

March 28, 1961

**Summary of the Conversation between Comrade
Peng Zhen and Romanian Ambassador in China
Barbu Zaharescu**

Citation:

"Summary of the Conversation between Comrade Peng Zhen and Romanian Ambassador in China Barbu Zaharescu", March 28, 1961, Wilson Center Digital Archive, PRC FMA 109-03792-03, 6-13. Translated by Lu Sun.
<https://wilson-center.drivingcreative.com/document/120005>

Summary:

Peng Zhen and Barbu Zaharescu discuss China's "great famine."

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from MacArthur Foundation

Original Language:

Chinese

Contents:

Translation - English

Summary of the Conversation between Comrade Peng Zhen and Romanian Ambassador in China [Barbu] Zaharescu

Time: 11:30 am, 28 March 1961

Location: Comrade Peng Zhen's Residence

Attendees: Deputy Mayor Jia Tingsan, Division Chief Xin Yi, Deputy Director Chen Boqing

Translator: Ding Yuanhong

Transcript: Shen Zhiwei

Comrade Peng Zhen: You are going back home! When are you leaving?

[Barbu] Zaharescu: Tomorrow.

Peng: Why are you going back in such a rush? You haven't stayed here for a long time, have you?

Zaharescu: Not because I am busy. It was because [our] party that wants me to go back quickly. I will pay a visit to you before going back home, because you are a friend of our country and you have been to our country for a couple of times.

Peng: I have been to your country for a couple of times. But I have never been to some East European countries. I would like to go to your country again. But if I only go to your country without going to other countries once, other countries will mind: why not go to their country?

Zaharescu: You are quite busy. It is impossible to visit every single country. You have been to our country, and are more familiar with us. Our Romanian party, country and people treat you as our friend; just like me, I have been in China for two years, and you may see me as a friend of China.

Peng: We will be friends forever. The Romanian Labor Party, led by the Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, the Romanian government and people are our friends forever. Our two countries are good friends forever. China has one saying: "Proof of the pudding, time will tell." This saying can apply to the bilateral relations between the two parties as well as the two countries, isn't it? You see [our relationship] can withstand the test?

Zaharescu: This sentence is correct. I can assure that, Chinese comrades can test the friendship of our party, country, and people toward the Chinese party and people. [You] will see this friendship as genuine and candid.

Peng: Same here, same here.

Zaharescu: I have worked in China for two years and two months. Though it's a short period to understand a big country like China, I will come to know China's achievements after all, especially to know Chinese people's hearts. I feel quite cordial here. Regretfully I cannot continue working here anymore. Otherwise I have to learn Chinese (I have already begun to learn), at that time we can have conversations directly.

Peng: That would be much convenient to communicate without going through them (referring to embassy attaché Dong Luo and translator Ding Yuanhong). Now without them, we can communicate mentally, but not on specific issues.

The two years when you stayed in China were two difficult years. On the one hand we have achieved greatly in work, on the other hand, [we] have encountered great famine. Such famine has been rare in Chinese history, thus it's difficult to deal with. If it were not for the dictatorship of the proletariat, people's commune, the general line, and the Great Leap Forward in China, it would be unthinkable [to confront] today's situation. It would be much more difficult than today's situation. We are mobilizing the entire party and people to manage to overcome the current difficulty. The spring has gone and things are getting better. The present difficulty comes from the natural disaster as well as human factors, namely, the subjective factor. at present the leadership of some communes are seized by landlords, rich farmers or their lackeys, or seized by generates who used to be members of the Communist Party and of poor peasants origin, but degenerated. These people are allies of the enemy. [They are] turning from revolutionaries to enemies. [It's difficult] to differentiate them from the enemies. If there is a difference, that would be: the first ones are fought into [enemies], the late ones are turning into [enemies]. There is the third kind of people, who we call dead bureaucrats, because they would not listen to the opinion of central and higher authorities, nor that of the masses. Can you say that they are our people? They are not. You say they are enemies. They are neither. [If] we say they are our people, they would not listen to the opinion of central and higher authorities and the masses, how could you call them our people? In some places, the leadership positions of communes' production teams are controlled by these people. Of course it's quite few units seized and controlled by landlords, rich farmers, and generates, but posing great danger. After the reactionary ruling classes were turned down, and through the masses' struggle, even so, the landlords, rich farmers, and bourgeois elements still have such influence. These landlords, rich farmers were struggled against by the masses in the period of land reform. Here we have seriously carried out [the Campaign of] the Suppression of Counterrevolutionaries, mainly through the mobilization of the masses. Law enforcement authorities, combined with the mobilization of the masses, carried out the [the Campaign of] the Suppression of Counterrevolutionaries thoroughly. There were millions [of people] who were sentenced to prison, and millions of [of people] who were regulated. Those who were guilty of the most atrocious crimes had blood on their hands. The fight with Jiang Jieshi, and the 21-year anti-Japanese war did not end the armed struggle. [We] still have such situation after seizing power through armed struggle, overthrowing three enemies, and experiencing the [the Campaign of] the Suppression of Counterrevolutionaries. Only for two years we did not carry out the Rectification Movement. In these two years, [we] have been busy with production, the Great Leap Forward and other work. We did not have time to devote to the rectification of the whole community and the [leadership] team, on top of the fact that some comrades were transferred out to develop industries and water conservation. [That was] how the reactionaries seized the opportunity to usurp the leadership. Here we also had many instances of small Hungarian Events: one production small team, one big team, a [people's] commune, and even some small factories.

Zaharescu: What's your opinion [on this]? Was it reactionaries took up arms and [launched] riots?

Peng: No. It's the usurpation of leadership, the Petőfi Club, and the peaceful evolution. Has Dulles brought forward peaceful revolution? They carried out Dulles' policy.

Zaharescu: Now they saw the counterrevolutionary incidents don't work anymore. [That's why they do it] through peaceful evolution.

Peng: What's the concern of Kennedy's policy? [John F.] Kennedy, [Dean] Rusk, [Adlai E.] Stevenson, etc. are showing concern over the freedom and welfare of the people in East European socialist countries. When we saw that our production small teams,

big teams, communes were taken up by landlords and rich farmers, we can't help think of people's happiness that was such a concern of Dulles, Eisenhower and Kennedy. [It was] these people's happiness they cared about. Do you think it is right? They don't care about Americans' happiness, and but they care about the happiness of people living in East European socialist countries!

Zaharescu: They care about traitors, people who ran away, care about sending them back, care about reactionary elements like King Mihai, and their class brothers, and thinking about returning the factories and manors back to them.

Peng: Lenin once said, after the proletariat revolution seizes the power, [we] have to carry out the proletariat dictatorship. For us the situation in these two years continues to attest to the validity of the Lenin's words, because the defeated exploitative classes have rich experiences, expertise, and other means.

In 1957 we carried out an anti-rightist struggle. After the Hungarian Event, bourgeois rightists saw what their brothers did in Hungaria. They said whether they could do it in China, so they wanted to do it in China. What kind of people were they? Pingshi, they also yelled out "Long Live Chairman Mao!" and "Long Live CCP!" Members of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPCSC), like Long Yun, Huang Zhaoxiong, Chen Mingshu, ministers like Luo Rongji, Zhang Bojun, Zhang Naiqi. Old communist party members are also included, like Ding Ling, you all know that. This time, our method is to let them stay active and get out. They are like mice, hiding in the holes. [Now] we seize them at all. Let them speak out and air views in a big way. Moreover, we have to take a photograph, put their anti-communist, anti-people comments on the paper. It's not only to put the big rightists' comments on the small newspapers, but on the bigger papers, [even] the People's Daily. They say the leadership of the country needs to be carried out by different parties in turn. They are good Mahjong players. When you play Mahjong, each player takes turns to be the dealer. They are taking turns to be the dealer.

Zaharescu: They thought to lead a country is like playing Mahjong, or gambling.

Peng: If they become the leaders, our momentum will be lost. When we lead, we give them good food to eat, good places to live. They are living in better places than we are. We even give them cars to drive. When they come to power, they will act like Najib. Thus we had to let them speak, and they spoke for more than two months. From late half of March, through April and May, and on June 8 we struck a counterattack and turned them back. But during this period, some of our young comrades could not hold back, and wanted to react. We said we should not react and let them speak out and attack, because once we react, they would not get out of the hole and get back so we could not get a hold of them any more. Thus until June 8, we did not say a word. During this period, not only young comrades, but some old ones could not hold back. A strike on June 8 captured half of a million. You say they will quit doing it? In two years they are doing it again. Though there were not many units they've taken, it still poses a great danger to us. It's a good thing, and also a bad thing. Because according to of the law of the development of things under the Dialectic law, [things] go to the opposite side through struggles. Through the [Campaign of] Rectification, these bad communes turned to the best ones. Peoples' eyes light up, consciousness is heightened, initiatives improved, and we have gained a new piece of experience: after [our] seizure of political power, [the enemies] took it back, and now we gained it back. This is the experienced we gained. Now the rectification is almost done.

See! It takes such a long time for me to finish. [I feel bad] to take [so much of] your time. It's undemocratic to take your talking time.

Zaharescu: I would like to hear all the words you said. These words explained the

Chinese situation and the CCP's opinions on these issues. It's a good thing to be undemocratic this way. [We need to] exercise dictatorship.

Peng: It takes two of us to unite and exercise dictatorship.

Zaharescu: Now it's my time to exercise dictatorship against Comrade Peng Zhen.

Peng: Go ahead.

Zaharescu: Our country came to understand the difficulties the Chinese economy experienced due to natural disasters. Our country and our party sensed these difficulties. It doesn't mean that it has already impacted us, but that for the socialist camp as a whole, every country has its own difficulties and reactions to each other. Though our country is small and provides limited material assistance, you will be sympathized with the Romanian people. Looking back to 1946-1949 when our country experienced the same famine and great difficulties. We were hard pressed for money. Then if it were not for the assistance from socialist countries, especially the Soviet Union, numerous people would have starved to death. Back then we were a newly liberated country. We believed that no matter how great difficulties were, the socialist organizational forms would overcome them. The main issue was to ask the party to have a correct political course and leadership, and carry the policies out among the masses. It's up to the organizational skills of the party, because it won't work out if [we only] have the correct political course without organizational skills. You mentioned of the Hungarian Event. The Hungarian [Communist] Party made huge mistake [when] counterrevolutionaries came from abroad. The party made grave mistake by opening the gate for them. This event was a great lesson for every communist party across the world. The mistakes the Hungarian [Communist] Party made, other parties did not make again and will never in the future.

Peng: There are counterrevolutionaries abroad as well as domestically. Counterrevolutionaries in our countryside have connections with Jiang Jieshi. Most of them are local landlords, rich farmers, and their lackeys

Zaharescu: We are quite clear that in the stage of transition from capitalism to socialism, even the success of socialism, the remnants of landlord and Bourgeois always want to restore [their rule]. In addition to this, there is the erosion of the Bourgeois ideas. Thus the task of the party is to strike down the restoration activities of the Bourgeois, and fight against the Bourgeois ideas. This is the dictatorship of the proletariat. We believe that through the dictatorship of the proletariat and the correct leadership of the party, we are sure to defeat these difficulties.

Peng: In the [past] two years the main issue [we have faced] has been the famine. There are more than sixteen hundred million mu of arable land in China. In 1959, calamity areas were more than six million hundred million mu, which is more than forty million hectares. In 1960 [we] had calamity areas of more than

900 million mu, equal to over sixty million hectares. This difficulty is hard to address and accept. Last year when we had drought, rice seedlings were so dry that [if you] lit a match on the one side of the land, the fire would burn to the other side of the land. Many rivers dried up, and even deep wells also ran dry. Old peasants with long beards said: "I have lived for more than eighty years and never heard about such a famine." Under these circumstances, pigs' growth is slowed without enough [pig] feed. Are you feeding pigs or human beings? Of course, you feed people first. It's just a temporary difficulty without pork meat to eat. It doesn't matter. But we won't have fertilizer without pigs. [It's a problem because] here we don't have much chemical fertilizer. We mainly depend on animal fertilizer. Every pig is a small chemical too. Animals have died at a high rate. The living ones are quite emaciated.

It's easier to handle the undead thin and weak ones, [but] here is nothing we can do about the dead ones. You know [that] our level of mechanization is quite low. Unlike you, we cannot use machines to grow crops. You know, [we] cannot use the small animals which were born this fall for the next year, nor the year after the next year. [And] we all rode horses before, [but the problem is that now] we cannot ride two-year-old horses. How old are these horses you could ride there? (Zaharescu: at least three years old.). It's better to ride horses of five, six, seven or eight years old. They are of great strength.

Zaharescu: In our country [we] almost all use tractors in the agricultural cultivation. We plan to achieve [the goal] that [there will be] a tractor for every a hundred hectares by 1965.

Peng: That's good of course. We not only have manufacturing issues, but more importantly, we have petroleum issues. Tractors cannot use alternative types of fuel, not even rubber. What is your country's annual yield of petroleum fuel?

Zaharescu: More than 11 million tons.

Peng: It will take several years [to live up to that standard]. We can only use animals right now. For this reason we might only have a couple of years to survive. [If we say] three years or so, we need God to not mess with us. If God does mess with us, it would be more difficult.

Zaharescu: We are communists and we can defeat God.

Peng: We can only defeat bit by bit.

Zaharescu: Please forgive me for talking for more than one hour. [I know] It takes [much of] your time. I wish you success in your work. I wish you to defeat your difficulties. We believe that with a strong and effective party, with excellent and heroic people and with all the possibilities, you are bound to overcome any difficulty.

Peng: Please send my regards to Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and the other leaders. [Please] wish them good health!