

May 22, 1957
**Report of Hungarian Ambassador Sándor Nógrádi to the
Hungarian Foreign Ministry About His Conversation With
Mao Zedong on the Occasion of Presenting His
Credentials**

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Summary:

Mao Zedong and Nógrádi discuss and compare the communist parties in China and Hungary.

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Contents:

- English Translation

[My] credentials were presented in the usual form. Afterwards, in the study of Comrade Mao Zedong, we had a warm and friendly conversation with Comrade Mao Zedong, which lasted approx. one hour and in which Comrade Zhou Enlai, the Chinese comrades present, and the members of the embassy also participated.

Comrade Mao Zedong inquired about our development. I briefly informed him about [our] achievements in the restoration of order, the revitalization of production, and the present development of [production], and touched upon the problems related to university youth and the intelligentsia. To illustrate the growing strength of the party, I mentioned that the number of party membership exceeded 300.000.

Comrade Mao Zedong remarked that the present number of party membership already appeared to be sufficient, and if we compared it to the size of the population, the Hungarian party was proportionately larger than the Chinese party. Comrade Zhou Enlai remarked that the Chinese party membership constituted approx. 2 percent of the total population. In the view of Comrade Mao Zedong, it was better [to have] a party whose membership was smaller but which was united and solid. I interposed that our party had been a Marxist party, but later it became detached from the masses. Comrade Mao Zedong added that the correction of the errors and [the use of] appropriate measures mattered a lot. In the case of the Hungarian party, [the toleration of] the activities of the Petőfi Circle and Imre Nagy had not been an appropriate measure.

Speaking about the events of October [1956], he said that in his opinion, these events had been regretful and harmful, they caused much harm to the Hungarian people and the international workers' movement, but the Hungarian events, like every bad thing in general, had a positive side, too. Namely, they woke up, first and foremost, the Communists in Hungary, and helped the Communist parties of the socialist camp, and the Communists of the whole world, to notice and acknowledge the errors, recognize the problems early enough, and search for an appropriate measure to correct the errors.

I remarked that in the difficult times, right after the counter-revolutionary attempt, we had not been alone, we received great help from the Soviet Union, the Chinese comrades, and the other socialist countries. The assistance that we got from the Chinese party and government in the political, ideological, and economic field was of great significance. Comrade Mao Zedong dismissed my thanks by saying that the political and ideological assistance had been a duty and a matter-of-course issue for which one should not expect thanks; concerning the economic aid, he remarked that it had been meager.

I emphasized that we had learned a lot from the Chinese comrades, and in Beijing, I considered it my principal duty to learn even more.

In response, Comrade Mao Zedong emphasized that the Chinese party had also learnt from the Hungarian events. To a not insignificant extent, the errors committed in Hungary existed, and still exist, in China, too. The cause of this [problem] is that the party is a very strong, ruling party, and the leaders and local leaders are able to enforce their will [solely] by coercive measures. For this reason, many party functionaries do not see and do not hear that the masses are dissatisfied with them. We also would not have believed that the people held so many, and so varied, views about the Hungarian events and about the Chinese issues that surfaced in this context, he said. Previously, we asked them if they had any opinion about our work, the work of the party; they said they had no opinion. Now it has come to light that they do hold views, and quite a lot, at that. To understand these opinions as much as possible, and to enable the people to give voice to their feelings, we have now organized a movement to improve the style of party work. This kind of movement has traditions in the Chinese party. As early as the beginning of the 1940s, there was such a movement. However, in the last 12 years we have not dealt with this issue, for we have been very busy because of the civil war, the reconstruction, and the social transformation, and no time was left for this purpose. Still, we can see that in our party work, the signs of bureaucratism, dogmatism, and sectarianism are very serious. Precisely this is why this movement was needed. If

we do not improve our work methods, it might happen that after some years, we will end up where the Hungarian party got in October. Now one can regularly read in the newspapers that a great number of people, primarily intellectuals and non-party democratic personages, sharply criticize our work methods and the party. A great part, 90 percent of these critical comments are correct and justified, they highlight the errors in an appropriate way. But to render it possible that they would openly voice these critical comments, one had to first create a suitable atmosphere, an atmosphere in which everybody can speak openly and frankly, without fearing retribution. Such an atmosphere can be created only by means of a countrywide movement.

Certain foreign comrades, Comrade Mao Zedong continued, might think, and they might be even worried, that by [launching] this movement, in which we give free rein to all sort of criticism and in which our errors are highlighted in the sharpest way, we do not do a service to ourselves, we damage the authority of the party, and this liberal dispute, a movement of this nature, might evolve into an anti-party, anti-Communist movement. However, one does not have to fear of such [an outcome], because the party is strong, it has 12 million members, and maintains leadership and guidance in every fields, and thus if the movement is guided by the party, it will not undermine the authority of the party.

With regard to this issue, Comrade Mao Zedong spoke about the problems of the Chinese intelligentsia. He said that during the revolutionary struggles of the party, which lasted several decades, [they] reared cadres who were excellent in the field of class struggle and political struggle. This is why we are skilled in class struggle and political struggle, we are highly qualified experts of these fields. However, the construction of socialism required us to perform many other tasks, too. We are less familiar with these fields. Thus we lack sufficient experience in guiding and organizing economic life, and in solving the problems of science, culture, education, and art. This is why it is necessary to make use of the work of the experts skilled in these fields. It is necessary to utilize the work of the intelligentsia. There are approx. 5 million intellectuals in China, who are mostly of bourgeois and petty bourgeois origin. They acquired their skills and knowledge in the bourgeois period, this permeates their consciousness, and thus the bourgeois influence will remain perceptible for a very long time; for these reasons, the tail of the bourgeois ideological influence is very long. The greatest part of the intelligentsia, the so-called middle strata, did not take sides, either against us or with us. However, in the recent years, because we stretched our legs too much, and everything was led and guided by the party, we constrained them in their movement, and [thus] they are dissatisfied with us, not openly but in their heart. Now we have pulled back our leg a bit; in the framework of the movement aimed at improving the party style, we have allowed them to go out to the garden, but only to the garden, where they can run about. We give them space in the party press, where they can express whatever different opinion they have, they can criticize and castigate us, and this way we can find out not only what errors we made but also that which person is motivated by which intentions, and whom we can rely on. This debate in the party press will be carried on for 1-2 months, and the whole movement for 1-2 years. In the framework of this debate, those [persons] who criticize us with unfriendly intentions will unmask themselves in front of the popular masses and the sincerely thinking stratum of the intelligentsia. This way it will be much easier to isolate them. At the same time, the well-intentioned, sincere middle strata will become our allies by means of this movement, precisely because we guarantee the free expression of their views, listen to them, and accept their criticism. By accepting that part of their criticism that corresponds to reality, we bring them to our side, and separate them from those rightist strata that want to hinder, rather than assist, us. Previously, intellectuals kept their woes to themselves, and their sighs could not emerge from their heart and stomach. Now we allow even the deepest grievances and pains to come to the surface. This will make the party stronger.

Concerning the present situation of the Hungarian party, Comrade Mao Zedong emphatically drew our attention to that under the current circumstances in Hungary, it would not be appropriate to resort to such measures, which were at present useful in China, for the purpose of regaining the trust of the masses. He remarked that only a completely solid, strong, and united party could successfully carry out such a movement. In your country, he said, now the important thing to do was to create, defend, and reinforce the authority of the party. Of course, criticism is necessary in

Hungary, too, but you should not give it wide publicity and [should not] exercise it in the party press. Instead, if you want to know the opinion and criticism of the masses, you should go to each factory separately, talk to the workers, and seek to become familiar with the opinion of the masses through these [conversations].

During the following [conversation], Comrade Mao Zedong mentioned that according to the information available for them, at present there was a lot of trouble with the intelligentsia in Hungary. He specifically elaborated how important it was to conduct patient agitational work among the intellectuals, which [should] be based on persuasion. Intellectuals were peculiar creatures, he said. Their intellect makes them individualist and hard-headed [people]. Therefore, whenever possible, one must use the method of persuasion, particularly the method of individual agitation, while dealing with them. One must reckon with that the individual persuasion of intellectuals requires long time, and in this work, one must not spare time and effort. While working among intellectuals, the methods of mass persuasion are inappropriate and ineffective measures, for precisely because of their different qualification and their individualism, one can never tell the same thing to a large group of intellectuals, [one cannot] simultaneously persuade every member of the group by using the same arguments. The great majority of them, due to their [social] origin and their other, well-known characteristics, approach the same problem in different ways and from different angles. Comrade Mao Zedong also showed us which method of persuading the intelligentsia was appropriate in practice by [using] the persons present for demonstration. He said that one had to start by selecting a sincere intellectual who was [relatively] the closest to us. If, by means of persistent work, we have persuaded him, and brought him wholly to our side, then next time he will join us when we go to persuade two other people. This way, by means of careful, systematic work, and by using measures that take individual characteristics into consideration, one can win over the majority of the intelligentsia in due time. Of course, this is not an easy task; instead, it requires exhaustive and patient work. The persuasion of the intelligentsia is [the task that] requires the greatest amount of work. If the party leads well, and it relies on the worker and peasant organizations, the greater part of the masses, among the workers and peasants, follows the party, because the masses usually go where the wind blows.

I said that in our country, May 1st had brought about a certain turn, the majority of the masses was already following us, which was also confirmed by the fact that over 300.000 people participated in the procession of May 1st. Of them, a substantial number were people who, practically speaking, had been on strike as late as December. Comrade Mao Zedong remarked that this happened because now the wind was blowing from a different direction; in December, it had been blowing from that direction, and thus they went in that direction, while now it was blowing from this direction, and thus they are going in this direction. (This meant that the masses were usually attracted to the greater force.)

Comrade Mao Zedong inquired that according to our calculations, how much time would be needed for the complete restoration of production and economic life; he heard that one needed approx. 3 years for that. He asked if this [view] corresponded to the evaluation of the party.

In my response, I said that the restoration of production and productivity to the level of early October would be probably achieved as early as the end of this year, and on this basis, in January 1958 we would launch the 3-year plan, which would already set more distant targets. Concerning the restoration of the cost price at the level of early October, we still have difficulties, because at the end of last year and in the beginning of this year, we raised wages to a very great extent. Mao Zedong was taken aback by the great increase of wages, and remarked that this was surprising for him, all the more so because to his knowledge, the living standards of the Hungarian laborers had not been too low in the past, either, and it could not be compared to the living standards in China. In his opinion, one cannot raise Chinese living standards at a rapid pace for the time being, because the [current] conditions of production do not render it possible.

At the end of the conversation, since in the introduction I forwarded the warm greetings of the leading comrades at home, Comrade Mao Zedong asked me to forward his thanks and greetings to

the Hungarian leaders; he mentioned Comrades Kádár, Dobi, Münnich, and Marosán by name.

I must mention that according to the experiences of the comrades who have been in Beijing for a substantial time, the conversation following the presentation of one's credentials [usually] lasts 20-25 minutes at most. This one-hour conversation, and the commentaries and advice of Comrade Mao Zedong, reflected the warm, friendly, and comradely interest and helpfulness of the Chinese comrades.

I request that the materials of the aforesaid conversation be forwarded by the Foreign Ministry to the Executive Committee of the HSWP for the purpose of studying them.

[Sándor] Nógrádi

Ambassador