

Record of Conversation between Erich Honecker and Eduard Shevardnadze, June 9, 1989

Shevardnadze: Our friends in the GDR need not worry. The party will remain the leading force in society. It exercises control over all-important processes despite great difficulties. The most important decisions, which the Politburo or the Central Committee has put before the Congress, are meeting with the consent of the Congress. Developments at the Congress are being followed very attentively. In the opening days, ambitious and demagogic speeches received support. As the Congress has proceeded, the ability of the deputies to differentiate between the truth, lies and demagoguery has grown.

A similar learning process is taking place among the people as well. In the beginning there were threats of strikes in case certain representatives were not elected to the Supreme Soviet. The publishing of everything from the Congress has proven to be correct. The CPSU must in the future adapt itself in its style of work to the new conditions.

Altogether one may be content with the results of the People's Congress. The Party has passed a difficult test. Henceforth the task is to solve urgent sociopolitical matters.

Here the Soviet Union can learn much from the GDR. A compelling example of this was the most recent exhibition in Moscow on "Berlin Days," in which the mastery of social problems was vividly shown. Millions of Soviet citizens live in poverty. Twenty million pensioners receive less than 70 rubles a month. In spite of great financial difficulties the Congress decided to raise the minimum pension to 80 rubles, for which the State must spend a total of 4 to 5 billion rubles per year. This is happening [despite] awareness of the fact that buying power has already considerably exceeded the supply of goods as it is. A further task of greater political importance is to increase the production of consumer goods. In addition it is necessary to solve the housing issue. The GDR has focused on this correctly and in a timely manner. A third difficulty is the extremely complicated national question. An assessment which found earlier that the national question had been solved forever was a big mistake. These problems existed long ago and have built up over the years. During the course of democratization, they have been revealed. Special problems exist in the Caucasus, in the Baltic republics, and recently in Uzbekistan as well.

One cannot be sure whether tomorrow will witness new conflicts erupting in other regions. The party requires a new nationalities policy. In this respect, the CPSU is preparing itself for a corresponding plenary session. The writing of a new constitution is also a pressing matter.

It is known that our friends in the GDR are well informed on the developments in the GDR, and are compassionate. Your valuable support would be highly appreciated in the Soviet Union.

Comrade Eduard Shevardnadze stated that Comrade Yakovlev will be received on Saturday by Comrade Czyrek, at the request of Comrade Jaruzelski, to receive information on domestic developments in Poland. At the moment it is still difficult to guess how the situation in Poland will continue to unfold. The most recent events are having serious consequences.¹ A profound analysis is necessary. It should be taken into account that Solidarity represents a

genuine force. The PUWP must accept a real defeat and finds itself in a very difficult position. In Hungary as well, an unsettling development is taking place.

Comrade Erich Honecker emphasized that he shares fully the evaluation made of Poland. At a meeting with Comrade Jaruzelski, [Jaruzelski] still gave an optimistic evaluation of the expected election results, although defeat was already becoming apparent.ⁱⁱ

It is well known that Poland lies between the GDR and the USSR. Socialism cannot be lost in Poland.

In Hungary the processes are most probably unstoppable. Many Hungarian comrades fear that in connection with the planned reburial of the prime minister from 1956, [Imre] Nagy, counterrevolution will break out again.ⁱⁱⁱ What Pozsgay proclaimed has nothing at all to do with socialism.^{iv} The question is whether it is possible to prevent a split within the Hungarian working class. If not, Hungary will slip further into the bourgeois camp. Comrade Erich Honecker remarked that he remembers quite well the events of 1956 and the role Imre Nagy played.

[Source: Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR-Bundesarchiv, SED, ZK, JIV2/2A/3225. Translated by Christiaan Hetzner.]

ⁱ A reference to the June 4 national elections in Poland.

ⁱⁱ The discussion between Honecker and Jaruzelski took place on May 22, 1989, in Berlin.

ⁱⁱⁱ Nagy, who had been executed in 1958, was ceremonially reburied on June 16, 1989.

^{iv} Pozsgay, in one instance, had appeared on West German television in early June and described the Prague Spring as a reform attempt whose outcome had yet to be determined.