

The Governor-General replied: »To-day and to-morrow impossible. I will let you know the day after to-morrow when I can see you.»

When, on the 21st, we had still received no answer, we sent another message to ask when he could see us. This time he did not answer at all.

On June 22nd, however, we received a huge red card of invitation to a dinner at SHENG's at 3 p. m. next day. The names of all the guests, fifty-two in number, were given on the card in order of rank — a method that has its advantages, as it tells one whom one is going to meet.

We drove to the yamen and were escorted across its courtyards to an inner, square-walled garden beside the house, where dinner was laid. Along the paths stood soldiers, armed with rifles and pistols. We passed between them, not without a feeling of uneasiness — we knew what might happen at a Chinese banquet in Urumchi!

Our host entered and greeted us. Then came the civil governor LI JUNG and two emissaries from Nanking, KUO and KAO. The two latter had been waiting to do their business for months and were still detained. YEW and I felt relieved when we saw Mr APRESOV come in at the head of the whole Soviet Consulate.

The menu consisted entirely of Russian dishes; and we drank brandy, white wine and champagne. Our host made a speech as long as the dinner-table, in which all the guests of honour were remembered. He turned towards me and said a lot of nice things about my travels.

The Russians and SHENG were both interested in our lorries and wanted to buy one or two of them. We had no objection; we should probably be compelled to sell them in any case, for financial reasons.

An official newspaper was edited in Urumchi, called the *T'ien-shan-jih-pao* or *Celestial Mountains Daily News*, an organ unique of its kind and of a piece with everything else in the town. In it one could read »news» that had appeared in the Peking and Nanking papers six months before. Information that was thought suitable or reassuring for the inhabitants, though seldom containing a word of truth, was printed daily.

There was also a Russian flying-school in Urumchi; and its aeroplanes manoeuvred over the town every day. The petrol arriving from Russia was consumed by these planes, while we had to be content with empty promises.

Food prices rose fantastically. On March 9th, at Bugur, 100 catties of flour cost 75 taels; on May 22nd, at Tikenliq, 550 taels; and on June 26th, at Urumchi, 5,000 taels. Later the price rose to 14,000 taels, and no-one could afford to buy bread. On June 2nd, at Korla, an egg cost half a tael; three days later, at Toqsun, 5 taels; and at the end of June, in Urumchi, 30 taels. Fruit, usually so cheap, also rose in price; a melon cost 60 taels, a cucumber 5.