

The Peking Caper Papers

By RUSSELL BAKER

WASHINGTON, Feb. 28—Very soon now the Peking Papers will start leaking from Government Xerox machines to the press. The record of President Nixon's famous conversation with Chairman Mao will almost certainly read very much as follows:

After shaking hands with the President, Chairman Mao asked him how he liked Peking and whether he was not exhausted from his long flight. He said he had heard that Mrs. Nixon had brought her own hairdresser and asked if the presence of a hairdresser on the Presidential plane did not make it difficult to carry on any but the most banal conversation.

The President said it did not.

Chairman Mao said that the hairdresser must be a remarkable practitioner of his craft. In a lifetime of seeking, the Chairman added, he had yet to find a hairdresser who could keep silent throughout the duration of a haircut. They constantly insisted upon informing the Chairman of successful wagers they had made upon horses. Moreover, he said, they were all George Wallace supporters.

The President said that Mrs. Nixon's hairdresser was a woman.

Chairman Mao said that despite his great love for the proletariat, which history would amply document, he would never permit a hairdresser to accompany him on a long journey in a cramped space.

"How has the weather been in China this winter?" the President asked.

Chairman Mao asked if Mrs. Nixon's hairdresser also cut his—the President's—hair.

President Nixon said that the American delegation had not been given ad-

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vance notice that this question would be raised, and he would prefer to withhold his response until he had had the opportunity to confer with his advisers.

The President then repeated his question about the weather.

Chairman Mao said that he had not reflected upon the weather for some time. He seldom thought about the weather, he said, except when some garrulous hairdresser, while cutting his hair, asked him if it was cold enough for him, or hot enough for him, or wet enough for him.

As a result, he continued, weather in China tended to be extremely bland except on days he had his hair cut. The Chairman promised the President that—now that he was thinking about the weather—he would make it snow in a day or two so that the President could see how efficiently the Chinese cleared the streets.

The President said that, at snow removal, America was Number One.

Chairman Mao said he would bet that Senator Barry Goldwater was furious about President Nixon's journey to China. He said he would also bet that Secretary of State Rogers was furious about not being asked by the President to participate in the present meeting.

President Nixon responded that while he had not been given advance notification of the Chairman's desire to discuss wagering and would, therefore, have to delay considering the chairman's bets until the National Security Council could meet, he nevertheless wanted to make one thing perfectly clear.

This, the President said, was that Senator Barry Goldwater was a great American. As for Secretary of State Rogers, he said, the only reason Mr. Rogers had not accompanied him to this meeting was quite simple. Mr. Rogers had a prior engagement to have his hair cut at this hour.

Chairman Mao asked the President if he had seen any good movies lately.

The President said he would have to refer that question to Professor Kissinger's staff. He asked the Chairman how he liked the musk oxen which the United States was giving to China.

The Chairman said that his wife had insisted upon the musk oxen, and he had not argued with her. Personally, he went on, he would have much preferred having the autograph of J. Edgar Hoover. He asked if the President had seen "Patton," and urged him to do so if he had not.

Mr. Nixon replied that he could not divulge classified information, but, in all candor, he went on, he wanted to point out to the Chairman that the present meeting, which was now ending, was historic, in that it was the first time a President of the United States had ever met with a Chairman of the Communist party of the People's Republic of China.

Chairman Mao accompanied the President to the door and pointed out that this was the first time a Chairman of the Communist party of the People's Republic of China had ever accompanied a President of the United States to a door. He asked the President if Mrs. Nixon's hairdresser would be returning to the United States.

The President said yes.

Chairman Mao said that would be a historic round trip for hairdressing. The meeting concluded.