

February 5, 1949 – Record of A. I. Mikoyan’s Conversation with Mao Zedong on the CCP’s Internal Policy

On February 5, 1949, during the day, another conversation took place with Mao Zedong in the presence of Politburo members of the CCP Central Committee: Zhou Enlai, Liu Shaoqi, Ren Bishi, Zhu De, and translator Shi Zhe. On our side, Comrades Kovalev I.V. and Kovalev E.F. were present.

On the Role of Foreign Capital in China

Mao Zedong said that China has been a center of oppression by foreign powers. Since 1840, for 100 years, China has been exploited by several foreign countries, unlike India, where the primary oppressor was Britain, and Indochina, where France played that role.

During this period, Mao Zedong said, the Chinese people sought a way out of this situation. The Taiping Rebellion and later Sun Yat-sen aimed to liberate China from foreign oppression. However, the parties of that time failed the test before the people, and only the Communist Party, possessing Marxism-Leninism, is achieving victory in our country.

On the Chinese Intelligentsia

Speaking about the Chinese intelligentsia, Mao Zedong noted that foreign capital systematically corrupted it. Many Chinese intellectuals received their education in the United States, Britain, Germany, and Japan. They unintentionally became conduits of these countries’ influence in China.

Mao Zedong said that many intellectuals are in the ranks of the Chinese Communist Party, but their ideology is not yet communist. That is why the two Soviet doctors present in China feel isolated. They have done and continue to do significant and useful work, but they cannot interact much with our intelligentsia, as they also do not speak Chinese well.

UPCOMING PLENUM OF THE CCP CENTRAL COMMITTEE

Mao Zedong further stated that the decision of the CCP Central Committee Politburo from January 8, 1949, had been translated into Russian and was being handed over to us through Comrade Orlov. Mao Zedong said that this decision essentially serves as the CCP’s political program for the near future. Local party organizations are demanding answers to a number of pressing issues, and in this regard, we are convening the next plenum of the CCP Central Committee.

I remarked that this plenum would likely be a turning point in the sense that it must prepare the party for new tasks arising from China’s current political situation.

Mao Zedong agreed with me and stated that the last CCP Central Committee plenum took place in June 1945. More than three years have passed since then. Preparatory work for convening the plenum is now underway. A special Politburo meeting was held to discuss the plenum, attended by Gao Gang, Lin Biao, Chen Yi, Liu Bocheng, and Bo Yibo. The meeting lasted four days. Now, the participants have dispersed, and only Liu Bachun remains here. He is 63 years old and previously worked with Sun Yat-sen. He studied in Moscow at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV). His role, as Mao Zedong noted, somewhat resembles that of the late Comrade Kalinin.

Liu Bocheng is a member of the CCP Central Committee Politburo. Also participating in the meeting was Politburo member Dong Biwu, the current chairman of the government of Northern China. Gao Gang is also a Politburo member. In total, the CCP Politburo consists of 13 members.

THE ROLE OF CRITICISM AND SELF-CRITICISM IN THE PARTY

Discussing the history of the Communist Party of China, Mao Zedong divided it into four periods:

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

During these periods, our party developed and grew. Mao Zedong stated that throughout these times, we have paid special attention to promoting criticism and self-criticism within the party, as we consider them the sharpest tools of Marxism-Leninism. However, elements of nepotism and favoritism still persist within the party—remnants of the Kuomintang ideology.

In our army, officers sometimes beat soldiers, and in such cases, we explain to them that their behavior is no different from that of the Kuomintang. Our local officials sometimes become detached from the masses, as was confirmed during the implementation of agrarian reform. This is why we strongly advocate for the comprehensive promotion of criticism and self-criticism within our ranks, as well as for the periodic review of party members regarding their ideological training and work style. In our party meetings, we raise issues that allow the lower ranks to scrutinize the upper ranks.

I commented that what Mao Zedong was saying demonstrated the presence of democratic centralism in the party, which is its strength. A vibrant democratic centralism is the foundation of Bolshevik accountability, as Comrade Stalin has repeatedly emphasized.

Mao Zedong stated that the party has achieved unity through the promotion of internal criticism and self-criticism.

I noted that various petty-bourgeois elements exert pressure on the party from the outside, and if criticism and self-criticism are properly developed within the party, this ensures the purity of its ranks. However, if the party becomes detached from the masses, there is a risk of degeneration within certain segments.

Mao Zedong fully agreed with me and stated that, given that a number of major cities have recently been captured by the People's Liberation Army, reactionary forces are becoming more active and attempting to pressure the party. He emphasized that the party's tasks are now becoming more complex, as its activities must extend beyond the countryside to the cities as well.

TASKS OF THE PARTY IN THE ARMY

Speaking about the party's tasks in the army, Mao Zedong stated that during the civil war, they were gradually democratizing the armed forces. The lower-level command staff is elected but must be approved by the higher command. Each company has a soldiers' committee in which officers also participate. War requires trained personnel, and the army serves as a good political school for the people. After the war, they plan to utilize military personnel in various sectors of economic and political work.

Fundamentally, the army is a peasant army. Soldiers who received land during agrarian reform form a reliable backbone of the army. They do not ignore Kuomintang soldiers either, striving to politically re-educate them as prisoners of war. At meetings of former Kuomintang soldiers, fighters of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) speak about their lives under the Kuomintang regime and how they live under the new conditions. They particularly emphasize that the new democratic government has granted them land, which has a strong impact on the former Kuomintang soldiers. Alongside this,

various pamphlets are published with comparative data on conditions in their territories versus Kuomintang-controlled areas. Every opportunity is used to highlight the Kuomintang's arbitrariness. This is how Kuomintang soldiers are reshaped in their favor.

Mao Zedong further stated that their democratic policy in the army allows soldiers even to criticize officers. For example, before a military operation, a meeting of a given unit is sometimes convened to discuss the upcoming plan. During these meetings, a commander might propose a retreat, while the soldiers insist on an advance. Under the influence of critical remarks from the soldiers, the commander may adopt an offensive plan instead.

Mao Zedong continued, noting that their army enjoys great prestige among the people. On February 3, 1949, when their troops entered Beijing, nearly all city residents welcomed their forces. Only one army unit entered fully equipped with American weapons. To highlight the irony of Chiang Kai-shek supplying them with American equipment, they deliberately removed all Soviet arms from this unit and fully outfitted it with American weaponry. The people also welcomed the advancing PLA troops in Tianjin, demonstrating public support and showing that the army presents itself in the best possible way to the people.

LEVEL OF INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT IN CHINA

Mao Zedong then turned to the economic situation in China, emphasizing that the standard of living for the Chinese people was very low. He stated that imperialism exploits China as a raw materials base, which directly affects the population's living conditions.

I noted that China exhibits stark economic contrasts, such as the major industrial hub of Shanghai compared to underdeveloped rural areas. In the early years of Soviet state-building, similar contrasts existed in the USSR, but over time, they were significantly reduced.

Mao Zedong agreed with me and continued to characterize China's economic situation. He stated that industry accounts for only 10% of China's total economy, except in Manchuria, where it constitutes 53%.

Taking advantage of the topic raised by Mao Zedong, I emphasized that industry is the foundation of a modern state. With a developed industrial sector, it is easier to improve the population's standard of living. Agrarian reform in the countryside removes obstacles to agricultural development, but it does not yet resolve the issue of the country's technical and industrial advancement.

ON THE APPROACH TO CAPITAL AND INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

Mao Zedong agreed, stating that in China, the advance against capital would proceed more slowly than it had in the Soviet Union.

I noted that China's industrial development would be easier compared to the Soviet Union's early industrialization, given the existence of the USSR and other people's democracies. Unlike the Soviet Union, which had to allocate a significant portion of its resources for defense against foreign intervention from the very beginning, China could benefit from more favorable conditions.

Mao Zedong agreed and added that, to some extent, even the Kuomintang contributed to creating favorable conditions for industrial development. He explained that both the Japanese and the Kuomintang had facilitated the concentration of capital in state hands. For example, in Manchuria, industry accounted for 53% of the economy, with 47% under state control and only 6% in private hands. More broadly, Mao Zedong noted, all major sectors of Chinese industry were already controlled by the state.

ON FOREIGN PROPERTY

I asked whether they had any plans to nationalize industry, to which Mao Zedong replied that they did not.

Taking advantage of the topic, I elaborated on our stance regarding foreign property in China. I stated that our position was that Japanese and French property should be nationalized, as well as British property whenever possible. As for American property, a cautious policy should be pursued to create the impression that American interests would be respected by the new government. Once a government led by the Communists firmly established itself in China, this issue could be revisited and decided based on the situation and American behavior.

ON THE PATH AND CHARACTER OF THE CHINESE REVOLUTION

I emphasized that the Chinese revolution was anti-imperialist in nature and aimed to undermine the position of imperialists in the country. Eliminating the landlords and the Kuomintang would not in itself remove imperialist influence, as both the landlords and the Kuomintang were merely agents of foreign imperialism. Weakening the foreign presence in China would, in turn, improve the position of the national bourgeoisie, which would likely welcome such a development.

I then explained our Central Committee's perspective on the nature and trajectory of the Chinese revolution and how it differed from both the Russian Revolution and the revolutions in the people's democracies of Eastern Europe.

I stated that China's path would not follow that of the Russian Revolution or the people's democracies because China's conditions were distinct from those of Russia and Europe. The victory of people's democracy in the European countries had been facilitated by two key factors:

1. The national bourgeoisie in these countries had discredited itself by collaborating with German occupiers. When the Red Army arrived, the bourgeoisie fled.
2. The arrival of the Red Army and its liberation of these countries from German rule significantly facilitated the establishment of democratic regimes by the Communists.

These factors, I pointed out, were absent in China. Both the Russian and Chinese revolutions were driven by internal forces. Another key difference between China and Russia was that Russia had not been oppressed by imperialists, and thus, its revolution was not anti-imperialist in character. In contrast, China had suffered long-term imperialist oppression, making its revolution fundamentally anti-imperialist.

Speaking about China's future regime, I noted that it would not represent a dictatorship of the proletariat in the traditional sense. Instead, the future Chinese regime would be a people's democracy—but without soviets. Lenin, in February 1917, had advocated for a dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry in Russia, but in practice, this did not fully materialize. The course of events led to the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat by October 1917.

It was possible, I suggested, that in China, the concept of a dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry might be realized in a purer form—without soviets. The future coalition government of China should embody the dictatorship of the working class and peasantry under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party.

In the people's democracies of Eastern Europe, I continued, state power functioned as a dictatorship of the proletariat, though not in its pure form. This function was directed at suppressing the

bourgeoisie. In China, however, this situation did not exist. Instead, the dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry in its pure form was more suitable. From what I understood, the Chinese leadership shared this view.

Mao Zedong fully agreed with our Central Committee's position, stating that it would greatly aid in finalizing their views on the nature of the revolution and in defining the tasks of the Chinese Communist Party. He asked me to convey his gratitude to our Central Committee and to Comrade Stalin for this and all other forms of assistance provided to the Chinese Communist Party.

Mao Zedong then said that during the period of the Soviet movement in China, the Chinese Communists adopted the program of the worker-peasant dictatorship but mechanically applied the same approach to the national bourgeoisie in China as was used for the bourgeoisie in European countries. As a result, although the decisions of the 6th Congress of the CCP only called for the confiscation of foreign capital, in practice, we implemented a policy of confiscating all national capital as well.

At present, Mao Zedong continued, we stand for the dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry under the leadership of the Communist Party—for a people's dictatorship—because workers and peasants make up 90% of China's population. Such a regime ensures democracy for the people and a dictatorship over landlords, bureaucratic capital, and imperialists. We call our regime a new democracy, based on the alliance of workers and peasants under the leadership of the proletariat, represented by its vanguard—the Communist Party.

Over the past ten years, Mao Zedong continued, we have been explaining the nature of the Chinese revolution. In doing so, we have highlighted the differences between the Chinese revolution and both the old bourgeois-democratic revolution and the socialist revolution. The bourgeois-democratic revolution is fading, and we are not yet able to adopt the most advanced form of democracy—that is, the Soviet system. That is why we call our regime new democracy, distinguishing it from the Soviet system, and our revolution new democracy, or people's democratic.

Our revolution is popular in nature; it is directed against imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic capital—all of which are being fought under the leadership of the proletariat. "This," Mao Zedong said, "is our entire political program."

We have had many people, Mao Zedong continued, advising us not to emphasize the leadership of the proletariat in the Chinese revolution, fearing it would alienate the intelligentsia. Lately, we have disregarded such concerns and have been stressing the role of the proletariat's leadership through the Communist Party, which is its vanguard. This has yielded good results. Even liberal democratic representatives arriving from the south to Mukden have declared in their statement that they are ready to work under the leadership of the Communist Party.

Mao Zedong then said that he had written about this particular stage of the Chinese revolution back in 1940, but at the time, the formulation was not fully developed, and he now wished to return to it. He emphasized that in formulating his views on the nature of the Chinese revolution, he had relied on Comrade Stalin's statements from 1917, as well as his later works concerning the character of the Chinese revolution.

Mao Zedong noted that he particularly valued Comrade Stalin's assertion that the Chinese revolution was part of the global revolution, as well as Stalin's criticism of Semich's nationalism in Yugoslavia. He repeatedly emphasized that he considered himself a student of Comrade Stalin and adhered to a "pro-Soviet orientation."

ON RAISING THE THEORETICAL LEVEL OF CCP MEMBERS

Mao Zedong also referred to various pamphlets he had written at different times, particularly *On Military Strategy* (published in 1936), *On the Party's Tasks* (1939), *On New Democracy* (1940), and *On the Fundamental Direction of the Chinese Revolution* (1945). Speaking about the last pamphlet, Mao Zedong said he was very pleased to find in Comrade Stalin's letter to Colonel Razin the statement that "retreat is a rational offensive." As soon as we received this letter, Mao said, we immediately broadcast it over the radio and studied it within the military units.

Mao Zedong further stated that familiarity with Soviet criticism of the erroneous philosophical views of Deborin and Bukharin played a significant role in strengthening the Party ranks. This Soviet critique elevated Lenin and Stalin in the eyes of our Party as the greatest Marxist-Leninist theorists. The criticism of Deborin's philosophical views helped us in our struggle against our own idealists. In general, Mao noted, we lagged behind the demands of Party education, as when we seized power, we focused primarily on political and economic issues. However, during the course of the war, we conducted extensive work to raise the theoretical level of our members, which in turn prepared us for the 7th CCP Congress.

When we first established the Party school, it was in complete disarray. Even I, sitting within the CCP Central Committee apparatus, could not bring it under control. Each department of the Central Committee had its own perspective. I warned our Party and the Central Committee about this situation as early as 1940, but I did not achieve positive results. I realized that to unify the Central Committee, we had to work on it thoroughly—which we did—thus ensuring the convening of the 7th CCP Congress.

On the eve of the congress, we held a plenary session of the CCP Central Committee, where we adopted a resolution on historical issues. This resolution detailed, in the most thorough manner, the political mistakes of past intra-party groups and factions (such as Chen Duxiu, Li Lisan, and others). Due to these groups and factions, we lost 90% of the Soviet-controlled territory we once held, as well as 90% of our Party members.

Why did this happen? It happened because some of our Party leaders had ideological wavering. Later, we adopted a policy of principled ideological struggle against these leaders but remained cautious in making organizational conclusions about them. We did not expel members from the Party for mistaken statements, and this contributed to our unity in the postwar period.

Now, there are no major disputes within the Party, though some mistakes were made during the recent agrarian reform and in urban areas. However, the Central Committee immediately corrected these errors. That is why we believe that the foundation of our unity is criticism and self-criticism.

With this, the conversation concluded.