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FROM WALT ROSTOW  
TO THE PRESIDENT  
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AUGUST 13, 1968

WHAT FOLLOWS IS NOT REQUIRED READING. BUT IT CAME ACROSS MY DESK THIS MORNING ALONG WITH THE HERBLOCK CARTOON ON RUSSIA. IT INDICATES ONE REASON THE CZECH CRISIS IS SO SERIOUS FOR MOSCOW AND WHY A YOUNG RUSSIAN BELIEVES MOSCOW MUST CRUSH IT.

QUOTE

FROM: AMEMBASSY MOSCOW, AUGUST 6, 1968

SUBJECT: YOUNG RUSSIAN'S VIEWS ON CZECHOSLOVAKIA, YOUTH PROBLEM, AND SAKHAROV LETTER

THE ENCLOSED MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION COVERS THE HIGHLIGHTS OF A LENGTHY MIDNIGHT CONVERSATION ON AUGUST 1 BETWEEN AN EMBASSY OFFICER (WAYNE SMITH, SECOND SECRETARY) AND A 28-YEAR-OLD RUSSIAN, VYACHESLAV ALEKSANDROVICH MEDINTSEV (PROTECT), THE DIRECTOR OF DISTRIBUTION IN THE MOSCOW UNIVERSITY PUBLISHING HOUSE. MEDINTSEV FIRST BECAME KNOWN TO THE EMBASSY SOME TWO YEARS AGO IN CONNECTION WITH THE PUBLICATIONS PROCUREMENT PROGRAM. SINCE THEN HE HAS OCCASIONALLY ATTENDED FILM SHOWINGS AND ONCE A FUNCTION AT SPASO HOUSE. HE IS NOT HOWEVER, REGULARLY ENCOUNTERED IN THE MOSCOW DIPLOMATIC CIRCLE. ON THE CONTRARY, HE KNOWS VERY FEW FOREIGNERS. HE SEEMS TYPICAL OF THE CROWD OF YOUNG, EDUCATED, URBAN RUSSIANS WHO THRONG TO THE LIBERAL PLAYS, AVIDLY READ THE LIBERAL POETS, AND REGULARLY LISTEN TO FOREIGN BROADCASTS. DURING THE CONVERSATION, HE REPEATEDLY USED THE PHRASES "ALL MY FRIENDS THINK THAT...", OR "ALL THOSE IN MY CROWD SAY..." MOREOVER, HIS VIEWS ON THE YOUTH PROBLEM AT LEAST SEEM TO COINCIDE WITH THOSE OF OTHER EMBASSY CONTACTS. IT CANNOT BE DETERMINED JUST HOW WIDELY THE VIEWS HE EXPRESSED ARE HELD, BUT IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT THEY ARE HELD BY AT LEAST MORE THAN A FEW YOUNG URBAN RUSSIANS.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

MEDINTSEV SAID HE AND ALL HIS FRIENDS HAVE A RATHER GOOD IDEA FROM BBC AND VOA AS TO WHAT IS GOING ON IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA. HE SYMPATHIZES FULLY WITH THE CZECHS BUT IS EXTREMELY PESSIMISTIC AS TO THEIR CHANCES FOR SUCCESS. "NO MATTER WHAT



OUR LEADERS HAVE SAID AT CIERNA, OR WILL SAY AT BRATISLAVA," HE SAID, "SOONER OR LATER THEY WILL HAVE TO CRUSH THIS THING IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA." HE WENT ON TO SAY THAT HE HIMSELF EXPECTS A REPETITION OF THE HUNGARIAN INTERVENTION, AND HE EXPECTS IT TO TAKE PLACE BEFORE THE YEAR IS OUT, ON THE OTHER HAND, HE SAID, THE MORE TIME THAT PASSES, THE MORE EMBARRASSING IT WILL BE FOR THE SOVIET UNION TO USE NAKED FORCE. THE PARTY LEADERS MIGHT THEREFORE RESORT TO MASSIVE ECONOMIC PRESSURES ON THE EXTERNAL FRONT, AND, INSIDE CZECHOSLOVAKIA, TO EFFORTS TO CO-OPT OPPOSITION ELEMENTS AND UNDERMINE THE POSITION OF THE LIBERALS. BUT HOWEVER THEY CHOOSE TO CRUSH IT, HE WENT ON, THE PRINCIPAL THING TO BEAR IN MIND IS THAT THEY (THE SOVIET LEADERS) SIMPLY CANNOT AND WILL NOT ALLOW THIS MOVEMENT TOWARD "SOCIAL DEMOCRACY" TO GO UNCHECKED--NOT ONLY BECAUSE OF THE DANGER OF THE CONTAGION SPREADING TO THE OTHER EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, BUT, MORE IMPORTANTLY, BECAUSE OF THE DANGER OF ITS SPREADING TO THE SOVIET UNION ITSELF. "AND IN THAT ASSESSMENT," HE SAID, "THE CP LEADERSHIP HERE IS PERFECTLY CORRECT. OUR GENERATION IS WATCHING DEVELOPMENTS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA WITH INTENSE INTEREST. IF THE CZECHS ARE ABLE TO CARRY OFF THEIR EXPERIMENT WITH THIS NEW TYPE OF 'LIBERAL' COMMUNISM, THEN CERTAINLY WE WILL BE ENCOURAGED TO DEMAND THAT THE PERIMETERS OF OUR OWN LIBERTIES BE EXPANDED." THE THING THAT MUST REALLY DISTURB SOVIET PARTY LEADERS, HE CONTINUED, IS THAT THE PARTY IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA IS ALLOWING ITS LEADING ROLE TO BE CHALLENGED. PERHAPS THERE THE PARTY CAN GET AWAY WITH IT BECAUSE, AT LEAST FOR THE TIME BEING, THE PEOPLE WILL UNITE BEHIND THE CZECH PARTY AGAINST SOVIET INTERFERENCE. BUT IN THE SOVIET UNION, HE SAID, THE PARTY COULD NEVER ALLOW ITS POSITION TO BE SO CHALLENGED. THE LEADERSHIP KNEW FULL WELL THAT THEY COULD NEVER RECEIVE ANY SORT OF FREELY EXPRESSED MANDATE FROM THE PEOPLE. THEY MUST RULE BY COERCION. FOR THE CZECHS TO SUGGEST THAT IT IS POSSIBLE TO RULE WITHOUT COERCION, CENSORSHIP, ETC., IN EFFECT, THEN, POSED A THREAT TO THE LEADING ROLE OF THE PARTY IN THE SOVIET UNION--A THREAT WHICH THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP ARE NOT LIKELY TO LONG ABIDE.

MR. SMITH SUGGESTED THAT PERHAPS THE 1968 CZECH AND THE 1956 HUNGARIAN SITUATIONS WERE NOT ALTOGETHER ANALOGOUS. THE CZECH PARTY WAS STILL IN CONTROL, AND CZECHOSLOVAKIA, UNLIKE HUNGARY IN 1956, IS NOT TRYING TO LEAVE THE WARSAW PACT. ON THE CONTRARY, IT HAS DECLARED ITS FULL INTENTION TO REMAIN WITHIN THE SOCIALIST CAMP. MOREOVER, THE CZECHS, UNLIKE THE HUNGARIANS IN 1956, HAVE THE SUPPORT OF MANY OTHER CP'S.

MEDINTSEV SAID THAT HE AND ALL HIS FRIENDS KNEW FROM FOREIGN BROADCAST THAT THE BRITISH, THE FRENCH AND ITALIAN CP'S, TO SAY NOTHING OF THE ROMANIANS AND THE YUGOSLAVS, HAVE LINED UP WITH THE CZECHS. THAT, OF COURSE, HE ADMITTED, MAKES IT A MORE COMPLICATED PROBLEM FOR THE SOVIET LEADERS. IF THEY SEND IN TANKS, THEY WILL ENRAGE WORLD PUBLIC OPINION AND FURTHER DIVIDE (PERHAPS HOPELESSLY) THE WORLD COMMUNIST MOVEMENT. THAT WOULD BE A SERIOUS LOSS. BUT ON THE OTHER HAND, IF THE CZECHS GET AWAY WITH "LIBERALIZATION," THE SOVIET LEADERS WILL SEE IN IT THE BEGINNING OF THE END OF THE CPSU AS PRESENTLY CONSTITUTED. THEY WILL SEE THEIR OWN POSITIONS THREATENED. "OUR



LEADERS ARE NOT GOING TO RISK THAT," HE CONCLUDED. "NO, THERE ARE NO TWO WAYS ABOUT IT. THEY WILL HAVE TO CRUSH THE CZECHS."

#### SAKHAROV LETTER

IN REPLY TO MR. SMITH'S QUESTION AS TO WHETHER OR NOT HE HAD READ THE SAKHAROV LETTER, MEDINTSEV REPLIED THAT HE HAD NOT, BUT THAT HE HAD HEARD ABOUT IT ON THE VOA AND THAT EVERYONE WAS VERY EXCITED BY IT. HE WANTS VERY MUCH TO READ IT, BUT HAS NOT YET BEEN ABLE TO LAY HANDS ON A COPY. HE COMMENTED THAT WHEREAS HE, OF COURSE, SYMPATHIZES WITH WHAT SAKHAROV WAS TRYING TO DO, HE THOUGHT THE MAN HIMSELF MUST BE EITHER A BIT QUIXOTIC--OR ALMOST UNBELIEVABLY COURAGEOUS. EVERYONE, HE SAID, WAS WONDERING WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO HIM SINCE THE LETTER CAME OUT.

#### YOUTH PROBLEM

SOVIET YOUTH THINK MARXISM-LENINISM IS A JOKE. CERTAINLY TO ONE BELIEVES IN THE INFALLIBILITY OF THE PARTY--OR EVEN THAT IT IS RIGHT MORE OFTEN THAN IT IS WRONG. THAT IS NOT TO SAY, HOWEVER, THAT THEY ADMIRE THE CAPITALIST SYSTEM. ON THE CONTRARY, THE SERIOUS SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN THE U.S. SUGGEST THAT "YOURS IS NOT THE WAY EITHER."

EXCLUDED FROM ANY ROLE, OR LIKELIHOOD OF ACHIEVING A ROLE, IN DECISION MAKING, SEEING THAT THERE IS VERY LITTLE CHANCE OF CHANGING THE SYSTEM, SOVIET YOUNG PEOPLE REACT BY SIMPLY IGNORING POLITICS AND CONCENTRATING ON THEIR OWN MATERIAL WELL-BEING. THIS DOES NOT MEAN, HOWEVER, THAT THEY ARE APATHETIC IN THE TRUE MEANING OF THE TERM. "WE ARE VERY MUCH INTERESTED IN EXPANDING THE LIMITS WITHIN WHICH WE ARE ALLOWED TO EXPRESS OURSELVES," HE SAID. AND IF THERE REALLY SEEMED TO BE A CHANCE TO CHANGE ANYTHING, SOVIET YOUTH WOULD REACT WITH VIGOR. "SINCE NOTHING IS GOING TO BE CHANGED, HOWEVER, WE CHOOSE TO STAND ASIDE FROM THE SYSTEM." A FEW YEARS AGO, HE COMMENTED, HE HAD THOUGHT CHANGES WERE IN THE OFFING. IT SEEMED THAT A PROCESS OF DEMOCRATIZATION WAS BEGINNING. BUT HE HAD LONG SINCE GIVEN UP ANY SUCH HOPES. AS LONG AS THE COMMUNIST PARTY IS IN POWER THERE WILL BE NO MEANINGFUL LIBERALIZATION. "AND THE RUSSIAN PEOPLE," HE CONCLUDED, "INURED BY HISTORY TO AUTHORITARIAN RULE, WILL SIMPLY GO ON SUBMITTING."

MR. SMITH COMMENTED THAT ONE MIGHT SAY THINGS SEEMED TO BE CHANGING FOR THE BETTER, ALBEIT VERY SLOWLY. THERE WERE MORE LIBERTIES NOW THAN THIRTY YEARS AGO. PERHAPS FIFTY YEARS IN THE FUTURE, THE SOVIET PEOPLE WILL ENJOY FREEDOMS UNTHOUGHT OF TODAY.

"WHAT HAPPENS THIRTY YEARS FROM NOW DOESN'T EXCITE ME," MEDINTSEV REPLIED. "THAT WILL BE TOO LATE FOR ME". END QUOTE

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