

Grachev Details Final Days of Gorbachev

*924B0192A Moscow NEZAVISIMAYA GAZETA
in Russian 27 Dec 91 Special Edition p 3*

[Interview with Andrey Grachev, USSR presidential press secretary, by Sergey Parkhomenko on 25 December 1991; place not given: "Andrey Grachev: 'He Believed He Would Succeed in Gluing This Broken Cup Back Together...': Press Secretary of the USSR President Discusses the Final Days in the Kremlin"]

[Text] [Parkhomenko] Well, now I can see that when people talk about the presidential apparatus abandoning the Kremlin, it is no metaphor...

[Grachev] Yes, of course. In a day or two no one will remain here, in these corridors—with the exception of technical services, of course—who once belonged to this apparatus. It is evaporating, so to speak.

[Parkhomenko] And going where?

[Grachev] Nowhere. To 1992. To the past.

The purely practical aspect of elimination of all the subdivisions is being handled by a special commission headed by the directors of two presidential apparatuses—Revenko and Petrov. By its decision and mutual agreement of the parties, certain temporary premises are to be afforded employees—the records and chancellery will not as yet be dismantled. The president does not intend to take away actual records. Although he has certain personal papers, apparently, which he will take along with him.

[Parkhomenko] All right. Then there is one more "technical" question—where is Gorbachev himself relocating? Is he going home?

[Grachev] As I understand things, the president of Russia would be better able to answer your question. Judging from the account published in your own newspaper concerning his meeting with journalists, he says that Gorbachev will have a dacha other than his present one, and an apartment other than his present one. Although the apartment he now has belongs to him personally. It is just that he was unable to privatize it—in his words, because the Moscow Soviet never did decide anything regarding the procedure for drawing up documents.

[Parkhomenko] Is the present mood in the Kremlin very depressing?

[Grachev] There is no panic or particularly severe anguish. Nothing above what people usually experience

when they find themselves in a situation of disarray. Even in view of the fact that this came down on them unexpectedly.

[Parkhomenko] You mean all the same they were not expecting it?

[Grachev] Well, for the most part, quite so.

I would put it this way—politically, all of this could be predicted. But as is always the case in Russia, the event takes place like thunder out of a clear sky, and in an irrational form. The overall trend of developments seemed comprehensible, but who would have supposed that in erecting a Union treaty, signing documentation, and undertaking for themselves certain obligations in its text and time frame, the leaders of the republics would simultaneously be building their “surprise”—for the country and for the world, even for their own circle?

I think that the first session of the State Council in Novo-Ogarevo following the August events gave the Union treaty and the Union itself a real chance. That was a day of compromise. And at that time it was still mutual compromise, it seems to me. Four hours of debate ensued at the session—on a confederation and confederative state, and on whether or not this state would have its own constitution. And then an honest deal was concluded, it seems to me, at the price of rejection of the Constitution.

It is following this, apparently, that everything began. And perhaps it began not even with the leaders of the republics themselves, but simply from an analysis and piecing together of the concepts factually in existence within the Russian leadership which comprised an alternative to the Novo-Ogarevo process. And apparently the concept of a confederative state with preservation of the center—and, therefore, of Gorbachev—did not blend in.

And therefore the following session at Novo-Ogarevo was already essentially doomed: Yeltsin arrived with prepared amendments of principle. With a proposal to again raise the question regarding the necessity of a unified state.

[Parkhomenko] In other words, the framework implemented at Belovezhskaya Pushcha was at that time already worked out?

[Grachev] In general outline, apparently it was.

[Parkhomenko] At that time the impression was taking shape to the effect that Gorbachev was very close to making a decision on resignation...

[Grachev] He was actually prepared to take this step twice in the past three months—yes, he essentially indicated such at the Novo-Ogarevo sessions.

On one occasion he posed the question in this form: “State or no state?” He said he was not prepared to

participate in the further development of events outside the framework of a state and would consider his role as having concluded.

Then there was a time during the second meeting there when he simply walked out of the hall where the session was being conducted. As soon as the question was raised once again as to not initialing the text but returning instead to discussion of problems which had seemingly been resolved, he stated: "Fine. Then it is apparently time for you to reach agreement among yourselves."

The paradox of this formula consists in the fact that what was done in Alma-Ata could take place in Novo-Ogarevo—had Yeltsin and Shushkevich not come to Gorbachev after a while and proposed a compromise version on behalf of the republic leaders who remained. This was a proposal to return to the resolution of the State Council that the text be sent to the Supreme Soviets of the republics for examination.

Already at that time they would be able to secure in principle everything which we now have—the aspect of a commonwealth without a center. But they themselves were probably not sufficiently prepared to come to such a decision. In addition, a representative of Ukraine was not there. And thirdly, the Asiatic republics, comprising the majority, could hardly be expected to support them in such a composition...

[Parkhomenko] In your opinion, what is Gorbachev afraid of now as he departs...?

[Grachev] It is just my guess, but he might likely be afraid of revenge and humiliation. Which I do not believe he deserves...

[Parkhomenko] Well, what about "I will not allow you to engage in politics any more!..."? That was just four years ago...

[Grachev] Of course there were such statements, and statements still more cavalier—you can find as many of these as you like on both sides. But, first of all, this is a normal element of political struggle for a normal society. Yet it does not justify humiliating a person in retrospect. To put it more concisely, this should not turn into revenge.

In politics people fight as they would in a duel—each has his own foil. And when one individual acquires power over another, and the instrument of this power becomes the past—then this is no longer political struggle.

[Parkhomenko] Is it possible, in your view, for the judicial proceedings on the putsch to turn into a trial of the party?

[Grachev] Yes. And one possible explanation for this would be the search for an enemy or scapegoat.

If we talk about satisfying this demand and thereby improving your life under conditions of increasingly menacing difficulties—anything can happen. But then

either it will have to be honestly said that it is the political process we are discussing, or it will be necessary, as is stipulated in a rule-of-law society, to set up a criminal trial—of specific criminals. But here you will have to take responsibility for the fact that people are being judged according to the laws of a new era for offenses they committed in the past—in a past to which you yourself belong and do not now come under jurisdiction only by virtue of the different political situation.

[Parkhomenko] Gorbachev has some accounting left to do—Sumagit, Tbilisi on 9 April, Baku, Vilnius in January, the putsch... There will be further discussion of all this. What do you think, is he capable of producing certain "sensational exposures"?

[Grachev] No, it would not seem so.

Because otherwise, he would not have been the man he essentially was all these years, i.e., a reformist. Not a reformer, but a reformist, including all the negative aspects that go with this. In other words, he would not be a man aimed at getting the very course of things to alter people and events. I do not believe he would be inclined even now, having removed himself from state responsibility and acquiring, it would seem, complete freedom, to reveal any items of sensation. I do not think so.

[Parkhomenko] All the same, when did it become clear to the president that this was to be his actual finale? When did he know it was inevitable? During the time of the putsch perhaps?

[Grachev] Well, which putsch do you have in mind?

[Parkhomenko] I am referring to the August...

[Grachev] I think he believed he would be successful in gluing this broken cup back together even after August. Essentially, if he did not believe this, he would probably not have managed to accomplish what is almost impossible to accomplish by the normal political yardstick—to conduct a congress and gather together republics which were just about disbanded even then.

It seems to me that even after the meeting at Belovezhskaya Pushcha he did not immediately realize that that was it.

At first there was the hope—understandable for a man who would very much like to hope—that altering everything and discarding it so simply would be impossible. That there would have to be some sort of reaction in society—similar to the reaction in August. That parliaments could not be silent, insofar as they were on the sidelines here. And that a society believing it would continue to live in a unified country would respond. That the press would not bow its head and lay down its arms so swiftly.

And I believe he waited several days for this reaction. But following the voting sessions in parliament he perceived this as the inevitable reality...