

12 November 1953

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Conversation between Congressman John Blatnik and the DCI

1. On 11 November 1953, Congressman John Blatnik (D., Minn.) discussed his recent trip to Yugoslavia and his conversations with key Yugoslav Government officials with Mr. Allen Dulles. [redacted] Southeastern Europe Division, was also present.

2. Congressman Blatnik was in Israel on 8 October 1953, the day that the U.S. and British Governments made known their intention to withdraw their occupation forces from the FTT. Although it had been his original intention to go directly from Israel to Yugoslavia, Congressman Blatnik decided to postpone his trip to Belgrade until near the end of his European tour so that he might bring back to the U.S. the latest possible impressions of the picture in Yugoslavia. Enroute to West Germany from Israel, Mr. Blatnik stopped in Athens to discuss the latest developments on the Trieste issue with Ambassador Cavendish W. Cannon, former U. S. Ambassador to Yugoslavia. Ambassador Cannon, who indicated he had not known of the U.S./British decision prior to 8 October 1953, deplored the inevitable strain on relations between Yugoslavia and the West, but felt certain a solution would be found satisfactory to the principals involved.

3. On 20 October 1953, Mr. Blatnik visited Trieste; although he did not see Sir John Winterton, Zone Commander, he was able to arrange a lengthy visit with General McFadyen, the U.S. Deputy Zone Commander. The Congressman was much impressed with General McFadyen's keen analysis of the complexities of the Trieste situation and felt that General McFadyen, while basically a military man, thoroughly understood the delicate diplomatic factors involved. Asked for his impression of Trieste, Mr. Blatnik pointed out that he was in Trieste after the original 8 October decision and prior to the riots of the first week in November. Despite the relative quiet, he did gain an impression that the Triestines were all too aware of the "economic consequences of our proposed withdrawal from Trieste." He felt they had lost all their drive and enthusiasm.

4. In Frankfurt, Mr. Blatnik accepted the picture painted for him by the press of a blustering Tito, moving troops to the Italian frontier and making inflammatory speeches. After six days in Slovenia and three days in Belgrade he had an entirely different picture. He outlined in some detail his visit to his relatives in Slovenia where he found a genuine fear of the Italians. He cited what he termed "a long history of Italian misbehavior in the area" between the two World Wars and said

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that Prime Minister Pella's statement that Italy would not relinquish her claims to Zone B and other former Italian territory had scared the common people (98% Catholic, 80% peasant) who wanted only to live out their lives in peace. Mr. Blatnik felt that the basic fear of the average Slovene that the Italians might come again was Marshal Tito's ace-in-the-hole; while the average Slovene might fight reluctantly to maintain Tito in power, the same Slovene would fight to the death in defense of his home.

5. At dinner at the home of Boris Kraigher, President of Slovenia, in Ljubljana, Congressman Blatnik again found, basically, a fear of Italian expansionism. Both with his friend of OSS days, [redacted] and others later in Belgrade, Mr. Blatnik found little or no feeling about the city of Trieste itself; reconciled to eventual partition, key Yugoslav figures were primarily hurt over the way in which the British and the Americans had handled the problem. The Congressman felt that "our people relied too much on the British; an independent U.S. evaluation of the Trieste problem would have served us better." The DCI pointed out that Italian reaction to the 8 October decision had been partly responsible for the Yugoslav reaction; Mr. Blatnik agreed that if the Italians had not played up the decision as a victory for Italy, it would have been easier for Tito to handle internal Yugoslav reaction.

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6. In Belgrade, Mr. Blatnik met with Mr. Bebler, Mr. Wilfan, General Kveder, Edward Kardelj and Marshal Tito. He spent nearly five hours with Kardelj, conversing in Slovenian. He feels that Kardelj is a far more flexible man to talk with than the average Yugoslav Government official. Kardelj stated that the U.S. had lost prestige not only with top officials but had lost a vast reservoir of good-will among the peasants. He spoke at length and convincingly of the Yugoslav position on the FTT and said that before the forum of world opinion Yugoslavia could only have gained stature as a result of its stand in the face of British and U.S. diplomatic action.

7. General Kveder, once strongly pro-Russian but more recently a lecturer in the United States on Soviet strategy and tactics, refused to be drawn into any conversation with the Congressman on the outcome of the Trieste issue. He limited his comment to an expression of "hurt feelings." Mr. Blatnik feels that the case of General Kveder is typical -- that of a man patiently won over to the West but who now feels betrayed and let down. In this connection, Mr. Blatnik cited the case of Sava Kosanovic, former Yugoslav Ambassador to the U.S. and a long-time pro-Western influence in Tito's government. Mr. Kosanovic was "bewildered" by the U.S./British action and felt that the efforts of long years to bring Yugoslavia and the West together had been placed in jeopardy. Bebler, on the other hand, spoke realistically of a stronger Yugoslav neutralist stand in the face of disappointments at the hands of both East and West.

8. Congressman Blatnik spent one hour with Marshal Tito on Thursday, 29 October 1953. Tito, speaking through an interpreter whose English translations he frequently corrected, evinced a willingness to negotiate his difficulties with Italy. In his conversation with Mr. Blatnik, Marshal Tito made four main points:

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a. He is anxious for a conference, whether it be four or five-power conference. Tito stated the conference need not necessarily be confined to Trieste; he is willing to discuss all aspects of Italo-Yugoslav relations including Italian fishing rights in Yugoslav waters, indemnification of nationals displaced by the treaty at the end of World War II, etc. He was adamant, however, that no pre-conditions should be attached to any conference.

b. He wants the U.S.S.R. completely out of the picture; he admitted frankly to a fear of Russian intervention.

c. He hopes that "existing direct relationships" can continue with the U.S.

d. He regrets, from a purely personal standpoint, the "kick in the shins" he received on 8 October. He had learned, when the U.S. had an Ambassador in Belgrade, to expect better of the U.S. Government.

9. Congressman Blatnik raised with Marshal Tito the "fear" he had found in Slovenia; Tito said "we cannot ignore the basic fears of our people, although we must not permit the actions of irresponsible mobs to influence our decisions in the national interest." Tito said he was sure Mr. Blatnik was well aware of the grave economic problems facing Yugoslavia, but asserted Yugoslavia would not allow itself to be black-mailed into accepting an arbitrary solution simply to gain an economic advantage.

10. Congressman Blatnik said he proposed to Marshal Tito that he, Tito, take the lead in a new form of diplomacy — a dramatic gesture toward world peace. He pointed out to the Marshal that twice in recent years he had aroused the excited admiration of freedom-loving peoples, in 1941 when he stood forth against the Nazis, and again in 1948 when he made his independence of Moscow clear. Now he could again cast aside old diplomatic maneuvers, blustering speeches, threatening troop movements and show his true statesmanship in a courageous forthright gesture of peace.

11. Mr. Blatnik feels his conversation with Marshal Tito was frank and that Tito made his points simple and clear. He realizes that his audience knows his ethnic background, but he believes he can honestly and objectively discuss the Trieste problem with his constituents and other members of Congress. He is certain that recent events connected with the Trieste issue will adversely influence Congressional attitude toward Tito during the forthcoming session of Congress. He regrets that only he and Speaker Joseph Martin will have visited Yugoslavia between Congressional sessions.

12. After completing his visit to Yugoslavia, Mr. Blatnik flew to Rome where he discussed the problem of Trieste at length with Mr. Zoppi, permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs. While he did not discuss

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Italian reaction, Mr. Blatnik did state that his conversations were frank and that he had left with Zoppi one reminder: if the Italians did not exercise their best judgment they might very well have the Iron Curtain itself on their northeastern frontier and not a buffer state in Yugoslavia.

13. Congressman Blatnik spoke highly of the "polished aggressiveness" of Ambassador Vlada Popovic in Washington; in Mr. Blatnik's opinion he is an excellent interpreter of Yugoslavia to the U.S. and of the U.S. to Yugoslavia.

14. Mr. Blatnik saw President Eisenhower and Mr. Livingston Merchant, Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, on 11 November 1953 and outlined to them the main points covered above.



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