

September 6, 1954

**Australian Government Trade Commissioner, Hong
Kong, to the Secretary, Department of External
Affairs, 'Visit to China by the British Labour Party
Delegation'**

Citation:

"Australian Government Trade Commissioner, Hong Kong, to the Secretary, Department of External Affairs, 'Visit to China by the British Labour Party Delegation'", September 6, 1954, Wilson Center Digital Archive, 'Visit by Clement Attlee and Labour MPs to China, Japan, Australia and Canada,' DO 35/5930, The National Archives of the United Kingdom. <https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/117859>

Summary:

This is a report on a visit by Clement Attlee's Labor Party delegation to China in August 1954. The report covers wide ground, summarizing the delegates' experiences and views on events in China, and contains a short account of Attlee's conversation with Mao Zedong. Mao and Attlee disagreed about the Soviet Union's policy towards Eastern Europe, and Mao, after defending the Soviet record, in the end admitted that he simply did not know enough about the situation in Eastern Europe. There was also some discussion of Taiwan, though Attlee was given the impression that China would not attack Taiwan for at least 10 years. There is also an interesting quote: "The delegation... received or were confirmed in the impression that the Chinese Government was... living in a world of delusions. The state had been reached where the Central People's Government viewed the outside world not as it was but according to how they thought it should be."

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Transcript - English

Australian Government Trade Commissioner Hong Kong

Secret

File No. 711

6 September 1954

Memo No. 516

The Secretary, Department of External Affairs

Canberra, A.C.T.

Visit to China by the British Labour Party Delegation

I refer to my telegram No. 68 of 2nd September, 1954, outlining some of the points made by Lord Lindsay following upon his return from China.

[...]

MEETING WITH MAO TSE-TUNG - FOREIGN POLICY

4. The meeting on 24th August between Mao Tse-tung and the delegation lasted three hours and it was apparent that Mao Tse-tung not only appeared very fit but was also mentally alert. Whether or not he has been ill is not clear but he was extremely tanned and gave the impression that possibly he had recently had a long convalescence in the open air. He was not at all fatigued by the long interview.

5. Some reports from correspondents have suggested that the meeting was seized by Mao as the occasion for delivering a long lecture on foreign policy to Mr. Attlee and other members of the delegation. This, however, is not true and I am assured by Lindsay that, if anything, the meeting was very vigorous, frank and at times, heated debate.

6. So far as the Chinese were concerned Mao deferred to none of his followers and in fact only one or two of them (including Chou En-lai) had anything to say at all. Mao himself was the speaker for the Chinese for ninety five per cent of the time. Liu Shao-ch'i did not speak at all.

7. Mao Tse-tung raised the questions of Formosa, United States policy, Japanese and West German rearmament and the part of the Labour Party could play in alleviating the tensions. The propositions, however, were by no means passively accepted and were ably countered by Mr. Attlee and other members of the delegation. Mr. Attlee apparently took exception to some of the comment on the United States and with some heat asked how such propositions could be accepted when in fact China was closely allied with the most barbarous of Western Powers and a potential destroyer of Western civilisation. Dr. Edith Summerskill was also quite equal to the occasion and pointedly asked Mao Tse-tung how the Chinese Communists could really expect the Labour Party to assist it in meeting its many international problems when in fact the Communist Party was bent on their destruction and would no doubt see to their annihilation should its policies ever succeed. It was on this issue - the question of democratic socialism - together with Soviet policy in Eastern Europe that Mao Tse-tung was in greatest difficulty and at a loss for answers. As for Eastern Europe he was non-[p]lussed when Morgan Phillips said that he had personal experience of almost all of the countries and political parties concerned and could speak with authority and conviction on just what the Soviet Union's policy had meant to the now satellite states. Mao Tse-tung eventually abandoned the argument by admitting his own lack of knowledge of the countries concerned and his inability to continue the discussion. Mr. Atlee, however, suggested that China could assist the growth of improved international relations by using its influence with the Soviet Union to

alleviate conditions in Eastern Europe.

8. On the question of Chinese concern about the rearmament of Western Germany Mr. Attlee is said to have remarked to Mao that he could not recall similar Chinese expressions of concern about East German rearmament. He went on to suggest that China could give thought, if it so wanted, to ways and means for achieving a scaling down of world armament.

9. Formosa received little attention in the discussion, partly because of time, but Mao Tse-tung did state the Chinese position and attacked United States policy on the question which he said lacked all justification. Apart from references to the Chinese determination to 'liberate' the island there was no discussion of possible military action. I believe, however, that Mr. Attlee told the Americans here that he had the strong impression that an actual armed attack on Formosa was unlikely for another ten years.

[...] [The rest of the telegram discusses the delegation's impression of China]

(W.P.J. Handmer)

Third Secretary