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Gorbachev's War for Control of the Regional Party Apparatus: The Situation in Moscow

An Intelligence Assessment

CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM
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An Intelligence Assessment

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Gorbachev's War for Control of the Regional Party Apparatus: The Situation in Moscow

Key Judgments

*Information available
as of 1 November 1986
was used in this report.*

During his second year as party leader, General Secretary Gorbachev has been showing mounting concern that his efforts to revitalize the Soviet system are being sabotaged by resistance from below. Under Brezhnev the central leadership effectively lost control over many lower level party organizations, and now Gorbachev is fighting to restore central authority. He has declared war on "localism" to force regional leaders to put national priorities above parochial or personal interests. He must make some progress in this to have any hope for implementing his larger policy agenda.

To win his war Gorbachev will first have to win the battle for Moscow. Under Brezhnev the capital became the personal barony of Viktor Grishin. During Grishin's tenure corruption and mismanagement became rampant, and the quality of life declined. The deterioration was hidden from the central leadership by a screen of false reporting and by the special privileges that kept it isolated from reality.

Reversing this situation and restoring firm central control over the Moscow party organization is critical to Gorbachev's overall domestic agenda. As the most visible regional party organization in the Soviet Union, the Moscow organization sets the standard for other local officials. If Gorbachev cannot whip it into shape, his failure will send a strong signal to regional officials that they can continue to operate in their old ways.

The Soviet leader is also counting on the Moscow organization to help restructure the work of the ministries—an essential element in his economic agenda. The party organizations of the ministries are all subordinate to the Moscow party, and Gorbachev has indicated that he intends to begin using them to actively oversee ministerial work. This provides the central party leadership with a means of bypassing the government bureaucracy in checking on ministerial performance.

To carry out the cleanup of Moscow, he has turned to the most dynamic and outspoken member of his leadership team—Boris Yel'tsin. Since taking over as Moscow party boss in December 1985, Yel'tsin has moved with extraordinary speed to throw out the old guard and set new standards for remaining city officials. He has put city officials on notice that they will be fired if they fail to perform, and he has followed through on his threats.

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While Yel'tsin's aggressive, no-nonsense approach is already producing results, it is also creating a strong backlash of resistance. He has antagonized officials at all levels; some have called for his resignation and even threatened his life. He has also no doubt alienated ministers and Central Committee officials by meddling in their work and has probably offended some of his Politburo colleagues, such as President Andrey Gromyko, with his brash tactics and disdain for the traditional privileges of the elite. There is very likely a growing coalition of interests that would like to see him fail.

The success Yel'tsin has in overcoming this opposition and otherwise accomplishing his tasks will be an early indicator of Gorbachev's prospects for revitalizing central political control over the rest of the country. Some of the indicators of success over the next year will include:

- Yel'tsin's promotion from candidate status to full Politburo membership, which would give him greater political weight vis-a-vis recalcitrant bureaucrats.
- A continued high rate of turnover among local party secretaries and remaining Grishin cronies in the city.
- A continuation of Yel'tsin's harsh rhetoric and his public lambasting of traditionally sacrosanct interests—such as the ministries and privileges for the elite.
- Aggressive interference by the party organization in the work of the national ministries.
- An improvement of industrial performance and the quality of life in Moscow, including the greater availability of goods, better quality services, more housing, and improved transportation.

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Gorbachev's War for Control of the Regional Party Apparatus: The Situation in Moscow

The Struggle With "Localism"

Gorbachev inherited a national party organization whose effectiveness had been crippled by regional fragmentation. In Gorbachev's words, regional leaders ran their domains like "independent princes" with little interference from Moscow. As a result they became increasingly parochial, advancing local interests at the expense of national priorities. Nepotism and cronyism ran rampant, with many local bosses surrounding themselves with incompetent sycophants. As speakers at local party congresses in 1985 revealed, many regional leaders under Brezhnev—particularly those in the Central Asian republics—were more likely to cover up mismanagement and corruption than to deal with underlying causes. To at least some degree, such problems permeated every regional party organization, posing a major roadblock to Gorbachev's efforts to revitalize the system.

Gorbachev's battle against localism began shortly after he took office. He quickly began to break up local fiefdoms and introduce new personnel practices to discourage parochialism:

- To ensure the loyalty of new regional leaders to Moscow, he has had many officials serve a brief stint in the CPSU apparatus before promoting them to head regional party organizations. According to a Central Committee official, this gives the central leadership an opportunity to evaluate candidates firsthand and acquaint them with its current thinking.
- To break up local dynasties, he has increased the practice of appointing outsiders from other regions to key provincial posts.

At the 27th CPSU Congress in February 1986, the new Soviet leadership demonstrated its solid support for Gorbachev's war on localism:

- Gorbachev assailed corruption and managerial ineptitude among regional leaders and insisted that no local party official or organization should be beyond central control.

- Second Secretary Yegor Ligachev drove the point home by including his home oblast and those of other top leaders among the regions that must be open to criticism and by proposing increased cross-posting of party workers between regions to break down local fiefdoms.
- Other leaders complained of the central leadership's failure to look into local problems, allowing "zones beyond criticism" to exist.

Since the congress, Gorbachev has given a high priority to this effort. He has repeatedly hammered away at the theme that officials can no longer operate in the "old way" and that they must adapt to the new standards set at the congress:

- At a June 1986 Central Committee plenum he attacked local party leaders for sheltering cronies, concealing failures, and getting plant managers to pad their production figures "to conceal the real state of affairs," and complained that "inertia," "outdated habits," and "ossified mentality" are hampering the process of "restructuring."
- During his visit to the Soviet Far East in July, Gorbachev was sharply critical of local officials for lagging behind the central leadership in adapting to the new standards.
- A Central Committee resolution on Gorbachev's September visit to the provinces criticized local officials for unilaterally postponing the implementation of Central Committee decisions.

Getting Control of Moscow

The erosion of the central leadership's control over the regional party and state bureaucracy was most evident in Moscow itself. In the hands of Viktor Grishin

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since 1967, the Moscow City Party Committee (gorkom) became a highly visible example of the lax style of party leadership Gorbachev has been excoriating (see inset). If Gorbachev fails to gain control over the capital's party organization, he would be unlikely to get other regional party organizations behind his agenda, and his overall domestic agenda would probably stall.

Gorbachev also had political reasons for giving a high priority to getting rid of Grishin. The Moscow party leader was reportedly advanced as a candidate to block Gorbachev's elevation as General Secretary in March 1985 and could have served as a rallying point for resistance to Gorbachev. Traditionally, the Moscow party organization has been a powerful political base, and Gorbachev clearly wanted it in the hands of a loyal ally. The specter of Grishin's predecessor directly challenging Brezhnev's policies in 1967 must have added to this concern.

The extent of the problem of localism was dramatically demonstrated by the difficulty Gorbachev had in removing Grishin from office. Despite the high priority Gorbachev attached to the task and the obvious problems in the capital, the Moscow gorkom—which had to vote him out—tried to stand with Grishin against the central leadership. For months rumors flew about Moscow that Gorbachev intended to replace Moscow's party boss, and Grishin himself reportedly expected the ax to fall at any moment. Nevertheless, Grishin stubbornly clung to his position and retained solid support in the gorkom

To build a case for removing Grishin, the central leadership launched a well-orchestrated campaign to discredit him:

- Allegations of widespread corruption in the Moscow retail trade system were aired in the press during the summer of 1985.
- Second Secretary Ligachev weighed in with a criticism of the city's trade organization party committees for "indifference" to the problems plaguing the system in an August 1985 issue of the party journal *Kommunist*.

The Decline of Moscow

Unusually frank remarks by First Secretary Boris Yel'tsin, Moscow's new boss, to an April 1986 meeting of city propagandists revealed that living conditions in the capital had declined sharply under Grishin. He reported that:

- *The municipal services planned for the city until 1990 provide for only 7.6 million residents, but the population has already soared to 8.7 million. As a result, 2.5 million people need housing, and another million share apartments with other families.*
 - *During the period 1975-85, Moscow went from second to 38th in the ranking of Soviet cities for new housing construction.*
 - *Life expectancy fell from 70 to 68 years during 1983-85.*
 - *Corruption in the capital's trade system has become rife. Eight hundred wholesale and retail trade officials were arrested in the first months of Yel'tsin's administration, and he claimed that he "still cannot see the bottom of this well of corruption."*
 - *Moscow's transportation system, once the capital's pride, has become rundown and unsafe. There were 2,000 accidents on it in 1985 alone*
-
- *A series of articles in *Sovetskaya Rossiya* claimed widespread mismanagement and corruption in the city's construction industry. The capital's housing authorities were charged with illegally certifying unfinished housing projects, and Moscow mayor and longtime Grishin crony Vladimir Promyslov was criticized—at that time the highest official publicly rebuked under Gorbachev.*

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Despite the mounting evidence of Grishin's mismanagement, when the party leadership moved to replace him in December 1985, the gorkom fiercely resisted.

[] citing eyewitness accounts of the gorkom plenum reported that, even though Grishin had earlier agreed to step down, he mounted a strong last-ditch effort to stay in power, rallying his supporters to his defense. To head off defeat, Gorbachev made a last-minute appearance and put his own political authority on the line by demanding Grishin's removal. Gorbachev reportedly told []

[] that he had had a "sharp confrontation" with Grishin at the meeting and that Grishin walked out of the session

Despite Gorbachev's intervention, a third of the gorkom members reportedly defied the General Secretary and voted to keep Grishin in office. Their concern was well founded; with Grishin gone there was swift

retribution—in January 1986 at the Moscow party conference 68 percent of the gorkom's 232 members were replaced

Cleaning the Augean Stables

Gorbachev brought in Boris Yel'tsin, an outsider and one of the most hard-driving and outspoken members of his team, to reestablish central control over the Moscow gorkom [] As soon as he took over, Yel'tsin moved swiftly to address the problems left by his predecessor. He immediately removed several of Grishin's top deputies, and, at the January 1986 city party conference, he gave a scathing critique of the gorkom's work under Grishin.

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Yel'tsin's apocalyptic assessment of the city's condition and scathing criticism of past management were accompanied by an influx of new blood into key posts:

- Within a month he brought in an outsider to serve as his second in command, replacing Second Secretary Raisa Dementyeva with Central Committee apparatchik Vladimir Zakharov and replacing the disgraced Moscow mayor Vladimir Promyslov with the director of the city's leading auto plant.¹
- After the initial party conference in January 1986, only one of the previous six gorkom secretaries and four of the 14 full bureau members were still in the gorkom leadership.
- He immediately purged the head of the local KGB and soon began a housecleaning of Moscow's police, whose officials had failed to respond to his call to clean up corruption.
- By September, 10 of the city's 33 borough party committee (raykom) chiefs were replaced, four of whom were sacked for incompetence or corruption.
- In October, the city bureau was reorganized and three new department heads were installed

New Standards of Accountability

Perhaps the most radical aspect of Yel'tsin's program is his ongoing purge of middle and lower level leaders. Having set clear standards for both surviving and newly appointed officials, he is now holding these officials and their subordinates strictly accountable for their performance, sacking those who do not measure up. At the 27th Congress in February-March 1986, he railed against "timeservers with party cards," and in June he turned up the heat, threatening that "nobody now has a safe-conduct pass" and promising to "quicken the pace" of cadre turnover.

¹ In August 1986 Zakharov was promoted to Minister of Culture, and two months later Yel'tsin installed an ally from the CPSU Construction Department, Yuriy Belyakov, as the new Second Secretary.

Yel'tsin's Meteoric Rise

Party official in Sverdlovsk Oblast from 1968 to early 1985 . . . brought to Moscow to head Central Committee Construction Department in April 1985, three weeks after Gorbachev assumed power . . . elevated to CPSU party secretary for construction and industry in July 1985 . . . moved to present Moscow party chief job five months later . . . elected candidate member of the Politburo in February 1986.

In July 1986 Yel'tsin announced a "certification" (*attestatsiya*) of officials to remove those who cannot meet his new standards. He stated that enough time had passed since the 27th Congress to give "everyone a chance to prove himself" and make it possible to judge if "restructuring has become their main concern." He frankly admitted that Moscow party reform is "going poorly" and that many local leaders remain "deaf" to the new leadership's appeals. To address this he said that a formal review would take place of party, government, trade union, and plant officials to determine whether they are still worthy of holding their posts, noting that the time had come to speed up the removal of "timeservers."

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- Yel'tsin has revived criminal prosecution of party members, and he seems committed to using it in his battle with the bureaucracy. According to a newspaper account of a recent meeting of the Moscow city leadership, 16 disgraced Moscow party officials are facing criminal complaints, and 29 have been expelled from the party.
- At an October gorkom meeting, Yel'tsin praised one raykom first secretary for requesting a transfer when he realized he was incapable of dealing with the problems in his region. He urged other officials to follow this example.

Yel'tsin Battles the Ministries

Yel'tsin has singled out the city's raykom chiefs for special criticism. At the July meeting he charged that, because of the "deep-rooted disease of inertia," all but five of the 33 raykom chiefs had failed to change their approach, a fact he found "very disturbing and worrying." At an October gorkom meeting, he said the party leadership was in the process of "carefully analyzing" the work of each raykom first secretary by talking to their subordinates and reviewing their work. He demanded that those who are not capable of "setting things in motion" retire and make way for more "energetic and enterprising" replacements. He added that some of these first secretaries have been told that the gorkom will ask for their removal unless they rapidly improve their work. Since the initial housecleaning in January 1986, several more raykom heads have left under a cloud, and more of these leaders will doubtless go.

Since announcing the certification campaign, Yel'tsin has carried out a wide purge of local officials (see table). There have been numerous reports in the Moscow city press of local party and government officials being removed for corruption or not measuring up to the new standards:

- In July 1986 Yel'tsin gave the chief of the city's main trade administration two weeks to eliminate problems in Moscow's retail trade network. True to his word, he called the official publicly to account at the end of the grace period and sacked him for failing to improve the situation.

Gorbachev is giving priority to the battle for Moscow, not only because of its symbolic value, but because he is counting on the gorkom to play a critical role in establishing more effective control over the central ministries. The party organization of each ministry which has a key role in monitoring the ministry's execution of policy—is part of the Moscow party organization, making the gorkom a potentially powerful tool for party oversight of economic revitalization programs. Gorbachev has personally made it clear that he intends to make maximum use of the gorkom to fight bureaucratic resistance in the ministries:

- A Central Committee decree in 1985 called for the party committees of the Ministry of Instrument Making, Automation Equipment, and Control Systems to more aggressively monitor the administration of the ministries and specifically stated that the Moscow gorkom would oversee this.
- In January 1986 the Politburo adopted a decree warning the ministerial bureaucracy to cooperate with Yel'tsin's efforts.
- At a July session the Politburo affirmed an increased role for the Moscow gorkom in disciplining errant ministerial bureaucrats, calling on it to conduct investigations and determine the extent of responsibility of government officials for the Chernobyl' disaster

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Turnover in Moscow Under First Secretary Yel'tsin

	Total Number in Position	Number Removed	Percentage of Turnover
Secretaries	7	6	86
Bureau members	17*	14	82
Party committee	232	160	69
Raykom first secretary	33	10	30
Department heads	18	12	67

* Includes candidate members

Note: As of 1 November 1986.

Yel'tsin has left little doubt that he intends to aggressively use the gorkom to control the central bureaucracy. In his first major speech as Moscow party leader, he drew attention to the gorkom's "special role" as the party organization to which the "Communists of all-union central apparatuses, ministries, and agencies belong." He chided the gorkom's departments for "being afraid to boldly use all forms of party influence on the ministries' party organizations, and for failing to help the leaders of the central apparatus to overcome inertia and foot-dragging." He has followed through by keeping close tabs on the work of the ministries:

- At an October city party committee plenum he called for the Moscow party, especially raykoms, to be "bolder" in exercising control over the ministries in Moscow.
- An 11 March editorial in the Moscow city party organization's newspaper reiterated Gorbachev's claim that the power of the ministries has become "hypertrophied" and that stronger local administration is necessary to ensure that decisions in the national interest are not impeded.
- In a speech in March, Yel'tsin noted that the gorkom had sent letters to 42 ministries, demanding that during the 1986-90 Five-Year Plan their Moscow enterprises increase labor productivity by 125 to 175 percent, laying down specific demands for

the introduction of new technology and the reduction of the number of workers employed in their factories.

- Yel'tsin reportedly fired the entire staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs diplomatic academy. He cited the academy as a prime example of an area where the gorkom "pursued a policy of noninterference" during Grishin's time, resulting in wide-scale corruption, nepotism, and mismanagement.
- At the July city party committee plenum he ordered local officials to review all investment plans and veto those that do not make use of new technology. If ministries object to having their plans disrupted, Yel'tsin promised to protect local party officials.

Opposition

Yel'tsin's aggressive tactics appear to be what are needed to undo the effects of years of inertia and laissez-faire management that have created many of the problems Gorbachev faces today. But with less than a year in office, the jury is still out on whether he will be able to get Moscow firmly under control, transform its party organization into a reliable tool for

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Yel'tsin's Outspokenness

Yel'tsin's outspokenness on a wide variety of subjects is a sharp break with the bland rhetoric of most Soviet officials. Even more than Gorbachev, Yel'tsin goes straight to the heart of matters, grappling openly with sensitive issues and leaving little to the imagination:

- *In a rough-and-tumble session of the Moscow gorkom, Yel'tsin ripped into Moscow's party bigwigs for having not only themselves, but their wives and children, chauffeured around in limousines. Noting that the practice had been abolished, he gloated: "Look, the committee secretaries are smiling—they all came here today in one car."*
- *At the same session he aired dirty linen, touching on such taboo topics as the city's worsening mortality statistics, mounting rates of serious crime—including burglaries and drug addiction—and a demonstration by disgruntled Moscow taxidrivers in front of party headquarters. He called upon session participants to "openly reveal" to the public everything discussed so that the people will learn the news from party workers, "not from the BBC."*
- *At the 27th Party Congress he criticized the powerful Central Committee apparatus, calling for the streamlining of its staff and specifically faulting the work of several departments.*

pressing Gorbachev's policy agenda, and restore the capital's economic and social health. Specifically, there is mounting evidence that Yel'tsin's tough policies are creating a backlash among key groups, who, if given the opportunity, may try to undermine his efforts.

Resistance From Below

Yel'tsin must count on the support, experience, and expertise of many long-serving local officials to effectively implement his policies. The fear and hostility he has generated among them, however, have created widespread resentment:

- In his speech to the Moscow party conference a month after he took over, Yel'tsin acknowledged that some people already considered his methods too "harsh," and at an October meeting he said that some are beginning to think that he is dishing out too much criticism.
- Anonymous questions asked of Yel'tsin at a meeting of party propagandists in April revealed a wellspring of resistance from within the Moscow party organization. He was accused of having "Napoleonic" ambitions and told to "go back to Sverdlovsk."
- At the July city party committee plenum, threatened officials reportedly again called for Yel'tsin's resignation, charging him with destroying the party organization, and report that he has since received anonymous threats against his life.

Central Committee Hostility

Yel'tsin's activist program is almost certain to offend powerful interests in the Central Committee. The majority of economic ministers are Central Committee members, and they are sure to be resentful of Yel'tsin's meddling in their work. Yel'tsin's call for reducing the size of the Central Committee's apparatus and his criticism of its departments have undoubtedly angered others, who could potentially ally themselves with the ministers to mount a challenge to Yel'tsin.

Uncertain Support in the Politburo

Yel'tsin's bare-knuckle leadership style, irreverence, and willingness to expose the party and its veteran officials to scrutiny and criticism—while popular with the masses and even segments of the party rank and file—may not sit as well with some senior leaders:

- Second Secretary Ligachev hastened to soften Yel'tsin's attack on "timeservers with party cards" at the party congress in February 1986, and even Gorbachev protege Vladimir Kalashnikov—the Volgograd party boss—registered sharp disagreement with Yel'tsin's negative characterization of veteran party officials.

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- Yel'tsin's attack on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs diplomatic academy probably offended President Andrey Gromyko. The fact that Gromyko has given former Moscow boss Grishin a respectable haven as a "consultant" in his Supreme Soviet Presidium's office also hints that this still influential Politburo member may not approve of Gorbachev's treatment of Grishin.
- Yel'tsin admitted that his plans for the development of Moscow are controversial, stating in a speech to the October gorkom meeting that they had been "very vigorously debated" at a recent Politburo session.

Prospects

The battle for Moscow is a critical test for Gorbachev. The Soviet capital is a highly visible example for the rest of the country; if Gorbachev cannot reestablish central control there and break it out of the corrupt and inefficient practices that proliferated under Brezhnev, it will send a strong signal to regional officials throughout the country that they can continue to operate in their old ways. If this happens, the General Secretary's entire domestic agenda would be blunted.

Yel'tsin's and Gorbachev's political opponents will be looking for an opportunity to strike. Should some of Yel'tsin's initiatives falter, an opportunity to counter-attack might be provided to the opposition. A combination of hostile Moscow officials and disgruntled ministerial bureaucrats could get a sympathetic hearing from members of the top leadership who may also want to slow Gorbachev's domestic agenda.

To retain the offensive if the going gets rougher, Yel'tsin will need continued strong personal backing from Gorbachev. Only with firm support from the top will he be able to continue to defy the rules of the game as they became established under Brezhnev and enforce the tough new standard he has created. Even if he is able to reestablish tight control over the Moscow bureaucracy and maintain top-level support,

however, it is still unclear if he will succeed in overcoming the forces of inertia and conservatism that pervade the system and in turning the performance of the capital around.

Even though it is too early for Yel'tsin to declare victory, especially on the broader issue of revitalization, he has made steady progress during his short tenure. The Moscow party organization has been largely renewed and has begun to solve some of the city's social and economic ills. The higher standards of performance and job insecurity he has imposed have served to focus the minds of the bureaucrats on the problems at hand. As a result of this increased "enthusiasm," according to Yel'tsin's July 1986 speech, the city has already achieved a moderately improved level of economic performance, an indicator of some success for his approach, which will doubtless improve his political standing within the leadership.

In the coming months, other indicators that Yel'tsin's program for revitalizing Moscow and Gorbachev's overall domestic strategy are succeeding will include:

- Yel'tsin's promotion to full Politburo membership status, which was enjoyed by Grishin. Yel'tsin is at present only a candidate member; his ascent to the upper rungs of the leadership would signal broad support for his methods at the highest levels.
- Continued turnover of city leaders. The majority of Moscow raykom first secretaries are still holdovers from the Grishin era. Yel'tsin needs to continue to install new personnel—probably from outside Moscow—into local leadership positions until he has completed the renewal process.
- Evidence that Yel'tsin is aggressively using his authority over party organizations in the ministries to improve their performance. This might include public criticism of the work of ministerial party organizations or a discussion of their performance at a meeting of the Moscow gorkom.

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- Improvement in Moscow's industrial performance, particularly in those areas deemed essential by Gorbachev, such as increased labor productivity, increased rate of introduction of new technology, and reversal of the trend toward expansion of Moscow's labor force.
- Improvement in the condition of Moscow's troubled social welfare system, including increases in the quantity and quality of consumer goods and services and the rooting out of corruption in systems delivering them; improvement in the city's fragile and overstressed transportation system; and renovation of the capital's corrupt and inefficient construction industry and progress toward solving Moscow's severe housing shortage problem ,

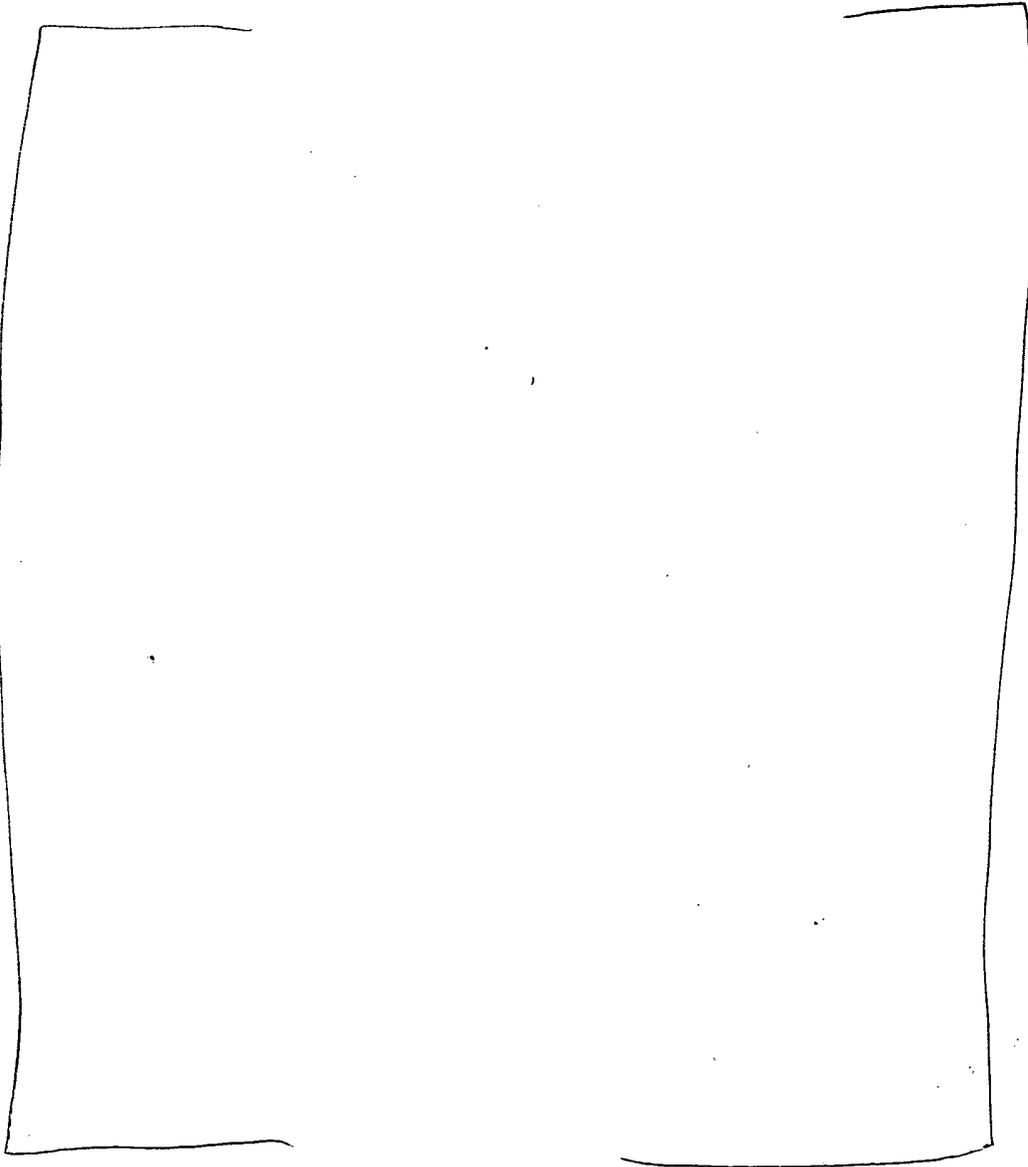
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