead courageously.