

Mr. TAYLOR: Nobody knows, sir. He is known to have disappeared from public sight for long periods on end, specifically—my dates are not exact—somewhere in the late thirties or early forties when it is believed he was treated in Moscow for serious war wounds and then more recently in the late fifties and early sixties. He was never evident when I was in China; he was the mystery man. The two ailments he is mentioned to suffer from are some complications arising from war wounds and it is also suspected that he has tuberculosis. When he has made speeches, as he did last autumn at Red Guard rallies, people who listened to tapes of those speeches and who are expert in the Chinese language, purported to feel that he was expressing himself with great slowness and great difficulty. He slurred over and made errors with simple words which would indicate some degree of physical disability. He does not look like a healthy man.

Mr. THOMPSON: Does he carry prestige to any depth at all should Chou En-lai slip from the scene?

Mr. TAYLOR: Mao carries so much prestige that it is very hard to put anybody else in that category. He does carry a considerable amount of prestige mainly because he was one of the great generals of the revolution and in the war against the Japanese. He won all his major battles.

Mr. THOMPSON: You did not mention Chou En-lai. Where does Chou En-lai fit into this hierarchy right at the present time and projected into the future?

Mr. TAYLOR: Some sort of deal must have been made because Chou En-lai, as Prime Minister, threw in his lot with Mao and Lin Piao early on in the great cultural revolution last summer. He has always been sort of two steps behind them, going along the same path. His speeches make fascinating reading if you compare them to Lin Piao's speeches at identical rallies at which one followed the other. Chou En-lai has always been slightly more moderate. In recent months, according to Red Guard wall posters which may or may not be reliable, Chou En-lai has frequently addressed Red Guards in Peking and said, "Leave my Government apparatus alone; stop heckling people like Chen Yi, my Foreign Minister; stop criticizing my other Vice-Premiers who are heads of Government departments"—the equivalent of Cabinet Ministers—"leave them alone." He seems to have gone along in order to preserve the smooth functioning of the Government bureaucracy and the economy of the country which, as far as we can tell, has been surprisingly little disturbed, so far. He still seems to be with Mao; traditionally, he has always been a compromiser, a mediator and a survivor.

Mr. THOMPSON: Is he a continuing factor, then, in the chain of leadership, as you see it?

Mr. TAYLOR: I think he is. Nobody who was in China when I was, or to whom I have talked since, has ever seen Chou En-lai as really having top leadership stature. He is a sort of Mikoyan. He has survived partly because of this. His background is a bit more suspect than most of the others. It is a rather upper class background. He has never been a senior in the party as apparently he has been in the Government.

Mr. THOMPSON: Now, just with regard to the physical situation in China at this moment, do you agree with the reports that widespread famine is inevitable