

September 9, 1963

Telegram number 638/45 from André Saint Mleux

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Summary:

Andre Saint Mleux summarizes a recent visit to China made by M. Scheyven.

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Honk Kong, 9th September 1963

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Telegram number 638/45

Reserved - Confidential

M. Scheyven, former Christian Democrat Minister of the Eyskens government, who just spent a month in China, arrived yesterday in Hong Kong. He visited Guangzhou, Shanghai and Wuhan, which is common, but also Fu Hi [sic], Shenyang, and Anshan in Manchuria, which is rarer for a Western visitor. He spent an hour and a half with M. Zhou Enlai.

But the Chinese Prime Minister was surrounded by many collaborators, which did not encourage him to share secrets. M. Scheyven visited many factories, various people's communes and, by necessity, hospitals where he received treatment. He also had the opportunity to twice speak to students, once in Beijing and once in Shanghai. Of these various contacts of which he spoke candidly during a one-to-one dinner with me, I want to emphasize the following information:

A) Foreign affairs: M. Zhou Enlai asked not to discuss the problem of Sino-Soviet relations, only mentioning 'that the people, including the Russians and Indians, were on the side of the Chinese people'. The other interlocutors constantly and vehemently criticized the Russian leaders and their policies, 'maybe even more than the Americans', noted M. Scheyven, who was still struck by their anti-Americanism. On this note, M. Zhou Enlai referred to the policies of General de Gaulle who 'stands up to the Americans', and he pointed to a significant similarity between French and Chinese policies, although M. Scheyven did underline certain 'nuances'.

B) Economic situation: M. Scheyven did confirm what we know about the improvement in nutrition. The factories he visited seemed to be working well. He did not understand why he was not allowed to visit the steel factories in Wuhan. He was struck by the existing unemployment in certain big cities, especially Shanghai. He had been to China six years ago and concluded that he returned to a country that was in the same state as in 1957, which confirms the economic disorganization caused by the great leap forward.

C) Political situation: He noted without pleasure, and sometimes spotted with frustration a close surveillance of foreigners in their internal travels; several clues also make him convinced that his conversations with his collaborator M. Nothom, in the places where they were lodged, were fully wiretapped. Once he realized that, he tried to take advantage by bringing about changes to his program, and on certain occasions he was successful.

The level of indoctrination of his interlocutors, and especially the students he spoke with, highlighted the regime's efforts to that effect in the last few years. He feels that the constant barrage on people's minds has led to the results that the Beijing leaders were hoping for. The comparisons between 'before the liberation and after the liberation' are the leitmotiv of the Chinese interlocutors, which confirms the ongoing campaign of the last few months.

Yet, in a general sense, his interlocutors seemed relaxed and the regime's stability does not appear under threat.

D) Religious problem: as a Christian Democrat, M. Scheyven focused on this question. He suggested to M. Zhou Enlai, who did not express an opinion, to allow the Christian

bishops to go to the Vatican council, and invoked the example of the Polish and Hungarian churches. He asked to see Monsignor Walsh again, whom he had met in 1957, but he was denied. However, he was able to meet with the Catholic Bishops of Beijing, Wuhan and Shanghai.

Both Bishops ordained before the liberation and some converted within the framework of the Chinese national church took part in the meetings.

Representatives of the party also took part and key themes were not really discussed. The generally discrete replies of the Bishops can be summed up by a formula used by one of them: 'we understand the position of the Vatican and the Vatican understands our position'. This somewhat obscure formula seems to indicate a desire to temporize.

Signed André Saint Mleux