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MY TELNO 1611: SOVIET INTERNAL: NATIONALITIES PLENUM

SUMMARY

1. GORBACHEV'S REPORT TO PLENUM ON NATIONALITIES COVERS HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO NATIONALITIES PROBLEMS, ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL BENEFITS OF UNION, MEANING OF SELF DETERMINATION, INCREASED RIGHTS FOR REPUBLICS. HE DENIES GROUNDS FOR QUESTIONING LEGITIMACY OF SOVIET POWER IN BALTICS AND RULES OUT BOUNDARY ADJUSTMENTS' WARNING TO ARMENIA AND AZERBAIJAN ON CONTINUING DISPUTE.

DETAIL

2. GORBACHEV'S REPORT TO THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE PLENUM ON NATIONALITIES PUBLISHED IN PRAVDA 20 SEPTEMBER, BEGAN WITH A LENGTHY ASSESSMENT OF THE HISTORICAL CAUSES OF THE CURRENT NATIONALITIES PROBLEM. IN BRIEF, THE PROBLEM WAS A LEGACY OF THE TSARIST EMPIRE WHICH LENIN HAD DONE MUCH TO RECTIFY. THE ABUSES OF STALIN AND THE SUBSEQUENT ADMINISTRATIVE COMMAND SYSTEM HAD FURTHER DISTORTED THE LENINIST NATIONALITIES POLICY. GORBACHEV INSISTED THAT OLD HISTORICAL UNTRUTHS SHOULD NOT BE REPLACED BY NEW ONES AND THAT FUNDAMENTAL VALUES CREATED DURING THE YEARS OF SOVIET POWER SHOULD NOT BE ECLIPSED. ON SPECIFIC ISSUES HE NOTED THAT THE MALDAVIAN REPUBLIC HAD BEEN FORMED WITHIN THE USSR IN 1940 AND THAT IN THE SAME YEAR THE BALTIC STATES HAD ENTERED THE UNION. ALTHOUGH MUCH CONCERNING THIS REMAINED TO BE ANALYSED AND EVALUATED THERE WERE NO GROUNDS FOR DOUBTING THAT THE DECISION OF THE BALTICS OF ENTER INTO THE SOVIET UNION, WAS MADE BY THE CHOICE OF THE PEOPLE.

3. GORBACHEV SPOKE BRIEFLY ABOUT THE NEED TO RECTIFY THE INJUSTICES SUFFERED BY CERTAIN ETHNIC GROUPS AND THE NEED TO SEARCH CAREFULLY FOR SOLUTIONS ACCEPTABLE TO ALL. HE SPOKE AT SOME LENGTH ABOUT THE ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL BENEFITS WHICH EACH REPUBLIC DERIVED FROM UNION MEMBERSHIP AND QUOTED AN EXTENSIVE ARRAY OF FIGURES TO DEMONSTRATE THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF THE REPUBLICS.

4. ON SELF-DETERMINATION, GORBACHEV SAID THAT THIS SHOULD NOT BE CONSIDERED ONLY AS CONSISTING OF THE RIGHT TO SECEDE. SOVIET AND OTHER EXPERIENCE SHOWED THAT IT WAS A COMPLICATED, MANY-SIDED PROCESS OF REAFFIRMING NATIONAL DIGNITY, DEVELOPING LANGUAGE AND CULTURE, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROGRESS. THIS PRINCIPLE WAS CURRENTLY BEST REFLECTED IN SELF-GOVERNMENT PROTECTING NATIONAL IDENTITY, THE RIGHT TO ENJOY THE BENEFITS OF SOVEREIGNTY AND THE RIGHT TO DECIDE QUESTIONS OF ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT INDEPENDENTLY. THE POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE OF REPUBLICS WOULD BE CONSOLIDATED BY A PACKAGE OF MEASURES. NEW RULES GOVERNING THE RELATIONS BETWEEN UNION AND REPUBLICS WOULD BE ENSHRINED IN THE CONSTITUTION. REPUBLICS WOULD HAVE JURISDICTION OVER ALL MATTERS EXCEPT THOSE TRANSFERRED VOLUNTARILY TO UNION COMPETENCE.

5. GORBACHEV WENT ON TO SAY THAT THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS FACED BY THE RUSSIAN REPUBLIC REQUIRED SOME ORGANISATIONAL AND POLITICAL CHANGES. WORK COULD BEGIN ON THE QUESTION OF NEW PARTY STRUCTURES FOR THE REPUBLIC. WITH REFERENCE TO SUGGESTIONS THAT THE STATUS OF SOME AUTONOMOUS TERRITORIES SHOULD BE AMENDED, HE SAID THAT PRIORITY MUST BE GIVEN TO EXTENDING THE RIGHTS OF THE PEOPLES CONCERNED.

6. GORBACHEV REJECTED THE IDEA OF BOUNDARY CHANGES AS LIKELY AS A SOLUTION TO CURRENT PROBLEMS. THEY WOULD MAKE THINGS WORSE. HE DISCOURSED AT SOME LENGTH ON THE IMPORTANCE OF GUARANTEEING THE RIGHTS OF ALL SOVIET CITIZENS. THE TIME HAD COME TO CONSIDER HOW THE FORCE OF LAW MIGHT BE USED TO DISBAND NATIONALIST, CHAUVINIST AND OTHER EXTREMIST ORGANISATIONS. WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO THE CONFLICT BETWEEN ARMENIA AND AZERBAIJAN AND THE FAILURE OF NUMEROUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE IT, HE OBSERVED THAT MOSCOW WAS ON THE BRINK OF HAVING TO TAKE DECISIVE MEASURES. ANARCHY COULD NOT BE ALLOWED, LET ALONE BLOODSHED.

7. GORBACHEV ALSO WARNED AGAINST AN EXCEPTIONALLY DANGEROUS TENDENCY TOWARDS ECONOMIC AUTARKY AND ISOLATION BY PROSPEROUS REGIONS AND REPUBLICS. THIS ROUTE WOULD LEAD TO GRAVE CONSEQUENCES FOR THOSE WHO SET OFF ON IT. BUT THE EXISTING ECONOMIC STRUCTURE WAS OVERCENTRALISED AND REPUBLICS HAD TO BE GIVEN MORE CONTROL. ECONOMICALLY BACKWARD REGIONS COULD BE HELPED FROM THE CENTRAL BUDGET BUT SUCCESSFUL ECONOMIC REGIONS SHOULD BE ABLE TO ENJOY THE BENEFITS OF THIS. WITH REPUBLICS, AS WITH FIRMS, THERE SHOULD BE AN END TO TAKING FROM THE PROFITABLE TO SUBSIDISE THE UNPROFITABLE. BUT THERE SHOULD ~~NO~~ ATTEMPT TO DISMANTLE THE VAST RANGE OF ECONOMIC LINKS BETWEEN REPUBLICS. THIS WAS LIKE THE OLD REVOLUTIONARIES WHO WANTED TO DESTROY THE MOSCOW-ST PETERSBURG RAILWAY BECAUSE IT HAD BEEN BUILT BY THE TSAR.

8. GORBACHEV DEFENDED THE RIGHT OF REPUBLICS TO ESTABLISH THE INDIGENOUS TONGUE AS THE STATE LANGUAGE BUT COMMENDED THE PROPOSAL TO GIVE RUSSIAN THE STATUS OF A STATE LANGUAGE THROUGHOUT THE USSR. HE MADE A COMPARISON WITH THE USE OF ENGLISH IN INDIA. HE ALSO SPOKE OF THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH, CRITICISING PAST AND PRESENT RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE AND CALLING FOR THE CHURCHES TO USE THEIR INFLUENCE IN PREVENTING INTER-COMMUNAL STRIFE. HE NOTED THAT THE NEW LAW ON FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE WOULD SOLVE DIFFICULTIES RELATING TO RELIGIOUS ORGANISATION.

9. GORBACHEV CONCLUDED WITH A CONSIDERATION OF NATIONALITIES ISSUES IN THE PARTY CONTEXT. HE REJECTED THE FEDERALISATION OF THE PARTY WHICH WOULD ENTAIL THE END OF THE PARTY AS FOUNDED BY LENIN AND IRREPARABLY DAMAGE PERESTROIKA. HE VOICED SUPPORT FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A CENTRAL COMMITTEE COMMISSION TO OVERSEE NATIONALITY POLICY AND INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS AND CRITICISED PARTY MEMBERS WHO HAD BEEN ATTRACTED TO OR FAILED TO OPPOSE NATIONALIST TENDENCIES.

10. COMMENT WILL FOLLOW SEPARATELY.

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