

November 28, 1968

Conversations between Mao Zedong and E. F. Hill

Citation:

"Conversations between Mao Zedong and E. F. Hill", November 28, 1968, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Chinese Communist Party Central Archives. Translated by Chen Jian.
<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/117143>

Summary:

Mao and Australian Communist Party leader E. F. Hill discuss the state the socialist movement in China and on the international stage.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

Original Language:

Chinese

Contents:

Translation - English

Mao Zedong: Did you visit China last year also at this time?

Hill: Yes, I came here last year around this time.

Mao Zedong: At that time, the working class in Beijing was not so united, and bad elements were stirring up trouble among the workers and dividing them into two factions in many factories.

Hill: Now the situation has improved tremendously.

Mao Zedong: Yes. When the bad elements have been exposed, things become better.

Hill: Yes.

Mao Zedong: We have never cleaned up the factories in the past. Our schools had been dominated by bourgeois intellectuals. A large portion of the countryside had been controlled by bad elements. It seems to me that it is not so difficult for revisionism to prevail.

Hill: Indeed, it is not.

Mao Zedong: For example, in a People's Commune, some brigades have been composed of several hundred households, some have been composed of several thousand households. Let's say, 2000 households and 10,000 people, and they are under the leadership of a party branch committee. If the branch secretary is not a good person, the whole brigade will be in trouble. Have you visited two factories in Beijing?

Hill: Yes, I did.

Mao Zedong: Are the party secretaries at the factories bad elements?

Hill: I cannot remember exactly what they told me. But the leadership of the factories has been changed.

Mao Zedong: (Turning to Yao Wenyuan[i]) Have you been to the Xinhua Printing Plant?

Yao: Yes. Neither the plant manager nor the party secretary were good persons.

Mao Zedong: This plant has 3,000 workers. Together with family members, almost 10,000. It printed money during the Qing times, and served the Beiyang warlords during the Beiyang period.[ii] When the Japanese took over, it served the Japanese. When the Guomindang took over, it served the Guomindang. During the ten-odd years since we took over the plant, it has served us. Many workers have remained unchanged. The main body of the work force has not changed, still consisting those who had served during the late Qing period and the Beiyang period.

Zhou Enlai[iii]: Now we have added some workers. We have expanded the number of the workers.

Mao Zedong: I mean that those who are in charge have not changed. This is the social foundation for revisionism to prevail in China. Without mobilizing the masses, without thoroughly mobilizing the working class, these problems will never be solved. But if this is not enough, we should send in the People's Liberation Army, and only then can the problems be solved.

Hill: Yes.

Mao Zedong: I want to ask you a question. Do you know what the imperialists will do? I mean, are they going to start a world war? Or maybe they will not start the war at this moment, but will start it after a while? According to your experience in your own country and in other countries, what do you feel?

Hill: In my opinion, they have not decided to start the war. They are facing tremendous difficulties now. And it seems to me that they will not start the war for a while. At least they do not have the strength to start a war on a global scale at the present time. This is the view held by the majority of people I know. However, viewing the situation from another angle, as they have lost the ability to make correct judgments, danger for military confrontation exists. But in an overall sense, they are not in a position to start a world war now.

Mao Zedong: Both the United States and the Soviet Union have the capacity to start a war. Next to them are such defeated countries as Japan, West Germany and Italy. Neither Britain nor France is much interested in fighting a war.

Zhou Enlai: [Charles] De Gaulle even has reduced (France's) military expenditure.

Mao Zedong: Even in Japan and West Germany, I cannot find signs to show that they are willing to fight a war. West Germany wants to annex East Germany so that Germany will be unified. Japan hopes to take back Okinawa. In actuality, Japan has not won its independence.

Zhou Enlai: The United States controls Japan militarily. There are so many American military bases there.

Mao Zedong: The situation after the end of the Second World War has been different from that after the end of the First World War. I do not know whether or not these of my opinions are correct. After World War II, the defeated countries have been unable to separate themselves from the victors. Not only in the field of finance and investment, but also in international and military affairs, they are unable to be independent from the victors. This is different from the situation after World War I. After World War I, Hitler emerged only after he had tried for a few short years.

Zhou Enlai: He did not recognize the Versailles Treaty.

Mao Zedong: He did not recognize the Versailles Treaty. At that time, the workers, intellectuals and the students in those [capitalist] countries were still willing to support the governments. The German Communist Party was such a big party, but it collapsed quickly.

Zhou Enlai: The Italian Communist Party collapsed even earlier.

Mao Zedong: The [German] Socialist Democratic Party also collapsed. The Nationalist Socialist Party and the Storm Troopers (Sturmabteilung) emerged in Germany. According to the rules of the two world wars, the United States always let other

countries fight the war first, and it would take action to enter the war only after the war had been fought for two years. Now both in Korea and in Vietnam, the United States was the first to bear the brunt. It has stationed 200,000 troops in Europe, mainly in Germany. In Vietnam, there are half million. In Korea, two divisions, more than 70,000. There are also [American troops] in Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines, and Thailand. Its military forces are scattered. It has extended two arms, one in Europe, one in Asia, involved in some small battles. Of course, the capitalists have their own calculations.

Zhou Enlai: They can make money.

Mao Zedong: The capitalists are not happy if there is no war for a long period. The capitalists in Australia are also included. They want to dispatch some troops [to Vietnam], but not many.

Kang Sheng[iv]: Only four battalions and 22 planes.

Zhou Enlai: They dispatch some troops, and the Americans will give them some money.

Mao Zedong: And they can also make some money.

Hill: Now the capitalists in Australia think that they have not made enough money, and they are not satisfied.

Mao Zedong: When they are not satisfied, they will quarrel with the Americans, hoping to get more money. How could [Harold] Holt[v] have drowned during swimming.

Hill: In that area the seashore is somewhat dangerous, and many people have drowned there in the past. He went there to have fun by taking risk.

Mao Zedong: That is not bad.

Hill: This is a good way to finish them.

Mao Zedong: What is the name of your prime minister now?

Hill: [John] Gorton.[vi]

Mao Zedong: This name sounds good, Gorton.

Hill: It only sounds good.

Mao Zedong: Your name also sounds good -- Hill.

Hill: It only sounds good.

Mao Zedong: Indeed, it sounds good. Is it "Hill" (Mao pronounced it in English)?

Hill: Yes, it is Hill.

Mao Zedong: How about changing it to “Mountain” (Mao pronounced it in English)? I have read many articles you have written. I am not so diligent as you are. I am lazy. I have not revised some of my own writings. Some of them should be revised. For example, when some of them are to be published in a second edition, I should revise them a little bit. When there is a third edition, I should revise a little bit once more. It is not necessary for some articles to be that long. Comrade Lin Biao[vii] has invented a new method, that is, to compile quotations.

Kang Sheng: The Greek language edition of Chairman Mao’s Quotations is translated by them (pointing to Hill).

Mao Zedong: Oh, it is translated by them. Confucius’s Analects is a collection of quotations. Buddhism also has collections of quotations.

Zhou Enlai: The Adamantine.

Mao Zedong: I am a very lazy person. I have never read the Bible. It does not attract me, and I do not know what is said there. Occasionally I will pick it up, but simply do not want to read it.

Hill: I fully understand what you mean as I often have the same feeling. I cannot read through it. But when I was a small boy, I was forced to read the Bible.

Mao Zedong: That is good. When you are forced to read something, that probably is good for you. Some say that I have never committed any mistake. As a matter of fact, I believed in Confucius’s feudalism when I was a little boy. Later, when I entered school, I believed in capitalism, taking [George] Washington and Napoleon as great heroes, and looking upon [Oliver] Cromwell, [Duke of] Wellington, and Admiral [Horatio] Nelson as wonderful human beings. During [Nikita] Khrushchev’s times, he often claimed that war was inevitable. But now they [the Soviet leaders] no longer make this kind of noise. To say that war is inevitable really means that war is avoidable. In recent years they no longer mention this issue. Isn’t that they seldom touch upon this issue?

Kang Sheng: They never mention this issue now. They sent troops to Czechoslovakia. At the Polish Party’s fifth national congress, this issue was not mentioned.

Mao Zedong: If that is the case, they, both the United States and the Soviet Union, and some other countries, are preparing to spread the war. As far as this is concerned, it seems that a war might begin. I am not quite sure about this question. Therefore I want to ask for your advice. But I can not force you to answer this question immediately. Can you reflect on this issue? We will come back to discuss this issue in one year’s time. But we must take people’s consciousness into our consideration. When the United States stopped bombing North Vietnam, American soldiers in Vietnam were very glad, and they even cheered. This indicates that their morale is not high. Is the morale of American soldiers high? Is the morale of Soviet soldiers high? Is the morale of the French, British, German, and Japanese soldiers high? The student strike is a new phenomenon in European history. Students in the capitalist countries usually do not strike. But now, all under the heaven is great chaos. Mainly in Europe, in the United States, in Latin America, and in Japan, there are student strikes. Are there also student strikes in your country?

Hill: Yes.

Mao Zedong: In another five years, our country, in a relative sense, will be in a better position to serve the revolutions of the people in various countries, the workers’

movement, the students, and the development and expansion of real Marxist parties. Since Japan's surrender in 1945, 23 years have passed. In another five years, 28 years will have passed. Without a war in 28 years? In reality, all kinds of wars have occurred since the end of World War II. According to Lenin, capitalism is war, and capitalism cannot exist without war. There are two superpowers in the world today. They not only have conventional weapons, but also have nuclear weapons. This is something that is not easy to deal with. They themselves also know this. Khrushchev's theory was that if the atomic bomb were used the earth would be destroyed, and that no winner would emerge in the war. The United States also holds the same view. These two superpowers are nuclear powers. Our country, in a sense, is still a non-nuclear power. With this little nuclear weaponry, we cannot be counted as a nuclear country.[viii] If we are to fight a war, we must use conventional weapons. Since we are neither the chief of staff of the Americans nor the chief of staff of the Soviets, we have no idea what exactly they are going to do, and we can only make our judgment by observing the situation. The populations of these two countries are similar, if they are to fight a large war, they will feel shortage in manpower. Now, by fighting a middle-size war, such as the war in Vietnam, the United States already has difficulties with manpower, the shortage in pilots in particular.

(Mao Zedong turned to Chen Boda[ix] and Kang Sheng) What have you discussed with them?

Kang Sheng: We have discussed our Party's Twelfth Plenum and that we are planning to convene the Ninth Party Congress. We also have discussed the true Marxist parties and groups in the world, such as the Stalin Group in the Soviet Union and some new Marxist-Leninist groups in Czechoslovakia and Poland. We also have discussed the parliamentary election questions you have discussed with the Italian comrades. Comrade Hill is particularly interested in your opinions on the "thoroughly establish" issue and on the "absolute authority" issue. He says that this discussion has been particularly enlightening for him.

Mao Zedong: The so-called "thoroughly establish" issue was mainly put forward by our former acting chief of staff Yang Chengwu.[x] Actually he was to "thoroughly establish" the authority of himself, while at the same time pursuing polycentrism. So far as "absolute authority" is concerned, I do not believe that such a thing ever exists on the earth. Marx, Engels, and Lenin seldom mentioned absolute authority, they only talked about the absolute truth. The so-called "absolute truth" is nothing but the total sum of various relative truths. This was what they had discussed, and this is what many philosophers have mentioned. I say that I have never seen "house" and I have never eaten "fruit." What I have seen is the Great Hall of the People, or such things like the Beijing Hotel where you are staying. Except for these things, the so-called "house" is something that you cannot see. I have not eaten "fruit." Probably you have, but I have not. I have not had peach, or pear, or apple. These are all very special names. All apples -- big apples and small apples; apples produced in this province, and apples produced in that province; apples from this country, and apples from that country -- are in the final analysis apples. "Fruit" is an abstract concept, although it is impossible to leave abstract concepts aside. Therefore, to follow people's customs, we may still say that we eat fruit, or say that we live in houses. Lenin points out that the specific is one aspect or one part of the general. For example, Comrade Hill, you have a very common name, and there are people with the surname Hill everywhere. Where did the name come from?

Hill: According to the tradition in England, people often take the place where they live as their name. The name Hill probably came from people who lived on a hill. For another example, there is a name Mill, which probably comes from those whose work was related to the mill.

Mao Zedong: Do you have people with the surname Water in your country?

Hill: Yes.

Mao Zedong: In China, there are the surnames Sui (water) and Jin (gold). But there is no such surname Yin (silver) in China, though Silver is a surname in foreign countries. In China there is also the surname Tian (field).

Zhou Enlai: Even the surname Xi (tin).

Hill: This is quite similar to tradition in England.

Mao Zedong: Is Stone a surname in your country?

Hill: Yes.

Mao Zedong: The situations in China and in other countries are quite similar, and many surnames come from feudal states in ancient times. For example, my surname is Mao, which came from a small state about 2,000 years ago under the rule of a dynasty. It was the Zhou Dynasty, Comrade Zhou Enlai's Zhou. (Pointing to Yao Wenyuan) Your surname is Yao, and you are the descendent of Emperor Yao. You are a descendant of an Emperor. In reality, whether or not Emperor Yao ever existed is a question.

Yao: It was legendary.

Mao Zedong: There is no evidence for the existence of Emperor Yao, Emperor Shun, or Da Yu.[xi] Probably there were some tribes with those names at that time.

Zhou Enlai: And they have changed from legendary figures to historical figures.

Mao Zedong: It is said that the Zhou, which had only about 3,000 slaves, defeated the state ruled by King Zhou of the Yin,[xii] which had several hundred thousand slaves. You see, how did we shift our discussion from the war issue to historical issues?

Hill: It is a pleasure to discuss them anyway.

Mao Zedong: Have you been to the United States?

Hill: No. They do not welcome a person like me and refuse to issue me a visa.

Mao Zedong: How about Europe?

Hill: That is OK.

Mao Zedong: Do you need a visa to travel from Australia to Britain?

Hill: In the past we did not need a visa. But now permission is required mainly because of labor laws. This is a problem concerning labor. For example, if I want to travel to Britain, I must first go to the British consul's office to have my passport stamped, proving what I am going to do in Britain.

Mao Zedong: What do you tell them?

Hill: During my last two visits, I had legitimate reasons. So long as you tell them that you are a tourist and that you will be staying there only for a limited time period, they will approve your application. However, the change indicates that Great Britain has been declining. In the past traveling [from Australia] to Britain was completely [dependent] upon one's free will. But now procedures have changed.

Mao Zedong: I am told that this is for solving the problem of unemployment. Britain has been sending its people to Canada, and sometimes also sends its people to the United States. Do they also send people to your country?

Hill: Yes, there are many British residents immigrating to Australia.

Mao Zedong: I do not mean immigration. I mean whether or not they still send people to your country now.

Hill: Yes, there are still people moving from Britain to Australia now. But they are not sent by the government; they move there by themselves.

Mao Zedong: The British government allows them to do so?

Hill: Not just allow, but even encourage.

Mao Zedong: This is for reducing the pressure on employment in its own country. I am told that the population in your country has doubled in thirty years, from six million to twelve million.

Hill: That is correct.

Mao Zedong: How long does it take to fly from your country to Hong Kong?

Hill: More than ten hours by air. The distance between Australia and Hong Kong is about 4,500 miles, which is equal to more than 7,000 kilometers.

Mao Zedong: In my opinion, the world needs to be unified. There are miles, kilometers, and sea miles, and there are also so many different languages. It is difficult to unify the language immediately, but if the world is unified these problems can be solved. In the past, many, including the Mongols, the Romans in the West, Alexander the Great, Napoleon, and the British Empire, wanted to unify the world. Today, both the United States and the Soviet Union want to unify the world. Hitler wanted to unify the world. The Japanese wanted to unify the Pacific area. But they all failed. It seems to me that the possibility to unify the world has not disappeared. The capitalist system is forcing the peoples in the world to accept capitalism, and this is a way by which to unify the world. Another way is that the peoples of the world will rise to make revolution and then unite together. In my view, the world can be unified. Now the United States is maneuvering the United Nations. I am afraid that it is not easy for either the imperialists or the revisionists to unify the world. Can they make a nuclear war, by which they will almost eliminate the population of the world, and then let the United States and the Soviet Union unify the world? But these two countries have too small a population, and they will not have enough manpower if it is dispersed. Further, they are also afraid of fighting a nuclear war. They are not afraid of eliminating population in other countries, but they are afraid of their own population being eliminated. Those countries located in the second intermediate zone, such as Britain, France, Germany, Japan, and Italy, are secondary powers. I am afraid that they are unwilling to fight a war. After all, I am afraid that we still must go the path directed by Marxism, first let peoples in various countries make revolution, and then freely unite together. Why is it necessary to have all these differences at

this time? At first, the Americans loved to talk about cosmopolitanism, but later they no longer talked so much about it. In fact, they favor unifying the world. I have read your articles. The intrusion of American capital into your country has caused discontent with the Americans. There is a difference between the Vietnam War and the Korean War, that is, the European countries are not there. Britain, France, Turkey, and Belgium all participated in the Korean War. Let me put forward a question, I will try to answer it, and you will try to answer it. I will consider it, and I ask you also to consider it. This is an issue with worldwide significance. This is the issue about war. The issue about war and peace. Will we see a war, or will we see a revolution? Will the war give rise to revolution, or will revolution prevent war? All in all, now there is neither war nor revolution. Such a situation will not last long. Is it about the time to finish the meeting?

Hill: Thank you very much.

Mao Zedong: I am told that you are leaving tomorrow?

Hill: Yes:

Mao Zedong: Have a safe journey.

Hill: Thank you very much. I thank the Chairman and the Chinese Communist Party for inviting us to visit China again. This visit is of great value for me, and it is also a great inspiration for my comrades.

Mao Zedong: Is it valuable?

Hill: Yes, extremely valuable. I fully agree with the Chairman's opinions on the "absolute authority" issue, and I also fully agree with the Chairman's opinion about the "thoroughly establish" question. But I also feel that we have a very important task, that is, we should go all out to spread and to apply Chairman Mao's thoughts. In this regard, we had not anticipated the great developments that have been achieved as we see it now.

Mao Zedong: We are planning to compile a collection of quotations by Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin. (Pointing toward Chen Boda and others) You are compiling the collection. Do not make it too long. If it is too long, people will have no time to read it. But do not make it too short either, if it is too short their basic ideas cannot be reflected. For example, capitalism is war. It seems that this rule no longer works now.

Zhou Enlai: Certainly it still works. After the end of World War II, small wars have never ended.

Hill: Yes.

Mao Zedong: There were also big wars, such as China's War of Liberation.[xiii]

Hill: I have debated with the revisionists in Australia on this issue.

Mao Zedong: After World War I, there were China's Northern Expedition and the ten-year Land Revolution War.[xiv] There was also the Spanish Civil War. (Pointing toward Zhou Enlai) Where did those five persons go?

Zhou Enlai: They were sent to Algeria by train.

Mao Zedong: We have five students in Morocco to study the language. The Moroccan government did not like these five students and expelled them. They were expelled to Algeria. Are they staying at our embassy?

Zhou Enlai: Yes, they are staying at our embassy. It (the Moroccan government) fears students.

Mao Zedong: Now some governments fear students very much. How can these five students be feared?

Yao Wenyuan: Somehow they also fear the Red Guards.

Mao Zedong: Let's stop here.

[i] Yao Wenyuan was then a member of the Central Cultural Group. He would be elected a member of the CCP Politburo at the Party's Ninth Congress in April 1969. As one of the "Gang of Four" (together with Wang Hongwen, Zhang Chunqiao, and Jiang Qing, Mao Zedong's wife), he was arrested in October 1976.

[ii] Mao Zedong alluded to the period from 1912 to 1928.

[iii] Zhou Enlai was the premier of the PRC State Council and, then, a member of the CCP Politburo Standing Committee.

[iv] Kang Sheng was then a member of the CCP Politburo Standing Committee and an advisor to the Cultural Revolution Group. He had been in charge of the CCP's external liaison affairs, as well as the Party's secret service for many years.

[v] Harold Holt was Australia's prime minister from January 1966 to December 1967. On 17 December 1967, while swimming at Portsea, Victoria, he disappeared and was presumed to have drowned.

[vi] John Gorton was Australia's prime minister from December 1967 to March 1971.

[vii] Lin Biao was then vice chairman of the CCP CC, defense minister, and Mao Zedong's designated successor. In September 1971, after the failure of an alleged coup attempt aimed at assassinating Mao Zedong, Lin Biao, together with his wife and son, escaped by plane from China. They all died, however, when the plane crashed in Outer Mongolia after failing to make an emergency landing.

[viii] China tested its first atomic bomb in October 1964 and the first hydrogen bomb in May 1967.

[ix] Chen Boda was then a member of the CCP Politburo Standing Committee and head of the Cultural Revolution Group. He would be purged by Mao Zedong in 1970 and disappeared from China's political arena.

[x] Yang Chengwu, acting PLA chief of staff from early 1966 to March 1968, was purged in March 1968 for alleged involvement in activities against Lin Biao. After Lin Biao's death, he was "rehabilitated" in the 1970s. Mao Zedong here referred to an article, published in Yang Chengwu's name, entitled "Thoroughly Establish the Absolute Authority of the Great Supreme Commander Chairman Mao and His Great Thought." For an English translation, see Peking Review, 10 November 1967, pp. 17-24.

[xi] Yao, Shun, and Da Yu were all legendary figures in pre-dawn Chinese history.

[xii] King Zhou, an infamous tyrant, was the last king of the Yin dynasty, which existed in the middle-reach of the Yellow River from around the 17th to 11th centuries BC.

[xiii] Mao refers to the Chinese civil war between the CCP and the Guomindang in 1946-1949, ending with the CCP's victory.

[xiv] The Northern Expedition occurred in 1926-1927, and the Land Revolution War lasted from 1927 to 1936.