



'Perestroika has restored to us our humanity' — Shevardnadze

Spark is near powder keg

By Eduard Shevardnadze
Soviet Foreign Minister

THIS will be a heart-to-heart talk, a thinking out loud, something very personal, deeply felt, perhaps. I wish to share with you what I have never spoken about in public, reflections on what I have succeeded in doing and what I have been unsuccessful in, on hopes unrealised and promises unfulfilled.

What will become of the party and consequently, of each of us? What position will each of us occupy as its fate is being decided? However much we ask such questions and however we attempt to answer them, the entire immense complex of them cannot shield us from

from the right also. Regret is even being expressed that the Central Committee's February plenum did not remove certain members of the leadership, the Foreign Minister included.

The savage expressions of the opponents of perestroika concerning, say, me, and some of my colleagues, do not embarrass me. But there are others — millions — at whom our homemade "ultras" are striking, and it is here that maintaining composure is impossible.

Because in appealing to the masses, who are experiencing many difficulties, and taking advantage of their unhappiness, they are deliberately throwing a spark into the powder keg.

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'March' in danger of collapse

Frustrations

From



Washington

IN early January I first wrote about the escalating frustrations many ordinary and formerly non-political Israelis were feeling; frustrations brought about by their growing understanding that their own government was blocking peace talks with the Palestinians; frustrations that were causing more and more Israelis to contemplate becoming lawbreaker by "marching" to Cairo to talk with the PLO themselves.

Ironically, these frustrations have now taken a very interesting turn. Initially the basic and immediate issue for most of these Israelis was the government of Israel's stonewalling and deception, even after the PLO had finally publicly "recognised" Israel's right to exist.

The more unspoken motivation for many of these Israelis, however, was (and still is) the brutal and at times Nazi-like treatment of the Palestinians by the Israeli Army in its ongoing attempt to crush the Intifada.

But today the frustrations are more heightened as well as more complex. And they include considerable bewilderment about why the government of Egypt seems to be blocking the many hundreds of waiting Israelis from staging their independent "peace march" to Cairo.

Back when I first wrote about this unique effort the Israelis organising it were very enthusiastic, even if rather naive. Their effort was going to be the first time that a mass group of hundreds, maybe thousands, of Israelis would violate the law and publicly meet with the PLO.

As I wrote at the time, "Out of growing disillusionment with the policies of the Shamir-Peres government, as well as increasing frustration with the small steps being taken by the mainstream peace groups including Peace Now, this group of Israelis began discussing the need to dramatically demonstrate that Israel must negotiate directly with the PLO."

In the beginning, this effort was centred within one of the large Kibbutz movements, and those who first met were purposefully intent on doing something very dramatic.

In the process of meeting to

The whole thing really was to be something of a spontaneous happening whose time had come. And the idea was to act quickly, as the Israeli organisers thought would be the case, in the hope that a novel effort of this kind might have a dramatic result.

Just what the Israeli government would have done if many hundreds of Israelis were meeting face-to-face with PLO personalities, rather than just a couple of Israelis as in the past, is now, of course, impossible to know. Just what effect such a "march" might have had on Israeli politics over the past few months we'll now never know.

But for sure, had the "march" taken place as originally conceived, it would have been a major embarrassment putting the Israeli government on the spot. Furthermore, the "march" just might have broken the taboo about the PLO once and for all while at the same time rendering the cynical law a thing of the past.

For a variety of reasons, however, the spontaneity of the original idea has now faded, the "march" hasn't happened, and the whole effort is in danger of totally collapsing.

Messages

More than once now the organisers have written pointed faxes, or made pleading phone calls, to Cairo asking Egyptian officials why a date has still not be set.

And in the past few days the

"peace march" and push it forward, the reality is they have shown considerable constraint to put it off.

Why would the PLO act in this way? For a great variety of reasons, including most of the same considerations the Egyptian government has had, including security. Plus, the fact is—for good or bad—that over the past few years Arafat's Fatah movement has grown closer and closer to the Israeli Labour Party, and to American Jews such as Rita Hauser who front for this wing of the Israeli establishment.

And Labour, with its own calculations of the situation in Israel and its own political considerations, is not in favour of such efforts as the "peace march" and has worked consistently to block such efforts. Moreover, Labour uses the Peace Now movement to do its work; and the "march" was always independent of Peace Now or any other single group. So Labour has acted to stall or prevent this "independent" effort which is not under its tutelage and control.

The Israeli organisers initially made contact in Israel with Arab Knesset members as well as with Faisal Husseini and other known PLO intermediaries. They noted they were eager to go quickly, that they needed Arafat himself to be there to greet them, and they also very much wanted some kind of gesture from the Palestinians to make their efforts

complex of them cannot shield us from the most important thing — perestroika and its life and death. The question of the party and its future is inseparable from this.

We know the results of the slogan of adherence to principle in defence of party unity. The consequences were persecution for dissidence and expulsion from party ranks and then expulsion from life.

Terror, mass punitive measures, the grief of families and whole peoples. As a result, while preserving the semblance of formal unity, the party found itself split, (between) outwardly unquestioning obedience (and) inner protest and disagreement. It was from this inner protest and rejection of ingrained defects, incidentally, that the grains of the policy which we call perestroika began to show through. The main purpose of our party is perestroika and its success and irreversibility.

Let us think carefully about the fact that in dividing people into “radicals” and “conservatives” we could be repulsing or isolating loyal allies and thereby really splitting the party. With what danger is such a split fraught and to whose benefit is it? This is by no means a rhetorical question. I have said repeatedly and believe, as before, that if perestroika fails, dictatorship is possible. However much we brush aside such a forecast, history does not allow us to forget it.

Manifestos have been made public, actions are being mounted. On a practical level an attack on the country's leaders is under way — not only from the left but

And no one can calculate the consequences of a social explosion capable of igniting not only befogged minds but also the giant stockpiles of nuclear and chemical weapons and nuclear power stations and zones already weakened by natural disasters and regions shaken by inter-ethnic strife.

Increasingly, accusations are being heard of slowness, inconsistency, a lack of boldness and so forth. It is also being said that perestroika has not only revealed our inveterate ailments but has intensified them. Optimism today is not in fashion.

On the contrary, many people are competing in pessimism and in making the most terrifying forecasts. I am not their partner in this. My vision of the future is optimistic, of the economic future at least. The new economic structures and mechanisms are still taking shape.

A legal base of the reforms is being created. We are faced with making an extraordinarily complex manoeuvre in the sphere of pricing (the most difficult, perhaps), without which a market simply will not be formed. Everyone understands that this is a painful and unpopular action, but we have to make up our minds to embark on it.

For many years heavy industry had the “green light” — perhaps this was right in its time, it is now difficult to say — but it subsequently proved too heavy for the people's well-being.

One-sided progress in arms manufacture paradoxically weakened the country's security in its most important component — the situation of the citizen. While proud of having achieved military parity with the US, we have

spark into the powder keg. Meanwhile, the “class enemy” is supplying us with these same syringes, anti-burn equipment, prosthetic appliances and wheel-chairs, and sending doctors and bone marrow.

I do not wish to remind you of the earthquake in Armenia, when we all — on both sides — remembered that we are simply people, members of a single worldwide, universal civilisation. perestroika has restored to us our humanity.

The belief that we are a great country and that we should be respected for this is deeply ingrained in me, as in everyone. But great in what? Territory? Population? Quantity of arms? Or the people's troubles? The individual's lack of rights? Life's Disorderliness? In what do we, who have virtually the highest infant mortality rate on our planet, take pride? It is not easy answering the questions: Who are you and who do you wish to be? A country which is feared or a country which is respected? A country of power or a country of kindness?

It is difficult for me myself to answer these questions.

I remember returning from Geneva following the signing of the Afghan settlement agreements. I have never spoken about this. Just the two persons who were with me at that time know about this.

It might have seemed that I should have been happy, there would be an end to the caskets arriving in the country. The account of deaths and expenditure, which had reached 60 billion rubles, would be closed.

But, despite this, I felt profoundly depressed. When my comrades asked me what the matter was, I did not conceal what was on my mind, it was hard for me to see myself as a Foreign Minister who had signed by no means a victory agreement.

Such had not been a frequent occurrence in the history of Russia and the Soviet Union.

this.

On this continent — and not only on this one — we had since time immemorial been rivals with the Americans. We are now attempting, and not unsuccessfully, to interact. But even in our milieu we are surrounded by an atmosphere of suspicion and accusations: “We are betraying our own ideals.” At each step I hear behind me the whispering: You have given away, sacrificed something somewhere, agreed to compromise somewhere — and other such words.

Of course, profound changes will occur in our alliance, and our co-operation and interaction will be built on a new basis. And if we pursue the right policy and do not make mistakes, we will not have to worry about the future of our relations with the East European countries. We can and will know how to build really civilised, equal relations with these countries.

Looking back at the years of perestroika, we may say with satisfaction that, as a whole, Soviet foreign policy has accomplished its main basic mission — the creation of the conditions most conducive to internal transformations in the country. We have smooth, stable relations with essentially all states without exception. It is particularly gratifying that many problems in relations with neighbouring countries which existed earlier have been removed.

There is, however, the other side of the coin. The “Cold War” is becoming a thing of the past. Military arsenals and military spending are being reduced — in the last two years we have reduced the latter 14 percent. These are real reductions, not propaganda. Countries' militarisation levels, ours included, are declining. Military confrontation is on the wane.

All this is very well, but we are noticing that a mood of complacency is emerging in a particular part of society. This cannot fail to cause concern. We are, after all, only at the start of the road. (*The Washington Post*)

discuss what could be done by the PLO. Actually, it wasn't going to be quite a “march”—though the “march” theme had a way of sticking—but rather a caravan of buses. Even by bus, Cairo is, after all, some seven slow hours down the road!

And the reason Egypt was chosen was not because of Camp David, but rather simply because Egypt is the only Arab country to which travel from Israel is possible. In addition, Egypt is the only place where the normal Israeli exit tax of some \$200 for international travel does not apply—an important consideration in view of the fact that each of the Israelis going on the “march” will be paying their own way.

Sign for ‘march’

Quite literally within just a few days—back in December of last year when the “march” concept first evolved—hundreds of Israelis began signing up to go on the “march to talk with the PLO”. And in the beginning most were willing to break the law that outlaws such talks, ready to take their own personal stand to break the psychological as well as political logjam.

And in the past few days the Israeli organisers have told Egyptian officials it's now or never, the “march” must be in the next few weeks or they will drop the idea and return the advance money to the over 600 persons already signed up and ready and willing to go.

There's some talk at this point of adding the “march” to the end of the Socialist International meeting scheduled for Cairo on May 23—not officially, mind you, just seizing the opportunity to have the event at that time.

But the organisers aren't optimistic in view of how they have been treated so far; and the SI, as I've also reported in my column, when it comes to matters Mid-east is pretty much under the thumb of it's affiliate, the Israeli Labour Party. So any effort connected with SI is either likely to be sabotaged or twisted beyond recognition.

All the details of just what has happened during the past five months concerning this matter remain to be uncovered, but after investigating the situation, including speaking with some of the key people involved and reviewing some of the messages sent back and forth, what follows is a preliminary summary of what has been going on.

It now seems that Egyptian officials were concerned right from the beginning that allowing such a grassroots “march” to go forward could get out of hand. It would be difficult to control such a large number of people; hard to know just what they would do or say; hard to know if Israeli groups opposed to such a spectacle, or among the Palestinians, might try to intervene.

All along issues of control and security were major considerations urging caution and delay. But in addition to these concerns both the governments of the US and Israel put pressure on Egypt to hold back.

Initially the argument used by both Israeli and US officialdom was that the Mubarak plan, which had melded into the Baker Plan after having been pretty much hatched in Washington in the first place, was moving forward and some kind of official talks in Cairo were in the offing. Hence, it was not the “right time”, so the argument went, for something like the Israeli peace groups was proposing.

As for the PLO, it too has been confused and uncertain just as all cautious “governments” in such situations proceed slowly and hesitantly. Whereas one would have expected the PLO to embrace the idea of such a

Word came back from Arafat back last December that he was supposedly supportive of the “march” idea. Meanwhile, the internal dynamics within the nearly one thousand Israelis pre-signed-up to go to Cairo began to take on more normal characteristics of Israeli politics.

Lost sight off, for some, was the original understanding that symbolically breaking the law with clear Israeli-PLO contacts among large numbers of people was the main novelty of the idea in the first place!

Manoeuvring

Moreover, behind-the-scenes, true to character, the large Labour-infiltrated Peace Now movement was all the time manoeuvring for a way to take-over and cop-opt the “march”. They had done the same with the “Hands Around The Wall” demonstration at the end of December in occupied Jerusalem. And indeed Peace Now is specifically used for this purpose even though some persons in the movement are far more progressive than the mainstream.

Meanwhile, with all of these pressures swirling in the background, the organisers decided not to talk directly to the PLO about the arrangements for the “march”, but rather to talk primarily to officials in Egypt who gave the impression they could also speak for the Palestinians.

But the more important reality was that the Egyptians quickly began showing signs of uneasiness. At first Osama Al-Baz and Butrous Ghali were directly involved.

Finally the Israeli organisers got so concerned that three of them went to Cairo to find out what was going on. They were given a series of polite assurances that their plan was a good one; but every time they pushed for a specific date they were told to wait, that the time wasn't quite right, that things had to still be worked out.

Right now the whole “march” is in danger of collapse. The Israeli organisers have been pretty much drained of their energy and certainly of their spontaneity.

If the Socialist International timing is chosen, the event is likely to be co-opted in crucial ways by the Labour Party and Peace Now.

Yet if the “march” isn't approved for sometime in May the organisers now say they are just going to cancel it.

Formula that guides the decision-makers

THOSE who control Europe, control the world”, is one of the most important political formula that guided national leaders and decision-makers almost throughout history, and certainly will continue to do so in the future.

On the turn of this century, the Germans unmatched military strength and economic power (that emanated from the German unity in the late nineteenth century) almost conquered Europe and thus almost dominated the world throughout bloody two World Wars that engulfed the world in the first four decades of this century. There is no doubt that the military, political and economic results of World War One and Two have led to dramatic changes in the history and the map of the world.

In the 45 years that followed the collapse of Germany as the major superpower in Europe, none of the European countries have managed to become a superpower. One of the reasons is that the two superpowers (the USA and the Soviet Union) were against the rise of a superpower in Europe because such an entity is against their regional interests. The second reason is mainly because none of the European countries have had the requirements of a superpower which are; the continental size, the large population, the nuclear arsenal particularly the first strike and second strike capabilities, and the huge diversified economy.

In this respect, as well as in others, history seems to repeat itself from time to time, in one way or the other. The same situation or event might re-occur in the same place but in different time with or without the same actors. The consequences of such an event, however, might or might not be the same because it depends on various socio-political, economic, and military factors that are intertwined to create the events.

Relying on this logic, history might repeat itself in the near future. This time again in Germany after 45 years of

WORLD



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VIEW

total separation between the German people. A separation that gave the people of one nation two different identities, one is Western, the other is Eastern.

However, the dramatic changes that took place in the last two years in the nature and orientation of world politics, particularly between the Eastern and Western blocs, have led to the emergence of a new global formula of regional security, political and ideological perceptions of the two superpowers for each other; more emphasis on inter-dependence than confrontation, and the superpowers' recognition of the fact that neither conventional nor nuclear forces can achieve their national goals and interests.

Realisation of these facts, have led to the easiness of international and regional tensions, conflicts, and contest, which contributed to the breaking up of the old regional security regimes. Thus, what was at one time impossible to even think about, has now become possible. Therefore,

the newly emerging era of global superpowers' detente, mutual interests, co-operation, and alliance have contributed and at the same time have led to the emergence of the idea of uniting the two Germanys again in the late 20th century. No wonder then if the two separated parts of Germany are to be re-united soon, just as it happened in the late 19th century by Bismarck the great.

The main issue that concerns the East and West now is: how to contain the German rising military and economic power and at the same time how to make sure not to unleash such a power once again on Europe or any where else? To many political realists, this situation is impossible to put it under control now or in the future, yet, it is the main issue that occupies the minds of the decision-makers in many of Germany's neighbouring countries and dread its unification. This very idea makes them feel nervous particularly when they remember the memories of the past.