

ORGANIZATION OF WEDDING, FUNERALS, DEATH ANNIVERSARIES, FESTIVALS BASED ON NEW WAY OF LIFE

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[Text] Right after the August Revolution, our people built "the new life" in accordance with President Ho's appeal. The campaign for building the new way of life has been going on ever since and bringing about positive results which have contributed to totally changing the face of our society.

In the rural areas of North Vietnam today, agriculture is being reorganized in the direction of the socialist large-scale production; the material and cultural life of farmers is being gradually improved, with the general look of villages and the behavior of collective farmers in their work, daily activities and all social relations showing many past and present changes and progresses. The old-fashioned and old customs and habits are being annihilated and repelled; new fine manners and customs are appearing along with the new social system and new men. Although we must still continue to maintain and to step up the struggle for elimination of all of the negative aspects of the old way of life, which is the age-old product of the feudal and colonial system and the backward small-scale production, our rural areas are evidently moving forward to become a new socialist countryside.

In cities, towns and industrial centers, there have been many civilized neighborhood blocks and streets, many "5 Goods" families and many agencies, factories and collective areas having adopted the new way of life. There the maintaining of order and security, public sanitation and beauty, the fight against superstition, the promoting of new labor behavior and joyful healthy activities, the elimination of weird clothes, queer behavior, etc. have helped create a new, clean and pleasant look for society.

However, next to these strong points and achievements, the campaign for building the new way of life is still plagued by many shortcomings and weaknesses. In the last few years, because of the serious aftermaths of the protracted war, because social management had been slackened, the negative phenomena

in social life that had been either annihilated or repelled were making their appearance again. The bad habits in weddings, funerals, festivals, death anniversaries, superstitions, etc. were being revived. Unhealthy and uncultural ways of life, weird clothes, tasteless manners, etc. tended to spread among a number of backward and spoiled youths and teenagers. Violations of state laws, harmful to order and security of society, were on the rise in a number of localities. This situation once again indicated that the campaign for building the new way of life was a long-term, difficult and complicated job which consisted of very many things within the realm of management of many sectors, none of which could be neglected even in a short time and all of which would require a tight and smooth coordination among the sectors concerned. Faced with this situation, the VWP Central Committee Secretariat issued Directive No 214-CT/TU on 15 January 1975 "about achieving the new way of life in weddings and funerals and for death anniversaries and festivals." The reason, as the directive admits, was that "recently superstitions and bad habits in weddings, funerals, death anniversaries, etc. have been restored in many localities, both in rural areas and cities. Very many cadres, party members and youth group members have set bad examples for the people by organizing weddings, funerals and death anniversaries in accordance with the old customs." While we emulate one another in productive labor and practice thrift for the sake of socialist construction -- with the immediate job in the countryside being to reorganize agricultural production and to take one step toward reforming agricultural management in the direction of the socialist large-scale production -- the practice of superstitions and bad practices in weddings, funerals, death anniversaries, festivals, etc. causes tremendous wastes of manpower and wealth. As we are putting economic and social management into order, these bad habits do hamper the organization and management of labor and management of market and create difficulties for maintenance of order and security, communications and transportation and preventive hygiene. While we are building the new man to be the collective owner of the new society, these bad habits make propaganda for determinism and feudal rites, weaken the determination and revolutionary spirit of the masses and create gaps for bad elements and the enemy to take advantage of. Since we are devoted to guaranteeing citizens' interests and taking care of the people's happiness, these bad habits only make young men and women, newlyweds and families that mourn miserable and trample on love, integrity and human dignity. In short, the bad habits in weddings, funerals, death anniversaries and festivals have been causing harm in all economic, political, ideological and social aspects. Weddings, funerals, death anniversaries and festivals are things that commonly affect every individual and family. To achieve the new way of life in these activities means to show realistic interest in the masses' material, sentimental and moral life and to help speed up fulfillment of political tasks. The directive, therefore, reminds us that "Party organizations and mass organizations must actively fight bad habits and superstitions; provide guidance for weddings, funerals and death anniversaries and festivals to be organized in accordance with the new way of life; and consider them a part of the cultural and ideological revolution."

To fight bad habits must go hand in hand with building our new customs.

Directive 214-CT/TU of the secretariat dated 15 January 1975 outlines the common guidelines and basic principle applicable to organizing weddings, funerals, death anniversaries and festivals in accordance with the new way of life and clearly points out what should become rules and principles for the people to observe and what has become or must become state regulations and laws.

As to weddings, the directive emphasizes that we seriously obey the marriage and family codes, which among other things guarantee free marriage, monogamy and equality of sex and prohibit early marriage, polygamy and demand of dowries. Free marriage does not mean indiscriminate love, of course, nor random marriage, but is based on serious desire to get to understand each other and to seek constructive opinion from one's family, mass organization and agency. Under our system marriage must be based on authentic love totally free from such motivations as position and money or any illegitimate reasons or coercion. The family, mass organization and agency are responsible for helping, advising a young couple to ensure its happiness, but should never interfere in a rude manner, nor prevent it from using the freedom of marriage determined by law. The official procedures for marriage consist of registering for marriage and the local authorities issuing a marriage certificate in accordance with the law. These are the only procedures -- and also ceremonies -- required. A marriage without these procedures is unlawful. After these procedures are completed, nobody has the right to force a couple to go through any other ceremonies. Such habits as consulting a fortune teller, selecting a good day or hour, avoiding a bad day or hour, bowing to parents, etc. are all eliminated. Local administrations must organize marriage registration and issue marriage certificates in accordance with the required procedures and in a solemn and convenient manner and do their best not to consider this as any other administrative jobs and to avoid too simple, careless and rude ways of doing it. A marriage certificate printed on good paper, presented in a solemn style and handed out by an official representative of the people's administration in a solemn and courteous atmosphere will bear great significance, not only legal but also psychological and moral.

Any gathering of relatives and friends on the happy occasion of registration for marriage will be the decision of the newlyweds and never a compulsory thing to do. If such a gathering is organized, they must make it an economical and healthy affair without show, waste and lavish long-drawn feasting. Drop the habit of inviting people to a wedding banquet in order to collect gift money, which is like money from a dinner sale; the habit of giving gifts as a debt payment; and the poor practice of announcing gifts and names of gift givers, which actually is aimed at boasting and encouraging other people to do the same, for what counts here is the enthusiasm of the guests who show up and not the gifts themselves.

About funerals, the directive clearly indicates that the regulations set by the Ministry of Public Health must be correctly observed. The dead must be buried within 48 hours in accordance with the rules and specifications for embalming and burial as detailed in articles 22, 23 and 24, Part VIII, of the "Regulations About Hygiene and Health Protection," issued in compliance with Decree No 194-CP of 31 December 1964 of the Council of Ministers.

As funerals mainly reflect expression of feelings of the living toward the dead, honestly express sorrows and offer realistic consolation and assistance to the family of the dead. All superstitious practices and bad habits in connection with the event of death, such as wearing straw hats and belts made of banana tree fibers, using canes, rolling on the ground while crying, burning paper offerings, serving big meals, receiving money and such offerings as alcohol and meats, etc., must be eliminated. The forms of mourning can be wearing a black arm band, a piece of black cloth on one's chest or a white turban on one's head. The form and time of mourning is the decision of individuals and families, which no regulations force them to observe. To be in mourning is not an obstacle to getting married and fulfilling one's military and other civic obligations.

Every township, town and city must have a cemetery; every hamlet and cooperative a hearse of distinguished and light design. In cities, burial of the dead is assigned to a state agency organization to do in accordance with the current law; in the countryside, cooperatives, villagers and local mass organizations take care of it and assist the families in mourning.

Among the ethnic minorities, while the common principles and regulations mentioned above apply in the case of weddings and funerals, depending on the situation of different ethnic groups and localities plans are needed to provide guidelines for close observation, but we cannot under the pretext of ethnic or local "characteristics" fail to fight superstitions and bad habits, nor tolerate overkilling of cattle, hogs and horses for long-drawn feasting.

Celebration of birthdays and death anniversaries is neither compulsory nor prohibited and is the decision of individuals and families. If they decide to celebrate, it must be simple and economical, with the habit of offering big meals to show off and to repay previous "debts" to be dropped.

For festivals there must be strict leadership over their contents so as to create good effects, such as to reinforce love for our country and native land; to mobilize people for emulation in productive labor, socialist construction by practice of thrift and hard working, and fulfillment of civic obligations; and to step up cultural and artistic activities, physical education and sports, which will help teach the tradition of progress and wholesome recreation. The directive emphasizes that we must eliminate superstitious customs in festivals, the organization of which must not create obstacle to production.

Within the spirit of the directive, we must study a classification of festivals in every locality in order to have appropriate plans and leadership measures. The rural festivals that have been eliminated should not be revived. We must eliminate any festivals that have little significance and yet are of superstitious character. As to the festivals that are both religious celebrations and sightseeing opportunities, such as the Huong and Thay Pagoda

festivals, we must have plans for gradual switch to organizing sightseeing tours to take place throughout the year at regular intervals, with respect for our people's freedom of religion being incorporated into such plans, but resolute efforts are to be made to fight bad superstitious habits. The festivals that are closely linked with the nation's historical anniversaries, such as the Hung Temple, Giong, Kiep Bac festivals, etc., must be improved and further heightened so as to teach about the nation's fine traditions. We encourage new forms of festivals, such as achievement celebration festival, talent contest festival, advice-giving festival, good-health festival, etc., which are taking place in many localities, particularly in industrial and agricultural areas. These new festivals are joyful, wholesome, interesting and attractive events that reflect our people's struggling spirit and enthusiasm for productive labor and satisfy the masses' needs for cultural activities and must constantly be improved in terms of educational content, artistic quality, scientific organization and mass character.

We must fully understand the spirit of absolutely fighting all kinds of superstitions whether they are in connection with festivals, death anniversaries, weddings and funerals or they are found in the people's everyday life as a whole. The directive of the Central Committee Secretariat emphasizes that we must make a distinction between superstitions and freedom of religion. The law of the state guarantees freedom of religion but strictly prohibits fortune telling, cards and face reading, seances, acting as a medium, tablet fortune-telling, drawing of amulets, worshiping of demons, belief in power of incense stick holders, purchase and sale of paper offerings, sorcery used in deceitful treatment of diseases, etc. Religious believers must obey state regulations as do any other citizens, in the case of weddings and funerals, and whether religious rites are observed or not depends on the choice of the people concerned.

The directive of the Central Committee Secretariat "about achieving the new way of life in weddings, funerals and for death anniversaries and festivals" is very necessary as it comes at this opportune time. It guides us in a very practical and realistic way.

To implement it properly, we must recognize the importance and urgency of the matter. We should not consider weddings, funerals, death anniversaries and festivals as something that belongs to the "private life" of each individual, but rather events that are part of the campaign for building the new way of life, the three revolutions -- the revolution in production relationships, the technical revolution and the ideological and cultural revolution -- and the construction of the new system, economy and man.

As to the measures to be taken for its implementation, we must closely combine constructive and destructive actions and education and coercion while on the one hand stressing the law of the state and on the other using the force of social opinion. In regard to customs and habits, the old no matter how backward sometimes does not disappear easily and the new and progressive

requires tremendous effort to build and sometimes takes generations to take shape and to become new habits and customs popular among the masses. In the struggle between the new and the old, in spite of the proletarian dictatorship, the old still persists and is even stronger than the new in the beginning. Therefore, we must take initiative and struggle resolutely, continuously and steadily to annihilate the old and backward; as to the new and progressive, we must encourage and strongly support it by every possible way. We have conducted the campaign for building the new way of life for the last 30 years. Of the old and backward many have been condemned by public opinion and prohibited by law. The old and backward is no longer as strong as it used to be. But the new and progressive has not yet become all habits and common psychology among the masses. According to the spirit and content of the directive of the Central Committee Secretariat about achieving the new way of life in weddings, funerals, death anniversaries and festivals, let us carry on even more effectively propaganda and explanations to create a social opinion that seriously criticizes and condemns the bad habits and praises the new way of life, at the same time study ways to draft and to improve actual rules, regulations and decisions about these matters and further develop effectiveness of the law of the state applicable to these matters. Recently the Vietnam Fatherland Front has discussed implementation of this directive from the Central Committee Secretariat and decided that every mass organization would draft a leadership plan for its own hierarchy and use its own publications to make the directive known down to the primary level and thoroughly implemented. The information, press, cultural and artistic agencies have also become more active as they have been campaigning for the new way of life in accordance with the directive of the Central Committee Secretariat. The Council of Ministers and Ministry of Culture have also issued practical guides to organization of weddings, funerals, death anniversary and festival celebrations, etc. In the face of the political task in the new stage, with the realistic experience gathered so far and positive leadership and guidance, we are determined to make the new way of life in connection with weddings, funerals, death anniversaries and festivals popular among the masses. The key factor in this is still first of all cadres, party members and labor youth group members setting examples, seriously implementing this important directive and actively campaigning to urge the people to implement it.