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Letter to Comrades Natta, Napolitano, Rubbi

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Summary:

A summary of political information gathered from Italian Communist Party's delegation to China on international relations, reforms and economic situation, and ideological and cultural positions of China.

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Italian Communist Party
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Ref. No.
To Comrades
Natta, Napolitano, Rubbi

Dear Comrades,

I'm sending you a brief report on the trip I took to China from August 5 to 25. I should begin by saying that the welcome I received, in Beijing and in the other cities I went to (Xian, Hangzhou, Shanghai, Qingdao), was particularly warm, emphasizing the value given to the friendly relations which have been established between our parties and the importance of the role granted to PCI in the European and international scene.

While travelling outside of Peking, my wife and I were accompanied by comrade Yu, head of the Italian office of the European section, as well as by comrade Zhang Xiang-Shan, who during the end of the 70's was the deputy head of the Culture and Propaganda Department and then, until 1982, president of China television. In all the cities I had meetings with the party secretary and deputy secretary of the province. In Peking, in addition to two initial meetings with comrade Li Shu Sheng, deputy head of the International Department and with comrade Zu Da-cheng, head of the European section, and a conversation with the Minister of Culture, I had a final meeting with comrade Xi Zhongxun, member of the Political Bureau. During these meetings, repeated mentions were made about the importance of Natta's visit to China and the meeting between Hu Yaobang and Natta in Rome.

I will now quickly present some political information or impressions that I gathered during the trip.

International relations - Given the time at which my visit to China occurred, I particularly concerned myself with the reactions of our Chinese comrades to the proposals made by Gorbachev in his Vladivostok speech and to the subsequent initiatives.

The opinions that I gathered emphasize the public views: an attitude of attention and openness (contacts between China and the USSR, at various levels, are multiplying, and even when I was in Peking there were many important Soviet leaders in China, including Archipov) but, at the same time, an emphasis on resolving three notable problems: the troops at the border and border disputes, Afghanistan, Cambodia. The harshest assessments were made on the matter of Cambodia, and, so, on the relations with the Vietnamese. A certain willingness (or at least an attitude of expectation) was however demonstrated with regard to the situation which developed in Hanoi after the death of Le Duan.

But perhaps the most significant aspect of the meeting with Xi Zhongxun was the very positive assessment he made regarding the political prospects of Gorbachev concerning economic reform: with the tendency to highlight analogies to the choices made in China. There was explicit reference to the possibility of a positive

development of relations not just between the countries, but — in the future — even between the parties.

Some days earlier, Xi Zhongxun had also met with Paul Laurent of the PCF, who was also vacationing in China. He was keen to communicate to me, with regard to that meeting, a criticism of the position of the PCF, in relation to three points: the delay in the current transformation in the economy and society; the lack of comprehension of the problem of a united and autonomous Europe; the total support given by the French to the Vietnamese position with concern to Cambodia.

As for the situation in East Asia, it seemed to me that the Chinese position was very concerned with avoiding any deterioration of relations with the Japanese. Regarding the Philippines, I was told that the PCC does not have “any relationship” with the Communist Party of the Philippines.

Reforms and economic situation – All the representatives with whom I was able to speak insisted on the importance of the turnaround several years ago and the successes obtained thanks to the economic reforms carried out in the last few years: highlighting in particular the strong increase in production and income, the rise in productivity, the acceleration of modernization and technological innovation, also due to the effects of various forms of mixed initiative with the participation of foreign capital. (In this regard, in addition to the four special zones, a particular emphasis is placed on the 14 “open cities” located along the coast and for which a government program provides for a series of conditions which are particularly favorable for foreign investments.)

But all the representatives also called to my attention — by the way of certain precautionary measures and by the “slowdown” adopted in the last period — the fact that an unduly high level of investment in the process industries and for the production of goods was and is creating dangerous imbalances: for example, imbalances between sectors (they complain about energy deficiencies, in certain areas of basic manufacturing, in certain infrastructures, etc.), deficits in foreign accounts, inflationary pressures, and the such.

I was not able to clarify if the concerns expressed regarded only the manifestations of imbalances in economic development, or also any repercussions of these imbalances on the social and political landscape (for the widening the income gap between various types of workers, between city and country, between the coastal areas and more underdeveloped regions, etc.). It seems clear to me, in any case, that these problems are open to discussion within the Chinese party; and if everyone declares to be willing to proceed with the implementation of a “reform,” the methods, the timeframe, and the contents of the reform may however be differently interpreted and emphasized, including with regard to the weight and complexity of the problems that China must face to progress on the road to development.

Ideological and cultural positions – On this topic — and in particular on the opening to Western culture and on the relationship between Marxism and other schools of thought — while I was in China, a lecture was made public, given in July by Zhu Houze, head of the Culture and Propaganda Department to a meeting of party members involved in the cultural sector. The lecture is very interesting for the sharp criticism of any closed position and of any dogmatic stance and for the urging to “deal with” the more modern non-Marxist culture as well.

In particular, four statements merit highlighting:

1) it is recalled that “in the past we used to try to transform the mass ideological positions regardless of the increase in the people’s cultural level: however, we

obtained very few results." For this reason, he explains that the fundamental task is to raise the cultural level of the entire nation.

2) it is emphasized that for this purpose all Chinese cultural heritage and its current potential must be treasured, but at the same time "world culture and the history of nations that had a great cultural influence in the world" must be studied. In particular he stresses the need for comparison and of interaction between Chinese and Western culture.

3) the fact is criticized that, in the past, administrative methods were relied upon too heavily, even in the fields of culture and the arts; these methods are rejected and greater flexibility and more respect for differences of opinion "in the cultural, economic and political sphere" are hoped for; the heads of cultural institutions are warned against making hasty decisions when they find themselves "facing unorthodox opinions and those differing from their own."

4) the study of non-Marxist theories is encouraged and in particular the need to deal with economic, cultural and technological development subsequent to Marx and Lenin is stressed, absorbing what could be useful even from theories and cultures permeated by the prejudices of the exploiting classes. Only this way the development of Marxist thought can be ensured.

The value of this framework of positions seems clear to me. It should be noted, if anything, that China's cultural structures seemed to me to be very weak in relation to these proposals.

Democratization and reform of the political system - The discussion on ideological and cultural positions is obviously connected, like that on economic reform, with the debate on the reform of the political system and on the democratization which is currently underway also in view of the conference planned for next year.

The point on which we tend to focus, with regard to the reform of the political system, is the need to introduce a clearer distinction between the functions of the Party and those of the State and of the Administration. On this point there seems to be a very broad convergence: even if some representatives had wished to highlight that it is a distinction which is very easy to state in principle, but far more difficult to render concretely into practice in all the various situations, from the central government to the administration of a district or of a factory. Discussion is also open, more problematically, on the need to create a better democracy. What is required today — above all, I was told, by scientists, technicians, intellectuals — is to be called on not only to give opinions or make proposals, but to participate in making decisions. This raises the problem of reforms that ensure more substantial forms of democracy in the party and in society.

Naturally the idea that China can adopt a Western-style system of democracy is declared "unrealistic". But it is emphasized - I take this sentence from a report on a debate on political reform which took place at the Party's Central School - that "the Party needs to correct the relationships with society and government and to drastically improve its style of work. But it continues to play an irreplaceable role as it will be only the political force that can guide the reform." We are dealing with statements which imply that a very lively debate is open on these issues.