

July 14, 1961

**Memorandum of Conversation between Liu Shaoqi
and R.K. Nehru**

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Summary:

Liu Shaoqi and R.K.Nehru discussed agriculture and the people's communes system.

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Chinese

Contents:

Translation - English

R.K. Nehru: When all is said and done, are there more advantages to being a big country with a large population, or more disadvantages?

Liu Shaoqi: There are more advantages to being a big country with a large population. There are always more disadvantages to having a small population and a small country. Of course, when the country and population are large, there are troubles too, but overall, as long as it can be managed well, as long as the people are organized well and it is led well, there are more advantages. Right now we, too, have met with some difficulties. Before our revolution succeeded, and also after the revolution, our work of [national] construction was at first relatively smooth; later, we ran into some difficulties.

The difficulties are economic, mainly in the agricultural sector. We can't yet control the weather. In the past two years there has been famine due to crop failure, and it has not rained much this year either; for example, the Beijing area could be said to have had three years of drought. But we believe these difficulties are temporary, that they are surmountable.

Our cadres are still not very practiced in leading economic work.

R.K. Nehru: May I ask, do you [all] think that people's communes are advantageous in developing agricultural production, or disadvantageous?

Liu Shaoqi: [Indian] Ambassador [Gopalapuram] Parthasarathy once asked about the people's commune situation, at his first meeting with us; at the time, I said that this was an experiment—a great, historic experiment—and that regardless of whether it succeeded or failed, it was still historically significant. Are rural people's communes advantageous or disadvantageous in developing agricultural production? We have already experimented for three years; there are still some problems, and some things have gone wrong. This is unavoidable in any historic experimental period. But we think it can still be done—it has only been tried for three years; [we] can experiment with it for ten years and then draw a conclusion.

R.K. Nehru: Ambassador Parthasarathy is more fortunate than I am; he saw the people's communes. When I left, there were still only advanced agricultural cooperatives. May I ask what factors led you to go from advanced agricultural cooperatives to people's communes? I ask this question because, even though India and China have different social systems, we are facing the same problems. We all want to increase production, industrialize, modernize and reform society.

Liu Shaoqi: There has already been much progress in our advanced agricultural cooperatives. [We] could have continued with these for many years without entering into people's communes. But the farming masses have already joined together on the basis of the advanced cooperatives to form communes, wanting to create better conditions for developing agricultural production. With the farmers wanting to do things this way, the question facing us was whether to condone or oppose it. At that time we did consider that there might be some problems with it in the future, that it probably wasn't entirely appropriate, but the farming masses wanted to do this, and had already set up people's communes—then, should we condone or oppose it? Whether it was right or wrong is for history to decide. We thought that if the communes were well-organized, with a suitable system of policies, they would prove superior to advanced cooperatives in spurring agricultural production. To make them helpful in spurring agricultural production, it would not do to [use only] a short period of time. Only in experimenting, on the basis of experience, can one find better methods. At present the [communes] have only been running for three years; it's too early to draw conclusions. The time has not yet come to say they're that good, because we still don't have enough experience; nor is it time yet to say they're bad.

R.K. Nehru: As an old friend, I would like to ask a straightforward question. Why do some socialist countries have doubts about whether the people's communes you've organized can succeed? What do they base this on? I don't know whether I should ask this kind of question.

Liu Shaoqi: [You] can ask this question. It is very natural to raise this question; even we ourselves considered, at the time, whether we should have communes. The problem was that the farming masses had already started organizing people's communes. At this time, should you condone it or oppose it? Forbid it or not forbid it, or praise it? The first time I met with Ambassador Parthasarathy we also talked about this question. At the time, everyone said that people's communes were good, but I said to the Ambassador at the time that whether they were good or bad would have to be tested. I said this was a major event, a great historic experiment by the broad masses of farmers; it was a mass movement, and regardless of whether it succeeded or failed, it was meaningful. Our revolution also went through many experiments, not a few of which failed. When India's [Mahatma] Gandhi led the struggle against the British, there were also many experiments, and many of them also failed. China's Sun Zhongshan [Sun Yat-sen] made revolution his whole life and was always failing; he didn't succeed once. But his failure was very beneficial to us. Without his failures, we could not have triumphed.

R.K. Nehru: But the people's communes are still, on the whole, successful?

Liu Shaoqi: It's too early to say they're successful. But we think they can succeed. Right now we have only tested this for three years; let's see in another seven years. Some specific policies and methods will not become complete without experience. Now that we have some experience, our duty is to formulate some specific policies and methods so that the people's communes can develop more normally. Today is different from three years ago. We can make some judgments about which things are beneficial to developing agricultural production and which are not, and in doing so can stipulate some methods to put the communes on a relatively healthy track. But [what we have done so far] is still not enough; experience must still be summarized, and methods improved, in order to develop better.

Agricultural cooperatives help to develop agricultural production; there is already experience [to prove] this. China, the Soviet Union, and other socialist countries already have this experience. If, on the basis of advanced agricultural production cooperatives, one makes use of the beneficial conditions of advanced agricultural production cooperatives, then adds people's communes, there will be even more beneficial conditions for developing agricultural production.

R.K. Nehru: We live in an age of social experimentation. Every nation differs in its historical background and specific circumstances. Although I'm not very clear on how the people's communes are implemented, I do sincerely wish you and the people of this honorable country success. I hope that [communes] can lead to higher production, better living standards, and overall happier lives. We in India have a different kind of system. We are currently experimenting with a rural development plan. We have also encountered great difficulties, but generally speaking it is successful.