A CONVERSATION WITH MAO TSE-TUNG

by EDGAR SNOW

During a five-hour interview with me in Peking on Oct. 16 last year, Chairman Mao Tse-tung expressed some of the views on Soviet-American, Euro-Russian and other problems of foreign relations as well as on the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution and its aftereffects.

The chairman criticized the violation of the Mao personality cult, explained why it took place, and asserted that the present foreign policy, the so-called "people's foreign policy," would continue.

The discussion was conducted in a friendly manner, and both sides were free to express their views. The chairman was courteous and patient, and his replies were clear and concise. The interview was recorded in Chinese, and I have translated it into English.

Chairman Mao is a great man of action, a great strategist, a great orator, and a great poet. He is a man of broad knowledge, and his views on foreign relations are based on a deep understanding of the world situation.

I believe that this interview will be a valuable addition to the literature on China, and I hope that it will be of interest to all those who are interested in the development of world affairs.

Edgar Snow
A LONE MONK WITH A LEAKY UMBRELLA

him two months before, during the October Day parade at T'ien-an Men Square, he had told me that he was "not satisfied with the present situation." I asked him to explain what he meant.

He replied that there were two things of which he highly disapproved during the Cultural Revolution. One was lying. Someone, while saying that the struggle should be carried out by reasoning, not by coercion or force, actually gave the other fellow a kick under the table and then drew back his leg. When the person kicked asked, "Why did you kick me?" the first person said, "I didn't kick you. Don't you see my foot is still here?" That, Mao said, is lying. Later the conflict during the Cultural Revolution developed into war between factions—first with spears, then rifles, then mortars. When foreigners reported that China was in great chaos, they were not telling lies. It had been true. Fighting was going on. (I was told by Premier Chou on another occasion that the army suffered thousands of casualties before it took up arms to suppress factional struggles.)

The other thing the chairman was most unhappy about was the maltreatment of "captive"—party members and others removed from power and subjected to reeducation. The old practice of the Liberation Army—freeing captives and giving them fares to go home, which resulted in many enemy soldiers being moved to volunteer and join their ranks—had often been ignored. Maltreatment of captives now had slowed the rebuilding and transformation of the party.

If one did not speak the truth, Mao concluded, how could he gain the confidence of others? Who would trust one? The same applied between friends.

"Are the Russians afraid of China?" I asked.

Some people said so, he replied, but why should they be? China's atom bomb was only this size (Mao raised his little finger), while Russia's bomb was that size (he raised his thumb). Together the Russian and American bombs were (putting two thumbs together) that size. What could a little finger do against two thumbs?

"But from the long-range view. Do the Russians fear China?"

It was said that they were a bit afraid, he answered. Even when there are a few mice in a person's room the person could become frightened, fearful that the mice might eat up his sweets. For instance, the Russians were upset because China was building air raid shelters. But if the Chinese got into their shelters, how could they attack others?

As for ideology, who had fired the first shot? The Russians had called the Chinese dogmatists and then the Chinese had called them revisionists. China had published their criticisms, but the Russians had not dared publish China's. Then they had sent some Cubans and later Romanians to ask the Chinese to cease open polemics. That would not do, Mao said. The polemics would have to be carried on for 10,000 years if necessary. Then Kosygin himself had come. After their talk Mao had told him that he would take off 1,000 years but no more.

The Russians looked down on the Chinese and also looked down on the people of many countries, he said. They thought that they only had to speak the word and all people would listen and obey. They did not believe that there were people who would not do so and that one of them was his humble self. Although Sino-Russian ideological differences were now irreconcilable—as demonstrated by their contradictory policies in Cambodia—they could eventually settle their problems as between states.

Referring once again to the United States, Chairman Mao said that China should learn from the way America developed, by decentralizing and spreading responsibility and wealth among the 50 states. A central government could not do everything. China must depend upon regional and local initiatives. It would not do (spreading his hands) to leave everything up to him.

As he courteously escorted me to the door, he said he was not a complicated man, but really very simple. He was, he said, only a lone monk walking the world with a leaky umbrella.

As a result of this and other informal conversations, I believe that in future Sino-American talks, Chairman Mao will surely adhere to the basic principles which have guided China in all her foreign policies, her ideological and world view as well as her regional policies. On the other hand, I also believe that, following an easing of international tensions, China will seek to cooperate with all friendly states, and all friendly people within hostile states, who welcome her full participation in world affairs.