

February 5, 1949

Memorandum of Conversation between Anastas Mikoyan and Mao Zedong

Citation:

"Memorandum of Conversation between Anastas Mikoyan and Mao Zedong", February 5, 1949, Wilson Center Digital Archive, APRF: F. 39, Op. 1, D. 39, Ll. 64-73. Reprinted in Andrei Ledovskii, Raisa Mirovitskaia and Vladimir Miasnikov, *Sovetsko-Kitaiskie Otnosheniia*, Vol. 5, Book 2, 1946-February 1950 (Moscow: Pamiatniki Istoricheskoi Mysli, 2005), pp. 72-78. Translated by Sergey Radchenko.
<https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/113322>

Summary:

Anastas Mikoyan and Mao Zedong discuss the role of foreign capital in China, Chinese intelligentsia, the role of criticism and self-criticism in the CCP, CCP tasks in the army, the level of China's industrial development, the Chinese attitude toward foreign property, and the road and character of the Chinese revolution. (Day)

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

On 5 February 1949 another conversation with Mao Zedong took place in the presence of CCP CC Politburo members Zhou Enlai, Liu Shaoqi, Ren Bishi, Zhu De and the interpreter Shi Zhe. Comrades I[van] V. Kovalev and E.F. Kovalev were present from our side.

ON THE ROLE OF FOREIGN CAPITAL IN CHINA

Mao Zedong said that China is the center of oppression on the part of foreign powers. Beginning from 1840 in the course of 100 years China was exploited by a series of foreign states in contrast to India, where England acts as the main oppressive country, and in contrast to Indochina, there France acts in the oppressor's role. During this period, Mao Zedong said, the Chinese people looked for a way out of the existing situation. The Taiping Rebellion [1851-1864], and later Sun Yatsen aimed at freeing China from foreign oppression. However, the parties of that time did not stand the test before the face of the people and only the communist party, in possession of Marxism-Leninism, is winning in our country.

ON THE CHINESE INTELLIGENTSIA

Speaking of the Chinese intelligentsia, Mao Zedong stated that they translated into Russian and will pass to us through Comrade Orlov the decision of the CCP CC Politburo dated 8 January 1949. Mao Zedong said that this decision in essence amounts to the political program of the CCP for the near future. Local party organizations demand an answer for a whole series of pertinent questions and in this connection we are calling another plenum of the CCP CC.

I said that, evidently, this plenum will have a turning-point character in the sense that it must prepare the party for new tasks, stemming from the current political situation of China.

Mao Zedong agreed with me and said that the last plenum of the CCP CC took place in June 1945. More than 3 years had passed since that time. Now preparatory work is being conducted for calling the plenum. Gao Gang, Lin Biao, Chen Yi, Liu Bochong and Bo Yibo were present at a special meeting of the Politburo devoted to the question of the plenum. The meeting took 4 days. Now the participants in the meeting left and only Liu Bachong [Liu Bochong] remained here. He is 63 years old, at one time he worked with Sun Yatsen. He was in Moscow, studied in the C[ommunist] U[niversity of the] T[oilers of the] E[ast]. His role, Mao Zedong said, is somewhat similar to the role of the late Comrade Kalinin. Liu Bochong is a member of the CCP CC Politburo. Member of the Politburo Dong Biwu, the current chairman of the government of Nor[thern] China, also took part in the meeting. Gao Gang is also a member of the CCP CC Politburo. In all they have 13 members of the CCP CC PB.

THE ROLE OF CRITICISM AND SELF-CRITICISM IN THE PARTY

Touching upon questions of history of the communist party of China, Mao Zedong separated it into 4 periods:

1. The Northern Expedition.
2. The Agrarian revolution
3. The Sino-Japanese War
4. The Civil War

During these periods our party grew and developed. We, Mao Zedong said, in the

course of all these periods paid particular attention to unveiling criticism and self-criticism in the ranks of the party, since we consider them to be the sharpest weapon of Marxism-Leninism. However, elements of nepotism and familiarity still exist in the party ranks, which is a legacy of the Guomindang ideology. In our army, officers sometimes beat the soldiers and in these cases we explain to these people, that their behavior is not different from that of the Guomindang in any way. Our local cadres sometimes part from the masses, as the conduct of the agrarian reform confirmed. That is why we stand for all-sided unveiling of criticism and self-criticism in our ranks and for periodic scrutiny of party members along the lines of their ideological preparedness and their work style. At our party meetings we raise such questions, which would give an opportunity for the bottom to scrutinize the top.

I said that what Mao Zedong is talking about testifies to the presence of democratic centralism in the party, and this is its strength. Lively democratic centralism is the basis of Bolshevik scrutiny, and Comrade Stalin pointed this out time and again.

Mao Zedong said that the party obtained unity by the means of unveiling criticism and self-criticism inside the party.

I remarked that the party is under pressure from various petite bourgeois elements from without, and if criticism and self-criticism have been unveiled in the party at the appropriate level, the purity of its ranks is thereby guaranteed. If the party parts from the masses the danger arises of degradation of some of its ranks.

Mao Zedong said that he fully agrees with me and stated that in connection with the fact that in the recent time a series of large cities had been already captured by the People's Liberation Army, the reaction[aries] are becoming more active and try to pressure the party. He stressed that now the tasks of the party become more complicated since not only the countryside but also the city is coming within the sphere of its activity.

PARTY TASKS IN THE ARMY

Speaking of the tasks of the party in the army Mao Zedong said that in the course of the civil war we gradually democratize our military forces. Our lower commanding ranks are elected, but this is approved by the high command. Every company has a soldiers' committee, in which officers also take part. War requires prepared cadres. The Army is a good political school for the people and after the war we intend to use the army cadres in various branches of the people's economic and political work. In the main our army is a peasant one. Soldiers who received land during the agrarian reform provide a reliable foundation for our army. We also do not ignore the Guomindang soldiers, whom we try to influence politically as prisoners of war. At the meetings of the former Guomindang soldiers the fighters of the People's Liberation Army make presentations, telling about how they lived under the Guomindang regime, and how they live in our conditions. They make a special emphasis on the fact that the new democratic regime gave them land. This has a great impact on the former Guomindang soldiers. Along with that we publish various brochures, which provide comparative data on the situation in our and the Guomindang areas. We use every opportunity for stressing the tyranny of the Guomindang. By these means we change the Guomindang soldiers to our tune.

Our democratic policy in the army, Mao Zedong further said, gives soldiers an opportunity to criticize the officers. For example, it happens that before beginning a battle operation a meeting of this or that low-level military unit is called, at which the plan of the forthcoming operation is discussed. At this meeting the commander sometimes offers a plan of retreat, and the soldiers, on the contrary, a plan of attack. Under the influence of critical remarks of the soldiers, the commander accepts the plan of attack.

Our army, Mao Zedong continued, enjoys great authority among the people. On 3 February 1949, when our forces entered Beiping [Beijing] almost all the city dwellers greeted our military units. Only one army, fully armed with American weapons, entered the city. On this occasion we took from this army all the Soviet arms and fully equipped it with the American arms so as to stress how Jiang Jieshi supplies us with American technology. The people also greeted the units of the People's Liberation Army advancing on Tianjin. This speaks to the fact that the population supports us and our army displays itself among the people from the better side.

THE LEVEL OF CHINA'S INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

Then Mao Zedong turned to the question of the economic situation of China and stressed that the standard of living of the Chinese people is very low. He said that imperialism uses China as a raw resource base, and this reflects on the standard of living of the population.

I remarked that in China one observes economic contrasts, for example, [between] the big industrial center Shanghai and the backward village. At the beginning of the building of the Soviet state such contrasts could also be observed in the Soviet Union but after years of existence of Soviet power we substantially liquidated them.

Mao Zedong agreed with me and continued to characterize the economic situation of China. He said that the industry takes up 10% in the entire economy of China, with the exception of Manchuria, where it takes 53%.

Using a question raised by Mao Zedong I stressed that the basis for a modern state is the industry. With the developed industry it is easier to raise the standard of living of the population in the country. The agrarian reform liquidates the obstacles to the development of an agricultural economy, but does not yet resolve the question of technical and industrial development. Mao Zedong agreed with this and said that in China the advance on the capital will take place more slowly than in the Sov[iet] Union.

I said that the process of the industrial development of China in the conditions of the existence of the Sov[iet] Union and the countries of people's democracy will take place considerably more easily in comparison with the industrial development of the Sov[iet] Union, which from the very beginning of its formation had to spend a huge portion of its means on defense from foreign interventionists.

Mao Zedong agreed with me and said that to a certain extent favorable conditions for the industrial development of China were created by the Guomindang itself. Mao Zedong said that the Japanese and the Guomindang-ists encouraged the concentration of capital in the state's hands. For example, in Manchuria industry takes up 53% of which 47% is in the hands of the state and 6% [belongs to] private capital. In general, Mao Zedong said, all main branches of the Chinese industry are in the state's hands.

ON THE ATTITUDE TOWARD FOREIGN PROPERTY

I asked if there are any plans for the nationalization of industry, to which Mao Zedong replied that they do not have such plans.

Using a question raised I shed light on our attitude toward the problem of foreign property in China. I said that with regard to the questions of foreign property we are of the opinion that one should nationalize Japanese and French property, and as far as possible, English [property] as well. With regard to American property one must

carry out a cautious policy, so as to create an impression among the Americans that their interests will be taken into account by the new government.

ON THE ROAD AND THE CHARACTER OF THE CHINESE REVOLUTION

I stressed that the Chinese Revolution is anti-imperialist by character, which must undermine the positions of the imperialists in the country. The destruction of the landlords and the Guomindang does not yet solve the question of the destruction of imperialists, since the former (i.e. the landlords and the Guomindang) are agents of foreign imperialism. Undermining foreign positions in the country, you thereby, I said, ease the situation of the national bourgeoisie, which of course will be glad about this.

Then I explained the point of view of our CC about the road and the character of the Chinese Revolution and about its differences from the Russian Revolution and the revolutions in the countries of people's democracy.

I said that the road of the Russian Revolution and of those of the countries of the people's democracy do not suit China, since the conditions of China are different from the conditions of Russia and Europe. I pointed out that two factors facilitated the victory of people's democracy in the European countries:

1. The national bourgeoisie of these countries compromised themselves by their contacts with the German occupiers and, when the Red Army came to these countries, the bourgeoisie ran away.
2. The very coming of the Red Army and its liberation of these countries from the German yoke eased the establishment of a democratic regime for the communists.

I said that these factors are lacking in China. The Russian and the Chinese Revolutions moved forward by their internal force. One should also take in account another difference between China and Russia: Russia was not oppressed by the imperialists and therefore its revolution did not have an anti-imperialist character. In China imperialist oppression took on the character of a long-term factor and therefore the revolution in this country has an anti-imperialist character.

Speaking of the future regime in China I said that it will not represent the dictatorship of the proletariat. The future regime of China is a people's democracy, but without the Soviets. Lenin in February 1917 raised the question of the proletarian and peasant dictatorship but this regime did not work out in the pure form. Events developed in such a way that in October 1917 the question was raised about the dictatorship of the proletariat. Perhaps, China will succeed in the pure idea of a dictatorship of the proletariat and peasants but without the Soviets. The future coalition government of China must represent the dictatorship of the working class and peasants under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party.

In the countries of the new democracies, I said, the regime carries out the functions of the dictatorship of the proletariat, though not in the pure form. These functions are directed toward the suppression of the bourgeoisie. You do not have this. Dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry in a pure form suits you better. As I understood you, this is how you think about this.

Mao Zedong expressed full agreement with the opinion of our CC and said that it will be a great help in the final formulation of [their] own views on the character of the revolution and in determining the tasks of the Chinese Com[munist] Party and asked me to convey gratitude to our CC and Comrade Stalin for this help and any other help, provided to the Chi[nese] Com[munist] Party.

Further, Mao Zedong said that during the period of the Soviet movement in China the Chinese communists adopted the program of the workers' and peasants' dictatorship but at the same time mechanically transferred the attitude toward the national bourgeoisie in the European countries to the Chinese bourgeoisie. As a result of this, though the decisions of the 6th Congress of the CCP only talked about the confiscation of foreign capital, we carried out the policy of confiscation of all national capital.

At the present time, Mao Zedong said, we stand for the dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry under the leadership of the com[munist] party, and for the people's dictatorship because workers and peasants comprise 90% of the population of China. Such a regime guarantees democracy for the people and dictatorship with regard to the landlords, bureaucratic capital and the imperialists. We call our regime a new democracy, based on the union of workers and peasants under the leadership of the proletariat represented by its vanguard—the com[munist] party.

In the course of the last 10 years, continued Mao Zedong, we explained the character of the Chinese Revolution. In this explanation we pointed to the difference of the Chinese Revolution from the old bourgeois-democratic and socialist revolution. The bourgeois-democratic revolution is declining and we still cannot obtain the most perfect progressive democracy, i.e. of the Soviet type, therefore we call our regime a new democracy, i.e. a people's democracy. Our revolution by character is a people's [revolution], it is directed against imperialism, feudalism and the bureaucratic capital. And all of this takes place under the leadership of the proletariat. "This is all there is", as Mao Zedong expressed himself, "to our political program."

We have many people, Mao Zedong said, who advised us not to say and stress that the Chinese Revolution is going forward under the leadership of the proletariat, so as not to scare away the intelligentsia. As of late we do not take this into account and stress the point about the leadership of the proletariat represented by the com[munist] party, which is the vanguard of the proletariat. This gives good results. And even the liberal democratic representatives, who had arrived in Mukden from the South, announced in their statement that they are prepared to work under the leadership of the com[munist] party.

Then Mao Zedong said that he wrote about the aforementioned character of the modern stage of the Chinese Revolution as early as 1940, but at that time this formulation was not developed and he wants to return to it in the near future. With this he stressed that when developing the question about the character of the Chinese Revolution he based himself on the pronouncements of Comrade Stalin, relating to 1917 and on his latest work, relating to the character of the Chinese Revolution.

Mao Zedong said that for him the most valuable were Comrade Stalin's instructions that the Chinese Revolution is a part of the world revolution, as well as criticism of nationalism of Simic in Yugoslavia. Mao Zedong several times stressed that he is a pupil of Comrade Stalin and holds a "pro-Soviet orientation."

ON INCREASING THE THEORETICAL LEVEL OF THE MEMBERS OF THE CCP

Mao Zedong referred also to brochures written by him at different times, in particular—about military strategy, published in [December] 1936, on the tasks of the party (1939), On New Democracy (1940), on the main direction of the Chinese Revolution (1945). Speaking of the last brochure, Mao Zedong said that he was very content to find in a letter from Comrade Stalin to Colonel Razin instructions to the effect that "retreat is a rational attack." We immediately, said Mao Zedong, broadcasted this letter on the radio and went through it in the units. Further, Mao

Zedong said that there was great significance for them in becoming familiar with the Soviet criticism of the mistaken philosophical views of [Abram] Deborin and [Nikolai] Bukharin for strengthening the ranks of the party.¹ This Soviet criticism raised Lenin and Stalin in the eyes of our party onto the level of the greatest theorists of Marxism-Leninism. Criticism of the philosophical views of Deborin helped us in the struggle with our idealists. In general, Mao Zedong said, we fall behind the requirements of party enlightenment because, when we took power into our hands, first and foremost we took up political and economic questions. However during the period of this war we conducted great work to raise the theoretical level of our ranks and thereby prepared for the 7th Congress of the CCP. I myself had a situation when, sitting in the apparatus of the CCP CC, I could not bring it under control. Each department of the CC had its own opinion. I warned our party and the CC about this situation, in particular in 1940, but did not achieve positive results. I understood that in order to unite the CC one should work in depth on this, which is what we did and thereby provided for the calling of the 7th Congress of the CCP. On the eve of the Congress we called a plenum of the CCP CC, at which a resolution on historical questions was adopted. In this resolution the political mistakes of the former in-party groups and currents (Chen Duxiu, Li Lisan, etc.) were recounted in the most detailed manner. Because of these groups and currents we lost 9/10 of the former Soviet territory under our control, and the same number of the members of our party. Why did this happen? This happened because some leaders of our party had ideological wavering. Subsequently, with regard to these leaders we began to follow the policy of principled ideological struggle with them, but we manifested caution about organizational conclusions with regard to them. We did not expel from the party for erroneous statements and this facilitated the fact that we met the post-war time united. Now there are no arguments in the party, though during the period of the recent agrarian reforms and in the cities some mistakes were made. The CC immediately corrects these mistakes. That is why we believe that the point of departure for our unity is criticism and self-criticism.

The conversation ended at this.

1. Marxist philosopher Abram Deborin fell into disgrace in the 1930s on account of his philosophical "idealism." Nikolai Bukharin lost power in 1929 and died in the Great Purge.