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MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

February 23, 1962

FROM: [REDACTED]

SUBJECT: Soviet Visit Report [REDACTED]

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cc: Messers:

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Two days before Christmas I went to a party where I unexpectedly met some of the Soviet exchange students now studying in the U.S. I had previously met and conversed at some length with most of them. The party was very crowded, one of the young men and I found a quiet corner where we spent several hours disturbed.

The Russian is studying American history with Professor Henry Steele Commager at Columbia. On previous occasions he and his friends seemed most dubious about my credentials as a Columbia professor, but during the ensuing month they had seen me on the campus at the door of my office, saw students talking to me about the course and saw the calendar advertisements of a lecture I gave (they did not attend the lecture, but, as I shall point out later talked to me about the theme). As a result of all this, they finally decided I was a bona fide Columbia University Professor.

We started by discussing the seminar in which the student is enrolled. I asked him about the assignments, language difficulties, etc. He told me that he wanted to meet me because I am -- he was being very earnest -- "the only American I and my friends met so far who, while disagreeing with us, does it in an intelligent way and uses our frame of reference." The Russian knows his American history thoroughly; he studied the English-language sources at the Higher School of Social Science in Moscow. He was telling me about the books on the Roosevelts (FDR and Teddy) he has been reading, and complained that they concentrate on the personal element rather than on the social forces that molded their policies. "Look here," I said, "isn't this the present Soviet approach? I, personally, don't believe in its validity, and this is why I am so distressed by the fact that the Soviets have learned it -- or have arrived at it independently." "What do you mean?" he asked. "Well," I said, "the treatment accorded the late Stalin period in Soviet historiography. The excesses of the Stalin era are now ascribed to the evil character of Stalin himself. This is not a Marxist analysis, Stalin was but a convenient label for a series of events now known as 'Stalinist.' Stalin did not commit his crimes alone; he was aided and abetted by Molotov, Malenkov and also, by Khrushchey, Suslov and Mikoyan. Further, Stalinism was but a superstructure of the socio-economic base of the country. And what was the base? The one-party system, the dependence of the judiciary, the state's ownership of the means of production." The Soviet student listened in silence and fascination.

He asked me what, in my view, are the weak points of the Soviet demand that the NATO General Heusinger be tried for war crimes. I replied that, most obviously, it was the delay in presenting the demand (16 years after the end of the war) that made it clear that the demand was calculated merely to embarrass the West. "Yes," he agreed, "it was a political trick on the part of the USSR. But then isn't it clear that the West harbors thousands of Nazis and that they present a threat to world peace?" "Well," I said, "there are also Nazis in East Germany and in some of the satellites (I said 'people's democracies,' he cer-

rected me with 'satellites.'). "But," he objected, "all the known Nazis in East Germany have been punished." I told him to explain the case of von Paulus, the German Commander at Stalingrad, who died very peacefully in his East German villa. "It was a mistake," he agreed, "not to shoot him." But, he insisted that there were no other cases. "Well," I protested, "look at the recent Eichmann case. Do you know that the USSR was the only nation that refused to cooperate with Israel in the gathering of evidence." "But he was sentenced to die anyway," he meekly protested. "No," I said, "that is not the point. The fact is that the country that suffered most from the Nazis, that claims its anti-Nazism most loudly, refused to help to prosecute a Nazi for diplomatic reasons." (By now we had several of the Soviets around us). One of them commented coldly that Israel kidnapped Eichmann from Argentina and that this was illegal. I got very angry. "This legal argument of yours," I said, "is hypocrisy of the worst kind (podleisheye litsemeriye)." Two of the Soviets nodded their heads. "To protect a mass murderer under the guise of respecting the right of asylum received under a false name! Why, there must be Soviet soldiers who fell during the war who are now turning in their grave imagine, their government refusing to cooperate in prosecuting Nazi criminals. Even Stalin would not have had the audacity to refuse to cooperate--the audacity that Khrushchev had! (The students looked pale, but did not protest.) But then, Soviet anti-Nazism was always contingent upon political considerations. As is widely known, it was the Hitler-Stalin pact that unleashed World War II." One of the students said, "The pact was necessary, but we should have sabotaged it." "Why," I said, "there was a time when German Communists collaborated with the Gestapo in rounding up German Social-Democrats." Later, the historian asked me whether I knew this for sure, for he had heard it somewhere.

Then the others left to refill their drinks, and I continued the conversation with the historian. He claimed that the unmasking of the "Stalin cult" has immeasurably strengthened the "Socialist camp." I told him that this is a double-edged sword. It also resulted, I reminded him, in the Hungarian uprising and in the creation of some severe strains in the bloc. He pretended not to understand and asked, "What strains?" I asked if he considered recalling of the Soviet ambassador from Albania a sign of the strengthening of Soviet bloc unity. "Albania is not important," he retorted. "The more important the rift," I argued. "In politics," I said (referring to a famous Russian fable), "doggies don't bark at elephants unless they are sure of another elephant's support. You know the other elephant," I added. He nodded. "What would you say," I asked, "if the U.S. recalled its ambassador to a NATO country?" He shrugged his shoulders.

"Why does the U.S. arm the Germans? Don't you know that if you arm the Germans the Soviets will give the atom bomb to China?" he asked. "You won't give the bomb to China," I assured him. "Why?" He seemed really surprised. "It is simple," I replied. "We know that the West Germans won't drop the bomb on us, but the Soviet leaders cannot be so sure that the Chinese won't drop their bomb on them." He seemed upset. "Besides," I added, "we must consider

the possibility that some other power (or indeed, little country) will get the bomb before the Chinese. It is time, I said, that you realize that the bomb can hurt not only us, and that the Soviet Union is not immune to it." "Yes," he said, "but you have Trojan horses in your camp who, in the case of a war, would fight against you." (Some others came over.) "Well," I replied, "ask any Soviet officer who was stationed in Eastern Europe whether the Soviet Union can really rely on the Poles, the Hungarians and the others. He was silent and just sipped his drink.

He wanted to talk some more about the Stalin cult. "The people now trust the Party," he said. "Should they?" I asked. "It is we, the Westerners, who denounced the crimes of the Stalin era while Khrushchev praised the Great Purges." (I paraphrased Khrushchev's 1937 remarks). There may be some people who for the first time, learned that the Party is capable of monstrous lies. What are the assurances that the Party won't lie again--in fact, that its present assurances are not lies?" "Yes," he said, "there is something to it, but you must agree that the people are happier now than they were under Stalin." "Yes," I told him, "but it is also true that the people were happier in 1904 than they were in 1894, and that the results are well known."

On the way home some of the other students asked me about the lecture I gave on Yevtushenko. "Why do you make such a fuss about him?" they asked. "He has not even been arrested," one of the students added indignantly. "And do you know why?" I asked. "Because he is not worth it," said the Soviet student. "That is not the reason," I said. "You would have arrested him some years ago, maybe even shot him, but now you are afraid; times have changed, comrades (vremena ne te, tovarishchi)." One of them said, "Yevtushenko plays into the hands of enemies of the Soviet Union." "Only history will show," I replied, "who is the enemy and who is the friend of the peoples of the Soviet Union."

There was an awkward silence, and then one of the students said that he hopes to see me again, and another one (the most "vicious" of the lot), broke into a Khrushchevian grin, stretched out his hand and said, "Allow me to congratulate you on the occasion of the sacred holiday of Christ's birthday" (Razreshite pozdravit' vas s svetlym prazdnikom Rozhdestva Khristova). We parted as friends.