

June 20, 1988

**Anatoly Chernyaev, Notes from a Meeting of the
Politburo**

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Summary:

Anatoly Chernyaev's notes from the Politburo session on June 20, 1988, during which military spending, party membership, the progress of perestroika, and CPSU organizational leadership were discussed.

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

Politburo Discussion of Gorbachev's Draft Report to the XIX Party Conference

From Gromyko's remarks. Could the Soviet Union afford to switch all resources to civilian objectives? Hundreds of billions went to the military ones. There is one big "but." They wanted to bend to their will. In the UN Security Council we proposed to the United States to stop the arms race. They rejected our proposals. That is why we could not stop our production of nuclear weapons, and did not want to reduce the number of our military bases. They had thousands of those. And we could not do otherwise in the name of the country's independence.

During Krushchev's time we had made 600 bombs (nuclear). He said then: how long are we going to do it? Under Brezhnev we could have taken a more rational position. But we continued to stick to the principle: they are racing, and we are racing, like in sports.

Science and intelligent people have already arrived at the conclusion about the senselessness of this race. But both we and they continued it. We approached this issue in a primitive way. And our high command started from the assumption that if a war was started, we would win it. And so we made more and more nuclear weapons. That was our mistaken position. And the political leadership carries the complete blame for it.

Tens of billions were spent on production of those toys, we did not have enough brains. But you all know how those issues were decided then. We should strengthen this point in the theses. I believe that it would make the report a contribution to policy and theory in this sphere.

Ligachev. How do we admit people to the Party now? Here are the statistics. Every 16th worker gets admitted, and every second-to-fourth person from scientists, writers, and the like.

Gorbachev. This issue is unresolved indeed. We cannot admit everybody who wants to [enter] the Party, and at the same time, we cannot alter the nature of our workers' party. We also admit very few young people. We need some criteria.

The means of mass communications do a great job in perestroika. We would not have moved anywhere without them. However, we would need to say that group-think dominates the media. We need to say that while criticizing, the press puts a person in a position where he has no rights. As Lenin said, what comes out is "literary jockeying." Glasnost should be healing. And how would you heal if a person cannot respond to what had been written about him. The framework of glasnost, the framework of democracy, the framework of socialism - we need to think them through and speak about them openly.

... It has been proposed that we should even more strongly emphasize that we managed to remove the threat of nuclear war, we should stress it even more. Yegor Kuz'mich [Ligachev] proposed that. However, I would not be too excited about it. We came to a correct understanding of the situation, and we should give it a calm assessment.

It says in the first drafts "thanks to our power." No - thanks to new thinking. If we do not stress realism, and do not proposed realistic things - nobody on the other side would meet us halfway, and nothing good will happen. This is a common process. Even though the conclusion that the threat of war was removed is very important. It is very important that the world has woken up and is taking its fate into its own hands...

About Komsomol. We used to have this phrase: "in partnership with the CPSU." I do not insist on the term "under the leadership," but we should somehow state it so that the relations with public organizations were understood in a democratic way. But not in such a way that everybody would read it as they want: what it means to lead, but not to order around. I understand it as ideological and political influence on the youth. In other words, I am in favor of leadership, but a correct one.

It is a questions - how to combine democracy, glasnost, with a strong central power that is necessary for our big country and the multinational state? Therefore, we proposed the formula: "in combination with party leadership." There were many doubts. Still, I think, we should not propose anything else here so far. We said: "at this stage," i.e. the present political structure does not allow anything more significant. In the Novo-Ogarevo team many people were not excited about this

phrase. But I am deeply convinced, and I thought like this all my life, and Lenin's idea of "Soviets [councils] with Communists" - is a promising and correct idea. If we want to ensure the success of perestroika, we cannot do that without the party. If we do not find appropriate organizational solutions for its implementation, it will not work. We need to strengthen executive committees, but only by strengthening the soviet [councils] themselves, assuming that Communists would be elected to them by the free vote of the people. In other words, Communists would be in power legally for the first time. And that way we will have a limit on the General Secretary, not that he can do anything: he can do anything, but within the law.

In short, we should think about the country, not about our seats. And if somebody was trying to adjust their work to be liked by Gorbachev, or Shcherbitsky, or Gromyko - we are against it. We opened on such a process that we must think and think about the country. And in the future, when we have led the country to a more open state, many things would become clearer.

Shevardnadze. Emphasized the thesis on human rights: how well we expanded it, it is a great cause.

Gorbachev. This section is still raw here. Human rights came from our revolution. And what did it lead to? In short it will not work like that in the theses.

Shevardnadze is saying that perestroika should abolish the deformities in ethnic relations. And that the section on secession from the USSR is simplified in our Constitution.

Gorbachev. What are you saying? Under the command-administrative system you can write anything in the Constitution. In the conditions of democracy you need to be careful about it.

We should state honestly that the party will lead, but it will lead exclusively on a legal basis, on the basis of a free mandate from the people.

In the Politburo we were talking about opposition parties. We believe that here we need to develop a firm policy. Only when we present this policy, when it gives results, will we then resolve our doubts about other parties, then everything take its place. Now the issue is not multi-party systems, the issue is the correct road for the entire society. The soil on which extremism grows is the same one which we want to leave ourselves. And today we are only planning many things.

Comrade Dolgikh was saying here that the people demand that we be on our guard. This is not the issue. Not 'on our guard,' but we should do our work, so that we have results. For me there is no question about I - socialism, as we see it now, fits the principles of democracy. But we will not achieve such socialism without the Party, and we should reform the Party.

Regarding means of mass communications. Everybody seems to support the thesis that democracy and glasnost do not mean anarchy. Many of us are inclined to press them down a little. But I would say that now we have accumulated some experience, and now we already can write a law on mass media. We could not do it before now. We were rightly afraid that we could strangle them to death.

I would say the same about the KGB. Let the country live, and let the KGB work in the new situation. Later, will see.

Vorotnikov gives a high estimate of the international section of the theses. Notes that we let ourselves get pulled into the arms race indeed. We found ourselves on the brink of a catastrophe.

Gorbachev. This is the softest term. Could use stronger words.

Vorotnikov. It is not imperialism, we are the ones to blame. We failed to use all means for peace. We got pulled into somebody's logic.

Gorbachev. There is a stupid dialectics here: if they do it, we will. There were opportunities - yes, but we got wound up. If you look closely - we were always catching up, and we did not use political methods to achieve our objectives in a proper manner. This admission can lessen our guilt to some degree. We wanted to ensure strategic parity. It is a good concept - strategic parity. But we were pursuing simply parity, mechanical parity. Did we want to have parity with the entire NATO? To race with the whole world in the volume of armaments: cannon by cannon, plane by plane? Then let us introduce ration cards for food, turn the country into a military

camp, and just race and race.

The situation has been changing, and now it is completely different. And we still have not used what we have. We are not changing direction. But we were not capable of using our peace-loving capabilities in a reasonable way. Originally, we wrote in our theses that we found ourselves on the brink of war. So it was in the original drafts, but then we decided to soften the wording so that we do not scare anybody.