

Documentation

Communists Should Be Atheists

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There has arisen in our society in recent years a problem of more than passing concern, which is to say that there now exist among our cadres some who have joined the ranks of religious believers. Not only are they sincere in their conversion, but they also actively participate in certain religious events and superstitious practices. Though their number is still not large, their influence must not be underestimated. Is there a need to remind these people once again that Communists are thorough materialists and therefore atheists to the core?

What is religion if it is not a type of ideology? Engels has stated: "All religions are nothing more than the illusory projection of the inner mind of external powers that are seen to dominate one's daily life. In this projection, human power takes on the form and shape of superhuman power." The unique feature of religion lies in its bestowal of supernatural attributes on so-called 'gods', which are merely the erroneous projections of an objective world. Religion, which is a form of social ideology, is nothing more than an illusion of the mind, a topsy-turvy projection and distortion of objective reality. It belongs to the system of thought traditionally known as idealism. Party members, as committed materialists, should not only disavow any belief in spirits, but they are under obligation to make every effort to advance the spread of materialistic atheism among the masses. Yet a small handful of cadres remain muddle-headed about this important matter. They say: "The Constitution decrees that all citizens have freedom of religion! I am a citizen; therefore, I am free to have religious beliefs." Only a person who has forgotten what it means to be a member of the Communist Party would even think to raise such a question. Party members are indeed citizens, but they are not ordinary

citizens; they are the vanguard of the Chinese proletariat. Party members must accept the restraints placed upon them by the Party Constitution, which stipulates that they endeavor to "suppress and overcome decadent capitalistic thinking, crippling feudalistic thinking, and all other forms of non-proletariat thinking." Religion definitely belongs to the last category. How can a Party member not only not suppress it, but actively participate in religious activities? This must lead to a loss of identity as a cadre, and it is under no circumstances to be tolerated.

In defense of their position, some will say: "But Lenin himself has declared religion to be a private matter." This is wrong. One cannot lay aside the Party Constitution with a quote from other sources, even if those sources be revolutionaries themselves. Also, you must look at the context as a whole before extracting particular arguments from it. Throughout his entire corpus of writings, Lenin has been definite on this question. He has clearly stated on more than one occasion: "As for the governing proletariat, the members of the Socialist Party, religion is not to be considered a private matter. Our Party is an enlightened alliance of front-line fighters, struggling to liberate the labouring class. This kind of alliance cannot, nor should it express indifference to religion, which is espoused only by the unenlightened, the ignorant and benighted. We say that the ideological struggle is not a private affair, but one involving the whole Party, an affair embracing the entire proletariat class."

Some of these cadres may then argue: "If you don't allow us to believe, why then do you continue to allow places for religious activity to exist?" This question arises from a profound ignorance of the Party's religious policy. We can, and do demand of Party members that they espouse atheism, but we cannot, and do not demand that the masses fit the Party norm. Religion will disappear only when the social conditions upon which it has been founded disappear. Only when civilization develops to a higher level will religion finally leave the stage of human history. Where is there a contradiction between proclaiming atheism on the one hand while, on the other, implementing the government's policy of religious belief? The answer is there isn't any. The policy on religious freedom asserts that every citizen is free to believe and also free not to believe, to move from disbelief to belief or from belief to disbelief, and is free to believe in individual forms of religion as well

as to join specific denominations within a system of religious belief. The essence of this policy, then, is to make of religious belief a private matter for each citizen. Religious activity should then be restricted in public to those places designated by custom or practice and/or in the privacy of the home. There should be no instruction, evangelization or proclamation of religious belief outside such venues. We should remind ourselves here that all citizens, believers and non-believers alike, share the same political and economic advantages and opportunities. This shared commonality of all citizens is most important to keep in mind since we live in a pluralistic society in which many different kinds of world views, thoughts and beliefs co-exist. This commonality among believers and non-believers is the political basis for our unity as a nation. While differences do exist among us, if there be mutual respect and the proper understanding of and compliance with the government's religious policy, we can still live harmoniously together, working shoulder to shoulder to advance the cause of Chinese socialism.

Fortunately, the number of muddle-thinking cadres described above is very small. Why do they exist at all? The answer may be found on the grass-roots level of Party organization, where discipline has weakened and a certain slackness has set in. This can be rectified, however, by a spirited and thorough implementation of the directives of the Fourth Plenary Session of the Fourteenth Central Committee of the Communist Party. Furthermore, by taking immediate and practical steps to strengthen the ideological base of cadres everywhere through further education, this problem can be overcome in time.

