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Letter, Boris Polevoi to the CC CPSU, Mistakes Regarding Social Ties with China

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Summary:

Soviet writer Boris Polevoi writes to the Central Committee concerning "a series of very serious mistakes" in Soviet social and cultural relations with China. These mistakes include the lack of a Soviet edition of the "Society for Chinese-Soviet Friendship" placed in the capital of the Soviet republics, the extravagant behavior of Soviet delegates in China, and evidence of China as being referred to as an inferior partner in the Soviet Union. Resetting these mistakes might strengthen Sino-Soviet public relations.

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CC of the CPSU

I managed to spend thirty five days in the Chinese People's Republic with a delegation of Soviet writers. We traveled through all the main provinces of the country for a long time, and, it seemed to us, had heart-felt discussions with numerous Chinese from all walks of life, beginning with the Premier Zhou Enlai and including simple people. Among the people we met were famous writers, academicians, managers of provincial party organizations, local branches of the Friendship Society of China and the Soviet Union, the directors of functioning construction factories, workers and peasants, and members of agricultural cooperatives.

In connection with this I consider it my duty to the party to communicate to the Central Committee information concerning, in my view, a series of very serious mistakes in the work of our organizations involved in conducting social ties with China, which seem to me to be significantly out of date and in need of further strengthening.

The Society for Chinese-Soviet Friendship has been in existence already for a long time in China, headed by one of the most authoritative activists of New China, Cde. Song Jiling. Traveling around China, we routinely, in big cities and small villages, came across the fruitful activities of this society—exhibits popularizing the achievements of the Soviet Union, reports about the Soviet Union, regularly produced for factories and even for the distant countryside, and the dissemination of Soviet literature, Soviet films, and so on. The Society has millions of members and is an extremely active and militaristic organization. Often in conversations with the leadership of the society or during reports prepared for us we were given inspired questions about whether or not we have a similar society in the USSR, how many members does it have, and so on. Our responses to the effect that cultural ties with all governments are handled by VOKS, and that we have several millions of friends in China, did not sound particularly convincing. The answer that we do not have such a society creates [the impression] of an unjust inequality in the mutual popularization of achievements, and it seems to us that this has already come to the attention of Chinese public opinion (*obshchestvennost'*). It seems to us that it is time to organize in the Soviet Union a corresponding Society of Soviet-Chinese Friendship with branches, at least, in the capitals of the republics, that the society should be a public and propagandistic organization, and led by well-known social figures with suitable experience. VOKS, which according to its charter is supposed to fulfill this role, seems to us to be unsuitable [for this task]. It seems to us that we should also issue a Soviet version of the newspaper, "Friendship," in Chinese, so that the Chinese would receive first-hand interesting material from the Soviet press. The writer and representative of CC Agitprop Cde. Zhou Yan suggested the issue properly, it seems to me, concerning the publication in Beijing and in Moscow of corresponding bibliographic guides with short descriptive notes, which would direct attention there and here to interesting works in Soviet and Chinese literature, and would recommend material for reading and the translation of the more significant articles in culture and science. This would help to make the translations correct and ensure that in both countries, based on mutual recommendation, only the best [articles] were translated.

The Chinese comrades devote exclusive attention to all Soviet figures traveling to China. Their ministers and leading figures of the country consider it their duty to welcome even secondary delegations, and engage them in conversation. Unfortunately, in this regard [the experience] is not mutual. For us all delegations are part of one general wave, but the Chinese, who treat us to politely with such attention, have the right to expect more from our side. This concerns the reception of the delegations, the care for their needs while they are here, and especially, the arrangement of meetings of the Chinese comrades with leading workers. This is especially the case with public measures, where the matter on our side is handled

very poorly. During our stay in China there was a Soviet film festival going on. It proceeded like an enormous cultural festival. There was preparatory mass work in factories, enterprises, and in the countryside, reports were presented, and as a result we were witness to the significant collection of people that took part in the festival. At the same time in Moscow a corresponding festival of Chinese film was taking place, and in China the sad news emerged that it was organized in a bureaucratic way, for commercial purposes, that films were shown to empty theaters, in a word, that our organizers relate to this as simply a routine "measure" to be checked off in some report. Go Moruo in his parting conversation politely directed my attention to this and added: "Probably, our films are still poorly made, and do not attract the interest of the Soviet viewer." Indeed the Chinese do not waste their words. Evidently, it made quite an impression.

In China they retain a memory of what is forgotten among us, and often recall those people who were the first emissaries to China of Lenin who significantly strengthened Chinese-Soviet friendship. The youth of the leaders of China today was connected to such people as Malin, Joffe, Borodin, Bliukher and other famous figures in China who have been forgotten among us, participants in the struggle of Zhong Shan [Sun Yat-sen], the teachers of the Guangzhou rural schools and the Whampoa Military Academy, the participants in the northern campaigns. Their portraits are in historical-revolutionary museums, and there are books about them and the guides talk about them extensively as the founders of Chinese-Soviet friendship, and people remember them and are proud of their friendships with them and so on. Yet we know nothing about them. Often uncomfortable situations emerge that in my view deserve attention. I think if we knew the names of the people, not everyone but at least some of them, that established the friendship with China this would be noticed by the Chinese and help the cause of the friendship. This would right away free us and them from the somewhat awkward lack of agreement currently existing between us.

It is time, it seems to me, to think seriously about the organization of the work of the Soviet advisers in Chinese industry. In most cases these are excellent people, with great and interesting experience, who are very intelligent and handle themselves well. The Chinese comrades offer them excellent conditions, pay rates, travel throughout the country, stays in the most expensive hotel rooms, feeding them well in restaurants ("chefanakh") [chifan, to eat food, Russified here], hosting them at banquets, and so on. The Chinese are a very economical people. It is not a secret that they live simply, and their modesty is evident even in their work style. It seems to me that the Soviet comrades are too pliant in their relationship to the privileged position and good fortune that they find themselves in. I think it is time to look into this problem, and to instruct our comrades that they do not have the duty to accept the good fortune that has come to them, and that they should live modestly and not compel the Chinese to make luxurious expenditures, and be content with their salary, which, it must be said, is very high. As an illustration of this situation I have taken the liberty of including here a report and personal letter from a Soviet scientist to a comrade-scientist in Moscow. In this letter, which is not written as a report, an intelligent and farsighted Soviet scientist and communist, it seems to me, reveals the inadequacies in current relations between the Soviet specialists and the Chinese, which we have heard about before at various times in various places from our engineers. I present the letter with the permission of the addressee.

And finally, concerning the Soviet side of the airline which is currently contributing to the connection between Moscow and Beijing. Our international lines have improved their work somewhat to the western countries, but this portion is as before in extremely bad shape, and revealing this for all to observe, as this line is used by a large collection of people from diverse nations, from Europe and China, is becoming a matter of political significance. Our airplane, on which there was a Chinese state security delegation headed by members of the CC returning from Poland, on 16 October was delayed for an entire day on the trip from Krasnoyarsk to Irkutsk because they could not find the appropriate fuel. On the return trip in Novosibirsk we had to change from an international airplane, as there was a smaller collection of

passengers continuing on to Moscow. And on this plane there was a Czechoslovak delegation headed by the Minister of Foreign Trade, and a Chinese delegation. Two flights were cancelled. The airport building was magnificent, but the service remained the same as when it was a peasant's hut. In three places along this route, maintaining the connection to China, hang copies of the well-known, if it might be said, pictures of Nalbandian, which illustrate Stalin and Mao Zedong, with Mao Zedong with the appearance of an agitated student attempting to pass an exam given by a professor. These pictures are nauseating even in the original, and here hang like copies from a bazaar. In general it would be better to decorate the airport in the foreign fashion, with large, colored and beautiful photographs and cities and locations traveled to by the planes, instead of pot-boiler copies of well-known works which can only evoke shudders from someone possessing even a limited amount of taste. In Novosibirsk across from the entrance to the airport on two columns hangs an enormous plywood shield, entitled "The USSR—the leading socialist power in the world." A giant red map of the USSR is drawn on it, and to the side are two columns, in alphabetical order, of the some ten countries of the people's democracies; thus China in this list comes after Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary (Vengrii), and the GDR. The Novosibirsk comrades, seeing this map, are completely devoid of a sense of humor, even as the following is written on the large map: population 200 million people, and on the small map—China—600 million. We ourselves have seen the amusement of foreigners as they look at this map. It seems to me that is necessary to severely revise this line and instruct the oblast committees of the party daily to work in the area of the cultural condition of the airports, the service there, and so on.

Relating to this, the contrast between the Soviet and Chinese portions of the line are striking, and this also seems to me to have political [consequences].

B. Polevoi

26 November 1956