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On Family Background

Editor's Note

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At present, the movement throughout middle schools in Beijing seems to be on the verge of death. Despite the hard efforts by the rebels, somehow the masses still have not been aroused to action, and the bourgeois reactionary line remains as strong as ever. This phenomenon has puzzled many comrades and has caused them to wonder: What on earth is it that has so effectively impeded the criticism of the bourgeois reactionary line?

We believe it is none other than the “theory of basing everything on family background” [weichushenglun], which has received wide social acceptance.

The source of the bourgeois reactionary line that was carried out in various middle schools in the past also lay in this reactionary theory of basing everything on family background.

This reactionary theory, which found its theoretical basis in the garbage heap of the metaphysical philosophy of the bourgeoisie, divides students into various ranks. It attempts to create a new privileged class in disguise under the socialist system. It even attempts to create a reactionary caste system and a new oppression among people themselves. It is this reactionary theory that has given young students this huge baggage of the

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The author of this essay, Yu Luoke, was a young worker and thinker in Beijing. Because of this writing, he was executed by the government in 1970.

“born Red” mindset, which has led them to believe that they were born revolutionaries, and which ultimately turned them into seedlings for revisionism. It is this reactionary theory that has made other students feel a strong sense of inferiority, resigned them to indifference, and caused them to give up devoting their share of responsibility to the future of the country and the world. Again, it is this reactionary theory that has caused many comrades, who have been misguided by the bourgeois reactionary line, to continue to hold onto their mistakes. And it is still this wicked reactionary theory that has caused many comrades to shrink in the face of the bourgeois reactionary line!

Comrades, how can we criticize the bourgeois reactionary line without overthrowing this wicked theory? Where can we train and bring up hundreds of millions of successors to the proletarian class without overthrowing this theory? If this theory is not overthrown, the color of China is bound to change!

Revolutionary rebels of the whole city: Didn't you want to repel the fierce counterattacks of the bourgeois reactionary line? Didn't you want to mobilize thousands upon thousands of the masses to fight with you, side by side? Then, you should raise raging billows and surging waves to completely break the dams of this reactionary theory. On that day, hundreds of millions of masses will break free of their chains and join with you to form an irresistible force. And only on that day will the bourgeois reactionary line be completely buried in its grave, and the color of China be forever bright red.

“On Family Background,” published by the Family Background Study Group of Beijing, has evoked immense repercussions throughout the society. We say: “The emergence of this theory is great!” It has announced the bankruptcy of the reactionary theory of basing everything on family background, and is a great victory for the proletarian revolutionary line.

“On Family Background” has dared to smash the bonds of the old traditions of society. It has bravely declared war against the reactionary theory of basing everything on family background with tremendous social influence. This revolutionary rebel spirit is great!

The emergence of “On Family Background” will inevitably be viewed by some as a big poisonous weed. But what does it matter? Marxism, in its infant stage, also was viewed as a poisonous weed; but it has become the guiding ideology for world's people today. Only through its struggle against falsehood will truth develop and be accepted by the masses. We are convinced that, despite its powerful appearance, the reactionary nature of this theory of basing everything on family background determines that it is only a rotten paper tiger. The revolutionary theory of “On Family Background” may be just a single spark today; but it will surely grow into a prairie fire tomorrow.

Meanwhile, we believe that, due to the author's limited understanding

of Mao Zedong Thought and insufficient investigation and research of the society, there are bound to be quite a few weak points and imperfections in "On Family Background." We earnestly hope that the broad masses of revolutionary comrades will use Mao Zedong Thought as a great weapon to assess it, and sincerely welcome any criticism of this article by our comrades.

On Family Background

The issue of family background has been a longstanding, serious social problem. It affects many areas.

If landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, bad elements, and rightists represent five percent of the country's total population, then the number of their children and close relatives will be many times higher. (This does not even include the children of capitalists, individuals with dubious history, and elite intellectuals, much less the children of office workers, rich middle peasants, and middle peasants.) It is not difficult to imagine how high the figure must be for young people from the Non-Red Five Categories.¹ Since China is a backward country, with a little more than two million manufacturing workers before Liberation, there are not too many of those with pure proletarian-class family backgrounds. A great many young people with bad family backgrounds² are generally not allowed to join military services and engage in classified work. Therefore, in particular work units, they (the Non-Red Five Categories) represent the absolute majority.

Owing to the influence of the "Left" in form, but "Right" in essence,³ policy of the reactionary line, those youth have seldom received equal political treatment, especially those from the background of the so-called Black Seven Categories,⁴ namely "curs," who have already become secondary targets of proletarian dictatorship. They are "born sinners." Under its influence, family background determines almost everything. Bad family background not only makes one inferior to others, but it also deprives one of the right to rebel against one's own family, defend the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee, defend Chairman Mao, and join the Red Guards. These days, so many innocent youth have died unnatural deaths and have drowned in the abyss of the theory of basing everything on family backgrounds. Faced with this grave problem, anyone who cares about the destiny of the country must confront and study it. Those seemingly sobering and comprehensive eclectic viewpoints are, in actuality, cruel and hypocritical. We must expose and criticize these viewpoints, and rise to defend Chairman Mao's revolutionary line. Here, we are going to seek answers from social practice as well as Chairman Mao's works, and explain our viewpoints from three perspectives.

Social Influence vs. Family Influence

Let us start with a widespread pernicious couplet: “If the father is a hero, the son is a good fellow; if the father is a reactionary, the son is a good-for-nothing—It is basically like this.”

The process of debating this couplet is the process of insulting those youth with bad family backgrounds, because the best outcome of such a debate can be that they are not “good-for-nothings.” Early on, there were few who would openly refute this view. Even if there had been anyone, he would have been very tentative and cautious. In reality, the left portion of this couplet was borrowed from Dou Erdun, a bandit leader of a feudal society. Does it take much courage to criticize a man like this? Some people suggested that this couplet has played some positive role. Did it? Chairman Mao said that if it is truth, then it will be in keeping with people’s interest; any falsehood is not in keeping with people’s interest. Whether or not something has played a positive role depends on whether it is truth—namely, whether or not it agrees with Mao Zedong Thought.

This couplet is not the truth; it is absolutely erroneous. Its problem lies in believing that family influence is greater than social influence, and in its failure to recognize that social influence is the ultimate determining factor. Simply put, the couplet only recognizes the influence of the father and places a father’s influence above anything else.

However, a diametrically opposite conclusion emerges from practice: Social influence far exceeds family influence, and family influence bows to social influence.

Any child, upon birth, will face both social and family influences. Just as a child starts to develop awareness of his environment, he starts school where he considers his teachers’ words a great deal more authoritative than those of his parents, and responds better to group education than individual education. He spends more time at school than at home; and he, as a young seedling, is nurtured by the grace of the Party and the sunshine of Mao Zedong Thought. As a result, social influence becomes the main influence.

Discussions with friends, leaders’ instructions, messages from newspapers, books, literature, and arts, exposure to customs and mores, and favorable influence from work will all leave one with indelible influences. These influences are collectively referred to as social influence, with which family influence cannot compete.

Even family influence is part of social influence. Whether one is getting good or bad family influence cannot be mechanically judged by who the father is. A heroic father and a reactionary mother do not necessarily mean good influence. If both parents are heroes, their children can still get

spoiled and turn into brats, or even worse sometimes. If both parents are ideologically sound, their dogmatic method of raising children can still produce the opposite of the desired effect. By the same token, a problem father does not necessarily exert negative influence, as was the case with Lenin. In short, whether one's family influence is good or bad should not be mechanically measured by his family background. Family background can only be used as a reference in understanding the whole picture of family influence.

By and large, our social influence is good because of the unparalleled superiority of our social system, the prominence our Party consistently gives to politics, and the Party's emphasis on the growth of the younger generation. The vast majority of people love the new society. Of course, we cannot neglect the complexity and the intensity of class struggles. We cannot lose sight of the fact that we are still in the midst of the sea of petty bourgeoisie. Our cultural and educational systems are yet to be thoroughly reformed, and social influence is not good all the time. Whatever their family backgrounds, our youth will be affected and led to commit this or that mistake once they are exposed to bad social influences. However, as long as there is proper guidance, they will quickly quit their old practices and return to the right track. Therefore, whether it is to deliberately let the young people carry the baggage of history or the baggage of their families, both belong to the same erroneous line; both are cruel. The overwhelmingly powerful, and yet sometimes imperfect, social influence means that it is wrong for youth from any background to give up ideological remolding. When it comes to ideological remolding, youth with good family backgrounds are not in any way superior to those from other backgrounds.

Whether it is family influence or social influence, they are both external causes. Overemphasizing influence is a reflection of the mechanism that denies subjective initiative. Human beings are capable of choosing their own directions, because truth is always more powerful and appealing. Do you truly believe that Marxism-Leninism is absolutely correct? Do you truly believe that Mao Zedong Thought is an invincible ideological weapon? Do you truly accept that internal causes play a decisive role? If so, then you should not believe that your father has more influence on you than anything else. Otherwise, it can only suggest that you are utterly confused.

The Issue of Laying Stress on Behavior

If you cannot refute that social influence plays a bigger role than family influence, then positive social influence is the mainstream, and you have to

agree that there is no causal connection between family influence and family background; then, we can agree to study several issues associated with the concept of “laying stress on behavior.”⁵

At the outset of the Cultural Revolution, many people described the idea of “laying stress on behavior” as a revisionist viewpoint. Only when they learned that this idea was brought up by Chairman Mao did they change their tone. That means that they have completely failed to understand this policy. Allowing these people to interpret this policy is bound to cause willful distortions. Due to space limitations, we are going to examine only three propositions, and see if they are in keeping with Mao Zedong Thought.

Family Background and Class Status [jiejichengfen] Are Entirely Different

Those seemingly impartial comrades have often told young people with bad family backgrounds: “First, we think family background matters; second, we do not base everything on family background; and third, we lay stress on one’s behavior.” Well, they were really addressing the wrong people.

Comrade Jiang Qing has explained the above idea before. She said, “It was meant for those who have already rebelled against their own class.” What did comrade Jiang Qing mean? For instance, Engels himself was a capitalist, but he rebelled against his own class and became a first-generation citizen of communism and an outstanding leader of the working class. Some committee members of the Paris Commune were themselves members of the capitalist class, but they were the representatives of this working-class commune. Similar cases can be found in the revolutionary period of our country. Can we deny their historical accomplishments because of their class status? No! We want to lay stress on behavior. This is called “the theory of not basing everything only on class status.” We believe the reverse is also the case. For someone whose class status is a coal mine worker, but who has betrayed the proletariat and revolution, we also need to put stress on his behavior; there is no reason whatsoever to forgive his crime. On a smaller scale, Li Ding Ming was a landlord, but he offered the Border Region Government the suggestion of “better staff and simpler administration.” Chairman Mao praised it and said, “Whoever you are [. . .] as long as your suggestions are good for the people, we will adopt them.” This is a real demonstration of how not to discredit the message because of the messenger. It is the application of the theory of not basing everything only on one’s class status.

Family background and class status are entirely different. A father’s class status is his son’s family background. In a feudal society, families were elements of a society and children would inherit their parents’ business; but,

this is no longer the case in a capitalist society, where family ties have already been loosened and the younger generations belong to the society. However, in a socialist society, younger generations have generally accepted proletarian education and are prepared to serve the cause of the proletariat. To still lump father and son together, and treat them as the same, is really a practice far too out-of-tune with the times.

In his 1939 book *Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party*, Chairman Mao indicated that the bourgeois intellectuals, at that time, fell under the category of a petty bourgeoisie class where everybody was the same. There was no effort to categorize intellectuals based on their class status.

In his 1957 book, *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People*, Chairman Mao again wrote: “With few exceptions, our college students are patriotic and support socialism, even though many of them come from families of nonworking people.” This is just another case in point.

Here we have learned that members of the same family are not necessarily members of the same class. This is something that even the class enemies know very well. For instance, during the movement, a verdict of an Intermediate People’s Court of Beijing determined that a counterrevolutionary rich peasant injured and killed his three sons at night, because they had informed against him. In another case, based on information on a handbill, the Party secretary of a certain commune in a city, a corrupt official, drowned his own child before taking his own life. He wrote in his will that he did it because he did not believe that his child would avenge him when he grew up.

Family background and class status cannot be mentioned in the same breath. Below is a dialog worth pondering:

A: [A student] asked, “What is your family background?”

B: “How about you?”

A: “I belong to the Red Five Category. My father is a worker.”

B: “Then I am better. I *am* a worker.”

If the theory of basing everything on class status does not even hold water, on what grounds can the theory of basing everything on family background exist?

Some would use Chairman Mao’s quotations and retort: “In class society everyone lives as a member of a particular class, and every kind of thinking, without exception, is stamped with the brand of a class.” This is a universal truth. Landlords and capitalists lived as members of the exploiting class for a long time, and their way of thinking is stamped with the brand of the exploiting class. Therefore, if they want to start all over again and begin their lives anew, they must thoroughly change themselves,

which is the basis for our theory that class status matters. But this is not applicable to their children, especially those growing up in the new society. Is it fair to say that their children live as members of the exploiting class? Where in the world can there be an exploiting class that does not exploit? There is none. Family influence certainly affects one's thinking, but social influence plays an even more important role. The society we live in today is a great school of Mao Zedong Thought. In terms of class status, the young people today are either about to be members of the working class, or have already become working class members. To place such an emphasis on "class status" for these youth, at this time, is to push them to the camp of the opposition class.

We must draw a clear distinction between class status and family background. Whoever blurs this distinction has, in effect, blurred any class distinction, despite his "Left" appearance.

Class Status and Behavior Have Little Correlation With Each Other

As a result, those seemingly impartial comrades have dropped class status from the discussions. Instead, they say: "We give consideration to both family background and behavior (meaning political behavior). [. . .]"

This is a reprise of the "family-background-equals-class-status theory." Compare the two theories, and you will find the difference to be a case of "the pot calling the kettle black." There is not much difference between the two.

Family background is beyond one's control, but behavior is not. How can the same conclusion be drawn about a person if he is judged by two sets of diametrically opposing criteria? In a previous analysis that we made at the beginning of this article, we concluded that family background is one factor in family influence, whereas family influence is one factor in behavior—and a less important one, at that. Social influence is the major determining factor of behavior. Accordingly, there is nothing in common between family background and behavior. Whether one is getting good or bad influence can only be determined through practice. Here, practice refers to one's political behavior. If one's behavior is good, then the influence he gets is good, and vice versa. The whole thing has nothing to do with family background.

Even if both family background and behavior were to be considered, then the following questions may be raised. Should we dismiss the achievements of someone with bad family background, but good behavior? Should we conceal the weaknesses of someone with good family background, but poor behavior? Should we double the punishment for someone with bad family background, and poor behavior? Should we exaggerate the merits of some-

one with good family background and good behavior? Is there justification for any of these?

The idea of “taking into account both family background and behavior” will inevitably lead one to the quagmire of “taking into account only family background, but not behavior.” It is very easy to ascertain one’s family background. Just open one’s file and it is done; or when meeting someone on the street, ask, “What is your family background?”—and that is it, simple and clear. However, it takes a great deal more work to ascertain one’s behavior, especially for those weird skeptics. They will never trust your behavior in either ordinary or tumultuous times. They are skeptical about both your past and present behavior. Moreover, they are prepared to suspect your future behavior. They will not stop their suspicion and pass their final judgment on you until after you die and the lid is laid on your coffin. Eventually, they will get tired of being skeptical. If family background is the litmus test, then the discussion here can end in two seconds. Furthermore, there is no single standard for behavior. Those who like compliments consider flattery to be the best behavior; those who like hypocrisy consider social formalities to be the best behavior; and those who like to tread the erroneous lines consider the incessant and baseless confessions by youth with bad family backgrounds to be the best behavior. Why bother to check out family background? Just go by these three sentences, and the problems will go away: “If the father is a hero, the son is a good fellow. If the father is a reactionary, the son is a good-for-nothing. If the father is an average man, the son is a fence sitter.”

Let us look at how Chairman Mao teaches us. He said:

The litmus test to see if an intellectual is revolutionary, unrevolutionary, or counterrevolutionary is whether or not he is willing and actually proceeds to integrate with the masses of workers, peasants, and soldiers. We have set a standard here, and I think this is the one and only standard.

Is family background this one and only standard?

Do the five criteria set by Chairman Mao for successors to revolution include family background?

The fifth point of the Sixteen Points is about resolutely carrying out the Party’s class line. It brings up the questions of on whom to depend, whom to unite, and whom to oppose. Does it include family background as a basis?

Do the three criteria for the revolutionary Left include family background? No! Absolutely not! What does the kind of family background one comes from have to do with whether or not he is revolutionary? Even if one comes from a bad family background, he can still be a revolutionary Leftist, a successor to the proletarian cause, and one on whom the revolution can depend. Every youth is equal before behavior. Young people with bad family

backgrounds do not need unity bestowed upon them as a favor, and should not settle for being on the outskirts. The question of who is the backbone of the revolution cannot be answered by who gave birth to you. We do not recognize any right that is not achieved through one's personal efforts. Those who are most determined about the revolution are the finest of people with the best behavior. No one can assert that Wang Jie is not as great as Lei Feng.⁶

When it comes to behavior, a fable by an ancient thinker leaps to mind. In it, the thinker observes that it is much harder to find a horse expert than to find a winged steed. Generally, when one examines a horse, he typically judges the quality of the horse by its appearance, place of origin, price, and breed—but he will somehow forget to take it for a ride and test to see if it is really a horse that can go for a few hundred miles, day or night. One cannot spot a winged steed by this process. Doesn't this describe some people today? They will only pay attention to the fixed aspects such as family background and social connections, but they will just forget what truly constitutes the basis for behavior. Over time, not only would a winged steed be wasted, but even an ordinary horse would degenerate into a "cur" as well.

We must put family background and behavior where they belong. Family background is not the criterion to judge whether a youth is revolutionary; the one and only criterion is behavior. If you truly believe that good family background will lead to good behavior, you can go right ahead and demonstrate better behavior than those with bad family backgrounds. Only those with poor behavior will use family background as a cover-up, and will use their fathers' names as trademarks to demand respect and acceptance. We say that, even if you belong to the first three categories of the Red Five Categories (revolutionary cadres, revolutionary soldiers, revolutionary martyrs), your family background will not compensate for your bad behavior, such as insistence on a counterrevolutionary line and failure to study and apply Chairman Mao's works.

Factors such as family background and social connections can only be viewed as a reference. Even this reference value will disappear if we find out what a youth's political behavior is like.

Family Background and Reliability Bear No Correlation

At this point, those seemingly impartial comrades change their tone and comment: "Of course, children of the Black Five Categories are not entirely the same as their parents. [. . .]" The implication is that they are certainly not the same as the children of the Red Five Categories, either. Why? Because,

this time, the magic of utilitarianism has come into play, and because the children of the Black Five Categories are “not reliable!”

But why aren't they reliable? Those who believe that external causes play a determining role would say, “After all, they have been exposed to bad influences.” Let us for the time being put aside the fact that bad family background does not necessarily result in bad influence, and that family influence is subject to social influence. Is it the case that, no matter how positive the social influence is, the more problematic one's family background, the worse one's behavior will be? This is not just a matter of one-plus-one-equals-two; rather, it is a matter of dialectical relationship. Chairman Mao said, “Nothing destroyed, nothing built.” He also said, “Destruction embraces construction.” If one does not wage a struggle against the unproletarian thoughts in one's mind, how can proletarian ideology be developed? We often describe as a flower in a greenhouse those youth who have been exposed only to Red education, but have never experienced serious and hard ideological remolding. Such youth cannot weather storms and are more vulnerable to being used by bad people. Hasn't this really been the case? Early on during the Cultural Revolution, some “good fellows” with enviable family backgrounds chanted, “If a father is a hero, the son is a good fellow.” But didn't they follow the revisionist line and become spokespersons for the bourgeoisie? Are they reliable? Great leaders—Marx, Lenin, and Chairman Mao, who led the great revolutionary causes of the proletariat—all have had bad family backgrounds. This fact is by no means an accident. The heart of the issue here is that it is the remolding of one's ideology that really matters, not family background.

Those who are convinced of the power of family background would say: “The children of revolutionary cadres are not interested in restoration and will not rise in revolt against their fathers.” Restoration often goes on without one's knowledge. Those capitalist fellow-travelers within the Party who were uncovered during the movement have received promotions in recent years, and have good family backgrounds. Are they reliable? The Work Groups that practiced the policy of “Left” in form, but “Right” in essence, would espouse the policy of either overtly or covertly discriminating against the youth with bad family backgrounds. In those days, most of those selected to serve on the revolutionary committees were the ones with good family backgrounds; but most of them ended up being the salespersons for the reactionary line of the Work Groups. Are they reliable? A certain leader of the Beijing middle school Red Guards even had two male and two female secretaries and one chauffer, in addition to cars, motorcycles, watches, cameras, and tape recorders. Comrade Chen Boda referred to him as a “bogus Red Guard.” It follows, therefore, that just depending on those with good family backgrounds is not going to eliminate the danger of restoration. There was an

empress in ancient China named Wu Zetian. She killed her chief minister Shangguan Yi, but kept his daughter as her private secretary. Some were worried about her, but the empress said, "What does it matter? As long as we have an honest and enlightened government, people will accept and trust us." But look at those who carry the reactionary line. They fear Mao Zedong Thought and do not implement Party policies. How can they trust the revolutionary youth? It is laughable! They call themselves "soldiers of the proletariat," but they do not even have the vision of the rulers of feudalistic societies. Our great leader Chairman Mao would never put family background as one of the conditions for a successor, because his policies are the most correct and his line is the most clearly delineated. Young people are the most reliable under his leadership. Otherwise, even if every youth had good family background, they would still be unreliable; such was the case in the Soviet Union, where the exploiting class was eliminated after the revolution.

There are quite a few people who advocate the theory of reliability; but, they have come up with few justifications. Is this the "class viewpoint?" Not at all! It is "class discrimination." It has nothing to do with the proletariat, but a great deal to do with the petty bourgeoisie. These people are preoccupied with how to serve their private interests, instead of the public interest. They have applied their own criteria to others, and cannot but go astray. In their view, if the father is reactionary, then the son is a good-for-nothing. This can go on generation after generation—and, as such, there will never be a day when we can emancipate all humanity and achieve communism. Therefore, they are not communists. In their view, whatever is the case with the father will be true of the son. They do not recognize that one's thoughts come from practice. Therefore, they are not materialists. In their view, as long as one has good parents, then he is necessarily going to have correct thinking and does not need to engage in hard ideological remolding and reform; therefore, they are not revolutionaries. Not only do they not make revolution, but they do not allow those with bad family backgrounds to make revolution, either. They call themselves "born Red," but little do they know that "born Red" is just a moon cake with a horrible filling.⁷

We must trust the vast numbers of youth who have been raised on Mao Zedong Thought. We should first trust those youth who have demonstrated good behavior. No one should use genetics to build up some, but to put down some others. To do this is to engage in mean and wicked tactics; there is absolutely no justification for it. We should not allow bourgeois prejudice to replace the class viewpoint of the proletariat. Of course, any ambitious youth should make up his mind to reform himself. Thus, bad influence notwithstanding, bad things can be turned into good things, and resistance into impetus. Without such a firm determination to reform one-

self, good behavior would be pointless and irrelevant, and the consequences would be unimaginable.

Concerning Persecution

In 1961 a senior official commented, “There should not be an unbridgeable gap between youth of different family backgrounds.” What should not exist is clearly around. What happened?

One can recall that, early on during the movement, the issue of persecution was first brought up by some popular figures. Afterwards, all claimed to have been persecuted by the revisionist clique. Since the revisionist clique was so reactionary, how could anyone be considered revolutionary if he had been favored instead of being persecuted by it? Thus, Tan Lifu⁸ said he was persecuted. Was he financially persecuted? He consumed lots of Dutch condensed milk during the three years of natural disasters. Was he politically persecuted? He was even admitted to the Party despite his highly reactionary mindset. In what ways does he resemble the mistreated, pampered child of a wealthy and influential family? The recently restructured *Beijing Daily* also printed a great many articles by the youth of the Red Five Categories. In these articles, they poured out their grievances and claimed that they were victims of the revisionist line of the former CCP Beijing Municipal Committee. We should say all youth were victims of persecution. Why should those youth with good family backgrounds be the only victims of persecution? Let us take a look and see what kinds of persecutions they were subjected to:

1. “We were kept out of universities; universities opened the door of convenience for the children of the exploiting class.”
2. “The youth with good family backgrounds were doing poorly academically, and were looked down upon by their professors.”
3. “Some youth with bad family backgrounds were even promoted to be cadres.”
4. “[. . .]”

Even if these could count as persecutions, then the victims were none other than the youth with bad family backgrounds. A major newspaper in the nation’s capital would even turn facts upside down; no wonder it went under. It is time we let facts speak!

Back in the days when the revisionist clique was in power, the former Ministry of Education would announce at the conclusion of the annual recruitment for new students, “This year we have given priority to admitting large numbers of the children of workers, peasants, and revolutionary cadres.” Many universities admitted hardly any children of the Black Five Cat-

egories, not to mention the important departments of universities. Schools took pride in setting up “classes for workers, peasants, and revolutionary cadres.” Is this what they called “opening the door of convenience for the children of the exploiting class?” Also, for all those who made it to the universities, the ones with good family backgrounds would receive better treatment. Many universities set up Poor and Lower-Middle Peasants’ Association-type organizations that stood on a par with the Chinese Communist Youth League. Since the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, some schools have forbidden children of the Black Five Categories to engage in networking [*chuanlian*];⁹ some have used family background to attack those students who dared to put up big-character posters; some have not allowed youth with bad family backgrounds to join various combat teams; some have used family background to pit masses against masses. [. . .] None of these took us much by surprise. Therefore, it can be concluded that persecution against the children with bad family backgrounds has become a common practice. As for the notion that students of the Red Five Categories were not competitive academically, this is a gross slander of students with good family background. Where is the evidence to suggest that a good family background is inversely proportional to academic success?

What has happened in institutions of higher education bears resemblance to what has happened in middle schools. According to an investigative report of problem classes released by the Beijing Bureau of Education, there was a category for the family backgrounds of the trouble-making students. Most of those students had good family backgrounds. (Note: Here, “trouble making” and rebellion are not the same. Trouble-making students mostly refer to those with improper male-female relationships and theft.) It so happened that in some problem classes, where most students were contributing to the troubles and chaos, the quiet students were the ones with bad family backgrounds. When asked why they were quiet, their reply was, “My family background is not good. Others can cause trouble and get away with it, but not me.” What they said was true, not only in middle schools, but also in elementary schools. There was one school principal who once said to a young teacher: “When two children make a reactionary remark at the same time, it is an error for the student with a good family background, but a matter of innate character for the one with a bad family background.” Once, all cadres of Young Pioneers with bad family backgrounds were deselected, owing perhaps to directions from the former Communist Youth League Municipal Committee. In recent years, the selection of cadres for the Communist Youth League and classrooms has also been based on family background. Generally, teachers, whether out of their own hearts or affected by public opinion, would give preferential treatment to students with good family

backgrounds (especially the children of revolutionary cadres). The reverse would be a pure exception. Otherwise, one would be branded “lacking in class viewpoints.”

The above situation is also very prevalent in factories. Those administrative cadres who have been promoted in the last three to four years were, almost without any exception, all from good family backgrounds. There was even an entry for family background on the nominees list for model workers. Some factories even stipulated that master workers with bad family backgrounds must not take apprentices and operate precision machine tools. Early on during the Cultural Revolution, there was a stipulation that “workers with bad family backgrounds have the right to vote, but do not have the right to be voted on.” In summarizing the crimes of the power holders within various factories, the so-called crime of “recruiting the deserters and traitors” (meaning, to promote someone with a bad family background to be a technical cadre) was one of the major crimes. It is not hard to imagine that future power holders will not dare to walk the same path. Red Guards organizations were also established in factories, but they were very restrictive about family background. Looking through all Party documents, one can only find the policy of relying on workers, but no document indicating that they should be workers with good family backgrounds. Who was it that divided the workers into two camps, as well?

More similar cases can be found in the countryside. Where representatives of revisionism engaged in the Four Clean-Ups Movement,¹⁰ the children of landlords and rich peasants were also classified and given class status. For those who did not demonstrate good behavior, their family backgrounds became their class status; those with average behavior were classified as agricultural laborers, whereas those with good behavior are classified as middle peasants. Why should those with good behavior be classified as middle peasants? Can't they be classified as poor and lower-middle peasants? Should the children of poor and lower-middle peasants with poor behavior be classified as landlords and rich peasants? Is behavior the result of family background, or vice versa? People with bad family backgrounds are deprived of their right to serve in such positions as administrators, accountants, and storeroom guards; nor are they entitled to job transfers. In the countryside, where universal education at middle school level is not available, those who can attend middle schools must receive recommendations from teachers, the Poor and Lower-Middle Peasants' Association, and the head of a production brigade. Of course, who would want to get himself into trouble for recommending the teenagers with bad family backgrounds? If a production brigade leader recommends, “This kid comes from good family background, obeys orders and works hard. Let's pick him,” this kid then gets to go to the middle school.

The same is the case with other parts of the society, as well. Family background has become a primary condition during the re-elections of Beijing's neighborhood committees in the past two years. There was even an entry for family background on the job application forms for unemployed youth that the subdistrict offices printed. There were two major categories on that job application form: family background, and a brief biography. Most applicants were young people and were more or less the same, in terms of their personal history. However, every prospective employer would pick only the ones with good family backgrounds. Otherwise, what would it suggest if they were to pick those with bad family backgrounds over those with good family backgrounds? As a result, those who were denied school admissions and sought jobs in local districts were mostly youth with bad family backgrounds. Only when large numbers of jobs were available were they somewhat sure of being assigned jobs.

The saying, "Family background crushes people to death" is absolutely true! A lot more people who have overcome their "class prejudice" can give additional and more typical examples. Who then are the victims? If things continued on like this, what would be the difference between those with bad family backgrounds, and those living in caste systems such as the blacks in America, Sudras in India, and the untouchables in Japan?

"This is a test for them!" Well, take back your test! You first put them in nearly the same categories as their parents—restoration-prone, unreliable, and ideologically behind. Then you expect so much of them, assuming that they could endure such impossible tests. What a conflict there was between what they thought of you, and what they expected you to do! Did they forget that Marx said, "Expecting the hapless to be perfect?" How immoral it was!

"Their fathers oppressed our fathers; therefore, we are going to be rough on them." What a narrow blood-relation view! In a capitalist society, once a father has declared bankruptcy, his son can separate himself from his father as long as he is willing to renounce his right of inheritance. It is hard to imagine that father-son relations today have become so close. How comically absurd their Leftism is!

Forget it! We should not waste more time refuting such groundless ideas. Let us instead study the root cause of this new caste system!

All this was created by the revisionists. Then, why would bourgeois elements oppress children with bourgeois family backgrounds? Isn't it strange? We say it is not strange at all. The revisionists did it precisely because they, and the young people they persecuted, do not share the same class. In order to carry out their restoration conspiracy, they do not see any difference between the children of the proletarian class and the children of the nonproletarian class. Perhaps those "flowers in the greenhouse" and inexpe-

rienced youngsters with a “born Red” mentality are of more use to them. These conspirators became panicky, especially after Chairman Mao issued the great call in 1962, “Never forget the class struggle!” Who are the primary targets of this movement? They are the capitalist fellow-travelers within the Party, and the “cow ghosts and snake demons”¹¹ that they have protected. In order to change the focus, they would deliberately juggle with concepts. Before, a father’s class status was his son’s family background; but now, a father’s class status has become his son’s class status. Thus, under the pretext of “class struggle” and ignoring the Party’s directives, a large-scale persecution campaign was launched, both covertly and overtly. Youngsters with bad family backgrounds became their shield, and persecuting those “born-sinners” became their proud way to mislead the public, and to “hang up a sheep’s head and sell dogmeat.”¹² Their practice, as stated above, is one of the factors that led the CCP Central Committee to correctly point out their line of “‘Left’ in form but ‘Right’ in essence.”

The revisionists used the force of old habits of society, and exploited teenagers’ innocence, in order to engage in criminal activities. They especially exploited the blind sense of pride on the part of some children of high-ranking officials (such as putting them in the first, second, and third categories because revolutionary soldiers and revolutionary martyrs are, in effect, also revolutionary cadres, forcing the children of workers and peasants into the fourth and fifth categories). They also exploited the weaknesses and mistakes of the lower-middle cadres. Some cadres recognized and promoted this series of reactionary policies, which is a reflection of their theoretical ignorance. They cannot distinguish between the class theory of Marxism-Leninism and the petty-bourgeois theory of basing everything on family background, which is a reflection of their ambiguous understanding of the situation. They cannot distinguish between the essential part of the youth’s behavior and the superficial part of their behavior, which is a reflection of their incompetence. They will not provide the youth with opportunities to demonstrate their political thought and have no idea how to conduct ideological work. As a result, they use family background as a tool to put down some and to lift up others in order to promote their work, which is politically a reflection of their waning enthusiasm. They are unwilling to conduct thorough research, but are content to hide behind the shield of family background, which is a reflection of fear in terms of revolutionary will. They are afraid to promote those who have demonstrated truly sound behavior, so as not to accept responsibility. All of the above facts have conspired to create a situation in our society that is totally unacceptable to our Party. A new privileged class has formed, followed by a new class that is discriminated against. This discrimination is based on something that came with birth, and is there-

fore unchangeable. Just as Chairman Mao pointed out, race oppression is class oppression. The types of behaviors demonstrated by those reactionary revisionists are a prelude to the counterrevolutionary restoration of the capitalist class.

Despite all that, we cannot but point out that counterrevolutionary revisionists primarily dismissed class line from the Right, for they willfully protected members of the Black-Five-Categories and members of the bourgeois class. They inducted those big-shot bourgeois authorities into the Party, and gave some members of the Black-Five-Categories favorable treatment and practiced peaceful coexistence with them. On the other hand, they persecuted the youth with bad family backgrounds, and persecuted some of the successors to the proletarian cause. If this is not a sharp and complicated class struggle, then what is it?

While in power, the Work Groups used the tactics of the ultra-Left to dismiss the class line. On the issue of family background, they could be called “birds of the same feather” with the revisionist clique. Therefore, this serious social problem not only remained unresolved, but it also became further exacerbated, publicized, and expanded. All sorts of violations of human rights appeared such as the cruel “taking out the roots,” the so-called debates that were totally humiliating, body searches, degradations, detentions, and beatings. Such violations became the means to disrupt the normal order of the lives of those youth and to deprive them of their political rights; but, they were all done in the name of “Super Mao Zedong Thought.” They resigned so many people to indifference and made them feel like the “guiltless”—guilty and inferior to others. They could not join the movement with all their might. They wanted to make revolution but did not have what it took; they wanted to join the rebel movement but could not meet the conditions to do so, which chilled the enthusiasm of so many revolutionary youth! The revolutionary forces were shrinking, and this played into the hands of the reactionary line; unintentionally, they played the roles of protecting the capitalist fellow-travelers within the Party, while pitting the masses against the masses. There is good reason to suggest that, unless the vast numbers of those most-oppressed youth with bad family backgrounds are completely set free, this movement will not achieve its ultimate victory!

Comrades, can this situation be allowed to continue? Shouldn't we act right now to completely clean up this mess and fill those man-made gaps? When reactionary forces were in power, the oppressed youth included not only those with bad family backgrounds, but also those youth from worker and peasant family backgrounds, and other youth who had confronted the capitalist fellow-travelers within the Party. We want to make this appeal: “All revolutionary youth oppressed by the reactionary forces unite and orga-

nize under the banner of Mao Zedong Thought! The reactionary line has persecuted you the most, and therefore your resistance should be firmest! When criticizing them, you are the most entitled to speak out—whereas, those bogus victims of the Tan Lifu type, who actually got favorable treatment, have no right to speak. If we counted on these people to criticize, then there would never be complete and thorough criticism. Therefore, you are by no means outsiders; you are the masters of your own destiny. Only cowards wait for favors to be handed down to them. Revolution has always depended on struggles! You should feel duty-bound to defend Mao Zedong Thought and the Party's class line, allowing neither the revisionist clique to distort it from the Right, nor the reactionary line to attack it from the Left. You should believe in your ability to handle this glorious task! You should not exclude those youth who were neither oppressed nor persecuted. You can unite them and fight with them to improve together. Comrades, we should believe the Party. We must firmly keep in mind Chairman Mao's teaching, "True materialists are completely fearless!"

The victory ultimately belongs to us! All oppressed revolutionary youth, rise up and fight brave battles!

Notes

1. "Red Five Categories" refers to workers, poor and lower-middle peasants, revolutionary cadres, revolutionary soldiers, and revolutionary martyrs. It was a term frequently used during the Cultural Revolution for those who were considered politically superior and reliable members of society.

2. The term "bad family background" is a very common expression in English writing on China. It means "bad according to the distorted standards of the time," and should not be mistaken for the idea of a truly bad family. It is a direct translation of a political term whose meaning is very different from the original sense of the phrase.

3. This is another political term used in the radical years of Chinese communist history. It means practicing the Right policy in the name of the Left.

4. "Black Seven Categories" refers to landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, bad elements, rightists, capitalist fellow-travelers, and capitalists. They were viewed as inferior to the Red Five Categories, and therefore politically unreliable and untrustworthy.

5. The term "behavior" [*biaoxian*] is political lingo, and was usually taken to mean "behavior" in a social and political context during the radical years of the People's Republic of China.

6. Wang Jie and Lei Feng, two deceased soldiers of the People's Liberation Army, were very well-known "model soldiers" for the whole country in the 1960s. Wang Jie was from an upper-middle peasant family, whereas Lei Feng was from a poor and lower-middle peasant family. Wang Jie's family background was considered less desirable than Lei Feng's family background, in the political and social context of that era.

7. "Born Red" was the actual name of a "moon cake" that was available in Beijing in those days.

8. Tan Lifu was a student leader of conservative Red Guards at Beijing Industry University during the Cultural Revolution. He was known for advocating the blood-relation theory.

9. “Networking,” known in Chinese as *chuanlian*, refers to the prevalent practice of going to other units and places across the country, in order to exchange revolutionary experience, by college and middle-school students at the start of the Cultural Revolution.

10. “Four Clean-Ups,” otherwise known as the “Socialist Education Movement,” refers to a CCP-initiated movement to clean up politics, economics, organizations, and thought. It started in 1963 and extended into 1965. It was aimed at exposing and weeding out Party leaders who were “capitalist fellow-travelers,” first in the countryside and then in cities all over China.

11. “Cow ghosts and snake demons” [*niuguisheshen*], as used during the Cultural Revolution, generally referred to the politically undesirable elements of society, such as those classified as one of the Black Seven Categories.

12. “Hang up a sheep’s head and sell dogmeat” is a Chinese idiom meaning to try to palm off something inferior to what it purports to be.