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MEMORANDUM

American Embassy

25X1

1953.

TO: The Ambassador
FROM: [redacted]
SUBJECT: MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION WITH TROKHLEN.

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I arrived at Trokhlen's apartment at 7:00 p.m. and left at 11:00 p.m. his

When I arrived, he and/wife, Anna, greeted me. The only other person present was their 2½ year old daughter, Irena. Their apartment is rented furnished (LE 25 per month) and the furniture seemed adequate. All the upholstered furniture was covered with white slip covers.

I was shown into their tiny reception room and was asked if I liked beer. When I said yes, two bottles of Amstel were brought in by his wife. Trokhlen and I split one bottle and he asked me what my first name was. [redacted] He said his was "Serge". For the rest of the evening we were Serge and [redacted] to each other.

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Before I could even finish my first glass of beer supper was announced and we entered the small adjacent dining room. They have no servants. His wife does all the buying, cooking and cleaning.

It was a cold-plate dinner, and the table was laden with various Russian dishes as well as ham, pork, cheese, pickles, etc. The caviar was of a better quality than the one served at the Russian Nov 7 reception. His wife evidently went through a lot of care preparing the dinner, for there was even a dish of fish and red cabbage, which Serge knew I particularly enjoyed at the Nov 7 reception. He reminded me of this.

Red and white wine, as well as vodka were also on the table. Serge asked which I preferred and I replied vodka. He too drank vodka and his wife drank white wine. Throughout the entire evening we only drank 4 small glasses of vodka each. At no time was a drink forced upon me. He even told me that if at any time I felt I was getting a bit high, I should stop drinking, for he knew I wasn't used to the stuff. The vodka was quite smooth, only containing 40% alcohol by volume (so it said on the Russian label).

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The most part of the evening was spent on small chit-chat and light conversation, talking about music, literature, [redacted] household problems, marriage, etc.

The only direct questions that Trokhlen asked were: How long did I live in New York; are there any other children in my family; are both my parents alive and where do they live. I answered these questions vaguely and even lied a bit. When I in turn asked him where his wife came from he told me that she was half Ukrainian and half Russian - that is, her mother came from Kiev and her father from Moscow. They showed me pictures of her family and evidently, so she says, she has a seven-year old sister (she herself

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is about 25). When I kidded him about the Ukraine always fomenting independence movements from the Soviet Union, he got very serious and said, "Oh no, there was just one nationalist there who tried to set up some sort of independence movement but he wasn't too successful". I thought this was rather an under-statement.

Trekhnien volunteered the information that he was the only child. He said he had a rather hard time of it when he was young for his father divorced his mother when he was two years old and there, therefore, his mother had to work quite hard to support him. He said that while he worked in the war factory during the war, he also attended night classes in an effort to better himself. He successfully passed the competitive examination to enter Moscow's Oriental Institute (course lasted five years) and upon completion of the Institute, he successfully passed examinations to enter the diplomatic service. He said he met his wife at the Institute and that they were married when he was 25. (He is now 28).

He seemed well briefed on the United States and on New York City in particular. He asked me how many people lived in New York and when I said 7 million, he said, "Oh no, it is 11 million" and seemed surprised that I didn't know. He also asked me how long Broadway was and when I said I didn't know, he laughingly said, "Roughly 92 kilometers". I then said that foreigners kid Americans that they don't seem to know much about their own country and Trekhnien seemed to agree.

He then got a bit jovial and started telling me a few anecdotes. He asked if I heard the one about the elephants. He said people of various nationalities were asked to write a thesis about an elephant and that the Englishman wrote on "The Hunting of the Elephant", the Frenchman wrote on "The Sex Life of the Elephant", the American wrote on "The Elephant and Communism", the Pole on "The Elephant and the Polish Question", the German handed in a five volume thesis on "An Introduction to the History of the Elephant" and the Russian wrote about "The Elephant - Does it Exist". I then said, yes, I had heard the joke and that, as a matter of fact, it appeared in the Journal d'Egypte a few months ago. He seemed a bit deflated.

He asked me how I liked Russian caviar and I said that his caviar was much better than the one served at the November 7 reception. I then asked why there weren't any pictures of Malenkov at the reception and his only comment was, "You have very keen eyes".

25X1 He then laughed and said he was quite surprised the other day when one of the teachers from the American University _____ came into the Russian Legation and asked for some Marxist literature. When I asked him why the fellow wanted it, he explained that the teacher told him that students at the
 25X1 _____ were asking to be made familiar with the works of Marx and Lenin. I asked if it were a political science teacher who made the request. He said he didn't know. He seemed to be very surprised when I mentioned that in the United States we studied the works of Engels, Marx, Lenin and Stalin as a regular part of political science.

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The conversation switched to work that we do _____ and I asked him what his duties were at his Legation. He said that he worked in the Political Section mainly specializing in relations with the countries adhering to the Arab Pact. He also added that the Soviet Minister, who doesn't speak English, takes him along to dinner parties and various appointments to do translating for him. He then asked me if I wrote reports, hastily adding "if that information wasn't secret". I said no my work is not secret, that I am mainly occupied with the Ambassador and that in any spare time I occasionally do write reports of a very minor nature.

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I then asked him how his Arabic was coming along at the Berlitz School (he says he reads and writes Arabic quite well but cannot speak it, therefore Berlitz). He said he wasn't too satisfied with the Berlitz lessons, that they were too slow. I then jokingly asked him why he didn't take lessons _____ His ears perked up and he got quite interested. He mentioned that he didn't think they would allow Russians to attend the American University, would they? I told him if he wanted to, I could find out. At this he got very enthusiastic and said he would like very much to take lessons _____ if it were possible. When I left their apartment at 11 o'clock, he again mentioned, "Don't forget to find out about that, will you?" Actually, I do plan to forget.

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While we were talking about music, he mentioned that some of his Russian records should be arriving soon and that he would be very happy if I could hear them when they do arrive. I told him I, too, was expecting some records and that he and his wife should come to my apartment, have dinner and listen to the music. He mumbled, "Maybe". While talking about American literature he talked enthusiastically about Howard Fast asking if I had heard of him. He seemed puzzled when I told him that Fast was on the 'list' and smiled when I explained that I meant he was an American Communist writer. He also mentioned that he liked Paul Robeson.

In the course of previous conversation, I asked him who gold-tooth was at the Soviet Legation. "Oh, that's my good friend Barkovski". Barkovski's son, Leonidas, was born about one year and 3 months ago.

Comments:

It is my personal opinion that all the questions asked me were the ones normally asked when two people meet each other socially for the first time. He never tried to pump me, he did not try to "ply me with liquor" and throughout the entire evening he and his wife were very courteous and quite charming. Also, their radio played all evening long, which, I am told, precludes the possibility that our conversation was recorded.

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