

December 26, 1956

Memorandum of Meeting with Khrushchev, Moscow

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Summary:

After lightly rebuking Hoxha's choices to use public trials for the executions of political criminals, Khrushchev reassures Hoxha of the Soviet Union's support for Albania, and concludes with a summary of the Soviet Union's current standing in the international sphere.

Credits:

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Translation - English

Also present were Suslov and Ponomarev

After Comrade Enver [Hoxha] spoke briefly, Comrade Khrushchev said the following:

We understand the difficulties facing the Party of Labor of Albania [PLA] and your state with regard to Yugoslavia. We can see as much. When I met with Tito in Crimea, I told him that the Yugoslav stance on Albania is not normal. They are conceited. They criticized the Party of Labor of Albania using a language full of hate. We used the information you had provided to us from Albania (on Yugoslav activities in your country) and we told Tito that they are not ending their spying activities and that they are intervening in Albania's internal affairs. Tito rejected this but he was unconvincing.

The Yugoslavs cannot accept Albania as a state on equal footing. I told Tito that he wants to bring down the leadership of the Party of Labor of Albania but that we will defend it. By criticizing the leadership of the PLA, he tried to deny all of the things they are doing against you, against the leaders of the PLA. He alleges that the PLA has not drawn any lessons from the Twentieth Congress, and therefore that it is unfit for leading the country and must be brought down.

They are conceited; they even criticized us and they do not place themselves on an equal footing with all of the other parties. We can see this in the stance they have adopted towards your party. We can see the position adopted by the Yugoslav leaders. Tito's speech is typical; he does not criticize from a position of equal footing but he hurls insults at the communist and worker parties.^[i] I told this to [Veljko] Mićunović when I saw him and he certainly told Tito.^[ii]

"You pretend that you are following a different course in building socialism, but why not understand that the Albanians are also following their own path, which they are putting into practice? Why try to impose your way on them?" He said: "What is Albania? We organized the Party of Labor of Albania. The current leaders in Albania have achieved nothing." I told him: "Why don't you value Albania and the leaders of the Albanian people? Why don't you see them as equals?"

The Yugoslavs operate from a nationalist position. They spoke a lot about Koçi Xoxe, whom they praised as a good man, a worker, a revolutionary.^[iii]

I told Tito that they are interfering in Albania's internal affairs. This goes against our mutual agreement, which clearly states that we shall not interfere in each other's internal affairs. So why do you do it? The Yugoslavs do not know you. Tito said that they are not interfering right now and that they have replaced the diplomatic employees. I told him that they are continuing to send in spies and that they were behind the Tirana Party Conference. We are defending and will continue to defend the Albanian comrades, because they operate from Marxist-Leninist principles.

Tito was enraged by your article in Pravda.^[iv] When he was here, he gave the impression of being both against you and against us. I also wanted to bring up some criticism about the article. We discussed it in the Politburo and we thought that some parts might be taken out, but you had requested that the article be printed without any changes, so we made no changes. The Yugoslavs were very upset because it was plain to see that the article was directed at them.

Taking into consideration the situation in Poland and Hungary, we agreed to publish the article. But it might have been written in some other way, without those insults.

We do not understand why you went ahead with the trial and execution of those

people under such circumstances.^[v] It was wrong to rush into a trial in that manner. You took this decision without taking a cold shower first but you should have taken a shower first and then reached a decision. In our view, this trial has been damaging and the executions have left a bad impression, especially the execution of a woman. As you know, there is currently a general tendency against capital punishment, regardless of the crimes committed, and especially when it comes to women. This decision may attract more adversaries around you. We are not talking here about ordinary crimes, but political crimes, so it is not necessary to punish people to death. You could have had the trial and come to a decision, but not a death sentence. You had a public trial (Comrade Hoxha says that the trial was not public). So you did not have a public trial but publicized the sentence. This further complicates the situation in the eyes of your enemies. They say that you had no evidence to hold the trial publicly, so you held it behind closed doors. Remember, when we tried Baghirov, even though we had plenty of evidence against him, there was still a reaction.^[vi] [Mir Jafar] Baghirov was [Lavrentiy] Beria's collaborator-that fact alone eased the pressure and ensured that reactionaries moved on from this issue. We made that decision because we are a big country, because we hold an important international position, and we are a strong country. But you are not in our position, so you should have been more restrained.

We are fully in agreement with your policies and your party's stance, but you need to be restrained and not rush to judgment. Do not give a reason to your enemies to keep fighting against Albania and against your party, because we support you, because Albania belongs to the socialist camp, and, therefore, your goals should be such that we can fully back them up. With the Yugoslavs, we will continue with the position that I discussed during the evening and at the plenum, meaning that we will maintain economic relations and some party relations with them, but we will keep waging an ideological battle with them. Peace has been destroyed.

How will events proceed from here? Of course, for the time being, disagreements with Yugoslavia will not simply vanish. My personal opinion is that Tito and Ranković are different from the others. I also said this to Mićunović, that the two of them support better relations with us but there are also people like Kardelj, Popović and Todorović who are wicked. Tempo is an unstable person in politics, like a bear in a china shop.

^[vii]

The Yugoslavs are afraid that we will cut off economic relations with them. Their delegation was supposed to get here in November to discuss economic agreements, but we told them that this was not an appropriate time so they will come here later, at a better time. Now we told them to come and they were very happy. Needless to say, we will maintain trade relations with them, as with every other country, on the basis of trading interests. We will get from them what we need and sell them what is in our best interest, not like before, when we used to buy materials we did not need out of the desire to help them out. We will not do this anymore. For example, we used to purchase wine, tobacco, fruits and so on. Now we do not get these from them-we can find them elsewhere, and even if we cannot find them elsewhere, we can do without them. I share all of this with you in confidence.

We will also revisit the agreements we have signed with them on the construction of factories in Yugoslavia. We have prepared a letter, which we will send as soon as the Politburo has approved it. In it, we tell them to postpone the implementation of the agreements and ask for a delegation from them to discuss these matters with our people. Of course, they will not be pleased with this letter. They will say that we are going back to 1948. But this is their business. One cannot offer credits to a country to the detriment of one's own populace, especially when such a country defames the Soviet Union. As the proverb says: "Don't bite the hand that feeds you. If you bite the hand that feeds you, we won't be feeding you anymore. You eat from your own bowl, but I won't let you take from mine."

These things will make our politics stronger. They will accuse us and say that we want to enforce political conditions on them. For a long time now, we have told them that there must be solidarity between socialist countries, but they do not practice solidarity. We will tell them that this would help them a great deal in getting a loan, but if they want, they can also get it from the United States. We will tell them that this situation is not good.

But this aggravation of the situation also has a positive outcome. By this I mean the fact that before, whenever we disagreed on many issues, we used to keep silent, whereas they were very aggressive in their press and published all kinds of articles. Now we can speak up in our press introducing documented arguments. People can understand our position better now. On the basis on this position, socialist forces grow in unity whereas the opportunistic line of the Yugoslavs gets publicly exposed.

We have prepared a long letter in response to Tito's letter, and we will show it to you. This letter exposes their opportunistic line. Our stance towards the Yugoslavs will continue to be the ideological battle and polemics without resorting to insults. Let us engage in polemics with them so that ordinary people can understand us, but let us not use insults, such as calling them spies and so on, and let us not waste our breath with things that people will not understand. This would only help them, like the time when nobody in Yugoslavia believed the charge that Tito was a spy. This kind of propaganda back then only helped Tito in the conflict with us by bolstering his domestic position. We should not resort to those kinds of insults.

The situation in the people's democracies now is good (he mentions all of the people's democracies with the exception of Romania). In China, too, the situation is good. In Poland, reactionary forces are mobilizing. [Władysław] Gomułka is faced with a difficult situation. The kinds of things published in the Polish press do not reflect the Central Committee's position; they go against Gomułka. But I think that things are going towards a stronger position for the party and the working class, and Gomułka's position is growing stronger too. The elections in Poland are very important. Zhou Enlai, who will come here for a visit, will also go to Poland. This will help Gomułka's position. We thought that it would be better to have the Chinese speak in Poland to help Gomułka's position than if we were to speak there, because reactionary forces have mobilized against us.

Things are improving in Hungary. It greatly depends on [János] Kádár and his comrades, not to attract elements from the bourgeois parties into the government right now. Now it is time to destroy the counterrevolution, to strengthen the party and then they can decide who must join the government, so that representatives of other parties understand that they might not make into the government at all. There is no reason for Kádár to rush; nobody is going to touch him and our military is there. The Hungarian workers understand that what happened was a counterrevolution and that our decision to crush it was in the interest of the working class. Later on, the assistance that the Soviet Union provided to Hungary in crushing the counterrevolution will become even clearer. Relations with England, France, and America are clear.

Events in Hungary triggered a campaign against the Soviet Union, but, on the other hand, they also strengthened our position. Military measures demonstrated to our enemies that the Soviet Union jealously guards its interests. This was a wakeup call to our enemies. They thought that after Stalin's death the Soviet leadership did not have enough heart to aggressively respond to enemies. Now they will understand what is meant by politics of coexistence. We want coexistence, but we will not make concessions in the name of capitalism and to the detriment of the socialist camp. What has happened until now has been a victory for us. If we had had losses, it would have been different. Now they will be more careful with us, and it is unlikely that they will adopt any crazy initiatives because the Soviet Union will not let them and war would be imminent.

This is how we assess the situation. Our standing is strong. The noise that is out there right now will calm down. If the Soviet Union and the people's democracies will grow even stronger, then we will ensure that the capitalist forces in the world will be destroyed.

As far as your economic situation is concerned, give us the documentation so that we may study it and provide a response when the delegation gets here. You must understand that we request the material only to study it and that the answer is that we will help you. In terms of your government delegation, let us discuss it. We think that it is important that a delegation gets here. On 3 January, the German delegation will get here, then the Hungarians, the Czechs, and then, you, the Albanians.

[i] The reference here is to Tito's speech in Pula, on 11 November 1956, in which he analyzed the international situation after the Soviet intervention in Hungary and targeted Stalinist "elements" in Moscow. The speech was originally published in Borba, 16 November 1956.

[ii] Veljko Mićunović was the Yugoslav Ambassador in Moscow.

[iii] Koçi Xoxe served as Minister of Interior and Central Committee Secretary from 1945 until 1948, when he was purged at the First Congress of the Communist Party of Albania (CPA) for "deviationism." He was executed in 1949.

[iv] Enver Hoxha's article, published on occasion of PLA's 15th anniversary, was in fact a thinly veiled attack against Tito. See "Albanskoi partii truda - 15 let," Pravda, 8 November 1956, 3. In his Pula speech, Tito also responded in kind to Hoxha.

[v] Khrushchev refers to the trial and execution of Liri Gega, Dali Ndreu (her husband), and Peter Bulatović the previous month, in November 1956. Gega, once a member of the Politburo, was expelled from the Central Committee in 1944 for "sectarianism." She remained a nuisance to Hoxha because she refused the official party line on the crucial wartime activities of Xoxe, Hoxha, and others. Placed under tight surveillance, she was accused-based mostly on fabricated evidence and forced self-incrimination-of collaborating with the Yugoslavs. Rumors (so far, unsubstantiated) emerged that Gega had been pregnant at the time of the execution, a fact that Khrushchev would later affirm publicly to denounce Hoxha as an unrepentant Stalinist.

[vi] Mir Jafar Baghirov was the head of the Soviet Azerbaijan Republic. In the summer of 1953, he was dismissed from his duties and quickly thereafter arrested. In 1956, he was tried on charges of cooperating with Security Chief Lavrenti Beria, and other charges, and sentenced to death. [vii] Those referenced here include Yugoslav communist officials Aleksandar Ranković (Head of Secret Police), party theorist Edvard Kardelj, Koča Popović (Foreign Minister), and Mijalko Todorović.