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LIGACHEV AND PERESTROIKA *mt*

SUMMARY

1. LIGACHEV SHARPLY CRITICISES THOSE WHO ARE SPREADING RUMOURS OF SPLITS IN THE POLITBURO, BUT NEVERTHELESS GIVES A REMARKABLY CONSERVATIVE INTERPRETATION OF PERESTROIKA.

DETAIL

2. ON 4 JUNE LIGACHEV ADDRESSED A MEETING OF WORKERS AT THE TOGLIATTI CAR PLANT. ACCORDING TO THE SUMMARY IN THE CENTRAL PRESS ON 5 JUNE MUCH OF HIS SPEECH CONSISTED OF A ROUTINE PEP TALK OF THE TYPE REGULARLY GIVEN BY MEMBERS OF THE LEADERSHIP TOURING THE COUNTRY. BUT HE ALSO GAVE A GENERAL ASSESSMENT OF THE STATE OF PERESTROIKA.

3. LIGACHEV SAID THAT THERE WAS NO ALTERNATIVE TO PERESTROIKA. IT WAS THE ONLY WAY OF OVERCOMING ECONOMIC STAGNATION AND SOCIAL APATHY SEMICOLON AND OF MORALLY CLEANING UP SOCIETY. RIGHTIST FORCES IN THE WEST SAW PERESTROIKA AS A THREAT. ALIEN VOICES WERE URGING THE USSR TO ADOPT A MULTI-PARTY SYSTEM AND AT TIMES CLAIMING THAT THIS WAS A PRE-CONDITION FOR COOPERATION BETWEEN THE USSR AND CAPITALIST COUNTRIES. THEY ALSO URGED THAT THE SOVIET UNION SHOULD ADOPT WESTERN MARKET ECONOMIC PRINCIPLES. ALL THIS WAS AIMED AT WEAKENING THE POLITICAL STABILITY OF THE USSR, DESTROYING SOCIAL JUSTICE AND INCREASING DIVISIONS IN SOCIETY. THE SOVIET UNION, HE SAID, WOULD NOT DEPART FROM SOCIALISM. THE HEALTHY DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY WAS THE GUARANTEE OF THEIR REVERSABILITY OF PERESTROIKA. IT WENT WITHOUT SAYING THAT THIS DEVELOPMENT DID NOT IMPLY THE WATERING DOWN OF THE PARTY'S ROLE IN SOCIETY. PROPOSALS OF THIS TYPE WERE UNACCEPTABLE. BUT THE PARTY DID HAVE TO PAY PERMANENT ATTENTION TO INCREASING ITS CONTACTS WITH THE WORKING CLASS.



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4. LIGACHEV THEN TURNED TO AGRICULTURE AND THE INTRODUCTION OF THE NEW ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES BASED ON LEASING. HE STRESSED THAT THESE NEW STRUCTURES WERE FULLY COMPATIBLE WITH SOCIALISM. THEY BROUGHT ABOUT SUBSTANTIAL INCREASES IN PRODUCTIVITY, AND IF WAGES ALSO INCREASED THIS WAS MONEY WELL EARNED. LIGACHEV STATED THAT THE ECONOMY WAS MAKING REASONABLE PROGRESS AND REJECTED CLAIMS THAT THE REFORMS WERE HAVING NO EFFECT.

5. HE THEN TURNED TO THE QUESTION OF DIVISIONS WITHIN THE LEADERSHIP. THERE WERE SOME, HE SAID, WHO FOR THEIR OWN REASONS TRIED TO FOIST ONTO PERESTROIKA THE THEORY OF INCREASING CONTRADICTIONS. HE COULD NOT HELP RECALLING HOW THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIALISM IN THE 1930'S HAD BEEN ACCOMPANIED BY THE IDEA OF THE WORSENING CLASS STRUGGLE - AND THE DISASTROUS CONSEQUENCES OF THIS WERE WELL KNOWN. THERE WERE OF COURSE DISCUSSIONS AND ARGUMENTS WHICH WERE CONDUCTED ON A SOCIALIST PLATFORM. BUT ENEMIES IN THE WEST (AND SOME WITHIN THE COUNTRY) WERE SPREADING THE IDEA THAT THERE WERE DISAGREEMENTS IN THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP AND IN THE POLITBURO. SUCH ACCUSATIONS HAD BEEN MADE MORE THAN ONCE AND THEREFORE MUST BE CONSIDERED INTENTIONAL. WEDGE-DRIVING WAS A WELL-KNOWN TACTIC. IT HAD WORKED IN THE PAST WHEN FALSE RUMOURS ABOUT MEMBERS OF THE LEADERSHIP HAD LED TO THE DEATHS OF MANY PEOPLE. BUT THESE WERE DIFFERENT TIMES, A DIFFERENT POLICY AND DIFFERENT LEADERS. ALL MEMBERS OF THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP WITH GORBACHEV AT THEIR HEAD WERE COMMITTED TO THE POLICY OF PERESTROIKA. AT THE PRESENT STAGE OF PERESTROIKA UNITY AND CONSOLIDATION WERE ESSENTIAL. THERE WAS NO DOUBT THAT THE FORTHCOMING PARTY CONFERENCE WOULD CONTRIBUTE TO SUCH UNITY.

COMMENT

6. THIS IS A NOTICEABLY HARD LINE SPEECH, AND THE REFERENCES TO THE ENEMIES IN THE WEST TRYING TO DESTABILISE SOVIET SOCIETY HAVE A REMARKABLY OLD-FASHIONED RING. THE REFERENCE TO THOSE INSIDE THE SOVIET UNION SPREADING RUMOURS ABOUT SPLITS IN THE POLITBURO IS CLEARLY AIMED AT ELTSIN, AND THE HARSH TONE OF LIGACHEV'S COMMENTS (EQUATING ELTSIN, BY IMPLICATION, WITH THE RUMOUR-MONGERS WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THE PURGES UNDER STALIN) SUGGESTS THAT HE HAS BEEN REALLY NEEDLED BY THE NATIONWIDE PUBLICITY GIVEN TO ELTSIN'S CALL FOR HIS RESIGNATION IN GORBACHEV'S RECENT PRESS CONFERENCE (MY TELNO 941). THESE COMMENTS ALSO SUGGEST THAT HE IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY IRRITATED BY SPECULATION IN THE WESTERN PRESS ABOUT

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HIS DIFFERENCES WITH GORBACHEV. AS GORBACHEV HAS DONE RECENTLY, LIGACHEV USED THIS OCCASION TO UNDERLINE THE IMPORTANCE HE ATTACHED TO LEADERSHIP UNITY IN THE RUN-UP TO THE CONFERENCE.

7. NEVERTHELESS, JUDGING BY HIS MORE GENERAL COMMENTS ON PERESTROIKA IN THIS SPEECH, HE IS NOT PREPARED TO MAKE ANY CONCESSIONS IN THE DIRECTION OF GORBACHEV'S MORE RADICAL CONCEPT OF PERESTROIKA IN SEARCH OF SUCH UNITY. THE MESSAGE THAT COMES OVER IS A MARKEDLY CONSERVATIVE ONE. THE IDEA OF PERESTROIKA AS A "REVOLUTION" IS NOT MENTIONED: NOR IS THERE ANY ACCEPTANCE OF THE NEED FOR RADICAL POLITICAL REFORM. PERESTROIKA IS MADE IRREVERSIBLE BY THE "HEALTHY" DEMOCRATISATION OF THE PARTY - BUT THERE IS TO BE NO REDUCTION OR WATERING DOWN OF ITS ROLE. GLASNOST SHOULD HAVE A "BUSINESS-LIKE" CHARACTER. MARKET ECONOMIC PRINCIPLES WERE A WEAPON OF WESTERN OPPONENTS AIMING TO DESTABILISE SOVIET SOCIETY.

8. COMING THREE WEEKS BEFORE THE OPENING OF THE PARTY CONFERENCE, LIGACHEV'S COMMENTS WILL BE WELCOMED BY THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY OFFICIALS WHO ARE LIKELY TO CONSIDER THEM AS THEIR MANIFESTO FOR THE CONFERENCE.

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