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THE SEPTEMBER 1989 CENTRAL COMMITTEE NATIONALITIES PLENUM:
A VICTORY FOR RYZHKOV AND VOROTNIKOV?

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Introduction

On the morning of September 21, 1989, Western newspapers hailed Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's success in removing several conservative members of the Politburo. These papers failed to report, however, that two Politburo members, Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov and Chairman of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR) Supreme Soviet Vitalii Vorotnikov, appeared to have established and strengthened two Central Committee (CC) bodies and polarized power within the Politburo. These moves may illustrate a retreat from Gorbachev's reform plans for the Party apparatus.¹ The reasons for these bureaucratic changes can be distilled from Ryzhkov's and Vorotnikov's comments made at a July 18, 1989 CC meeting. The CC called this event "Rethinking the Party's Function and Role in Society."²

The July 1989 Meeting

At the CC meeting in July 1989, and in opposition to Gorbachev's call to dismantle the Party apparatus, Ryzhkov argued to reinforce this body. First, he asserted that the Communist Party is in serious trouble and "that the authority of cadres in terms of nationality issues is being undermined."³ Second, Ryzhkov claimed that the structural changes occurring in the Party apparatus were inadequate and that more changes (further bureaucracy) were needed.⁴ Finally, he demanded a redistribution of responsibilities in the Politburo and the Secretariat:

Given the importance of the problems is it permissible, for instance, that two members of the Politburo should study the problems of the countryside? I

¹Gorbachev revealed his plans for restructuring the Party apparatus in a note published in *Izvestiia TsK KPSS*. In this note, he stated that the CC apparatus should form Commissions to oversee the CC Departments and reduce the size of the Party apparatus by one-third. In addition, Gorbachev called for the elimination of eleven CC departments. For more on Gorbachev's plans for the Party apparatus, see "Zapiska Gorbacheva M.S. ot 24 avgusta 1988: K voprosu o reorganizatsii partiinogo apparata," *Izvestiia TsK KPSS*, No. 1, 1989.

²*Pravda*, July 21, 1989.

³*Ibid.*

⁴*Ibid.*

think not. We must look at the distribution of duties for the whole membership of the Politburo and the Central Committee Secretariat and assess whether the appropriate sector of the party leadership is successfully performing its task.⁵

Vorotnikov argued at the CC meeting in July 1989 that the RSFSR should have a voice in Russian nationality affairs. Previously, he asserted the need to establish RSFSR bodies such as a Russian Academy of Sciences, a RSFSR Trade Union, and a RSFSR MVD (Ministry of Internal Affairs).⁶ Vorotnikov also sought to institute a RSFSR Buro or Secretariat:

We believe that, particularly in light of public opinion, it is necessary to boost the Russian Federation's sovereign rights. We must improve the party political structure and create economic and administrative organs of management which correspond to those existing in other republics.⁷

Thus, the arguments proposed by both leaders to redistribute duties within the Politburo and Secretariat and to establish an RSFSR Buro were brought to the floor of the CPSU CC plenum of September 19-20, 1989.⁸

The September 1989 Plenum

As a result of the September 19-20, 1989 plenum, Ryzhkov and Vorotnikov implemented the proposals made at the previous meeting in July 1989. Several Party leaders, who spoke at the plenum, supported Ryzhkov's and Vorotnikov's plans to establish new Party bodies.

Former First Secretary of the Tatar ASSR and currently Secretary of the CC Gumer Usmanov requested the establishment of a Russian Communist Party instead of the proposed Buro or Secretariat.⁹ Moreover, First Secretary of the Jewish Autonomous Oblast B.L. Korsunsky also called for the establishment of RSFSR bodies similar to those that existed in

⁵*Pravda*, July 21, 1989.

⁶See, for example, *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, September 3, 1989.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸It is interesting to note that neither Chebrikov, Nikonov, nor Shcherbitsky spoke at the July 1989 CC meeting. These leaders were possibly in political trouble at this time.

⁹*Pravda*, September 22, 1989. The creation of a Russian Communist Party is significant because it would give Russian nationalists, who are usually very conservative and against reform, an active voice in political affairs within the RSFSR which did not exist before.

the 1920s.¹⁰ In addition, First Secretary of Azerbaijan A-R Kh. Vezirov demanded the creation of a CPSU Commission on Interethnic Relations and a CC Department to be headed by a CPSU secretary.¹¹ Other participants made similar comments at the plenum and the final draft communique reflected their efforts to establish such bodies. The draft stated:

It is deemed expedient to form a CPSU Central Committee Commission on national policy questions. Analogous commissions could be created within union republic Communist Party Central Committees and where necessary in party *krai* and *oblast* committees.¹²

In addition, the draft addressed the role of the RSFSR:

The possibility should be examined of coordinating the efforts of party organizations operating on the territory of the RSFSR by way of regularly holding Russian conferences of the CPSU which would tackle fundamental questions of the activity of the republic's Communists, and also the possibility of creating in the structure of the CPSU Central Committee a Central Committee Buro (Secretariat) for the direct operational leadership of the RSFSR's party organizations....¹³

While Gorbachev is trying to pare down the Party apparatus, the CC, led by Ryzhkov and Vorotnikov, established additional and strengthened existing Party bodies.

Leadership Changes at the September 1989 Plenum

The September 1989 plenum instituted several personnel changes that surprised Western observers.¹⁴ The Politburo released Chairman of the Legal Affairs Commission Viktor Chebrikov, First Secretary of the Ukraine Vladimir Shcherbitsky, CC Agricultural Secretary Viktor Nikonov, former First Secretary of the Leningrad Gorkom Yuri Solov'yev and former First Deputy Minister Nikolai Talyzin.

Chebrikov's retirement especially shocked Western scholars who thought he might be the second or third most powerful functionary in the Party apparatus because of his oversight of the KGB, military, and nationalities. Analysts should have expected his

¹⁰*Pravda*, September 22, 1989.

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²*Pravda*, September 24, 1989.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴See the Appendix for a list of Politburo and Secretariat members.

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downfall since he approved the military's use of brute force to suppress the demonstration in Tbilisi, Georgia in April 1989.¹⁵ Furthermore, Chebrikov's health was reportedly in decline and this may have led to his retirement.¹⁶

Analysts viewed retired Viktor Nikonov as a Gorbachev supporter. Nikonov was a full Politburo member, a Secretary of the CC responsible for agriculture, and Deputy Chairman of the CC Commission on Agriculture. His removal as a CC Secretary for Agriculture under Ligachev is consistent with Ryzhkov's earlier call for a redistribution of duties at the July 1988 CC meeting.¹⁷ In addition, Western analysts believed that Nikonov was appointed as deputy chairman of the CC Commission for Agricultural Affairs to watch over Ligachev. However, Nikonov's retirement appears to benefit Ligachev since the latter may now have a free reign over agricultural policies.¹⁸

Shcherbitsky's expected retirement was not so surprising. He is ill with cancer and faced unprecedented labor and ethnic troubles in his republic earlier this year.¹⁹ His decision to retire was probably genuine.

The Politburo promoted Chairman of the KGB Vladimir Kryuchkov and GOSPLAN Chairman and Ryzhkov associate Yuri Maslyukov to full membership.²⁰ Kryuchkov's appointment is the most interesting. The Supreme Soviet appointed Kryuchkov as chairman of the KGB in October 1988, and he jumped to full membership without serving the required one to two year term as candidate member. He is a protege of Yuri Andropov and attempts to project himself as a reformer interested in fighting corruption, drugs, and international terrorism. Reportedly, Kryuchkov successfully placed informers among aides of leading Politburo members. His rapid rise may be a result of this invaluable "intelligence gathering" service to Gorbachev.²¹

¹⁵For example, see Uzbek First Secretary I.A. Karimov's speech to the CC plenum, *Pravda*, September 21, 1989 for the failure of law enforcement organs during the rioting in Fergana Oblast. Chebrikov's involvement in the Tbilisi massacre of April 9, 1989 is documented in *Moskovskie Novosti*, No. 37, September 10, 1989. The appearance of this document before the plenum helped to cement Chebrikov's removal.

¹⁶Chebrikov met with Soviet historian Roy Medvedev recently. Medvedev reported that Chebrikov "spoke with difficulty and could no longer manage a full workday." See *Newsweek*, October 2, 1989.

¹⁷*Pravda*, July 21, 1989.

¹⁸See, for example, Ligachev's interview on agrarian work from TASS, October 9, 1989 as translated in *FBIS-SOV*, October 10, 1989.

¹⁹Rumors of Shcherbitsky's illness circulated several months before his retirement. See, for example, *Newsweek*, October 2, 1989. His

²⁰Maslyukov's rise is tied directly to Ryzhkov when both worked together in GOSPLAN in 1982.

²¹*Newsweek*, October 2, 1989. It is interesting to point out that Kryuchkov's

The Politburo promoted Chairman of the Council of Union Yevgenii Primakov and Chairman of the Party Control Committee Boris Pugo to candidate membership. Primakov is one of the architects of new thinking and is a close ally of both Gorbachev and CC International Affairs Commission Chairman Aleksandr Yakovlev. On the other hand, Pugo is a former KGB man who shares career ties with Kryuchkov. Western analysts expected Pugo's assignment to the Politburo, since all previous chairman of the Party Control Committee were full or candidate members of the Politburo.

However, Gorbachev was unable to promote two close allies into the Politburo, Soviet Vice President Anatolii Lukyanov and Chairman of the Party Organization and Cadres Building Commission Grigory Razumovsky. (Lukyanov's appointment as Vice President normally carries full membership in the Politburo; Razumovsky is the only candidate member of the Politburo who is also a Secretary and chairman of a CC commission). These two men continue to wait for promotion.

One of the more interesting aspects of the September 1989 CC plenum is the promotion of four *oblast* first secretaries, Andrei Girenko, Yurii Manaenkov, Yegor Stroev, and Gumer Usmanov, into the CPSU CC Secretariat, a body believed to be inoperative.²² Their responsibilities are not yet clear but it appears that their functions might be related to the establishment of the CPSU Commission for Interethnic Relations and a RSFSR Buro. In fact, two of the new CC Secretaries, Yurii Manaenkov and Yegor Stroev, commented that their appointments completely surprised them.²³

Thus, the appointment of the four new secretaries indicates somewhat of a revival for the CC Secretariat, as this body ceased to function following the September 1988 reorganization of the Party apparatus. At the November 28, 1988 CC plenum, for example, a resolution transferred executive authority from the Secretariat to the CC Commissions which emasculated the Secretariat. Gorbachev advisers Georgi Shakhnazarov and Feodor Burlatsky, as well as Boris Yeltsin, confirmed the fact that the Secretariat did not meet any more.

informers might be found in the General Department of the CC where First Deputy Chief P.P. Laptev, a former KGB functionary under Andropov, has operated freely since the early 1980s. The General Department documents the activity of the leading Party organs and its representatives.

²²See the Appendix for biographical information.

²³*Pravda*, September 23, 1989.

The resolution from the November 1988 plenum also stated that the formation of the CC Commissions should be regarded as an important measure for restoring collective discussion and for adopting decisions within leading party bodies. It can be argued that the portfolios of the senior secretaries became too large: Each secretary, except for Moscow Gorkom First Secretary Lev Zaikov, became responsible for only one issue, with Ligachev the only secretary truly affected. (Prior to the reorganization, Ligachev's portfolio included ideology, foreign affairs, economy, transportation, education, and cadres.)

However, the Secretariat suddenly reappeared in April 1989 when it ordered the liberal press organs such as *Argumenty i fakty* to stop criticizing the military.²⁴ Support for the Secretariat began to grow. Sverdlovsk First Secretary Leonid Bobykin, who is a Ryzhkov ally, called for the return of this body at the July 1989 CC meeting.²⁵ In addition the reappearance of the Secretariat gives new strength to Ligachev who formally chaired this body and who chairs the Politburo while Gorbachev is on vacation or out of the country.²⁶ Following the September 1989 plenum, the Politburo formally assigned the Secretariat to form a RSFSR Buro and a Commission and Department for Interethnic Affairs in the CC apparatus.²⁷ Thus, the Secretariat's revival testifies to the strength of forces led by Ryzhkov and Vorotnikov.

Divisions in the Politburo: 1989

Four factions divided the Politburo prior to the September 1989 CC plenum: "fast" reformers, technocrats, "slow" reformers, and neo-conservatives.²⁸ The boundaries of these factions were fluid and, depending on the issue, one or more groups could combine to push through their demands. First, the "fast" reformers argued for radical political, military, economic, agricultural, and foreign policy reforms specifically through glasnost. Fast reformers included Gorbachev, Chairman of the CC Ideology Commission Vadim Medvedev, Soviet Foreign Ministers Eduard Shevardnadze, and Chairman of the CC Commission on International Affairs Aleksandr Yakovlev.

²⁴*Izvestiia TsK KPSS*, No. 6, 1989.

²⁵*Pravda*, July 21, 1989. Bobykin is a protege of Ryzhkov's from Sverdlovsk. Both men were appointed to work in the CC apparatus in 1982-1983.

²⁶For example, Ligachev still chaired meetings of the Politburo with Chebrikov despite his so-called "demotion" in September 1988. See *Washington Post*, October 12, 1989.

²⁷*RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 191, October 6, 1989.

²⁸Anders Aslund argues that there are actually five "fluid" factions. See Anders Aslund, *Gorbachev's Struggle for Economic Reform*, Cornell University Press, 1989.

Technocrats belonged to the second faction in the Politburo. They sided with either "fast" reformers or "slow" reformers, argued for political, military, economic, agricultural reforms and were willing to experiment. They also criticized informal groups and wanted some limits on glasnost. Technocrats within the Politburo were CC Secretary for Agricultural Affairs Viktor Nikonov, Prime Minister Ryzhkov, and Chairman of the CC Commission on Socio-Economic Affairs Nikolai Slyunkov.

The third faction consisted of "slow" reformers. They sided with either technocrats or neo-conservatives. These leaders argued for economic and agricultural reform but wanted stringent limits on glasnost. They also criticized informals and emphasized the importance of Soviet national security issues. Slow reformers included Chairman of the CC Commission on State and Legal Affairs Viktor Chebrikov and Moscow Gorkom First Secretary Lev Zaikov.

Neo-conservatives composed the fourth faction. These leaders occasionally sided with slow reformers. They argued for minimal reforms in agriculture with an emphasis on ideology. They criticized informals severely and favored greater limits on glasnost. They shared the slow reformers' views on Soviet national security issues. Members of this group were Chairman of the CC Commission on Agriculture Yegor Ligachev, Ukrainian First Secretary Vladimir Shcherbitsky, and Vitalii Vorotnikov.

However, after the September 1989 CC plenum ended, and consistent with speeches given by the members, a more polarized Politburo appeared. The "reformers" group has evolved from the fast reformers. Members of this group include Gorbachev, KGB Chairman Kryuchkov,²⁹ Medvedev, Shevardnadze, and Yakovlev. The remaining three groups combined into a coalition labeled the slow reformers/neo-conservative group. Members of this group include Ligachev, GOSPLAN Chairman Yuri Maslyukov, Ryzhkov, Slyunkov, Vorotnikov, and Zaikov.³⁰ Internal and external pressures on the leadership will determine whether this coalition persists.

The coalition may have the power to pose a threat to Gorbachev's reform plans. In a speech after the plenum, Ligachev warned that liberals in the Soviet Union sought a return to capitalism and are pushing the country further into chaos.³¹ In addition, Gorbachev began

²⁹Kryuchkov should be seen as a floater even though his views appear radical. During a crisis he would probably side with slow reformers/neo-conservatives.

³⁰Ligachev should really be placed in a category by himself yet he enjoys some support from this faction while Vorotnikov and Zaikov tend to be more conservative on other non-Party issues than Ryzhkov.

³¹TASS in *FBIS-SOV*, September 22, 1989.

to retreat from his reform program as evidenced by (1) laws prohibiting strikes in the economic sector; (2) a crackdown on liberal newspaper editors; and (3) limits on private businesses which amounts to a rejection of market socialism.³²

Conclusion

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Ryzhkov and Chairman of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet Vitalii Vrotnikov, a majority of Politburo members seems to articulate views that run counter to Gorbachev's intended reforms of the Party apparatus. The fact that many Politburo members seem to centralize and reinstitute Party bodies such as the Secretariat testifies to Gorbachev's weakness in controlling some aspects of the September 1989 Nationalities Plenum. It is possible that the return of the Secretariat and the assignment to that body of four new secretaries suggests a retreat for reformers in the Party leadership.

³²Los Angeles Times, October 17, 1989.

APPENDIX

New CC Secretaries

Andrei (Adolf) Nikolaevich Girenko- Portfolio unknown but will most likely become Chairman of the Legal Affairs Commission. Labeled as a conservative. Born in 1936. Ukrainian. Mining authority, 1958-1963; Party member as of 1963; First Secretary Krivoi Rog Gorkom, 1963-1970; Low-level Party assignments in the Ukraine, 1970-1975; CPSU Inspector, 1975; Second Secretary, Kherson Obkom, 1975-1980; First Secretary of Kherson Obkom, 1980-1987; First Secretary of Crimean Obkom, 1987-1989. Member of Central Committee State and Legal Commission as of November 30, 1988. Strong ties with Aleksandr Kapto, Chief of the CPSU CC Ideology Department.

Yurii Alekseevich Manaenkov- Portfolio unknown but will probably become chief of the RSFSR Bureau as he originally proposed the idea. Background in agriculture. Seen as political reformer. Born in 1936. Russian. Party member as of 1960. Employee of Lamskoe District Newspaper, 1958-1962; Raikom Instructor in Tambov Oblast, 1962-1963; Deputy Editor of District newspaper "Leninskaya Pravda," 1963-1964; Chief Agronomist, Staroyurevo District Kolkhoz, 1964-1968; Secretary, then Second Secretary of Rzhaksa Raikom in Tambov Oblast, 1968-1970; First Secretary Umet Raikom (Tambov Oblast), 1970-1973; Department chief in Tambov Obkom, 1973-1975; Secretary of Tambov Obkom, 1975-1983; Second Secretary of Tambov Obkom, 1983-1984; First Secretary of Lipetsk Oblast, 1984-1989; Full member of Central Committee in 1986.

Yegor Semenovitch Stroev- Portfolio unknown but will probably become Deputy Chairman of the Agricultural Affairs Commission. Agricultural specialist and seen as a reformer. Born in 1937. Russian. Party member as of 1958; Student in Tambov Oblast, 1955-1960; Agronomist for local paper, 1960-1963; Deputy Secretary Uritsky Raion Kolkhoz-Sovkhoz Production Directorate in Orel Oblast, 1963-1970; Secretary Khotynets Raikom, Second Secretary, Pokrovskoe Raikom, then Chairman Prokrovskoe Raikom in Orel Oblast, 1963-1970; First Secretary Pokrovskoe Raikom, 1970-1973; Secretary for Agriculture, Orel Oblast, 1973-1984; CPSU CC Inspector, 1984-1985; First Secretary Orel Obkom, 1985-1989; Full member CPSU CC since 1986.

Gumer Ismagilovich Usmanov- Portfolio unknown but will probably become Chairman of the Interethnic Affairs Commission due to his ethnic background. Agricultural specialist and a conservative. Born in 1932. Tatar. Party member as of 1953. Low-level Party official in Tatar ASSR, 1960-1965; First Secretary Bui Raikom (Tatar ASSR), 1965-1966; Chairman Tatar ASSR Council of Ministers, 1966-1982; First Secretary Tatar ASSR, 1982-1989. Usmanov attacked Yeltsin at the 19th Party Conference.

Politburo as of September 20, 1989

FULL MEMBERS:

Mikhail Gorbachev: General Secretary and President

Vladimir Kryuchkov: KGB Chairman

Yegor Ligachev: Chairman, CC Commission on Agriculture

Vadim Medvedev: Chairman, CC Commission on Ideology

Yurii Maslyukov: Chairman, GOSPLAN

Nikolai Ryzhkov: Prime Minister

Eduard Shevardnadze: Foreign Minister

Nikolai Slyunkov: Chairman, CC Commission on Socio-Economic Affairs

Vitalii Vorotnikov: Chairman, Presidium, RSFSR Supreme Soviet

Aleksandr Yakovlev: Chairman, CC Commission on International Affairs

Lev Zaikov: Moscow Gorkom First Secretary; some oversight of defense industry

CANDIDATE MEMBERS:

Alexandra Biryukova: Deputy Chairman, Council of Ministers

Anatolii Lukyanov: Vice President

Yevgenii Primakov: Chairman, Council of Union

Boris Pugo: Chairman, Party Control Commission

Georgii Razumovsky: Chairman, CC Commission on Cadres

Aleksandr Vlasov: Premier, RSFSR

Dmitrii Yazov: Minister of Defense

Secretariat as of September 20, 1989

Oleg Baklanov: Defense and Chemical Industry

Andrei Girenko: Unknown— Legal Affairs?

Mikhail Gorbachev: General Secretary and President

Yegor Ligachev: Chairman, CC Commission on Agriculture

Yurii Manaenkov: Unknown— RSFSR Buro?

Vadim Medvedev: Chairman, CC Commission on Ideology

Georgii Razumovsky: Chairman, CC Commission on Cadres

Nikolai Slyunkov: Chairman, CC Commission on Socio-Economic Affairs

Yegor Stroeve: Unknown— Agriculture?

Gumer Usmanov: Unknown— Nationalities?

Aleksandr Yakovlev: Chairman, CC Commission on International Affairs

Lev Zaikov: Moscow Gorkom First Secretary; some oversight of defense industry