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RESIGNATION OF TIKHONOV

SUMMARY

1. SOVIET PRIME MINISTER TIKHONOV RESIGNS ON HEALTH GROUNDS. HIS DEPARTURE WAS LONG EXPECTED. BUT HIS SUDDEN RESIGNATION OTHER THAN AT A SUPREME SOVIET SESSION IS UNUSUAL AND MAY SUGGEST POLITBURO DISAGREEMENT ON THE ECONOMY. RYZHKOV SUCCEEDS. HE IS THE LOGICAL CHOICE AND REINFORCES GORBACHEV'S FIRM STAMP ON THE LEADERSHIP.

DETAIL

2. IT WAS ANNOUNCED LAST NIGHT ON THE EVENING OF 27 SEPTEMBER THAT TIKHONOV HAD RESIGNED AS CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS FOR HEALTH REASONS AND THAT RYZHKOV, THE SENIOR CENTRAL COMMITTEE SECRETARY DEALING WITH ECONOMIC AFFAIRS, HAD BEEN APPOINTED TO REPLACE HIM.

3. TIKHONOV'S RESIGNATION WAS SUBMITTED IN A LETTER TO GORBACHEV WHICH WAS READ OUT AT A SESSION OF THE PRESIDUM OF THE SUPREME SOVIET YESTERDAY. TIKHONOV REFERRED TO A RECENT DETERIORATION IN HIS HEALTH AND SAID THAT ON THE INSISTENT ADVICE OF HIS DOCTORS WAS FORCED TO ASK PERMISSION TO RETIRE.

4. TIKHONOV'S DEPARTURE IS NOT UNEXPECTED ALTHOUGH HE WAS FORMALLY NOMINATED AT THE APRIL PLENUM TO DELIVER ONE OF THE MAIN REPORTS TO NEXT YEAR'S PARTY CONGRESS. BUT THE TIMING IS SUDDEN AND THE MANNER OF HIS DEPARTURE SUGGESTS THAT THE DECISION WAS TAKEN AT SHORT NOTICE. IT WOULD BE MORE NORMAL FOR THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS TO RESIGN AT A SESSION OF THE SUPREME SOVIET AS KOSYGIN DID IN 1980, AND FOR THE DECISION TO HAVE BEEN APPROVED IN ADVANCE BY A CENTRAL COMMITTEE PLENUM. TIKHONOV HAD ONLY JUST RETURNED FROM HOLIDAY AND WAS APPARENTLY WELL ENOUGH TO ATTEND A DINNER FOR KADAR ON 25 SEPTEMBER. HE IS OVER 80 AND HIS HEALTH MAY WELL HAVE DETERIORATED BUT IN THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP ILLNESS IS RARELY A SUFFICIENT CAUSE FOR RESIGNATION AND THE ANNOUNCEMENT COULD HAVE BEEN DELAYED FOR A MORE APPROPRIATE OCCASION. IT WOULD NOT EXCLUDE THE POSSIBILITY THAT HIS DEPARTURE WAS PRECIPITATED BY A DISAGREEMENT AT THURSDAY'S POLITBURO MEETING AT WHICH THE MAIN POLICY DOCUMENTS OF THE CONGRESS WERE DISCUSSED INCLUDING THE GUIDELINES FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEAR PLAN.

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5. AT ALL EVENTS, GORBACHEV WILL NOT BE SORRY TO SEE HIM GO. TIKHONOV WAS STEEPED IN THE ATTITUDES OF THE BREZHNEV ERE AND GENERALLY REGARDED AS A BRAKE ON GORBACHEV'S EFFORTS TO GALVANISE THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE ECONOMY. RYZHKOV, AGED 56, WILL BE A MUCH MORE CONGENIAL PRIME MINISTER. HIS CAREER ADVANCED RAPIDLY UNDER ANDROPOV AND GORBACHEV. HE WAS APPOINTED A SECRETARY OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE IN NOVEMBER 1982 AND A FULL MEMBER OF THE POLITBURO IN APRIL THIS YEAR. EARLIER HE OCCUPIED SENIOR POSTS IN GOSPLAN AND AN INDUSTRIAL MINISTRY. HE WAS A LOGICAL CHOICE TO REPLACE TIKHONOV ALTHOUGH VOROTNIKOV, CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS OF THE RSFSR, WAS THOUGHT TO HAVE A STRONG CLAIM AND THERE HAVE BEEN PERSISTENT REPORTS THAT GORBACHEV WANTED THE JOB FOR HIMSELF.

6. THIS MOVE WILL FURTHER CONSOLIDATE GORBACHEV'S POSITION IN THE POLITBURO (FROM WHICH TIKHONOV WILL PRESUMABLY RESIGN AT THE NEXT CENTRAL COMMITTEE PLENUM, DUE SHORTLY). IT TAKES THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE LEADERSHIP SINCE HE TOOK OVER AN IMPORTANT STAGE FURTHER. FOLLOWING THE EARLIER ESTABLISHMENT OF LIGACHEV AS EFFECTIVELY NUMBER 2 IN THE PARTY AND THE APPOINTMENT OF SHEVARDNADZE AS FOREIGN MINISTER, GORBACHEV'S NEW TEAM IS VIRTUALLY COMPLETE AND THE OLD GUARD HAS ALMOST LEFT THE SCENE.

7. RESIDENT CLERK PLEASE INFORM LLEWELLYN SMITH.

CARTLEDGE

FEO PALACE WHITEHALL
SOV D.

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