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MODUK FOR DACU

MY TELNO 101: CENTRAL COMMITTEE PLENUM: COMMENT ON GORBACHEV'S
SPEECH

SUMMARY

1. GORBACHEV'S MARATHON AND WIDE RANGING REPORT WHICH TAKES UP 4 1/2 PAGES OF TODAY'S PRAVDA (28 JANUARY) SEEMED ALMOST MORE APPROPRIATE FOR A CONGRESS THAN A CENTRAL COMMITTEE PLENUM. HE WAS FRANK AND HARD-HITTING IN EXPOSING PAST FAILURES AND ABUSES BUT OFFERED NO SPECIFIC NEW SOLUTIONS. HE MAY BE PREPARING THE GROUND FOR MORE RADICAL POLICIES IN THE FUTURE, WHICH COULD SURFACE AT THE NEXT PLENUM WHICH IS TO DEAL WITH ECONOMIC REFORM, AND AT A PARTY CONFERENCE PROPOSED FOR NEXT YEAR WHICH WILL CONSIDER, (NEXT TWO WORDS UNDERLINED) INTER ALIA, 'DEMOCRATISATION' OF THE PARTY.

DETAIL

2. GORBACHEV PAINTED A STARKER PICTURE THAN EVER BEFORE OF THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PROBLEMS WHICH HAD ACCUMULATED FROM THE BREZHNEV PERIOD AND EARLIER: AND BLUNTLY ADMITTED THAT THE RESPONSIBILITY LAY WITH THE PARTY LEADERSHIP AND SHORT-COMINGS WITHIN THE PARTY ITSELF. IN PART THE PURPOSE OF SUCH FRANKNESS, AS HE ACKNOWLEDGED HIMSELF, IS TO EXPLAIN AND JUSTIFY THE RADICAL CHANGES NECESSARY TO EXTRICATE THE COUNTRY FROM STAGNATION GIVEN THE INERTIA AND RESISTANCE TO WHICH HE REPEATEDLY ALLUDED IN HIS SPEECH. ONCE AGAIN HE STRESSED THE NEED FOR A 'RADICAL TURN' AND 'REVOLUTIONARY TRANSFORMATIONS' SINCE THERE WAS NO ALTERNATIVE AND 'NOWHERE TO RETREAT TO'.

PERSONNEL POLICY AND DEMOCRATISATION

3. CADRES POLICY, BILLED AS THE MAIN SUBJECT OF THE PLENUM, RECEIVED A LOT OF ATTENTION IN GORBACHEV'S REPORT BUT HE HAD LITTLE IN THE WAY OF ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE TO PROPOSE. HE WENT SO FAR AS TO ADMIT THAT STAGNATION OF CADRES IN LEADING ORGANS HAD WEAKENED THE PERFORMANCE OF THE POLITBURO AND GOVERNMENT AND THAT INCOMPETENT SENIOR OFFICIALS HAD REMAINED IN THEIR JOBS FOR DECADES. HE DECLARED THIS MUST NOT BE ALLOWED TO HAPPEN AGAIN BUT PROPOSED NO

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MECHANISM TO PREVENT IT, SUCH AS COMPULSORY RETIREMENT AGE OR LIMITATION ON TENURE WHICH HAD BEEN WIDELY RUMOURED IN ADVANCE OF THE PLENUM. THE ONLY SIGNIFICANT STRUCTURAL CHANGE PROPOSED IS SECRET BALLOTING FOR SECRETARIES OF PARTY COMMITTEES FROM DISTRICT TO REPUBLIC LEVEL, WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF SEVERAL CANDIDATES. THIS IS UNLIKELY TO HAVE MUCH EFFECT IN PRACTICE. GORBACHEV ALSO SAID IT WOULD BE 'LOGICAL' TO DEMOCRATISE LEADING PARTY ORGANS BUT DID NOT EXPLAIN HOW. PROBABLY HE WAS UNABLE TO GO AS FAR AS HE WOULD HAVE LIKED IN THIS PART OF HIS REPORT. HE MAY ATTEMPT TO PUT FORWARD MORE RADICAL PROPOSALS AT THE PARTY CONFERENCE, WHICH HE SUGGESTED SHOULD BE HELD IN 1988.

4. OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR DEMOCRATISING SOVIET SOCIETY DISCUSSED IN GORBACHEV'S REPORT INCLUDED MINOR CHANGES IN THE PROCEDURE FOR ELECTING DEPUTIES TO SOVIETS, WHICH WOULD PERMIT SEVERAL NOMINATIONS TO BE CONSIDERED AT PRE-ELECTION MEETINGS, AND ENLARGED ELECTORAL CONSTITUENCIES WITH SEVERAL CANDIDATES TO BE ELECTED FROM EACH.

NATIONALITIES

5. GORBACHEV DEVOTED A LENGTHY SECTION OF HIS REPORT TO NATIONALITIES POLICY, OBVIOUSLY PROMPTED BY THE RIOTS IN ALMA ATA LAST MONTH TO WHICH HE SPECIFICALLY REFERRED, ADMITTING THAT SIMILAR INCIDENTS HAD OCCURRED BEFORE. THIS WAS PERHAPS THE FRANKEST ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE GAP BETWEEN REALITY AND THE PROPAGANDA OF MULTI-NATIONAL HARMONY SINCE THE 1920S, BUT GORBACHEV HAD ONLY FAMILIAR RECIPES TO OFFER: MORE INTERNATIONALIST EDUCATION, FAIR REPRESENTATION OF ALL NATIONALITIES AND ETHNIC GROUPS IN PARTY AND STATE BODIES ETC.

GLASNOST' AND LEGALITY

6. FIRM COMMITMENT TO GLASNOST' WAS A CONSISTENT THEME OF GORBACHEV'S REPORT AND HE EXPLICITLY BACKED THE FRANKNESS AND CRITICAL ATTITUDE OF THE MEDIA AND CREATIVE INTELLIGENTSIA. THERE WAS NO INDICATION OF ANY RETRENCHMENT IN THE POLICY OF GLASNOST', DESPITE GROWING NERVOUSNESS RECENTLY ON THIS ACCOUNT AMONG SOVIET INTELLECTUALS. GORBACHEV EVEN SUGGESTED THAT LAWS SHOULD BE WORKED OUT WHICH WOULD GUARANTEE GLASNOST'.

THE ECONOMY

7. THE SPEECH CONTAINED LITTLE NEW ON THE QUESTION OF ECONOMIC REFORM: IT WAS LARGELY A REHASHING OF THE ECONOMIC PROGRAMME OF THE 27TH PARTY CONGRESS: SELF-FINANCING, ECONOMIC ACCOUNTABILITY, ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURAL REORGANISATION, LESS INTERFERENCE FROM ABOVE, INCREASED EMPHASIS ON QUALITY AND PAYMENT BY FINAL RESULTS. GORBACHEV GAVE VAGUE ENDORSEMENTS OF THE ROLE OF THE PRIVATE PLOTS AND INDIVIDUAL LABOUR ACTIVITY AND CALLED FOR GREATER DEVELOPMENT OF COOPERATIVES.

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8. THE REVIEW OF THE ECONOMIC ACHIEVEMENTS OF 1986 WAS CAUTIOUS: IT WAS GENERALLY SUCCESSFUL BUT SERIOUS PROBLEMS REMAIN UNSOLVED AND THERE IS NO ROOM FOR COMPLACENCY. BUREAUCRATIC INERTIA AND OBSOLETE ECONOMIC THINKING LEFT OVER FROM THE 30S AND 40S MUST BE OVERCOME.

9. THE WAY AHEAD WAS PLOTTED ONLY SKETCHILY: THERE IS TO BE A NEW LAW ON THE SOCIALIST ENTERPRISE, A CONGRESS TO REFORM THE STATUS AND ORGANISATION OF COLLECTIVE FARMS, FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS IN THE WORK OF THE CENTRAL ECONOMIC BODIES AND A PROPOSAL TO FORM LARGE PRODUCTION UNITS THAT COULD BE VARIATIONS ON THE THEME OF THE CDR'S (NEXT WORD UNDERLINED) KOMBINATS. FURTHER MAJOR REFORMS WILL PROBABLY WAIT UNTIL THE NEXT PLENUM: THIS IS TO BE A PERIOD OF CONSOLIDATION. THE PARTY HAS SHOWN THE WAY: IT IS NOW UP TO THE CADRES TO MAKE IT WORK THROUGH GREATER COMMITMENT AND DISCIPLINE: GORBACHEV'S 'HUMAN FACTOR'.

CONCLUSION

10. THE BROAD RANGE OF ISSUES COVERED IN THIS UNUSUALLY COMPREHENSIVE AND PROGRAMMATIC REPORT COULD BE ENOUGH TO EXPLAIN WHY THE PLENUM WAS DELAYED FROM LAST YEAR. BUT I SUSPECT, IN THE LIGHT OF SOME VERY CIRCUMSTANTIAL RUMOURS ABOUT PROPOSALS FOR INTERNAL PARTY REFORMS THAT SOME CONTROVERSIAL ELEMENTS IN GORBACHEV'S ORIGINAL DRAFT WERE THE SUBJECT OF PROLONGED DEBATE AND DID NOT SURVIVE. THERE IS SOME OBVIOUS HEDGING, E.G. 'I THINKTHAT IN PRINCIPLE STABILITY OF CADRES IS NECESSARY. BUT THIS MUST NOT BE CARRIED TO EXTREMES OR, ONE COULD SAY, TO THE POINT OF ABSURDITY'. IT IS NEVERTHELESS CLEAR FROM THE ROBUST TONE OF GORBACHEV'S SPEECH THAT HE IS DETERMINED TO PUSH AHEAD ON SEVERAL FRONTS. HE INDICATED AGAIN, AS HE DID IN HIS SPEECH IN KHABAROVSK LAST JULY, THAT THE MORE HE EXAMINES THE SITUATION THE MORE SERIOUS THE PROBLEMS APPEAR AND THE MORE RADICAL THE SOLUTIONS NEEDED TO DEAL WITH THEM. BUT SO FAR HE REMAINS STRONGER ON RHETORIC THAN RECIPES.

11. FURTHER COMMENT WILL FOLLOW WHEN THE PLENUM IS OVER.

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