

Session of the Politburo of the CC CPSU

4 April 1985

Chairman: cde. Gorbachev M. S.

In attendance: cdes. G. A. Aliev, V. I. Vorotnikov, V. V. Grishin, A. A. Gromyko, G. V. Romanov, M. S. Solomentsev, P. N. Demichev, V. I. Dolgikh, V. M. Chebrikov, M. V. Zimyanin, I. V. Kapitonov, K. V. Rusakov, N. I. Ryzhkov

I. About the agenda and the schedule of the April (1985) Plenum of the CC CPSU.

GORBACHEV. All the comrades received proposals on this issue. They were prepared in connection with the exchange of opinions, which took place earlier. The memo specifies the dates of the convening and holding of the Plenum, which will have to define clearly the issues introduced for the consideration of the XXVII Congress of the CC CPSU.

I think we should specify somewhat the wording of the CC CPSU report to the Congress, stating that it is not the next party tasks in foreign and domestic policy but simply party tasks are being introduced for the consideration of the Congress, because the Congress will consider the new edition of the CPSU Program, and the tasks to be determined are not only the immediate party tasks, but also long-term tasks.

GROMYKO. Right.

GRISHIN. Is there going to be a separate report on the new edition of the Party Program at the Congress?

GORBACHEV. No. The Secretariat is introducing the proposal that the issues related to the new edition of the Party Program and the changes to the CPSU Charter should be presented as part of the main report of the Central Committee.

ROMANOV. This is right.

GORBACHEV. Simultaneously, a proposal is introduced to elect the same number of delegates to the XXVII Congress as were elected to the XXVI Congress, i.e. 5,002 delegates. It means that the norm of representation would somewhat raised: one delegate to the congress would be elected from 3,670 party members.

We also need to determine the timetable for the reporting and election campaign. It is proposed to hold conferences of primary organizations in September-November; regional, city and district party conferences—in November-December; oblast and krai party conferences—in December-January; congresses of Communist parties of the Union republics—in January-beginning of February of 1986. This timetable as a whole fits well with our schedule of economic measures, which will be implemented in the country in the period of preparation for the congress.

GROMYKO. Good timetable.

ALIEV. We could approve these proposals.

GORBACHEV. Any objections?

POLITBURO MEMBERS. No.

The resolution is adopted.

2. About the draft of Addresses of the CC CPSU for May 1, 1985.

GORBACHEV. The CC Secretariat considered the draft of CC CPSU Addresses for May 1 diligently, introduced some corrections, and approved it.

GRISHIN. I have small editorial comments on the text.

GORBACHEV. They should be considered and taken into account. Are there any other corrections to the draft of Addresses?

POLITBURO MEMBERS. No.

GORBACHEV. Then we can approve them.

The resolution is adopted.

3. About holding the demonstration of representatives of working people of the city of Moscow and artistic and political decoration of the city in connection with celebrating May 1, 1985.

GORBACHEV. The Moscow Party Committee introduced proposals on holding the First of May demonstration and decoration of Moscow. I think that these proposals are well-prepared, they take the experience of the previous years into account.

GRISHIN. In Moscow, everything will be ready for the demonstration by the end of April.

GORBACHEV. Then we can probably agree with the proposals of the Moscow City Party Committee.

POLITBURO MEMBERS. We can agree.

The resolution is adopted.

4. About measures to fight drunkenness and alcoholism.

GORBACHEV. As you probably remember, over two years ago, the Politburo created the Commission chaired by A. Ya. Pelshe to work on the issues of fighting drunkenness and alcoholism. Later this Commission was headed by M. S. Solomentsev. It introduced its proposals, which were discussed locally, and then considered by the CC Secretariat. Today those proposals are being introduced for the discussion of the Politburo. Let us give the floor to cde. Solomentsev.

SOLOMENTSEV. The session of the Secretariat of the CC CPSU approved the main points of the drafts of resolutions of the CC CPSU, the USSR Council of Ministers, the Decrees of Presidiums of the Supreme Soviets of the USSR and RSFSR on this issue.

At the same time, the Commission of the CC CPSU was entrusted with finalizing the drafts of these documents. We believe that the suggestions and recommendations expressed at the session of the Secretariat were implemented:

- the ideological and political level of the documents was raised;
- the necessity of a comprehensive approach to the solution of the pressing problem was emphasized;
- the tasks for annual cuts in the volume of production of vodka, hard liquor, and fortified grape and fruit wines were specified.

The alcoholic drinks that we purchase abroad should be calculated together with the volume [of such drinks] produced in our country.

In 1983, our country imported wine and vodka products for 579.4 million rubles, and in 1984—for 672,9 million rubles.

The need to increase the prices for wine and vodka products with the purpose of decreasing the demand for those was discussed.

A proposal was introduced to increase the legal age of persons to whom alcoholic drinks could be sold.

It seems expedient to prohibit selling spirits to persons younger than 21.

It would serve the interest of preserving and strengthening [people's] health in the most critical period of their physical development.

It is extremely important that the proposed regulations forbids sale of alcohol to persons of draft age and to young servicemen, which consequently, will help improve the discipline in the army.

I think that even if at first we will not be able to achieve implementation of this ban everywhere, still, its moral and psychological influence will definitely be very positive and will serve as a serious restraining factor.

The changes and amendments to the drafts of the Decrees are aimed at strengthening the fight against drinking and alcoholism.

It is intended to establish administrative responsibility for drinking at one's workplace, to increase administrative and criminal responsibility for drinking alcohol in public places, for engagement of underage persons in drinking, violation of the rules of sale of alcohol drinks, small-scale speculation with wine and vodka products, production of moonshine liquor, and for operating transportation vehicles in the state of drunkenness.

A number of additional conditions for using better the possibilities of forced treatment for alcoholism are provided [in the draft].

The prerogatives of comrades' courts and commissions for fighting drunkenness at the executive committees of local Soviets is being expanded.

[The draft] provides for creating commissions for fight against drunkenness on enterprises, in organizations and institutions.

As a whole, the laws will become stricter in respect to drinkers. Fines will be strengthened especially.

The following additional measures are being proposed:

---it is proposed to create commissions for fighting drunkenness on enterprises, organizations and institutions. They will be able to use the measure of public impact in the form of a fine up to 50 rubles for violation of the anti-alcohol laws against the violator.

---Comrades' Courts will be able to impose a fine of up to 50 rubles on the violators (currently—up to 10 rubles);

---administration of enterprises, institutions and organizations is accorded the right to bring violators, separately from any administrative punishment, simultaneously to disciplinary responsibility, to revoke monetary prizes, end-of-the-year bonuses, subsidized trip vouchers to resorts, and to push them back in the queue for the apartments upon coordination of actions with the trade union committees;

---the police is accorded the right to impose fines for the first-time production of home-made liquor without the purpose of selling, and for purchasing home-made liquor.

Currently this right is accorded only to the administrative commissions of the executive committees of the local Soviets.

A draft letter from the Central Committee to party, trade union, and Komsomol organizations, labor collectives, and the Soviet people has been prepared.

A direct, sincere conversation with Communists, Komsomol members, and all citizens is in order. It will help to raise the overall awareness of the danger of the existing situation in connection with the spread of drunkenness, and [encourage] mobilization of the society for the fight against this evil.

It would be expedient to send this letter to Central Committees of the union republics, krai and oblast party committees, Councils of Ministers of the union republics, executive committees of krai and oblast Soviets of people's deputies, the Young Communist League (YCL), the Central Committee of Komsomol, so that it would be discussed at party, trade union, and Komsomol meetings and at meetings of the working people.

I would like to emphasize that the drafts of the proposed documents reflect the opinion and the mood of wide masses, of the party and Soviet organs, and of public organizations.

They were received with support and approval of the Central Committees of the union republics, of 29 krai and oblast party committees, and of 170 labor collectives, i. e. everywhere where they were previously discussed.

Participants of those discussions emphasized the timeliness of adopting the urgent and decisive measures for strengthening the fight against drunkenness and alcoholism, for rooting them out in the maximally short time frame—the next 5 to 10 years.

The CC CPSU, the Central Committee Commission, the editorial boards of newspapers and magazines, and TV and radio stations receive thousands of letters, including collective letters, with tens and hundreds of signatures.

One of the letters, received from Moscow, contained over 1,200 signatures, and another letter, which came from Novosibirsk, contained over 2,700 signatures.

The authors of those letters expressed serious concern in connection with the spread of drunkenness, with that enormous economic, moral, and socio-political damage, which alcohol inflicts on our society, on its physical and social health.

“The drunken epidemics has enveloped our country, and there can be nothing worse than that.” “Our youth is decomposing from vodka.” “Our enemies want to grab us with their bare hands.” “Remove the bottles filled with this terrible poison from the shelves.” “Undertake the [necessary] measures, and we will be cheering like children for everybody's happiness.” These are the most characteristic excerpts from the letters.

That drunkenness is the subject of special concern to people is also evident from the sociological surveys conducted in various regions of the country, and among various strata of the citizens.

59 to 74% of respondents selected “the problem of drunkenness” as their response to the question “What problems preoccupy you most?” As it turns out, it is precisely this problem that concerns people more than any other, including accommodations, household problems, food, being second only to the preservation of peace.

The growth of drunkenness leads to enormous material damages. The damages from drunkenness account for 30 billion rubles a year, according to the most conservative estimates. Academic economists believe that these damages exceed 50-60 billion rubles.

GORBACHEV. This is just the economic damage, and what about other damages?

GROMYKO. For example, the moral and psychological ones.

SOLOMENTSEV. Here are some data from the last year, 1984. 9.3 million drunk persons were picked up from the streets. 12 million people were punished administratively for violations of the anti-alcohol laws—it is more than in 1983.

In the last year, the total number of crimes committed on the grounds of drunkenness has increased, among them, there were over 13 thousand rapes, and about 29 thousand robberies, which is considerably higher than in 1983.

The concern of the healthy forces of our society is clear and well-grounded: not only the biological, but also the genetic foundation of our people is being threatened.

It cannot but concern us that two-thirds of the drinkers are socially passive people, who do not participate in public life.

In short, the problem has assumed such an acute socio-political character, that the unconditional need has emerged to undertake radical and urgent measures—organizational, economic, ideological, and administrative.

Of course, implementation of such measures is not an easy task, but we can overcome the difficulties if we exhibit consistency, persistence, and purposefulness, if we endow the fight against alcohol and drunkenness with a genuinely popular, mass-based character.

In this connection, a proposal is being introduced to support the initiative to create clubs and societies of sobriety, to create an All-Union Voluntary Society for Fight for Sobriety with its own publication (magazine).

Regarding the proposal to create an All-Union Research Center for Medical and Biological Problems. With time, this Center will cover all aspects of the problem—social, economic, legal, and so on.

It is important to put a start to it, to create it. The Institute of Forensic Psychiatry named after Serbsky has the real capacity to host it. We should establish the center at the Institute.

Regarding principal comments and objections.

There are not many of them.

Deputy Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers cde. I. I. Bodyul introduced two proposals. First—instead of the proposed Commission for Fighting Drunkenness at the USSR Council of Ministers—to establish a Central Socio-Political Commission.

He also proposed to set the guidelines for cutting the production of alcoholic drinks not by volume, but by percent—with some decrease compared with the actual sales in the previous year.

One proposal was introduced by cde. E. A. Shevardnadze. It boils down to the idea that we should differentiate our approach to the production of home-made spirits in the traditional wine-producing regions, not to ban completely the production (not with the purpose of selling) of chacha and araka (a variety of moonshine).

The Commission does not find sufficient grounds to accept those proposals. And this is why.

1. The center does not have a [single]state organ, which could unite and coordinate efforts of all state and economic organs in the fight against the drunkenness.
2. The decision on cutting the production of vodka and other alcoholic drinks, we believe, should be concrete, and the annual decreases in the volume of their production should be quite impressive, so that people would realistically feel them, so that they would gain confidence that the fight against drunkenness has been put on a stable material basis, and that the root of it all—the alcohol—would be rooted out.
- 3.

As far as chacha is concerned. Chacha is home-made vodka, in essence, moonshine. And therefore, with all due respect to some local customs, we probably should not agree to officially allow its production. They might ask us—and why should moonshine production be banned in the Vinnitsa or Kursk oblasts then?

The materials presented for the discussion are the result of great collective work, which lasted for almost two and a half years. Tens, hundreds of officials of the central and local party and soviet organs, specialists and scientists took part in preparing those [materials].

The Commission took into account the opinions of the public, and proposals of the working people.

We had to look into the archives, the distant history, search through a pile of books, magazines, scientific research, talk with many scholars, historians, sociologists, economists, doctors, and lawyers.

The best minds of the mankind have been warning us: alcohol is harmful, it is a more powerful and dangerous enemy than either: illness, hunger, epidemics, or war.

The people share the same opinion about alcohol. Their wise sayings and proverbs contain condemnation of drunkenness, and express the pain and grief inflicted by it.

Do our people drink from times immemorial, like some persons allege? Nothing like that! Vodka began to be sold in Russia only in the end of the XVI century. Before that it was permitted to brew and consume only weak alcoholic drinks—home-brews, honey drink, and beer.

As the drinking spread, the resistance to it grew as well.

In the middle of the last century, a powerful wave against drinking and for sobriety rolled across Russia (especially in the central Russia and the Baltics).

That time also witnessed open statements by the best representatives of the Russian intelligentsia, writers, doctors, and lawyers in support of that massive popular movement.

L. N. Tolstoy wrote a series of articles against drunkenness. They were united by his sincere, passionate and wise appeal: “It is time to come to our senses!”

On this growing anti-alcohol wave, under the pressure from the progressive public, and the Bolsheviks, the Tsarist government was forced to implement the “dry law.” Sales of vodka were banned everywhere.

In December 1919, the RSFSR Council of People’s Commissars adopted a resolution “About prohibiting production and sales of alcohol, hard liquors and substances containing alcohol throughout the territory of the RSFSR.”

Therefore, the prohibition continued in force. That situation lasted until the fall of 1924.

As you know, Lenin was decisively against using such a drug like vodka, even if it was profitable in commerce. At the XX Party Conference, he said, “Vodka will lead us not forward to communism, but backwards, to capitalism.”

His unbending position found its reflection in the second Party Program (1919), and in the GOELRO Plan.

One of the postulates of the Electrification Plan stated: “Banning of alcohol consumption as unconditionally harmful for the health of the population should be continuously implemented in the future.”

The [state] monopoly on vodka was introduced in 1924-25 as a temporary measure. Two years after the ban on production and consumption of vodka was repealed, Stalin speaking before foreign workers' delegations said, "Currently, our policy is to cut down the production of vodka gradually."

However, it did not happen. The production and consumption of alcoholic drinks continued to grow. The per capita consumption in liters was as follows: 1913—3.88, 1925—0.88, 1928—1.58, 1940—2.14, 1950—1.88, 1955—3.26.

The 1960s, and the beginning of the 1970s witnessed a significant increase in production and consumption of alcoholic drinks: 1960—3.88, 1965—4.97, 1970—6.85, 1972—7.15.

In 1972, serious efforts were made to strengthen the fight against drinking. A resolution was adopted, and a CC CPSU Letter was sent to all primary party organizations.

The essence of both of those important documents was to "implement energetic, most decisive struggle aimed at rooting out drinking."

The Resolution of the USSR Council of Ministers adopted at that time (May 16, 1972), set out to "implement measures to decreasing the production of vodka and other strong alcoholic drinks in 1972-1975."

Unfortunately, at that time, we did not succeed in realizing those plans.

The curve of consumption kept rising even higher after 1972: 1975—8.19, 1980—8.3, 1984—8.3.

And these data cannot be considered to be comprehensive, because they do not reflect the consumption of moonshine, industrial alcohol, and other alcohol-containing substances.

8.3 liters of pure alcohol per capita—this is an average amount for the country. In the RSFSR, this indicator is even higher—10.3 liters, in the Primorsky Krai—12, Kamchatka—14.5, Sakhalin—almost 17 liters.

If one looks at the overall pattern of growth of alcohol consumption in our country historically, one can see that after reaching the level of 1913 in 1960—the highest level of alcoholic drinks consumption in the three hundred year history of Russia, we then in the next 25 years—in a quarter of a century—exceeded this level by the factor of 2.2, and in reality (taking into account the consumption of moonshine, the industrial grades of alcohol, and so on) threefold, if not more.

To represent more visually the scale that drinking has reached in our country, I will present the following data for comparison.

As many scientists have argued, in 1913, although drinking was widespread, about half of men in Russia did not drink; 9 out of 10 women and 9 out of 10 boys of draft age did not consume any alcoholic drinks.

Today, however, according to the information of the Institute of Sociological Research, 99% of the adult population consume alcoholic drinks to some extent. Non-drinkers (teetotalers) represent fractions of one percent.

We have approached the threshold, after which, as they say, there is nowhere to retreat. Behind us is our future, the future of our people, the future of our creative plans.

An attack and only an attack against alcohol, against drinking [is in order]! A decisive, planned, concentrated [attack]. There is no alternative.

We have to solve a task of an unseen before complexity. It is difficult to count on success with this heavy burden of vodka. We have to throw it off decisively.

The sobering, and hence the improvement of the physical and moral health of the considerable part of the Soviet people, first of all of our youth, will multiply our forces in the struggle for communism.

In the situation of socialism, we possess everything we need to solve this problem, to show the entire world the power and the appeal of the new society, to vividly confirm the reality of those supreme moral values, which socialism and the soviet way of life have brought us.

GORBACHEV: Are there questions for cde. Solomentsev? No questions? Who would like to speak?

DEMENTSEV (First Deputy of the USSR Finance Minister): M.S. Solomentsev has just presented in detail the measures proposed for fighting drinking. They have a great political and social importance. The problem of drunkenness and alcoholism has intensified in the recent years in our country indeed. Consumption of alcoholic drinks inflicts considerable economic and moral damage. It represents an intolerable phenomenon in the life of our society. Overcoming drunkenness and alcoholism is an important task of a special political significance, an unalienable part of the implementation of the program of perfecting the developed socialism outlined by the party.

At the same time, a number of issues require careful consideration so that the decision would be comprehensively balanced and realistic. This refers, in particular, to the question of the scale and timetable of cutting the production of alcoholic drinks. It is proposed to cut the production of vodka, beginning in 1986, by 30 million dals annually, fortified grape wines—by 20 million dals, fruit wines—by 45 million dals, and to completely cease production of fruit wines in 1986-1987, and to decrease vodka

production from 280 million dals in 1985 down to 100 million dals by 1990, or to cut it down by 2.8.

Implementation of the above measures would cut the resources of retail trade by 5 billion rubles in 1986, by 10 billion rubles in 1987, by 13.5 billion rubles in 1988, by 17 billion rubles in 1989, and by 18-20 billion rubles in 1990. At the same time, the USSR State Budget revenue will decrease by 4 billion rubles in 1986, by 7.5 billion rubles in 1987, by 11 billion rubles in 1988, by 14 billion rubles in 1989, and by 15-16 billion rubles in 1990.

The USSR Finance Ministry considers raising the issue to fully phase out the production and sales to the population of fruit wines during the period of 1986-1987, and to gradually decrease the production of vodka and fortified wines the right thing to do.

There emerges the issue of ensuring the balance between the growth of the income of the population and the supply of consumer goods, and also between the budget revenue and government spending.

At the same time, the work on the draft of the Main Directives for the XII five-year plan and the period up to the year 2000 shows that [our] search for the sources to cover the retail resources and the missing budget revenues does not provide grounds for a full balance. According to the information of the USSR Gosplan, the retail trade budget for 1990 is still 10-15 billion rubles below balance.

The preliminary data show that accounting for the growth of the population income, the trade balance should be established in 1986 with an increase of over 16 billion rubles.

In order to supply this balance, we have to find consumer goods resources additionally for more than 21 billion rubles. Annually, we were able to find resources to cover the balance of consumer goods of no more than 14 billion rubles.

Judging from preliminary calculations, we have not yet balanced the state revenue and spending for 1986. We have to pay special attention to the fact that in the recent years, the main source of our state revenue—value-added tax—has not been growing. There is no growth, due to the saturation of the market, in such goods as TV sets, washing machines, household and cultural items, radio receivers and others, yet the sales to the population of such goods as automobiles and goods like these, remains at the level of previous years.

However, the main reason is that the quality of those goods has improved [only] insignificantly.

The Councils of Ministers of the Union republics, the Ministries and [state] organizations should undertake active measures for producing additional quantities of consumer goods with improved quality, appropriate variety, and for increasing [the volume] of paid services for the population.

By improving the quality and increasing the volume of production of consumer goods we can increase the budget revenue and improve the resources of the trade balance. But even if we take into account the implementation of the measures for price increases for the remaining goods, as it is stipulated in the draft resolution, even that might now allow us to compensate fully for the missing budget revenue and the trade balance resources.

GORBACHEV. There is nothing new in what you have just said. Each of us knows that there is nothing to be purchased for the cash held by people. But you are not proposing anything other than forcing people to drink. So just report your ideas briefly, you are not in the Finance Ministry, but at the Politburo session.

DEMENTSEV. A significant decrease in the production of vodka and alcohol products might lead to the growth of moonshine production, as well as stealing of technological alcohol, and would also cause the additional sugar consumption. To deal with this, very serious measures of anti-alcohol fight would be required, as it is proposed in the draft resolution.

The USSR Finance Ministry considers raising the issue of cutting production of vodka, wine, and other alcoholic drinks correct. At the same time, weighing everything that was said, we should do some additional work on the issue of the quantity and volume of such cuts.

L. A. VORONIN. (First Deputy Chairman of the Gosplan USSR [State Planning Committee]). USSR Gosplan enthusiastically supports the proposals that were introduced to fight drinking and alcoholism. The time is ripe to implement such measures, of course, and in general they are needed.

At the same time, to take another look at the instruction contained in paragraph II of the draft resolution. Here it is proposed to cut production of vodka and other hard liquors by 30 million dals, low-grade fortified grape wines by 20 million dals, and fruit wines—by 45 million dals annually. In addition, it is suggested to stop production of fruit wines altogether in 1986-1987.

I would like to report that if such a cut in alcoholic drinks production is implemented, we literally will have nothing to provide for the cash that is held by the population. Therefore, it would be good if the measures outlined in paragraph II could be once again thought through carefully, and the timetable of implementation was more realistic.

GORBACHEV. The essence of the question of fighting alcoholism is to cut the production of vodka. We cannot tolerate our drunk budget any longer.

S. P. BURENKOV (USSR Health Minister). I would like to report to the Politburo that quite an extensive drug abuse service has been created in our country. It employs over 6.5 thousand doctors and other medical personnel. The drug abuse service has 91 thousand beds available for treatment of drug and alcohol abuse patients. The

drug abuse services at big enterprises work especially well. Experience shows that we should expand this service actively. This is our perspective.

SOLOMENTSEV. What kind of perspective is that—to increase the number of alcoholics.

BURENKOV. I would like to ask to specify the paragraph of the resolution about the creation of a medico-biological center devoted to the issues of the fight against alcoholism, and to formulate this paragraph as cde. Solomentsev proposed it.

* * *

ALIEV. This is not an easy task.

GORBACHEV. Are there any objections to the recommendation of cde. Kochetkov?

POLITBURO MEMBERS. No.

KOCHETKOV. I consider it as [a sign of] great trust from the Politburo, and I will try to do my best to live up to it.

GORBACHEV. We wish you success.

The resolution is adopted.

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GORBACHEV. In conclusion, I would like to exchange opinions with the Politburo members on the following issue. The thought about the need to fight consistently with ceremoniality, arrogance, glorification, and toadying expressed at the March Plenum of the CC CPSU received an unexpectedly powerful resonance in the country. A large number of letters from working people has been received by the Central Committee on this question. I would like to share one of those [letters] with you. It was written by V. A. Zavialov, member of the CPSU from 1944, from Leningrad. Here is this letter:

“It was rightly said in your speech at the funeral meeting that we have to engage in struggle against ceremoniality. The latter without doubt does a lot of damage to our cause. Ceremoniality, as a rule is accompanied by glorification and toadying, which are still flourishing in our party. And unfortunately, it is the top leadership that is to blame for this. In his time, Stalin gave his “approval” for glorification. I am thinking about electing honorary presidiums, writing greeting letters to the Central Committee on the occasion of various events, or birthdays of important persons, speeches praising the General Secretary, making up reports addressed to him about some labor heroism, and the like. Sometimes even Stalin himself was making fun of the celebratory rituals. But it never went beyond making fun of them. Too bad! Because business style helps one

avoid miscalculations in work and to correct mistakes quickly. Ceremoniality does not help here. This is what happened in the beginning of the 1930s, when among the noise about successes, it was “not noticed” that Lenin’s efforts to improve the destroyed agriculture (NEP [New Economic Policy-S.S.]) were annulled by the liquidation of the “kulaks” as a class on the basis of the “thorough” collectivization.

It is known that N. S. Khrushchev began the struggle against the Stalin personality cult very unsuccessfully. After that struggle he himself got into the worst sort of cult. I do not intend to analyze Khrushchev’s mistakes in this letter. I will only mention one of his statements in connection with the emerging practice of promoting the Presidium of the CC CPSU to the honorary presidiums. I wrote cde. Khrushchev about it, believing that we should give up such a practice.

They informed me on the phone from the Leningrad Oblast CPSU Committee that my letter was reported to cde. Khrushchev and that he said: there is nothing terrible in electing honorary presidiums. I am not insisting that there was something terrible in that. However, one has to have to consider that the procedure of the “honorary” itself is evidence of the lack of modesty of those who are promoted to those “honorary” [presidiums]. Besides, such practice contradicts the line of Marx, Engels, and Lenin’s behavior. It is not clear to me, how can one justify the promotion of the “Politburo headed by ...” to the honorary presidium of a gathering, if the Marxist classics were always against such actions. For instance, Marx and Engels, when they joined the First International, demanded that their leadership should not be emphasized. Lenin had been fighting against the ceremoniality and doing things just for a show all his life. It would suffice to recall how he reacted when they wanted to celebrate his 50th birthday in order to understand what his attitude to glorification was.

The historical experience teaches us often, behind the ceremonial noise, [our] leaders lose their orientation and the sense of proportion. People believe that the nineteen Brezhnev’s “Gold Stars,” and Chernenko’s third “Gold Star” had not only undermined their own reputation, but also ricocheted against the members of the CC CPSU Politburo. People lament, and not without grounds, “And where is the Politburo looking in such cases? Could it be that the [Politburo] members believe that General Secretaries, and themselves as well, could be decorated as they wish and as much as they wish? One cannot introduce awards on the principle—my hand is my master. That would undermine the meaningfulness of the awards. Does this style truly fit into the Leninist norms?” It would be desirable if the main headquarters of our party—the CC CPSU Politburo—did not give any pretext for such perplexed questions. All the perplexity would disappear on its own, if the thesis about modesty and business character of communists would be implemented in reality not just in the words, but in the deeds from the bottom to the top of all of the party organizations. So far, we have not achieved it in the party.

One has to note that the existing system of rewards in the broad sense of the word currently needs some serious correcting. Take for example the mass awards of orders and medals—it turned into a plain routine phenomenon. A year ends—you have to give awards and bonuses! One may ask—for what? For fulfilling the plan? For good work?

And why should we work poorly and not fulfill the plan? It seems to me that we should exhibit the feel for proper limits and elementary modesty in the celebratory rituals. Efficiency will only benefit from it.

On the eve of the XXVII Congress of the CPSU, at which the new edition of the Party Program will be proposed, it would be expedient to add to the Program or to the Charter an appropriate paragraph against all varieties of ceremoniality and glorification to mobilize Communists for the struggle against them. At the Congress, we have to say in our full voice that the word of the Communists should not differ from their word. It would seem that this is such a simple and universally known truth. Yes, this truth is very simple. However, the life shows that it is not too easy to realize it in practice, in the work.

Rank-and-file Communists and non-affiliated citizens have high hopes for the XXVII Congress of the CPSU. It should demonstrate a model of modesty, efficiency and organization. One cannot say that the past Congresses avoided glorification of General Secretaries of the CC CPSU and of our successes. In both cases glorification only harms our work. One can get an impression that the author of these words speaks against making our successes known. No, I am only saying that successes should be mentioned modestly, without getting “dizzy with success.” Talk about success should be supported by a serious analysis, which would allow us to find reserves for a more efficient work in the future.

Skeptics tell me that my letter will remain in the apparatus of the CC CPSU and will not be reported as addressed. I do not think so. Because the CC CPSU apparatus, especially the Letters Department, should be interested in channeling information from “below” to the Politburo, if serious problems relevant to the entire party are touched upon in it. The strength of the party is in its ties with the masses. One of the types of such communication is the letters of rank-and-file Communists to the CC CPSU and its Politburo. Starting from these positions, I decided to write a letter to you.

Esteemed Mikhail Sergeevich, the Communists are hoping that you will be able to manage very difficult tasks. I wish you all success in this cause and to be well.”

As you can see, this is a serious letter, even though it contains a certain shift of two aspects: the need to maintain and strengthen the authority of the party and, on the other hand, the need to fight against all kinds of exaggerations. Therefore, let's react to this public opinion more actively. Let our speeches be shorter, we should use fewer of any kind of epithets, reject unnecessary compliments, and the ceremonial, surface optimism. Our people understand very well both the problems and the tasks facing the country, and the necessity of an even more powerful unity with the party in the center. Lenin spoke about the authority of leadership, about the authority of [top] leaders. But it should not be confused with the authority of the party, which each one of us should try to strengthen to the maximum. Because it is no secret that when Khrushchev expanded the criticism of Stalin to the unbelievable proportion, that brought only the damage, after which we are still unable to gather all the [broken] pieces together to some degree.

GROMYKO: Proportion should be preserved in everything. I would not adopt any particular decision on this issue, but undoubtedly, there is some rational core in what the people write.

GORBACHEV: All in all, we should talk about the authority of the party, the Central Committee, and the Politburo. As far as concrete persons are concerned, we should not only apply proportion and modesty, but also do without extra, unnecessary epithets.

ZIMYANIN: We are going to hold a joint Plenum of creative unions dedicated to the 40th anniversary of the Victory. Would you say that we should not adopt a letter to the Central Committee or elect an honorary presidium headed by the CC General Secretary?

GORBACHEV: I think that you can adopt the letter to the Central Committee and elect the honorary presidium consisting of the CC Politburo without mentioning General Secretary maintaining the traditions, but in all this it is necessary to abide strictly by the principles of collective leadership, Leninist modesty, and not to allow any excesses, or any kind of glorification.

POLITBURO MEMBERS: Correct.

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