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LEADERSHIP CHANGES IN MOSCOW

THE PERSONNEL CHANGES IN THE SOVIET PARTY AND GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED YESTERDAY AND TODAY (MY TELEGRAMS 1617 AND 1619) ADD UP TO A REMARKABLE TWO DAYS IN SOVIET POLITICS. WE SHALL NEED TO LET THE DUST SETTLE BEFORE WE PRODUCE A CONSIDERED ASSESSMENT. BUT IT IS ALREADY CLEAR THAT GORBACHEV HAS CONSOLIDATED HIS POSITION THROUGH AN OPPORTUNIST, THOUGH DEFT POLITICAL OPERATION, IN WHICH HE APPEARS TO HAVE HELD THE INITIATIVE THROUGHOUT.

2. WE KNOW NO MORE THAN BEFORE ABOUT HIS MOTIVES. THE OBVIOUS EXPLANATION STILL SEEMS THE LIKELIEST: PERESTROIKA WAS FLAGGING, DISCONTENT WAS SPREADING AMONG THE PEOPLE AND PERHAPS THE LEADERSHIP. AND A DRAMATIC COUP DE MAIN - IN HIS USUAL STYLE - SEEMED THE BEST WAY TO REASSERT HIS DOMINANCE. HE IS NOW PRESIDENT - A POST HE HAD PLANNED TO RECEIVE ONLY NEXT SPRING. HE HAS REEMOVED MOST OF THE OLD BREZHNEV HANDS FROM THE LEADERSHIP (ONLY SHCHERBITSKY, THE UKRAINIAN PARTY LEADER REMAINS; BUT TO REMOVE HIM WOULD REQUIRE A PLENUM OF THE UKRAINIAN PARTY). LIGACHEV HAS BEEN HANDED THE POISONED CHALICE OF AGRICULTURE. THE MEN HE HAS PUT IN CHARGE OF IDEOLOGY AND SECURITY DO NOT HAVE THE PERSONAL AUTHORITY OF THEIR PREDECESSORS. (THE KGB IS NOT REPRESENTED IN THE POLITBURO, FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE 1973). GORBACHEV NOW HAS THE FREER HAND HE WANTED TO PURSUE HIS OWN POLICIES.

3. THAT DOES NOT, OF COURSE, MEAN HE WILL HAVE THINGS ALL HIS OWN WAY. THE CLEAN-OUT WAS A CIVILISED ONE: THE TREATMENT OF GROMYKO WAS PARTICULARLY COURTEOUS. BUT IT WILL HAVE AROUSED RESENTMENT AMONGST THE OLD HANDS WHO HAVE HAD THEIR WINGS CLIPPED. THEY WILL BE WAITING FOR GORBACHEV TO PUT A FOOT WRONG. AMONGST A WIDER PUBLIC, THE CONSPIRATORIAL NATURE OF THE COUP, THE SUPINE ROLES OF BOTH THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE AND THE SUPREME SOVIET, AND THE TOTAL LACK OF CONVINCING PUBLIC EXPLANATION, IT, WILL REINFORCE CYNICISM ABOUT GORBACHEV'S COMMITMENT TO GENUINE OPENNESS AND DEMOCRATISATION.

4. MORE FUNDAMENTALLY, THESE POLITICAL CHANGES AT THE CENTRE, AND

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FIDDLING WITH PARTY ORGANISATION'S IN THE PROVINCES, WILL HAVE NO DIRECT EFFECT ON THE APATHY AMONGST WORKING PEOPLE, OR ON THE DEEP ROOTED ILLS OF THE INDUSTRIAL AND AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY, WHICH ARE AT THE BASIS OF THIS COUNTRY'S PROBLEMS. GORBACHEV MAY NOW HAVE THE POWER. BUT BY THE SAME TOKEN, THE BUCK NOW STOPS WITH HIM. IF HE CANNOT DELIVER THE GOODS TO THE PEOPLE, HE WILL HAVE NO ONE ELSE TO BLAME IN FUTURE.

5. MY I.F.T. COMMENTS ON THE PESONNEL CHANGES IN MORE DETAIL. MY SECOND I.F.T. CONTAINS RECOMMENDATIONS ABOUT MESSAGES TO GORBACHEV AND GROMYKO.

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