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**From the Journal of Ambassador P. F. Yudin, Record
of Conversation with Mao Zedong, 31 March 1956**

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Summary:

Soviet Ambassador Yudin discusses the 20th Congress of the CPSU with Mao, including Khrushchev's "secret speech" denouncing Stalin and his cult of personality. Mao had already seen a copy and discusses mistakes in Stalin's policy towards China at length.

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From the Journal of

P.F. Yudin

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No. 289

RECORD OF CONVERSATION

with Comrade Mao Zedong

31 March 1956

Today I visited Mao Zedong and gave him Comrade Khrushchev's letter about the assistance which the Soviet Union will provide: 1) in the construction of 51 enterprises and 3 scientific research institutes for military industry, 2) in the construction of a railroad line from Urumqi to the Soviet-Chinese border. Mao Zedong asked me to send his deep gratitude to the CC CPSU and the Soviet government.

Further I said that I had wanted to visit him (Mao Zedong) in the very first days following my return to Beijing and to tell about the work of the 20th Congress of the CPSU and, in particular, about Comrade Khrushchev's speech at the closed session regarding the cult of personality. Mao Zedong responded that because of his illness he had found it necessary to put off the meeting with me. Mao Zedong said that the members of the CPC delegation who had attended the 20th Congress had told him something about the work of the Congress and had brought one copy of Comrade Khrushchev's speech regarding the cult of personality. That speech has already been translated into Chinese and he had managed to become acquainted with it.

During a conversation about I.V. Stalin's mistakes Mao Zedong noted that Stalin's line on the China question, though it had basically been correct, in certain periods he, Stalin, had made serious mistakes. In his speeches in 1926 Stalin had exaggerated the revolutionary capabilities of the Kuomintang, had spoken about the Kuomintang as the main revolutionary force in China. In 1926 Stalin had given the Chinese Communists an instruction about the orientation to the Kuomintang, having viewed it as a united front of the revolutionary forces of China. Stalin said that it is necessary to depend on the Kuomintang, to follow after that party, i.e. he spoke directly about the subordination of the Communist Party of China to the Kuomintang. This was a great mistake which had held back the independent work of the Communist Party of China on the mobilization of the masses and on attracting them to the side of the Communist Party.

Through the Comintern, Mao Zedong continued, Stalin, having become after the death of V.I. Lenin the de facto leader of the Comintern, gave to the CC CPC a great number of incorrect directives. These mistaken and incorrect directives resulted from the fact that Stalin did not take into account the opinion of the CPC. At that time Wang Ming, being a Comintern worker, met frequently with Stalin and tendentiously had informed him about the situation in the CPC. Stalin, evidently, considered Wang Ming the single exponent of the opinion of the CC CPC.

Wang Ming and Li Lisan, who represented the CPC in the Comintern, tried to concentrate the whole leadership of the CPC in their own hands. They tried to present all the Communists who criticized the mistakes of Wang Ming and Li Lisan as opportunists. Mao Zedong said, they called me a right opportunist and a narrow empiricist. As an example of how the Comintern acted incorrectly in relation to the Communist Party of China, Mao Zedong introduced the following.

Under the pretext that the Third Plenum of the CC CPC, while considering the coup-plotting errors of Li Lisan, had not carried the successive criticism of these mistakes to its conclusion and allegedly so as to correct the mistakes of the Third Plenum of the CC CPC, the Comintern after 3-4 months had sent to China two of its own workers - [Pavel] Mif and Wang Ming - charged with the task of conducting the Fourth Plenum of the CPC. Nonetheless the decisions of the Fourth Plenum of the CC CPC made under the pressure of Mif and Wang Ming, were in fact more ultra-leftist

that Li Lisan's line. In them it was stated that it is necessary to move into the large cities, to take control of them, and not to conduct the struggle in rural regions. In the decisions of the Fourth Plenum of the CC CPC there was permitted such, for example, a deviation, that in the Soviet regions of China which were blockaded by the Kuomintang even the petty trading bourgeoisie was liquidated and all kinds of internal trade was stopped. As a result of this policy the Chinese Red Army, which in 1929 was comprised of 300,000 fighters, was reduced by 1934-35 to 25,000, and the territory which made up the Soviet regions of China was reduced by 99%. CPC organizations in the cities were routed by the Kuomintang and the number of Communists was reduced from 300,000 to 26,000 people. The Soviet regions were totally isolated from the remaining part of the country and remained without any products, even without salt. All this caused serious discontent among the population of the Soviet regions.

As a result of the ultra-leftist policy of Wang Ming, the more or less large regions which remained under CPC leadership were mostly in North China (the provinces of Shaanxi, Gansu, Ningxia), to which Wang Ming's power did not extend. Wang Ming, backed by the Comintern, essentially managed it so that the 8th and 4th armies removed themselves from subordination to the CC CPC.

Wang Ming and his successors saw the Kuomintang as the "young power," which absorbs all the best and will be able to gain a victory over Japan. They spoke against the independent and autonomous policy of the Communist Party in the united front, and against the strengthening of the armed forces of the CPC and revolutionary bases, against the unification of all strata of the population around the policy of the CPC. Wang Ming's supporters tried to replace the genuinely revolutionary program of the CPC, which consisted of 10 points, with their own six-point program, the author of which was Wang Ming, although this was, in the essence of the matter, a capitulationist program. In conducting this whole program Wang Ming, backed by the Comintern and in Stalin's name, spoke as the main authority.

Wang Ming's supporters, taking advantage of the fact that they had captured a majority in the Southern bureau of the CC CPC in Wuhan, gave incorrect directives to the army and to the local authorities. So, for example, once, to our surprise, said Mao Zedong, even in Yanan the slogans of the CPC which were posted on the walls of the houses were replaced, on Wang Ming's order, with slogans "about a stable union with the Kuomintang," etc.

As a result of the serious ideological struggle and the great explanatory work following the 7th Congress of the Communist Party, especially in the last four years, the majority of Communists who made left or right errors acknowledged their guilt. Wang Ming at the 7th Congress also wrote a letter with acknowledgement of his mistakes, however he then once again returned to his old positions. All of the former activity of Wang Ming, Mao Zedong said, which was carried out under the direct leadership of the Comintern and Stalin, inflicted a serious loss to the Chinese revolution.

Characterizing the Comintern's activity overall, Mao Zedong noted that while Lenin was alive he had played the most prominent role in bringing together the forces of the Communist movement, in the creation and consolidation of the Communist parties in various countries, in the fight with the opportunists from the Second International. But that had been a short period in the activity of the Comintern. Consequently, to the Comintern came "officials" like Zinoviev, Bukharin, Piatnitskii and others, who as far as China was concerned, trusted Wang Ming more than the CC CPC. In the last period of the Comintern's work, especially when Dimitrov worked there, certain movements were noticed, since Dimitrov depended on us and trusted the CC CPC, rather than Wang Ming. However, in this period as well, not just a few mistakes were made by the Comintern, for example, the dissolution of the Polish Communist Party and others. In this way, said Mao Zedong, it is possible to discern three periods in the activity of the Comintern, of which the second, longest period, brought the biggest loss to the Chinese revolution. Moreover, unfortunately, precisely in this period the Comintern dealt most of all with the East. We can say directly, commented Mao Zedong, that the defeat of the Chinese revolution at that time was, right along with other reasons, also the result of the incorrect, mistaken actions of the Comintern. Therefore, speaking openly, noted Mao Zedong, we were

satisfied when we found out about the dissolution of the Comintern.

In the last period, continued Mao Zedong, Stalin also incorrectly evaluated the situation in China and the possibilities for the development of the revolution. He continued to believe more in the power of the Kuomintang than of the Communist Party. In 1945 he insisted on peace with Chiang Kai-shek's [Jiang Jieshi's] supporters, on a united front with the Kuomintang and the creation in China of a "democratic republic." In particular, in 1945 the CC CPC received a secret telegram, for some reason in the name of the "RCP(b)" (in fact from Stalin), in which it was insisted that Mao Zedong travel to Chongqing for negotiations with Chiang Kai-shek. The CC CPC was against this journey, since a provocation from Chiang Kai-shek's side was expected. However, said Mao Zedong, I was required to go since Stalin had insisted on this. In 1947, when the armed struggle against the forces of Chiang Kai-shek was at its height, when our forces were on the brink of victory, Stalin insisted that peace be made with Chiang Kai-shek, since he doubted the forces of the Chinese revolution. This lack of belief remained in Stalin even during the first stages of the formation of the PRC, i.e. already after the victory of the revolution. It is possible that Stalin's lack of trust and suspiciousness were caused by the Yugoslavian events, particularly since at that time, said Mao Zedong with a certain disappointment, many conversations took place to the effect that the Chinese Communist Party was going along the Yugoslav path, that Mao Zedong is a "Chinese Tito." I told Mao Zedong that there were no such moods and conversations in our Party.

The bourgeois press around the world, continued Mao Zedong, particularly the right socialists, had taken up the version of "China's third way," and extolled it. At that time, noted Mao Zedong, Stalin, evidently, did not believe us, while the bourgeoisie and laborites sustained the illusion of the "Yugoslav path of China," and only Chiang Kai-shek alone "defended" Mao Zedong, shrieking that the capitalist powers should not in any circumstance believe Mao Zedong, that "he will not turn from his path," etc. This behavior of Chiang Kai-shek is understandable, since he knows us too well, he more than once had to stand in confrontation to us and to fight with us.

The distrust of Stalin to the CPC, Mao Zedong continued further, was apparent also during the time of Mao Zedong's visit to the Soviet Union. One of our main goals for the trip to Moscow was the conclusion of a Chinese-Soviet treaty on friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance. The Chinese people asked us whether a treaty of the USSR with the new China will be signed, why until now legally there continues to exist a treaty with the supporters of the Kuomintang, etc. The issue of the treaty was an extremely important matter for us, which determined the possibilities for the further development of the PRC. At the first conversation with Stalin, Mao Zedong said, I brought a proposal to conclude a treaty along government lines, but Stalin declined to answer. During the second conversation I returned once again to that issue, showing Stalin a telegram from the CC CPC with the same type of proposal about a treaty. I proposed to summon Zhou Enlai to Moscow to sign the treaty, since he is the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Stalin used this suggestion as a pretext for refusal and said that "it is inconvenient to act in this way, since the bourgeois press will cry that the whole Chinese government is located in Moscow." Subsequently, Stalin refrained from any meetings with me. From my side there was an attempt to phone him in his apartment, but they responded to me that Stalin is not home, and recommended that I meet with [A.I.] Mikoyan. All this offended me, Mao Zedong said, and I decided to undertake nothing further and to wait it out at the dacha. Then an unpleasant conversation took place with [I.V.] Kovalev and [N.T.] Fedorenko, who proposed that I go on an excursion around the country. I sharply rejected this proposal and responded that I prefer "to sleep through it at the dacha."

Some time later, continued Mao Zedong, they handed me a draft of my interview for publication which had been signed by Stalin. In this document it was reported that negotiations are being held in Moscow on concluding a Soviet-Chinese treaty. This already was a significant step forward. It is possible that in Stalin's change of position, said Mao Zedong, we were helped by the Indians and the English, who had recognized the PRC in January 1950. Negotiations began right after this, in which Malenkov, Molotov, Mikoyan, Bulganin, Kaganovich and Beria took part. During the negotiations, at Stalin's initiative there was undertaken an attempt by the Soviet

Union to assume sole ownership of the Chinese Changchun (i.e. Harbin) Railway. Subsequently, however, a decision was made about the joint exploitation of the Chinese Changchun (i.e. Harbin) Railway, besides which the PRC gave the USSR the naval base in Port Arthur, and four joint stock companies were opened in China. At Stalin's initiative, said Mao Zedong, Manchuria and Xinjiang were practically turned into spheres of influence of the USSR. Stalin insisted on the fact that in these regions only Chinese people and Soviet citizens be permitted to live. Representatives of other foreign states, including Czechs, Polish people, and Englishmen who were living permanently in those regions should be evicted from there. The only ones whom Stalin skipped over through his silence were Koreans, of whom there are counted one and a half million in Manchuria. These types of pretensions from Stalin's side, said Mao Zedong, were incomprehensible to us. All this also was fodder for the bourgeois press and representatives of capitalist states. In fact, continued Mao Zedong, in the course of the negotiations around this treaty, there was the most genuine trading going on. It was an unattractive way to pose the issue, in which Stalin's distrust and suspicion of the CPC was brightly expressed.

We are glad to note, said Mao Zedong, that the Chinese Changchun (i.e. Harbin) Railway and Port Arthur have been returned to China, and the joint stock companies have ceased to exist. In this part of the conversation Mao Zedong stressed that Khrushchev did not attend these negotiations, and that Bulganin's participation in them was minimal. Stalin's distrust of the CPC was apparent in a number of other issues, including Kovalev's notorious document about anti-Soviet moods in the leadership of the CPC. Stalin, in passing this document to the CC CPC, wanted, evidently, to stress his mistrust and suspicions.

Over the course of the time I spent in Moscow, said Mao Zedong, I felt that distrust of us even more strongly and there I asked that a Marxist-representative of the CC CPSU be sent to China in order to become acquainted with the true situation in China and to get to know the works of the Chinese theoreticians, and simultaneously to examine the works of Mao Zedong, since these works in the Chinese edition were not reviewed by the author in advance, while the Soviet comrades, counter to the wish of the author, insisted on their publication.

Mao Zedong reminded me that upon my (Yudin's) arrival in China he had persistently and specially recommended to me to complete a trip around the whole country. In relation to this I told Mao Zedong about a conversation which I had with Stalin, in the presence of several members of the Politburo, upon my return from the trip to China. Stalin at that time asked me whether the ruling Chinese comrades are Marxists. Having heard my affirming response, Stalin said, "That's good! We can be calm. They've grown up themselves, without our help."

Mao Zedong noted that in the very posing of this question Stalin's distrust of the Chinese Communists was also made apparent.

Important things which, evidently, to some extent strengthened Stalin's belief in the CPC, were your (Yudin's) report about the journey to China and the Korean War-performance of the Chinese people's volunteers.

In such a way, said Mao Zedong, if we look historically at the development of the Chinese revolution and at Stalin's attitude to it, then it is possible to see that serious mistakes were made, which were especially widespread during the time of the Comintern's work. After 1945, during the period of the struggle with Chiang Kai-shek, because of the overestimation of the forces of the Kuomintang and the underestimation of the forces of the Chinese revolution, Stalin undertook attempts at pacification, at restraining the development of the revolutionary events. And even after the victory of the revolution Stalin continued to express mistrust of the Chinese Communists. Despite all that, said Mao Zedong, we have stood firmly behind the revolutionary positions, for if we had permitted vacillations and indecisiveness, then, no doubt, long ago we would not have been among the living.

Then Mao Zedong moved on to a general evaluation of Stalin's role. He noted that Stalin, without a doubt, is a great Marxist, a good and honest revolutionary. However, in his great work in the course of a long period of time he made a number of great and serious mistakes, the primary ones of which were listed in Khrushchev's speech. These fundamental mistakes, said Mao Zedong, could be summed up in seven points:

1. Unlawful repressions;
2. Mistakes made in the course of the war, moreover, in particular in the beginning, rather than in the concluding period of the war;
3. Mistakes which dealt a serious blow to the union of the working class and the peasantry. Mao Zedong observed that this group of mistakes, in particular, the incorrect policy in relation to the peasantry, was discussed during Comrade Khrushchev's conversation with [PRC military leader] Zhu De in Moscow;
4. Mistakes in the nationality question connected to the unlawful resettlement of certain nationalities and others. However, overall, said Mao Zedong, nationality policy was implemented correctly;
5. Rejection of the principle of collective leadership, conceit and surrounding himself with toadies;
6. Dictatorial methods and leadership style;
7. Serious mistakes in foreign policy (Yugoslavia, etc.).

Mao Zedong further stressed a thought to the effect that overall in the Communist movement great victories were won. The single fact of the growth of the Socialist camp from 200 million people to 900 million people speaks for itself. However, in the course of successful forward advance in some certain countries, in some certain parties these or other mistakes arose. Mistakes similar to these and others, he said, can arise in the future too. I observed that it would be better not to repeat mistakes like Stalin's. To this, Mao Zedong answered that, evidently, there will be these types of mistakes again. The appearance of these mistakes are entirely explicable from the point of view of dialectical materialism, since it is well known that society develops through a struggle of contradictions, the fight of the old with the new, the new-born with the obsolete. In our consciousness, said Mao Zedong, there are still too many vestiges of the past. It lags behind the constantly developing material world, behind everyday life.

In our countries, continued Mao Zedong, much has come from the former, capitalist society. Take, for example, the issue of the application of corporal punishments to the accused. For China too, this is not a new issue. Even in 1930 in the Red Army during interrogations beatings were broadly applied. I, said Mao Zedong, at that time personally was a witness to how they beat up the accused. Already at that time a corresponding decision was made regarding a ban on corporal punishment. However, this decision was violated, and in Yan'an, it is true, we tried not to allow unlawful executions. With the creation of the PRC we undertook a further struggle with this ugly manifestation. It is entirely evident, continued Mao Zedong, that according to the logic of things during a beating the one who is being beaten begins to give false testimony, while the one who is conducting the interrogation accepts that testimony as truth. This and other vestiges which have come to us from the bourgeois past, will still for a long time be preserved in the consciousness of people. A striving for pomposity, for ostentatiousness, for broad anniversary celebrations, this is also a vestige of the psychology of bourgeois man, since such customs and such psychology objectively could not arise among the poorest peasantry and the working class. The presence of these and other circumstances, said Mao Zedong, creates the conditions for the arising of those or other mistakes with which the Communist parties will have to deal.

I observed that the main reason for Stalin's mistakes was the cult of personality, bordering on deification.

Mao Zedong, having agreed with me, noted that Stalin's mistakes accumulated gradually, from small ones growing to huge ones. To crown all this, he did not acknowledge his own mistakes, although it is well known that it is characteristic of a person to make mistakes. Mao Zedong told how, reviewing Lenin's manuscripts, he had become convinced of the fact that even Lenin crossed out and re-wrote some phrases or other in his own works. In conclusion to his characterization of Stalin, Mao Zedong once again stressed that Stalin had made mistakes not in everything, but on some certain issues.

Overall, he stressed that the materials from the Congress made a strong impression on him. The spirit of criticism and self-criticism and the atmosphere which was created after the Congress will help us, he said, to express our thoughts more freely

on a range of issues. It is good that the CPSU has posed all these issues. For us, said Mao Zedong, it would be difficult to take the initiative on this matter.

Mao Zedong declared that he proposes to continue in the future the exchange of opinions on these issues during Comrade Mikoyan's visit, and also at a convenient time with Comrades Khrushchev and Bulganin.

Then Mao Zedong got distracted from this topic and getting greatly carried away briefly touched on a few philosophical questions (about the struggle of materialism with idealism, etc.). In particular he stressed that it is incorrect to imagine to oneself Communist society as a society which is free from any sort of contradictions, from ideological struggle, from any sort of vestiges of the past. In a Communist society too, said Mao Zedong, there will be good and bad people. Further he said that the ideological work of China still to a significant extent suffers from a spirit of puffery [*nachetnichestva*] and clichés. The Chinese press, in particular, still cannot answer to the demands which are presented to it. On the pages of the newspapers the struggle of opinions is lacking, there are no serious theoretical discussions. Because of insufficient time Mao Zedong expressed a wish to meet with me again to talk a little specifically about issues of philosophy.

At the end of the discussion I inquired of Mao Zedong whether he had become acquainted with the *Pravda* editorial about the harm of the cult of personality, a translation of which was placed in *Renmin Ribao* on 30 March. He responded that he still had not managed to read through that article, but they had told him that it is a very good article. Now, said Mao Zedong, we are preparing for publication in *Renmin Ribao* a lead article which is dedicated to this issue, which should appear in the newspapers in the coming week. Beginning on 16 March, he noted jokingly, all the newspapers in the world raised a ruckus about this issue—China alone for the time being is silent.

Then I briefly told Mao Zedong about the arrival in the PRC of 16 prominent Soviet scholars and about the beginning of the work of a theoretical conference dedicated to the 20th Congress, which is opening today in the Club of Soviet specialists. Soviet and Chinese scholars will deliver speeches at the conference.

Mao Zedong listened to these thoughts with great interest.

The conversation continued for three hours. Mao Zedong was in a good mood, and joked often.

The Deputy Head of the Administration of Affairs of the CPC Yang Shangkun, the Chief of the CC CPC Translation Bureau Shi Zhe and Counselor of the USSR Embassy in the PRC Skvortsov, T.F. attended the conversation.

AMBASSADOR OF THE USSR TO THE PRC P. YUDIN