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INTRODUCING AN ARTICLE ON ANTI-REDTAPISM

- COMMUNIST CHINA -

By Chi Wen-fu

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INTRODUCING AN ARTICLE ON ANTI-REDTAPISM

[This is a translation of an article written by Chi Wen-fu originally published in Chung-chou P'ing-lun, No. 10, 1960 and reprinted in Kuang-ming Jih-pao, Peiping, 28 May 1960, page 3.]

An article entitled "Anti-Redtape" written by Comrade Wu Han was published in Jen-ming Jih-pao on 15 June 1959. It was lively written, vigorously opposing redtapism. He said: "Documents are necessary. No matter what society or era we live in, there are always documents. But, if they become redtapism, it would be bad. We should oppose it."

Anti-redtapism does not mean that documents are not needed at all. After enumerating the many merits of documents, he specified the demerits of redtapism: "But everything has two phases. Merits are followed by demerits. Because of greater convenience in writing than making an appointment for talking with each other, despatches are sent everywhere and substitute for personal talks in solving problems. Superfluosness is therefore one defect of redtapism. Since despatches are written without being subject to a time limit, the efforts of others required to read them is not considered. In addition, a series of conventional phrases are used. This results in writing long despatches, another defect of redtapism. Some people are inclined to show off in writing by drawing many similes and allusions, introducing many conventional phrases at the beginning, repeating them several times, then turning to the main subject and at last concluding again with much triteness and formality. This results in emptiness. These three characteristics, superfluosness, lengthyness and emptiness, constitute the demerits of redtapism."

The paragraph quoted above has presented a vivid

picture of redtapism. Superfluous, long and empty despatches are not intended to read by the recipients. Comrade Wu Han is a historian. He cited several prominent redtapists in the history as examples. The First Emperor of the Ch'in Dynasty was said to read many chin of documents every day. Wen Emperor of the Sui Dynasty was so preoccupied with the reading of despatches as to leave little time for taking meals. Aside from these examples, Wu Han further vividly described how Tai Tsu of the Ming Dynasty had suffered from redtapism and afterwards opposed it. He stated:

"Tai Tsu of the Ming Dynasty was a real redtapist. This can be proved from historical records. According to the records of Tai Tsu, in the eight days from 14 September to 21 September in the 17th year of Hung Wu (1384) submitted by the various departments were 1,660 documents related to 3,391 subjects. On the average, he read or listened to over 200 reports and disposed of over 400 matters a day. Submerged in the ocean of documents, he felt helpless.

"Suffering breeds opposition and struggle. Suffering from redtapism, Tai Tsu turned into a determined opponent to it. Once he was very angry at a long, empty document, punished the man who wrote it, and determined to change the tradition. The story is as follows: Some people liked to submit documents with ten thousands of words. Ju Tai-su, an official of the Justice Department, who had passed a provincial examination and liked to show off in writing, once submitted his opinion on current affairs in 17,000 words. A person was ordered to read for Tai Tsu. After having listened to 6,370 words of this document, Tai Tsu realized that it only superficially hinted that all the officials employed by the government were inept scholars without giving any concrete proofs. He became angry and summoned Ju Tai-su to the court, asking him to speak out on who in the Justice Department was an inapt scholar and who was a vulgar official. Ju Tai-su could not answer upon repeated questioning. Tai Tsu was so infuriated as to order to have him beaten. Next evening, Tai Tsu ordered some one to read for him again. Only after covering 16,500 words, the document touched on the main subject. Among his five recommendations comprising about 500 words four are practicable. Tai Tsu immediately ordered them carried out. In the meantime, he extolled Ju Tai-su

as a loyal official and said: 'It is my fault to feel repugnant in listening to a long document and repudiate a loyal officie.' He admitted being mistaken to beat him, but also pointed out the fault of Ju Tai-su who might have clearly presented his opinion in 500 words instead of 17,000 words. In order to correct such defects, he prescribed certain forms for making proposals to be practiced throughout the nation and topped it with a preface describing the development and need of such form (see The Biography of Ju Tai-su in Ming History No. 139 and Preface to Forms for Making Proposals in the Works of Tai Tsu of the Ming Dynasty No. 15). This happened in the 9th year of Hung Wu (1376). But, after eight years, in 1384 he still had to read over 200 documents every day. It seems that there might be less empty and long documents but the defect of superfluousness persisted."

What can we derive from the story as stated above? Recommendations which could be stated clearly in 500 words were actually put in 17,000 words. This is really an obnoxious thing. Is this phenomenon still existent at the present time? Is such an ocean of documents still annoying the people? In fact, redtapism is still flourishing. Chairman Mao has constantly warned us in this respect. Over abundant, detailed and out-of-date documents have been spent for writing, printing, delivering, reading, replying and filing a document. During the Great Leap Forward era when our work is onerous and our energy and time is precious, we cannot afford to waste it. The three characteristics, superfluousness, lengthiness, and emptiness, stated by Comrade Wu Han refer to something like internal diseases. Their harmful effects can hardly be described by the present writer. We should make a common effort to eradicate them.

Redtapism is, in fact, a revelation of bureaucratism. Document travelling is incompatible with our demands for being responsible, practical and loyal to service for the people. We should oppose redtapism and economize in the use of documents and prevent them from becoming superfluous. In the last part of his article Comrade Wu Han particularly extolled the anti-redtapism action taken by Hai Sui. Although Hai Sui represented a personality during the feudal era, he actually worked for the people. This was rarity during that era. He stressed economy in writing despatches. "Despatches

should be simple. --- Only one sentence should be used when it can cover the main subject and two or three sentences should be used when they are needed. A short paper should be used when it can cover a main subject and a long paper may be used when it is needed. It is enough to cover the subject in mind and no more." Such a realistic attitude should be followed by all of us.

END