

October 7, 1989

**Record of Conversation between M.S. Gorbachev
and Members of the Politburo of the Central
Committee of the Socialist United Party of Germany**

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Summary:

Gorbachev speaks about perestroika and the necessity of political reforms in both the Soviet Union and East Germany.

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

Record of Main Content of Conversation Between M.S. Gorbachev and Members of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Socialist United Party of Germany. Berlin, Germany. October 7, 1989.

Gorbachev. In this connection, I would like to return to the 1970s. Then everybody in the world acutely felt the challenges of the scientific and technological revolution. We all remember how energetic were the West's actions in adjusting to it. By the way, they did it without taking the interests of the working class into account. At that time we had a sharp discussion of those urgent issues in the CPSU. It was then that the thesis appeared that if we did not saddle [sic - master] scientific and technological progress, then socialism would lose. The processes causing us to lag behind became so apparent that L. I. Brezhnev agreed that it was necessary to hold a special Plenum of the CC CPSU devoted to the problems of acceleration of scientific and technological progress in the USSR. We are not going to talk about specific reasons why that Plenum was never held. It was a miscalculation. It was a strategic miscalculation, and we are still feeling the consequences of that. You approached those problems differently in the GDR. I could see it myself when I studied your experience of the economic reform in 1966 here.

In the 1970s you understood the challenge of the times, and actively responded to it. And that was correct, it allowed you to do many things. These are two examples of different reactions to the needs of social development, which require transformation in the party's practical policy.

This has a direct relevance to our perestroika. Where the party is behind the times in theoretical and practical terms, there we have to harvest bitter fruit. You all know how inter-ethnic conflicts and passions have flared up in our country recently. Inter-ethnic problems are very complex. There are many issues interwoven there: the economics, the demographics, the problems of sovereignty, history, traditions of separate peoples. We had to present the society with thoroughly developed approaches to these problems. But while we were intensively working on those problems, which, of course, took some time, other forces were planting poisonous seeds in the soil of inter-ethnic relations. And only when we passed the platform of inter-ethnic policy at the September [19-20] Plenum of the CC CPSU the society calmed down in a certain way. The people got clear signposts that allowed them to consolidate the social forces.

[...] You know, it was important for me to hear about it here. Because our perestroika is also a response to the challenge of the times. In the end we, communists, think about what we leave behind, what we prepare for the generations to come

I did say to Erich, however, that it seems that it would be much easier for you than for us. You do not experience such tensions in the socio-economic sphere. But to make a decision to undertake political reforms is also not an easy thing to do. In the future you will have to make courageous decisions. I am speaking about it from our own experience. Remember, Lenin used to say that in turbulent revolutionary years people get more experience in weeks and months than sometimes in decades of normality.

Our perestroika led us to the conclusion that the revolutionary course would not receive the support of the working class if [its] living standards were not improving. But it turned out that the problem of sausage and bread is not the only one. The people demand a new social atmosphere, more oxygen in the society, especially because we are talking about the socialist regime. I am saying this to remind you of the problems that we are facing at home. Figuratively speaking, people want not only bread but the entertainment also. If you take it in a general sense, we are talking about the necessity to build not only the material but also the socio-spiritual atmosphere for the development of the society. I think it is a lesson for us. It is

important not to miss our chance here. The party should have its own position on these issues, its own clear policy in this respect also. Life itself will punish us if we are late. By the way, in this connection, we moved up the dates of the XXVIII Congress of the CPSU [to 2 July 1990].

There is an understanding in the society - the state of affairs in the society will determine.

[...]

From our own experience, from the experience of Poland and Hungary, we saw that if the party pretends that nothing special is going on, if it does not react to the demands of reality, it is doomed. We are concerned about the fate of the healthy forces in Hungary and Poland, but it is not easy to help them. There they gave up their positions. The positions had been given up because they could not give a timely response to the demands of reality, and the processes took a painful turn. The Polish comrades did not use the opportunities that opened up for them in the beginning of the 1980s. And in Hungary, already in the end of his life, Kadar deeply regretted that he did not do what he could and should have done in time. So, we have only one choice - to move decisively ahead, otherwise we will be defeated.

It is even more true, if you keep in mind, as we have already mentioned, Erich, they already rub their hands waiting for a social revenge on a global scale, for constricting the socialist sphere. It makes it even more important - not to slow down - it would mean defeat.

The CPSU and the Socialist United Party of Germany, as the most powerful of the fraternal parties, have an opportunity for not only strengthening its authority, but to widen it on the basis of the original principles from which they were created, and in the name of our ideals, the ideals of October. Now is a good moment to act for you. And what could be more important for Communists than the future of our movement! We, on our part, are ready to be with you in the future, to cooperate closely and constructively. In this we are open to you without any reservations.

[...] Gorbachev. Miners gave a good lesson to the Secretary of the Donetsk Regional Party Committee. At the enterprises workers were saying right in the shop: why [was it that] the leaders of the country, of the party, care about the workers, are interested in their feelings - there was the new minister with a visit recently - but they had no water in the workers' town for two weeks, and they could not get the Chairman of the local Executive Committee to come[?] It is no surprise that the workers actively supported some communists, and demanded that others were immediately replaced. And we often see that some of the leaders cannot pull the cart any more, but we don't dare replace him - we are afraid to offend him. Meanwhile, the problems grow and become very painful. In short, there are many "bells" for the party.

On the German side members of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Secretaries of the Central Committee Comrades H. Axen, J. Herrman, H. Dohlus, E. Krenz, V. Krolkowski, G. Mittag, K. Hager, G. Schabowski, W. Jarowski, members of the Politburo G. Böhme, H. Sindermann, H. Kessler, G. Kleiber, S. Lorenz, E. Mielke, E. Mückenberger, A. Neumann, H. Tisch, W. Stoph, W. Eberlein, Candidate members of the Politburo W. Walde, I. Lange, G. Müller, M.Müller, G. Schürer, and also members of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany G. Seiber, F.I. Herrmann, H. Oh, H. König participated in the conversation.

From the Soviet side present were: V. Falin, G. Kh. Shakhnazarov, I. P. Aboimov, V. I. Kochemasov. G. I. Gerasimov, V. A. Kopteltsev.

The conversation was recorded by G. S. Ostroumov on October 7, 1989.