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121376	MEMO	RICHARD PIPES TO RICHARD ALLEN RE. INTERVIEW WITH GEORGE URBAN ***R 8/3/2016 M380/1***	1	8/21/1981	B1

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MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~ August 21, 1981

ACTION

MEMORANDUM FOR RICHARD V. ALLEN

FROM: RICHARD PIPES

SUBJECT: Interview with George Urban

Attached (Tab I) please find the revised transcript of my interview with George Urban of Radio Free Europe, which you have authorized, occasioned by the approaching 25th anniversary of the Hungarian uprising. The purpose of the dialogue, which is intended to be broadcast in the various languages of Eastern Europe, is to give the people of that area a Western perspective on their recent past and on their present predicament. I have studiously avoided anything that could smack of policy recommendations, concentrating on analysis of past and present trends. Urban, who is a master in the art of interviewing, has asked me to urge you strongly to authorize broadcast of this interview on the grounds that there is immense curiosity in Eastern Europe concerning the views of the new American Administration of their situation and that this is one, non-controversial way of satisfying it. In any event, nothing further will be done with this script until you have given your O.K. (C)

RECOMMENDATION

That you authorize the release for broadcast by RFE of the enclosed interview.

Approve as is _____

Revise as indicated ✓

Disapprove _____

Attachment:

Tab I Draft interview with George Urban

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~
Review August 21, 1987.

Question No. 1.

The 1956 Hungarian revolution was preceded by Khrschev's de-Stalinizing speech at the 20 Party Congress and the Polish upheavals. Yet the supremacy of the Communist Party, both in the Soviet Union and in its client states, seemed firm and so did all the other institutions of Soviet rule.

Would you have been surprised as a Western historian of Russian affairs if you had been told in, say, May 1956 that the people of a fully totalitarian and seemingly quiescent country - Hungary - would, after an uprising lasting no longer than a week, demolish the whole apparatus of Communist power and Soviet control ?

A: The question can be answered in two ways. On the one hand totalitarianism is generally regarded as a system which is so solidly entrenched, by virtue of its monopoly on political power, its total control of economic resources, its monopoly on the media, as to be virtually immune to internal challenges. That is the prevailing view among political scientists. From this vantage point, I certainly would have been surprised, if say in early 1956, I had been told that this kind of a regime could be so readily subverted from within. At the same time, a case can be made that authoritarian regimes are extremely rigid and therefore more vulnerable to internal shocks than democratic societies. That is to say, a democratic society is in some ways extremely messy, but this messiness is also a source of great strength in that it makes a democratic society able to absorb shocks. An authoritarian regime, on the other hand, if the situation gets out of hand -- as it did in Hungary -- finds that it cannot cope with the challenge. The contrast can best be depicted in the words of an American writer of the early 19th century, who, comparing absolute monarchies to democracies, said, "An absolute monarchy is like a majestic sailing ship that commands the waves, but then hits a rock and goes down, whereas democracy is like a raft that is unsinkable, but whose passengers always get their feet wet."

So to revert to your question. My feeling is that totalitarian states, such as Communist ones, are very hard to challenge, but once the challenge gathers a certain momentum, regimes of this sort are far less able to cope than democratic ones.

Urban: Would you say that in 1956 the majority of historians of East European concerns would have shared your views on this matter if the question had been put to them?

A: I find this question difficult to answer. I would say that most political scientists and sociologists would have regarded the totalitarian systems of Eastern Europe at that time to be far more stable than I would have. I remember that at the Russian Research Center, of which I was a member in the late 40s and through the 50s, we had rather strong disagreements between, say, the historians on one side and the sociologists and political scientists on the other. The latter tended to stress the stabilizing factors, we tended to emphasize the sources of instability.

Urban: I remember Salvador de Madariaga at the time wrote an article which in fact turned into a preface to a book I wrote on Hungary, in which he said, "Well, here were people who had no models of freedom in front of them. They'd been brought up, the young, in Communist schools with Communist indoctrination, and yet lo and behold, the spirit of freedom had survived and here it was." Now this implied that he himself was a little surprised to see that, despite this complete indocrination and schooling, the spirit of freedom did survive and people did rise against this dictatorship.

A: I cannot speak for de Madariaga, but as for myself, I feel as follows: The spirit of freedom, I believe, is unquenchable. It is as endemic to man as it is to all other biological forms. All animals are meant to be free unless they have been bred

through many generations to become domesticated; even then the underlying nature has not been altered in the case of most animals and they can very rapidly revert to a wild condition. The real problem lies not in the presence or absence of a desire for freedom: the real problem lies in the ability to assert freedom and to institutionalize it. There are two kinds of freedom. There is anarchic freedom, which simply means, "I want to do what I want to do and nobody is going to stand in my way" which can be extremely destructive and ultimately express itself only in short-lived spasms of violence. There is also the concept of freedom of a profounder kind which is rooted in a sense of law, which says: "If I want to be free, so do my fellow-men; my freedom requires recognition of their freedom, and that means subordination of everyone to a higher principle, the principle of law." This latter notion is not, I believe, a natural, biological fact, proper to all living creatures, but a cultural phenomenon, and moreover, one restricted to a small part of the globe. It is accepted mainly in societies which have been exposed, on the one hand to Jewish and Christian religious traditions, and, on the other, to the traditions of Greek philosophy and Roman law.

Urban: Just very briefly, would you say that ... I know that this is very difficult to guess at ... that the Hungarian revolution in 1956 was tending toward the second form of liberty?

A: The Hungarian revolution of '56 was too short-lived to predict in which direction it would have gone, but I have the impression that all countries of Eastern Europe, with the possible exception of those which have been very long under Turkish domination, have a tradition of Western liberty, inspired by Roman law, urban self-government, and so on.

Question No. 2.

Ironically enough, the Hungarian uprising satisfied to the letter Lenin's formula for Revolution :

> 'The fundamental law of revolution... is as follows : it is not enough for revolution that the exploited and oppressed masses understand the impossibility of living in the old way and demand changes : for revolution, it is necessary that the exploiters should not be able to live and rule in the old way ... for revolution it is essential, first, that the majority of the workers should fully understand that revolution is necessary and be ready to sacrifice their lives for it; secondly, that the ruling classes be in a state of governmental crisis which draws even the most backward masses into politics ...'

Let us, for the sake of argument, accept Lenin's formula, for it is commonsensical enough. All he is saying is: revolutions occur when the people are, for one reason or another, fed up with their rulers, and the rulers have lost the confidence that their rule is legitimate. How would Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968 and now Poland <u>comparatively</u> speaking measure up to Lenin's prescription ?

A: The quotation from Lenin is standard Marxist lingo, it doesn't present anything particularly new. You must, of course, always remember that Lenin drew a very sharp distinction between revolutions in what he called "feudal" and "bourgeois" societies which were always "progressive", and revolutions in Communist societies, (which meant societies dominated by him and his minions) which were by definition always counter-revolutionary. Therefore, if Lenin were confronted with this quotation while he was alive, he would have vehemently denied that it applied to any country under Communist rule. There were, after all, several major anti-Communist rebellions while Lenin was alive; in particular, the Kronstadt rebellion and the Autonov rebellion, one by sailors the other by peasants. Both of these uprisings against Lenin's government were denounced as counterrevolutionary and savagely crushed.

Now to turn to the second part of the question: how I compare the Hungarian revolution of 1956, the Czech events of '68, and the present events in Poland. I would stress a fundamental distinction between what is happening in Poland today and that which has happened in Hungary in the 50s and in Czechoslovakia in the 60s. In Hungary and in Czechoslovakia you had essentially a revolt of the apparatus of the Soviet leadership. The masses were relatively uninvolved, at least initially. In Hungary, the trouble began when the top elements of the Hungarian Communist Party and the military rebelled against Soviet rule. In Poland, by contrast, you have <u>mass</u> dissatisfaction in the face of a regime that initially was totally loyal to the Soviet Union. It is

as a result of the enormous pressures generated from below that the people on top had to yield and thus got into trouble with Moscow. It is precisely the mass character of what has happened in Poland that has made it so much more difficult for the Soviet Union to deal with Polish insubordination employing the kind of devices which it has used in the case of Hungarian or Czech insubordination. There it was a relatively easy matter to invade by force; in Poland the application of military force would be extremely difficult. I believe that that difference in the nature of the revolutions accounts for the hesitation of the Soviet Union on how to deal with Poland.

Urban: Let me try to qualify this. The Hungarian uprising did start with the intellectuals and television men and radio people and the poets, and so did the Czech. But, within a few days, in Hungary certainly, but also Czechoslovakia, the workers were out on the street and they got their arms from the Hungarian army and they were shooting at Russian tanks. The Manfred Weiss works, on the Island of _____, which is a very large factory, the largest factory I think in Hungary to this day, did add a very strong working class sentiment. Of course, I am not disputing the fact that the intellectuals, if you like, started within the upper _____. That's number one. In the second one, if I may just stress the point that in the Polish case, wasn't it true that they started under the cross and Catholicism as a working class movement, as it were, completely outside as you say of the government machinery and government ideology. This is just a footnote.

A: Precisely. I don't mean to say that the Hungarian revolution of '56 was purely an elite revolt against Russian rule. Of course, before long it came to involve the whole nation. But the fact is that in Poland, unlike Hungary and Czechoslovakia, what you had was a gradual preparation, largely ideological in nature, and the organization of opposition to the ruling elite on the part of intellectuals, workers, clerical elements, and so on. Thus, by the time this opposition broke into the open, in the summer of 1980, you had in place a powerful infrastructure with which the government was impotent to cope. The government had no choice but to try to appease it while trying at the same time to satisfy its Russian patrons in Moscow. That is very different from the situation in Budapest and in Prague. The Polish opposition is far deeper as well as better organized than was the case in Hungary or Czechoslovakia. Incidentally, it may well be that the strategy of the Polish resistance was influenced by the experience of Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

Urban: In what way?

A: That is to say that the Polish intellectuals have drawn their lessons from the experiences of '56 and '68.

Urban: This is what the Czechs said in '68, that they tried to draw the lessons from Hungary and yet, of course, they did not succeed in drawing it. People I've talked to, many of them, they always said, well, of course, we could see the Hungarians wanted a frontal attack on the system. We're going to be clever, we're going to do it in different ways. Now on the Poles, perhaps also misreading to some extent the lessons both of Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

A: The Czechs learned from the Hungarians to the extent that they decided not to challenge the Soviet Government openly. In particular, they made it clear to the Russians that they intended to remain in the Warsaw Pact. But that is a relatively minor issue distinguishing the Budapest-Prague events from those in Poland where you have superbly organized mass resistance which the government has been unable to break. The real difference is that in the case of Hungary, as well as that of Czechoslovakia, it was the native Communist leadership that led the efforts to attain some degree of liberation from Soviet rule, whereas in Poland it was not the government, but the intellectuals and the trade union movement that fought for that objective: I mean the working class, 10 million men and women. Now you cannot declare 10 million workers counterrevolutionary -- even Moscow would find it difficult to do that, because 10 million workers is virtually the whole nation; if you take the wives and children into account -- that 10 million is Poland. As a result, the Soviet Government is forced to say that Solidarity is O.K., it is just the extremist elements that have penetrated it that are causing all the trouble. But the irrefutable fact, which no amount of rhetoric can wish away, is that the Polish Government and its Moscow supporters are confronting the organized opposition of an entire nation.

Urban: Is it not ironic to you as a historian, whereas in the past the Poles were the ones who led uprisings in the names of liberty, national independence, etc.; this time it was the Hungarians who did that in '56, and Poles started at least by confining themselves to very ordinary bread-and-butter issues:

meat, prices, supplies, and things of that sort. Repeatedly in '70 and '76, whenever they had trouble since Gdansk in '70; every time, it was not nationalism, it was not liberty ... it is only now in the last phase that they are coming to press censorship and slowly moving to a stop ... is that not a historically ironic ....

A: I think you underestimate the political and ideological element in current Polish resistance. It is true that the movement came to a head over bread-and-butter issues; but the intellectual guidance to the movement given by KOR, its intellectual leaders who have incurred the greatest wrath of Moscow, has been very much in a political and ideological direction. What the bread-and-butter issues have made possible is to attach to the political and ideological movement the masses of workers who are neither politically nor ideologically motivated. It is only because of food shortages and other failings of an economic nature in Poland that the masses of Polish workers have come to recognize that you must do something about the political and economic system in order to better their condition. This is what brought the movement to the surface and made it into a mass movement. But the people who have been ideological mentors of this movement from the very beginning had very clear political objectives in mind. Jacek Kuron, for example, in the essays which he wrote in the 70s, outlined a program of action which was certainly not confined to bread and butter issues.

Question No. 3.

One is deeply puzzled by the Russian people's lack of response to Hungary, Czechoslovakia and now it would seem Poland. Where have all the 19th Century Russian revolutionaries, nihilists and anarchists gone ? In November 1956, days after the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution, Hugh Seton Watson said in a BBC broadcast:' In the 19th century Russia was hated throughout Europe because of Nicholas I, known as the gendarme of Europe. In the 19th century there were the Decembrists, countless rebels who suffered to redeem the good name of Russia. Herzen and Ogarev swore on the Sparrow Hills to devote their lives to the cause for which the Decembrists died. Will no Russian swear to avenge the dead workers and students of Budapest ?... are there no heirs to the Decembrists left ? '

How would you answer these questions 25 years on ?

A: I think the implication buried in this question is entirely unfair. There are literally thousands of Russians and representatives of other nationalities in the Soviet Union who have risked their welfare, freedom and sometimes even their very lives to protest Communist policies at home and abroad. We know that there are several thousand political prisoners in the Soviet Union right now. These are people incarcerated for years, sometimes in psychriatic wards... What about Iurii Orlov, the man who founded the Helsinki movement in the Soviet Union? what about Shcharanskii? what about Sakharov, who is under house arrest? In addition to these prisoners, there are hundreds if not more Russian dissenters who have been forced to leave their country and most of whom now live under miserable spiritual and economic conditions in the West. Indeed, it is astonishing how many people in the Soviet Union are willing to risk everything to stand up to the system. Don't forget, Herzen, after all, did not have to be a hero. He was sentenced to administrative exile a couple of times by Nicholas I. One of these times, he served as a government employee in one of the provinces in the north. He lived under no great hardship. Subsequently, when he emigrated abroad in 1847, he continued to draw money through international banks from his estates in Russia, which he used to support his subversive publications. He never served a sentence in prison. He was never exposed to great pressures of the kind that Russian dissidents are subjected to today. The resistance in Russia is astonishing, given the kind of penalties that attach themselves to it.

What has changed, compared to the 19th century, is the character of the struggle. In the 19th century there was a great revolutionary tradition. People believed that in order to change the system, you had to make a revolution in the country, that is, overthrow the regime. Resistance, therefore, often took violent forms, including bomb throwing, assassinations, organized conspiracies, and so on. That is no longer true today, and it is no longer true because the revolution of 1917 has turned out to be such a terrible disappointment. It would be very difficult to find a Russian today who believes that if you overthrew the Soviet regime, you would get a solution for all the country's problems. A true Russian revolutionary before 1917 believed that, namely that all evils -- including even sickness and death from natural causes -- derived from the nature of the "system" and that, therefore, by implication, if you toppled this system everything would be fine. Today people believe more in a struggle of ideas, and in particular, in the vital necessity of spreading the truth. The Socialist Revolutionary's slogan in the late 19th and early 20th century held: "Through the struggle you will gain your freedom." Today, probably most Russian dissenters who are in reality revolutionaries, would change that slogan to read: "By asserting the truth you'll gain your freedom." The struggle is for simply getting rid of that enormous lie that Communism is and asserting the truth, bringing humanity face-to-face with reality. I find, for example, that the liberal spirit in this transmuted form is much more alive in the East than it is in the West.

Urban: When you say, struggle for truth; I mean isn't that the most revolutionary and subversive thing that one can think of in relation to this regime? One could hardly think of a more unpleasant...

A: Well, I fully agree. This is why I say, this is how they wage the struggle: for to assert openly the truth in the Soviet Union, or in any Communist regime for that matter, is a revolutionary act of the highest degree. This is why nothing, for example, bothers the Soviet Union more about what is happening in Poland today, than the breakdown of internal censorship, or the ability of Radio Free Europe to spread the truth in Poland. That is because the Communist regime rests not only on lying, but on its ability to persuade its population that it must accept the lie as reality. Once that breaks down then the Party's power begins to dissolve. So, to answer your question, I think it would be entirely unfair to suggest that there are no revolutionaries in Russia today. There are thousands of them; they have just changed the method of struggle: from bomb-throwing to truth-spreading.

Urban: Why is it that in Russia you encounter people at the drop of a hat who will tell you that "well, the Hungarians were rightly surpressed" at the grassroots level as well as higher up, because we have shed our blood for them and look what our desserts have been. The Czechs, we liberated the Czechs, and look what they've done to us. This is a very broad feeling, the Pushkin type of thing toward the Poles, the same sort of action you find today. How does that chime in with this revolutionary resistance people that you mentioned.

The revolutionaries in Russia were always a small minority. That was true in the 19th century and it is equally true today. The masses of the people, today as then, support the regime, out of a combination of ignorance and chauvinism. This used to drive the revolutionaries in the late 19th century to absolute desperation. Of course, you are correct in saying that there are many people in the Soviet Union who supported the crushing of the Czechs in '68 and who probably would support today the crushing of the Poles; these, however, are not intellectual dissenters, but are the ignorant and nationalistically inclined masses.

Question No. 4.

I asked you a moment ago: Where have all the 19th century Russian revolutionaries gone? Let me ask you now: Where have all the Western supporters of freedom gone ? In March 1957 Albert Camus wrote:

> 'The slaughtered people are our people. What Spain was for us 20 years ago Hungary will be today... In Europe's present solitude, we have but one way of being so - which is never to betray, at home or abroad, that for which the Hungarian combatants died and never to justify even indirectly, at home or abroad, what killed them.'

Can it be said that the Western governments or people have lived up to Camus's famous vow ? And if they have not, why not ?

A: No, my answer would be that they have not lived up to it, and, indeed, the voices of resistance in Western Europe to totalitarism have fallen off during the past 25 years, just as in Eastern Europe they have intensified. There are probably two causes that explain this phenomenon. One is the progressive spread of bourgeois sentiments and interests among the lower middle and working classes in Western Europe. With the rise of living standards, a desire to preserve hard-earned economic gains at all costs develops and brings with it apathy toward political ideals. There has been a phenomenal improvement in living standards for the masses of Europeans, and they are not prepared to jeopardize this new status. There used to be perhaps a time when they had very little to lose; they have a great deal to lose today. In the second place, equally if not more important, is the fear of nuclear weapons, which, of course, is a new phenomenon. This has been in some measure due to deliberate Soviet efforts which by the buildup of nuclear forces, and by the propaganda surrounding it, has created in Europe a climate of appeasement -- a fear that standing up to the Soviet Union brings about the risk of war and, therefore, that appeasement has become essential to survival. In their propaganda the Russians have succeeded in drawing a contrast between <u>peace</u> and <u>freedom</u>, making peace appear superior to freedom, and the struggle for freedom to be tantamount to a threat to peace. This has been a very successful propaganda ploy and one which must be fought against if we are to stop this moral corruption. Indeed, just as inside the Soviet Union the Communists accuse people who stand up to the system or criticize it of mental debility,

so now they accuse people in the West who challenge their views on nuclear strategy of being literally mad. They have persuaded a lot of Europeans that to even think of standing up to the Soviet Union is an act of madness, and this has had a very corrupting influence. From that point of view, our rearmament program is of utmost importance because once people begin to perceive that the Soviets cannot credibly blackmail us with nuclear threats, that there is a real nuclear standoff, then much of that mentality is likely to dissipate.

Urban: Just to come back to this Camus quotation, I would like to focus a little more if I may on the intellectual side, the writers, the thinkers, because they were the ones who after Spain carried the flag for so many years, Spain being the big show, the big symbol. That has totally vanished as far as Hungary is concerned, to say nothing of Czechoslovakia, absolutely vanished. Whereas in '57, he was obviously very hopeful that somehow this would keep going on.

A: The situation in the case of Spain was quite different. Spain was a battle-ground between Fascism and anti-Fascism, and decent people then lined up on the side of anti-Fascism even to the extent of persuading themselves that the Communists were friends of freedom. That was accomplished by whitewashing the unprecedented terror that was then sweeping the Soviet Union. You had to choose between Hitler and those who stood up to Hitler. This was not a terribly difficult choice to make. Today, you have to choose between what you may regard as perhaps an unpalatable

regime, but a regime that may in some ways be evolving toward something better on the one hand, and nuclear war on the other.

Urban: Camus said that the Hungarian uprising was against Fascism, Soviet Fascism; I didn't quote that here.

A: That may be so, but that is certainly not the perception in the West. Many intellectuals in the West are committed to the "better red than dead" mentality. Now dead, of course, is bad, and red is not so good either, but red at least gives you a prospect of evolution toward something better. You can deceive yourself that while the Soviet system is not an agreeable one, nevertheless it contains the possibilities of change, whereas nuclear holocaust offers no prospect of change at all, only the end of life on this earth. So the alternatives here are very different from what they were in the 1930s in Spain.

Urban: And these alternatives have not been in Poland, in Czechoslovakia, there is no change in this which is so surprising. The feeling is, as you say, the other way around; its gone the other way around.

A: But you see there is a lot that has to do with the dread of nuclear war. The Russians have persuaded many intellectuals in the West, including people of such great political and scholarly experience as George Kennan, that to stand up to Soviet demands, particularly if superficially they seem to be reasonable demands, risks war, that all war will be nuclear war, and that nuclear war will spell the end of humanity. Presented with such an alternative people who have not the slightest sympathy for the Soviet system will opt for what they regard as the course of peace, and the course

of peace in this instance often also means the course of appeasement. One must break with this way of thinking.

Question No. 5.

At the time of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 (and, of course, much earlier in the case of the Yugoslav defection) the conventional Western political wisdom was to say that our best way of softening up the monolithic and oppressive character of Soviet power was to give moral support (there was never any question of giving anything else) to what were really ' wars of national liberation ' in the satellite states. President Johnson's and Zbigniew Brzezinski's ' bridge building' notion relied on the isolation of East Germany as a prelude to making Russia a more pliable partner to negotiate with.

Our policies have changed. East Germany has been recognized. The contagion in Hungary and Czechoslovakia has been contained if not cured. Has it sunk in with the Western political establishment (or, shall we say, with the American) that any ' liberalization' of the Soviet bloc must start from Moscow ? And is it rational to think in 1981 that it could start in Russia ? The Polish example seems to refute this thesis, for what we can now see in Poland is the uneasy but more and more institutional existence of what amounts to a two-party regime - of Solidarity and the Communist Party (and we may well add the Church as a third). If the Polish alternative survives, there may be life yet in the older assumption that the way to the reform of the Soviet system leads through the reform of its ' soft underbelly' rather than the other way around.

A: I doubt if anybody can manipulate these processes. These massive secular processes of liberalization are spontaneous and outside of anybody's control. In general, my view would be that the chances of liberalization are considerably greater in countries of Eastern Europe than in the Soviet Union, and this because of the traditions which we have mentioned before. There are old traditions of liberty in countries like Poland and Czechoslovakia and Hungary that are lacking in the heartland of Russia. Hence, it seems to me, the possibility of change occuring in Eastern Europe is greater than in Russia. There is a further reason for this expectation. In Eastern Europe resistance to the Communist system is always accompanied by nationalism, that is, it represents not only resistance against a particular regime, it is at the same time resistance against domination by a foreign power. The forces of opposition in Eastern Europe draw a great deal of strength from that. It is very difficult in Poland to say what is the stronger factor, whether it is the opposition to Communism or opposition to Russian domination. It could be both and perhaps the latter is even more powerful. Now that is lacking in the Soviet Union. Hence it is hard to see how the fusion could occur among the Great Russians. Now among the minorities of the Soviet Union, the Ukrainians, the Georgians, the Uzbeks, the Latvians, and so on, the situation is different, and here resistance assumes stronger forms. Thus, anti-Communist liberalism fusing with anti-Russian nationalism is always a more potent force than resistance to political tyranny is of itself.

Urban: The question really is that we have seen until now that the Russians have been able and did block every type of liberalization of satellites -- Hungary, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and now evidently yet in Poland. What really bothers me; can any of these liberalization movements go any length at all without some firm liberalization first going on in the Soviet Union so that the green light is given by Moscow, because it seems to me that in no other way will these countries really be able to liberalize.

A: No, I don't agree. I mean, Hungary today, represents a case of a Communist country that has liberalized.

Urban: Not institutionally.

A: Even institutionally. The economic system in Hungary, what has come to be known as "goulash Communism", represents a considerable departure from the rigid, planned economies which prevail in the Soviet Union or East Germany. The Soviet Union is confronted with a particular problem with its East European dependencies. It wants to maintain control over them, but is also aware of tremendous forces of resistance to its control. I believe that the Soviet Union is prepared for a compromise, one that achieves a modus vivendi of a kind that it has in Hungary and Romania where it secures its principal foreign policy and military objectives while maintaining at the very least a facade of Communist orthodoxy, so that there is no infection inside the Soviet Union. Moscow may tolerate all kinds of variants in Eastern Europe. In fact it has tolerated them in Poland throughout the 70s.

Urban: Why did it not tolerate Czechoslovakia? That would have been an absolutely perfect solution from your point of view.

A: I think it did not in the case of Czechoslovakia mainly because of military considerations. I have always felt, although I have no evidence to support this feeling, that the final decision to march into Czechoslovakia was due to the insistence of the Soviet military who claimed that the whole Warsaw Pact military plan would collapse if they could not count on Czechoslovakia. Don't forget there were no Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia before '68, and therefore Czechoslovakia would have become a very uncertain unit in the structure of the Warsaw Pact. Therefore, to answer your question, I don't think its a question of black and white. I mean the Soviet Union does not have to have orthodoxy, complete orthodoxy. Certain minimum conditions have to be met, but I think the Soviet Union can live with a considerable variety of systems.

In the case of Hungary, the Soviet Union has gone very far, not only in acquiescing to but even encouraging processes of change. What I think pleases the Soviet Union, particularly, is that Hungary appears stable. Here is a regime which is an active member of the bloc, follows the Soviet lead in foreign policy, military policy, one-party rule, and at the same time the population seems to be reasonably satisfied.

Urban: We'll be coming to that satisfaction problem in the next question I think.

Question No. 6.

After the suppression of the Hungarian uprising, as also after the occupation of Czechoslovakia, the Western world was awash with the moralizing verbiage of its leaders and leader-writers: Now the Soviet Union has revealed its true self for all the world to see ! Now the counter-revolutionary Soviet state has lost all claim to speak in the name of the oppressed and under-privileged ! and so on.

Yet, it was in the wake of Hungary that Khruschev and the Soviet ideology he represented scored their greatest successes in the Third World, and it was after the suppression of the Prague Spring that the appeasement of Moscow, known as détente, got into its stride. Far from heaping moral opprobrium on the Soviet Union for what it had done in Prague, and far from increasing its military preparedness to increase the stakes for Moscow, the West, and especially Germany, got more and more alarmed by the exercise of Soviet power and began to seek an accomodation with it. In other words, the revelation, in Budapest and Prague, of the fascist character of the Soviet regime did not leave us with the message that ' with people using such methods we cannot come to any agreement', but , rather, a very different conclusion: 'people who have the guts to use such methods are strong and dangerous, and we'd better say and do nothing that might arouse their anger". Creeping self-Finlandization, in other words.

Do you share the impression that, beginning roughly with Czechoslovakia in 1968, the prime West European concern is no longer - as it still was in the case of Hungary - any ' destabilization ' of the Soviet system in Eastern Europe, but to think of destabilization as an embarrassment and wish for its speedy settlement with or without the use of Soviet troops ? That is certainly the current mood in Germany vis-à-vis Poland;'Include us out'.

A: Yes, people bow to power, not only in Europe, also in the Far East, and in the Middle East. Everywhere people bow to power. You mustn't forget that when Hitler stood at the pinnacle of his power, say in the late 30s and early 40s, he was widely admired, and people bowed to his superior power. I mean the Vichy phenomenon was not confined to France. This acquiescence to superior power is particularly pronounced today when the nuclear factor has entered into consideration. Polls of public opinion in Europe show a very interesting development. Those people who are most afraid of the Soviet Union, who think the Soviet Union is stronger than the United States, are also the ones who are least sanguine about NATO and most in favor of a rapprochement with the Soviet Union. There is a very clear correlation between fear of the Soviet Union and the desire to accommodate the Soviet Union. This matter runs through the numerous public opinion polls conducted in Europe. These people don't like the Russians. There is no evidence at all in any of the polls that sympathy for Russia or for the Soviet system or for Communism is on the increase. Quite the contrary: the number of admirers of the Soviet system, of people who believe that the Soviet Union has found solutions to human, social problems is decreasing. At the same time, fear of the Soviet Union is growing and with it the desire to accommodate. For that reason, of course, it is absolutely vital to alter this perception of the balance of power in our favor, because I think then the spirit of accommodation will also attenuate.

Urban: It is remarkable that if the Polish situation which erupted in '56 first, evoked at the time in Germany a kind of reaction that "now we can see what a beastly system it is, now we know what liberty is for, etc. In 1981, they wish it away, they don't want to be bothered with that, "let's hope that somehow it's settled, because it's so irritating, so nasty." So that's part of the syndrome.

A: It's even worse than that. I think there are people in Western Europe who would welcome Soviet intervention in Poland, because they regard Poland as a destabilizing factor that may cause economic and even political trouble for them. They would not be at all averse to having the Russians come in, assume responsibility for Polish debts, restore the Polish economy, and get things going again.

Urban: Capitalist realism.

A: Very well put.

Urban: But do you think that the American intend now to build up a strong force and increase the credibility of that force and to show muscle, etc.? Is it going to have a rapid effect in Europe, especially in Germany, on these vascillating people whom you described.

A: It will take time, because there is a perception in Europe which has grown over the years, and which has not been entirely without basis, that the United States is vacillating, weak power on which one cannot rely. To restore the credibility of the United States and its reliability as an ally will take some time. But I believe once that is established we will see a change in mood in Europe.

Urban: You don't think there is a factor of masochism in all this? You said, early on, you said that Europeans are now so rich that they want to guard their new property and their new amb_____ and the rest of it. Let me put it to you that there may be a strangely perverse element in Europe as well. A lot of people say this wealth, all this messy capitalist wealth is something that ought to be purged by some Eastern wind, you know. This is this old notion, especially in German from "East-to-Orient-to _____" may be Communism or whatever, but nevertheless it's going to purge all this ill-gotten wealth, all this materialistic, stereotyped living, and all the rest of it. Some history, some German history shows some evidence for this.

A: I think this is a very marginal phenomenon in Germany. There are probably some young people there who feel that way, but for the majority, the overwhelming majority of people, once they feel that the United States is a better guarantor of the peace and prosperity of Europe than the Soviet Union, then there will be no question whom they will prefer. What has happened in the past ten years or so is that people have come to feel that the United States is not a dependable ally and that they must get the best deal they can out of the Soviet Union, even though they don't like it or anything it stands for.

Question No. 7.

Let me suggest that we do a bit of 'dangerous 'thinking and place ourselves in the shoes of an imaginary member of the Soviet Politburo - a ' dove' of the Western type of pragmatic persuasion - trying to find an answer to the problem of Poland in 1981. He might argue as follows:

'Since the end the Great Patriotic War, Comrades, for 36 years now, we have been labouring under a great illusion. We thought we had reliable allies on our Western borders, whereas in fact they were and are a great and increasing burden to us. How did they repay the blood we had shed for them and the assistance we had given them in their efforts to build socialism ? By rank ingratitude. The Yugoslavs welched on us in 1948; the East Germans fought our troops in 1953; the Poles rose up against us in Poznan and then in Warsaw in 1956; the Hungarians staged a full-blown counter-revolution in 1956; the Czechs reneged on socialism in 1968, the Rumanians defied and defy us in the Warsaw Pact and Comecon, and now we have trouble on a truly large scale with the Poles again. Even minuscule Albania ganged up against us with the renegade Chinese and got away with it.'

'Sooner or later, Comrades, we must face the fact that our socialist allies are not allies at all but a source of great danger to us. Every few years one or the other will threaten the security of our whole system and social order. They are a grave burden on our economy. In a warlike crisis they would threaten our lines of communication or indeed rise up against us. They have undermined our credibility in the Third World and destroyed our leadership of the World Communist movement. Who needs allies like that ? I therefore suggest that we follow Comrade Lenin's advice to the workers of Tver:" Get rid of all drags, parasites and harmful hangers-on ", and find ways and and means of shedding this insupportable burden.'

Can you see this sort of an argument being fielded in the Politburo ? Could it be deployed with any chance of success ? Would it run into the immovable object of Communist Messianism combined with Russian national interest ? Could the West do anything to support it ?

A: I don't doubt that there may be people high in the Soviet hierarchy who think in those terms, who question whether the whole thing is worth it; but, at the same time it is quite inconceivable that the Soviet Government could publicly adopt such a policy, and this for the following reason. The whole political legitimacy of the Bolshevik regime rests on its claim of being in the vanguard of history, that is being part of the irrestible advance of time. Now that kind of legitimacy requires the relentless spread of Communist power. Hence the Brezhnev doctrine: no country that has ever gone Communist can revert to its previous condition. To acquiesce to the loss of so important a part of the Communist domain as Eastern Europe, to allow it to revert to some other system, say a social-democratic one, let alone one with a free economy, would deal a dreadful blow to the whole legitimacy of the Soviet regime and undermine its power internally.

Urban: So in other words there is no hope for these countries to wriggle out of this embrace without a complete collapse of the Soviet power?

A: No, that is not necessarily so. As I have said before, you might have quiet revolutions which would not challenge overtly the myth that they are part of the Communist commonwealth. The Russians have tolerated in Hungary what we have described, they have tolerated it in Poland: an independent church, de facto outside party control, and private agriculture. They have acquiesced to that for a long time because it was done quietly. If you had asked ordinary Russians, say two or three years ago, "what are things in Poland like?", they would have responded, "Poland is a socialist country, just like ours". They wouldn't be aware of the

fact that Poland had a powerful independent church and a large independent farming community. As long as such revolutions occur quietly and do not challenge the myth that the Soviet system is forever marching forward, one can get away with it. But, overtly to acquiesce ...

Urban: (inaudible)

A: Well up to a point, but certainly it cannot be overtly acknowledged, because to acknowledge it overtly begins to raise questions among the Soviet population itself: "What is this whole system, where is it going, on what kind of voyage are we engaged? We are told we are moving relentlessly forward, the whole world will be like us, but it isn't happening that way at all."

Urban: When the supremacy of the party is challenged, which it is, when the press is not monolithic any more, which it isn't, when the church is a second power, and Solidarity is a third power, to what extent can the most liberal pretenses go on to say that this is in the main line of socialism and O.K. from so on?

A: You can't. I think the events and developments in Poland have long ago overstepped their permissible political boundary, and this is why the Soviet Union cannot, in the long run, tolerate what goes on in Poland. It has officially declared the present system in Poland to be counter-revolutionary. The problem is not one of taking a stand but of moving into action. The Soviet problem is not whether to acknowledge the system or not but how to undo it: that presents strategic and tactical problems, not theoretical ones. They cannot accept this system, but at the same time, right now, they do not know quite how to undo it.

Question No. 8.

Whatever Janos Kadar's role in 1956 may have been (and I said some very hard things about him in a book I published in 1957), it seems clear that the majority of Hungarians have by now made their peace with him. What is more, they appear to have come, through Kadar, to a modus vivendi with the system as well. They did not, mind you, do so with any enthusiasm , but as a smaller evil than the one they knew under Rakosi and the ones they can still see in their neighbourhood - Czechoslovakia and Rumania, for example, to say nothing of the Soviet Union. And for this very reason the Hungarians have come under attack lately - not least by some of their own writers and intellectuals both at home and abroad. The charge against them is that the nation has allowed itself to be 'wrapped round', that the Magyars have sold their birthright for a mess of pottage, their pride and honour for a more comfortable existence, and so on.

There is a great piece of truth in these self-accusations. They recall the 19th century controversy between the diehards of the 1848 War of Liberation and those who supported the 1867 Compromise with Austria. Yet, I'm inclined to ask (with some pre-war Hungarian historians I respect) whether the Magyars as a nation could have have survived, given their racial and linguistic isolation in the centre of Europe, if, having given battle and shed a great deal of blood, they had not eventually come to terms with their enemies or even oppressors: Turks, Austrians and others? And whether under the conditions obtaining today it isn't the nation's first duty to preserve itself even if that entails a temporary loss of self-respect ?

I am raising these points only because so often in the Great Encounter between the West and the Soviet Union the Central and East European countries are looked upon, or suspected to be looked upon, as mere pawns in the game, and I feel it is important - speaking as we are today to Central and East European audiences - that we seek some answer to the question: How exactly do the national integrity, 'Europeanness', and general survival of Hungarians, Poles, Czechs and Slovaks figure in the imagination (if they figure at all) of thoughtful people in Western Europe and the US ?

A: I know of no responsible thinker, writer, politician in the West who would accuse the East Europeans of any kind of moral cowardice or unnecessary submissiveness to the Russians. Everybody with any intelligence is aware of the tremendous difficulty under which these people have to live and there is widespread admiration for any show of resistance on their part. The Charter 77 resistance in Czecholosvakia is an incredible phenomenon. All intelligent people in the West realize this. Here are people who are condemning themselves to long jail sentences, not to mention loss of jobs and the other kinds of perquisite which the Communist regime alone can dispense, by signing their names to documents which in the eyes of the government are patently criminal. No, quite the contrary, there is no denigration; there is only admiration.

Urban: I had more in mind a slightly broader phenomenon as I tried to describe here, people in Hungary for example under the Turks always had to eat humble pie because national survival was at stake. They suffered it for a 150 years, and then they came out and reaserted their nationhood. Now there is a similar feeling in Czechoslovakia too that we have got to sit this out, it's a gastly time, we've got to live with a certain lie, we have to guard our language, we have make compromises with our own minds and souls, if you like. This is uncomfortable, it does not fit in with the national image, with national pride and all that, but it has to be done. And I always feel they want some assurance from us that we don't despise them as nations for that. That we still think of them as future good members of the European community or Western

community of nations, etc., etc.

A: I think there is no question that this is exactly the present feeling in the West. The West realizes the difficulties under which these people live. In fact, probably, if anything, people in the West have an exaggerated notion of the hardship of the communist system, so there is great understanding and unbounded admiration for anything these people do to maintain their individual dignity and national pride. I really cannot think of a single instance of anyone of whom I know or whom I have read in the West saying, "These people have become embroiled in the system and rather than standing up they are succumbing and doing Russian bidding."

Urban:

A: I really cannot think of a single instance, I don't know of a single writer in the West who holds this view.

Urban: Yes, this is self-accusation, as I see it.

A: It must be.

Urban: But a very potent one. Do you think the American administration now shares that view of this general appreciation of East Europeans as allies, but as allies in trouble.

A: Well, absolutely. As you know, President Reagan issued a month or so ago a Captive Nations Declaration. There is a general view here which I think is bipartisan, that these people have been conquered, they have been occupied, and that they are good members of the European community who simply right now, for reasons entirely beyond their control, cannot play their proper role.

Urban: This again is a hypothetical question I pose, speaking for Marshall Brezhnev and I would be saying to him

certain things again quoting Lenin against him, this is the famous first decree of the Soviet state written allegedly by Lenin himself, which speaks out very forcibly against incorporations and annexations and suppressions of feelings, etc. as we have it in this quotation. So the question is, if I put this to President Brezhnev, would he give me the same sort of reply as you said in your very first answer to my question, as Lenin would have done, that this applies to states rising against the bourgeoise not to our sort of affairs. What would he say, what could one say, what would you say?

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A: This goes back exactly to what I've said before, namely that Lenin always drew a distinction between principles that applied to communist societies and those that applied to non-communist societies. They were completely different. The right of national self-determination, for example, in this view, can only be exercised in non-communist societies. When, for example, two or three months after the declaration which you quoted had been issued, the Ukrainians declared their independence, Lenin felt no qualms about at once dispatching Red Army troops to reconquer the Ukraine. He did so subsequently in all the borderland areas where he had the military capability, ending up with Georgia in 1921. Nationalism, according to him, was a progressive force in bourgeois societies, but absolutely counter-revolutionary in communist ones. In general, Lenin followed a rule which some Western author whom I cannot identify at this moment had formulated. He said that the communists follow the following rule: "When I am weak, I appeal to the sense of fairness, because it is your principle, but when I'm strong, I appeal to power, because this is my principle."

Urban: That would make a very good ending, but let's just say a word or two about the morality of this double yardstick because this, of course, applies to the whole Leninist anomaly. We can't possibly accept this, can we, as non-Leninist, non-Marxist that there are these two different yardsticks. One applies to bourgois society, one socialist society. So you as a Western historian, how would you formulate your objection to this double yardstick?

A: First of all, the morality which claims that what I want is moral, but what you want is immoral, is the law of the jungle. This an immoral ethic, fundamentally unacceptable. Because all morality by definition must rest on reciprocity. All morality assumes objective criteria, applicable equally to both parties. There must be an appeal to some higher principle if we have disagreements. Secondly, I believe this principle is untenable also on practical grounds, because ultimately it can only be enforced by superior power, by coercion. That is not workable. That is, in the short run, you can enforce it, but whether you can establish a viable social order on this principle, I very much doubt. Many of the problems which the Soviet government today experiences internally and externally are due to the fact that reality is catching up with them. Reality catches up with them, because, after all, morality, is simply a recognition of the fact that in relations between human beings, if they are to be based on something other than the self-destructive law of the jungle, there must be some higher principle to which all the parties adhere. For that reason, Communist morality as defined by Lenin can only work in the short term, and only if based on overwhelming power.

In the long-term, and once that power begins to erode, it cannot operate. You cannot establish an ongoing social system on the basis of that kind of pseudo-morality.

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DICK PIPES

RVA has reviewed the attached and made certain adjustments.

He wanted me to reaffirm with you that there will be no printed text, no printed excerpts, no press announcement, etc.-- just an overseas broadcast by RFE.

Thanks.

Janet

Janet

Talked to George Urban on phone 2 Sept. 1981 1:45 PM x communicated needed excisions as well as above injunction.

RP