

January 6, 1961
**From the Journal of S. V. Chervonenko, Record of
Conversation with Mao Zedong on 26 December
1960**

Citation:

"From the Journal of S. V. Chervonenko, Record of Conversation with Mao Zedong on 26 December 1960", January 6, 1961, Wilson Center Digital Archive, AVPRF, fond 0100, opis 55, papka 454, delo 9, listy 98-105. Translated for CWIHP by Maxim Korobochkin.
<https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/116976>

Summary:

Ambassador Chervonenko records an unexpected and surprisingly warm meeting with Mao in which the leader talks about his lessened role in the Chinese government.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

From the diary of TOP SECRET

S. V. CHERVONENKO Copy No.3

"6" January 1961

Outgoing No. 9

RECORD OF CONVERSATION

with comrade Mao Zedong

26 December 1960

According to the instructions of the Center I visited Mao Zedong today.

In the name of the CPSU CC and comrade N.S. Khrushchev personally, I congratulated Mao Zedong with his 67th birthday and wished him good health, long life and fruitful work.

Mao Zedong was very impressed by this warm attention from the CPSU CC and comrade N.S. Khrushchev. He was deeply moved, and, without concealing his emotions, he most warmly expressed his thanks for the friendly congratulations and wishes. Mao Zedong stated that it is a great honor for him to receive these high congratulations on his birthday. He asked to give his warmest thanks to comrade N.S. Khrushchev and wished him, personally, as well as all the members of the CPSU CC Presidium, good health and big fruitful successes in their work.

Then, on Mao Zedong's initiative, we had a conversation. He told me that the Chinese leaders have to work a lot now. "As for myself - he mentioned - I am now working much less than before. Though - Mao Zedong went on - I mostly work 8 hours a day (sometimes more), the productivity is not the same as it used to be. His comprehension of the material studied is less effective, and the necessity arose [for him] to read documents printed in large characters." He mentioned in this connection that "this must be a general rule that people of advanced age are in an unequal position to the young as regards the efficiency of their work."

Mao Zedong then emphasized that his resignation from the post of the Chairman of the PRC had lessened the load of state activities on him. Speaking about this he mentioned that at the time when he had submitted this proposal he had been supported only by the Politburo members, while many members of the CPC CC had objected. "There was even more disagreement among the rank and file communists." By now, he said, everybody was supporting this decision.

As he continued talking about his work and the activities of the leadership of the CPC CC, Mao Zedong said that for several years, practically from 1953-54 he was not chairing the Politburo meetings any more. He said that from 1956 Liu Shaoqi is in charge of all the routine activities of the Politburo, while he is taking part in some of the meetings from time to time. Mao Zedong mentioned that he personally is usually working and consulting mostly with the members of the Permanent Committee of the CPC CC Politburo. Sometimes specially invited persons also take part in the meetings of the Permanent Committee.

Then Mao Zedong told that on some occasions he takes part in the enlarged Politburo meetings. Leading party executives from the periphery are usually invited to these meetings, for instance the secretaries and deputy secretaries of the CPC CC bureaus from certain regions, the secretaries of the CPC Provincial Committees. Mao Zedong said that now he practically never speaks at the CPC CC Plenums, and even at the CPC Congress he just delivers a short introductory speech. His resignation from the post of the Chairman of the Republic gave him also an opportunity to refrain from participating in the work of the Supreme State Conference. However, he mentioned in this connection, I systematically study the documents and materials (before they are adopted) of the most important party and state conferences and meetings.

Mao Zedong agreed with my statement, that in spite of a certain redistribution of authority between the CPC CC leaders he (Mao Zedong) still has great responsibilities in the leadership of the party and the country. He said that he still often has to work at night. "The principal workload is connected with the reading of numerous documents and materials." Twice a day, for instance, he said, "they bring me two big volumes of routine information on international affairs, which of course it is necessary to look through to keep updated, not to lose contact with life."

In the course of the conversation I mentioned that the rapidly developing international affairs demand constant attention and timely analysis. I stressed the outstanding significance of the Moscow Conference where the recent international developments were submitted to deep Marxist-Leninist analysis.

Mao Zedong agreed with this statement and quickly responded to the topic, saying: "The Moscow Conference was a success, it was thoroughly prepared, and the editing commission, which included the representatives of 26 parties, worked fruitfully." Foreign representatives, he went on, are often puzzled and ask why was the conference so long. Mao Zedong said that they apparently do not have a full understanding of the real situation when it took more than 10 days for each of the representatives of 81 parties to deliver his speech. Then there were repeated speeches, not to mention the work on the documents themselves. He stated: "It is very good that there were arguments and discussions at the conference. This is not bad."

Then, agreeing with my statement on the deep theoretical character of the documents of the Moscow Conference, Mao Zedong added that these documents caused a great confusion in the Western imperialist circles, among our common enemies.

During the conversation I gave a brief review of the work to popularize the results of the Moscow Conference in the Soviet Union, to study the Conference's documents within the political education network.

In his turn Mao Zedong told me that the study of the Moscow Conference documents is also being organized by the CPC. As for the summarizing of the Conference's results, the CPC CC has not yet sent any precise instructions on this question to the provinces.

Then he told me that the CPC CC Plenum will take place in January 1961 (the last Plenum was in April 1960), where the CPC CC delegation at the Moscow Conference will present its report. It is planned to adopt a short Plenum resolution on this question, expressing support of the Moscow Conference's decisions. Apart from the results of the Conference the January Plenum of the CPC CC will also discuss the economic plan of the PRC for 1961.

After that Mao Zedong told me that there are certain difficulties in the PRC which make it impossible to elaborate a perspective plan, "and we also lack the experience for this." At first, he went on, the CPC CC wanted to work out a plan for the three remaining years of the second five year plan. However, 1960 is already over. So it was decided to make separate plans for the two remaining years of the five year plan. He said that the current plan of economic development for the first quarter of 1961 exists and is practically put into implementation.

For my part I told him about the favorable conditions for planning achieved in the Soviet Union, of the adoption of the economic plan and budget for 1961 by the Supreme Council of the USSR.

Expressing a critical opinion of the lag with the adoption of economic plans in the PRC, Mao Zedong said that the plan for 1960, for instance, was adopted only in April 1960, and on some occasions plans were adopted by the sessions of CAPR [Chinese Assembly of People's Representatives] only in June-July. He explained it by the lack of sufficient experience in the PRC.

I told Mao Zedong of the forthcoming Plenum of the CPSU CC, of the serious attention paid by the party and government to the problems of agricultural development in the Soviet Union, including some special features of the forthcoming Plenum, where the most important questions of further increase of agricultural production will be discussed and resolved.

Mao Zedong said that the CPC CC is now also "specializing" on agriculture. Increasing the attention to this question, he continued, "we are even thinking about narrowing the industrial front to some extent." Explaining this idea he said that it is about a certain lowering of the scale of capital investments into the industrial production, including some branches of heavy industry; capital investments into the construction of public buildings will also be cut.

In the course of the conversation he briefly mentioned the bottlenecks of the PRC's industry, pointing, for instance, at the mining and coal industry, and the transport as well, talked about the interconnection of these industries, their influence on the development of many other branches (steel production etc.).

Returning to the problem of agriculture, he emphasized that the lack of appropriate attention to this most important field of the PRC's economy, as well as to the development of the light industry, would make it impossible to satisfy the requirements of the population for foodstuffs, clothing and consumer goods. Our own experience, Mao Zedong went on, persuaded us that "organizing the production of living plants and animals is much more difficult than the production of lifeless items - metals, ore, coal etc." He stated jokingly that "the dead will not run away from us and can wait."

In the course of the conversation Mao Zedong repeatedly stressed that after the revolution in the PRC the material requirements of the Chinese population have been steadily growing. So the CPC must seriously contemplate these problems, and the way to overcome the arising difficulties. Of course, it is not the difficulties only that matter. Even when we have successes, new problems and tasks are appearing all the same. He stated in this connection, that even in 300-400 years new problems will be still arising, demanding to be solved, "no development will be possible without them."

I shared with Mao Zedong some of the impressions from my trip around the Soviet Union together with the Chinese delegation headed by Liu Shaoqi, stressing the significance of the trip for the strengthening of friendship and solidarity between the USSR and the PRC.

Mao Zedong actively supported this part of the conversation. He said that in China they are very happy with this visit, "it is very good that it took place." Both our peoples, he said with emphasis, demanded such an action to be taken. "By making this decision, the Central Committees of both parties satisfied the demands of both peoples."

I told him as if jokingly, that many republics of the USSR, Ukraine for instance, were however "displeased" that the Chinese delegation was not able to visit them. He said, laughing, that this protest should be addressed to the members of the delegation, for instance to Yang Shangkun, who is present here at the conversation, as the Politburo had no objections against prolonging the visit. I noted in the same

tone that the Chinese friends had disarmed the "displeased" Soviet comrades, saying that it was not their last visit to the Soviet Union. So, Mao Zedong said, one can maintain that they owe you.

When he broadened the topic of the usefulness of these meetings and visits I told him that during the trip of the Chinese delegation Soviet citizens had repeatedly asked to give him (Mao Zedong) their best wishes and expressed their hope that he will also come to the Soviet Union when he finds it convenient, visit different cities, enterprises, collective farms, especially that he had had no chance to get better acquainted with the country during his previous visits. He reacted warmly and stated that he "must certainly find the time for such a visit."

Then Mao Zedong told that in China he is criticized by the functionaries from the periphery, who are displeased that he has not been able yet to visit a number of cities and regions - Xinjiang, Yanan, Guizhou, Tibet, Taiyuan, Baotou, Xian, Lanzhou etc. These workers, he said, used to call me "the Chairman for half of the Republic," and when I resigned from this post in favor of Liu Shaoqi, they started to call me "the Chairman of the CPC for half of the country."

In the final part of the conversation Mao Zedong returned to the notion of his alleged retirement from active state and party work, saying half-jokingly that now "he will wait for the moment when he will become an ordinary member of the Politburo." I have not consulted anybody in the party on this matter, he mentioned, even him, Mao Zedong said, pointing at Yang Shangkun, you are the first whom I am telling about my "conspiracy."

I expressed assurance that the members of the CPC will apparently not agree to such a proposal from Mao Zedong. Then, he said jokingly, I will have to wait until everybody realizes its necessity; "in several years they will have mercy for me."

The conversation lasted more than an hour in an exceptionally cordial, friendly atmosphere. When it was over Mao Zedong came to see us to our car. Bidding us a warm farewell, he once again asked to give his warm greetings to comrade N.S. Khrushchev and the members of the CPSU CC Presidium and most sincere thanks for their congratulations and warm wishes.

Candidate member of the CPC CC Secretariat Yang Shangkun, the functionaries of the CPC CC apparatus Yan Min Fu and Zhu Jueren, Counselor Minister of the USSR Embassy in the PRC Sudarikov N.G. and the counselor of the embassy Rakhmanin O.B. were present at the conversation.

The Ambassador of the USSR in the PRC

[signature]

S. CHERVONENKO