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USSR: PARTY CONGRESS. COMMENT ON PROCEEDINGS SO FAR.

SUMMARY

1. IN A TWO AND A HALF HOUR SPEECH GORBAHCEV STUCK TO HIS GUNS ON PARTY REFORM. FEW CONCESSIONS TO HARDLiners. PARTY MUST LEARN TO WORK IN A MULTI-PARTY SYSTEM. ON OTHER KEY ISSUES - EG MARKET ECONOMY - NO INNOVATIONS. GETS A LUKEWARM RECEPTION.

2. ATMOSPHERE TENSE: BUT NO MAJOR RIFTS YET. LIGACHEV AND POLOZKOV SUPPORT RE-ELECTION OF GORBACHEV AS PARTY LEADER. LIGACHEV ATTACKS 'THOUGHTLESS RADICALISM' AND GETS LOUD APPLAUSE. BUT REFORMIST COMMENTS BY YAKOVLEV ALSO WELL RECEIVED.

3. FOR GORBACHEV, SO FAR SO GOOD. BUT A LONG WAY TO GO YET.

DETAIL

4. THE CONGRESS CARRIED OUT ITS FIRST DAY'S PROCEEDINGS WITH LITTLE CONTROVERSY. IT ELECTED A PRESIDIUM, SECRETARIAT, DRAFTING AND MANDATE COMMISSIONS AND AGREED ITS AGENDA RELATIVELY SWIFTLY. THE AGENDA IS AS FOLLOWS:

I. POLITICAL REPORT BY THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE TO THE CONGRESS (ALREADY PRESENTED BY GORBACHEV)

II. REPORTS BY MEMBERS OF THE POLITBURO AND SECRETARIAT (20 MINUTES EACH TO ACCOUNT FOR THEIR WORK)

III. REPORT OF THE CENTRAL REVISION COMMISSION (IE PARTY CONTROL BODY)

IV. ON THE PARTYS BUDGET AND PROPERTY

V. ON THE DRAFT DOCUMENT 'TOWARDS A HUMAN, DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM'

VI. ON THE DRAFT PARTY STATUTE

VII. POSITION ON THE CENTRAL CONTROL COMMISSION

VIII. ELECTION OF THE PARTY LEADERSHIP

IX. FURTHER RESOLUTIONS AND STATEMENTS

5. BY THE END OF THE FIRST DAY THE CONGRESS HAD HEARD REPORTS BY THREE MEMBERS OF THE LEADERSHIP (ITEM TWO OF THE AGENDA) - RYZHKOV,

MDEVEDEV AND YAKOVLEV.

6. GORBACHEV'S OPENING REPORT

6. THE MAIN EVENT OF THE DAY WAS GORBACHEV'S TWO AND A HALF HOUR REPORT ON BEHALF OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE. THIS WAS DESIGNED AS AN ACCOUNT OF THE PARTY'S ACTIVITY OVER THE PAST FOUR YEARS AND AS A GUIDE TO FUTURE POLICY DIRECTIONS. HE COVERED A WHOLE RANGE OF POLICY QUESTIONS. BUT THE CRUCIAL QUESTION AT THIS CONGRESS IS THAT OF THE ROLE AND STRUCTURE OF THE PARTY ITSELF. THERE WERE NO SURPRISES OR SUDDEN SHIFTS. GORBACHEV WAS SPEAKING ON BEHALF OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE AND READING A REPORT AGREED IN ADVANCE WITH THEM. WITHIN THESE CONSTRAINTS, IT WAS A GOOD WORKMANLIKE PERFORMANCE. THERE WAS ONLY ONE REAL SIGN OF EMOTION, WHEN HE STRESSED THAT THE FEDERALISATION OF THE PARTY WOULD LEAD TO A CHALLENGE FROM ALTERNATIVE SOURCES OF POWER (OTHER PARTIES, NATIONALIST EXTREMISTS ETC). ON PARTY REFORM HE STUCK FIRMLY BY THE MODERATELY REFORMIST PROVISIONS OF THE DRAFT STATUTE AND PROGRAMME. AS THOSE DOCUMENTS ARE THEMSELVES TO THE LEFT OF CENTRE IN PARTY TERMS, SO GORBACHEV'S PRESENTATION WAS CLEARLY TILTED TOWARDS THE DEMOCRATIC CAMP, ALTHOUGH IT WILL NOT HAVE GONE FAR ENOUGH TO SATISFY THE RADICAL DEMOCRATIC PLATFORM.

7. ONE IMPORTANT POINT OF THE REPORT WAS A REFERENCE TO OBJECTIONS BY MANY PARTY MEMBERS TO THE PROPOSAL THAT THE POLITBURO AND POST OF GENERAL SECRETARY BE REPLACED BY A PRESIDUM AND POST OF PARTY CHAIRMAN. IT WAS FELT THAT A PRESIDUM WOULD NOT HAVE THE OPERATIONAL ABILITY TO HOLD THE PARTY TOGETHER AGAINST CENTRIFUGAL REPUBLICAN TENSIONS.

ATMOSPHERE

8. NATURALLY ENOUGH THERE WERE SIGNS OF TENSION ON DAY ONE, IF NO OPEN CONTROVERSY. ONE OF THE FIRST DELEGATES TO SPEAK, AT THE VERY BEGINNING OF THE CONGRESS, PROPOSED THAT THE POLITBURO AND CENTRAL COMMITTEE RESIGN IMMEDIATELY, AND THAT NONE OF THEIR MEMBERS SHOULD BE ELECTED TO THE NEW LEADERSHIP BODIES. BUT THE PROPOSAL WAS LARGELY IGNORED. GORBACHEV AND PARTICULARLY RYZHKOV (THE LATTER CHAIRING PART OF THE PROCEEDINGS) SEEMED RATHER ILL AT EASE AT TIMES. BUT AT NO POINT DID PASSIONS BOIL OVER.

9. GORBACHEV WAS GIVEN OCCASIONAL APPLAUSE DURING HIS SPEECH. BUT ITS RECEPTION IN GENERAL WAS LUKEWARM. YAKOVLEV, HOWEVER, GOT A GOOD HAND WHICH SUGGESTS THAT THE CONGRESS IS NOT TOTALLY DOMINATED BY HARD LINERS.

10. THE CONGRESS ELECTED TO ITS SECRETARIAT ONE OF THE ''DEMOCRATIC PLATFORM'' LEADERS WH HAD FAILED TO BE ELECTED TO THE RUSSIAN PARTY CONFERENCE SECRETARIAT TWO WEEKS EARLIER. BUT THE CONGRESS DID NOT ALLOW THE ''DEMOCRATIC PLATFORM'' THE OPPORTUNITY OF PRESENTING A REPORT PARALLEL TO THAT OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE.

11. GORBACHEV'S POSITION

IN INTERVIEWS FOLLOWING THE FIRST DAY'S PROCEEDINGS BOTH LIGACHEV AND THE NEW RSFSR PARTY LEADER, POLOZKOV, SAID INDEPENDENTLY THAT THEY WOULD ACTIVELY SUPPORT THE RE-ELECTION OF GORBACHEV AS LEADER OF THE PARTY. PRESUMABLY, THEREFORE, LIGACHEV DOES NOT INTEND TO STAND AGAINST HIM. NEVERTHELESS, LIGACHEV MADE AN ATTACK IN HIS REPORT, ON DAY TWO, ON WHAT HE TERMED ''THOUGHTLESS RADICALISM'' OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS. HE ALSO SAID THAT PERESTROIKA COULD NOT GO AHEAD WITHOUT THE SUPPORT OF THE PARTY. THIS WAS ALMOST CERTAINLY AN IMPLICIT ATTACK ON GORBACHEV'S CLOSE ALLY ALEKSANDR YAKOVLEV, WHO IN A LIBERAL REPORT AT THE END OF DAY ONE HAD SAID THAT REFORM WOULD GO AHEAD WHETHER THE PARTY SUPPORTED IT OR NOT. BUT IT BY NO MEANS CONSTITUTES AN OPEN ATTACK ON GORBACHEV.

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