

*Repeating
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ROUTING AND RECORD SHEET



SUBJECT: (Optional)

FROM:
Acting Director, Foreign
Broadcast Information Service

EXTENSION

NO. FBIS-0002-88

DATE 5 January 1988

TO: (Officer designation, room number, and building)

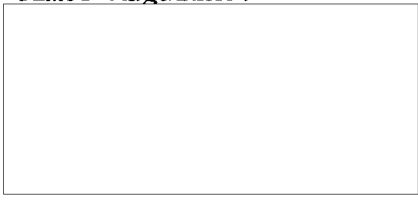
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OFFICER'S INITIALS

COMMENTS (Number each comment to show from whom to whom. Draw a line across column after each comment.)

1. Director of Soviet
Analysis
Room 5E29, Headquarters

For your information. Here is an observation by our Chief of Analysis Group regarding the recent Gorbachev-Reagan exchange noted by William Safire in last Sunday's New York Times Magazine.



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4 January 1988

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Gorbachev's Quip to the President

Some confusion has arisen over General Secretary Gorbachev's quip in response to the President's use of a Russian maxim (doveryay no proveryay -- trust but verify) at the INF signing ceremony. Pravda doctored Gorbachev's remark by softening its thrust; and William Safire in the New York Times Magazine (3 January) cites a Soviet emigre as claiming that the Soviet interpreter put an amiable twist on what was a rude remark. The truth lies somewhere between the two versions.

Rechecking of the videotape confirms the interpreter's version--that Gorbachev said "You repeat that at every meeting (vy na kazhdoy vstreche eto povtorayete)."
Safire's source erroneously says he used the Russian verb boltayete, which does not mean "repeat" but has the sense of "run on at the mouth." Pravda for its part saw fit--quite possibly at the General Secretary's instruction--to amend his remark to make it even more innocuous than it actually was; indeed, Pravda's revision expresses common interests between the two leaders. Pravda's version has Gorbachev saying "We repeat that at every meeting (my povtorayem eto na kazhdoy vstreche)."



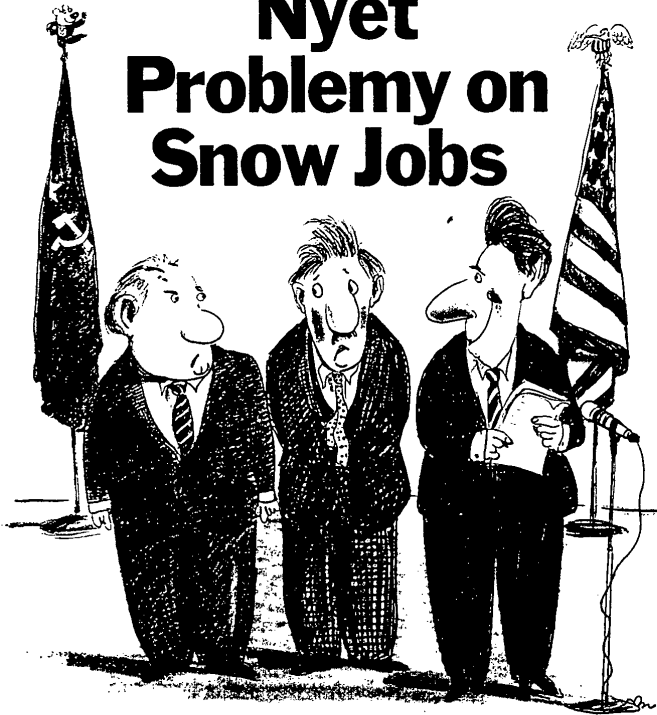
(FBIS)

STAT

On Language

BY WILLIAM SAFIRE

Nyet Problemy on Snow Jobs



KEITH BENDIS

BRUSH UP YOUR RUSSIAN; détente is back. When Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev signed the treaty in Washington on medium-range missiles, the world television audience witnessed what seemed like a nice bit of by-play between the two leaders. Mr. Reagan recalled a Russian maxim: "Though my pronunciation may give you difficulty, the maxim is *doveryai no proveryai*. 'Trust but verify.'"

According to the interpreter, Mr. Gorbachev replied amiably: "You repeat that at every meeting." Mr. Reagan smiled, "I like it," and the spirit of good will was all over the place.

However, a former refusenik who heard the Russian phrase before the English translation writes to set us straight: "The General Secretary used the Russian verb *boltaete*, which does not mean 'repeat,' but means 'drivel.' He said, 'You always drivel that,' which sounds in this context rather rude. Most of my Russian friends were flabbergasted; even in Soviet schools they teach people not to use such rude words when speaking to older and respected people, let alone Presidents."

I turned to a second, perhaps more objective, source. Eugene Beshenkovsky, information manager at Columbia University's W. Averell Harriman Institute for Advanced Study of the Soviet Union, says: "*Boltaete* [pronounced *bol-TA-et-yeh*] does not quite mean 'to drivel,' which suggests nonsense. It is closer to 'to talk about just for the sake of talking.'" It does not mean, as the interpreter softened it, repeat, the Russian verb for which is *povtoriat*.

Well, was it rude? "It is not considered a very polite expression," said Mr. Beshenkovsky, trying to be diplomatic, but he then had to be straight about it: "Yes, rude."

The perfect translation, I think, would have been: "You do run on at the mouth about that," or more politely, "You always go on and on about that." That might have wiped the smile off the President's face.

I, too, have my translation problems. In a piece about the way the presence of the American media turns Gorbachev into Gorbachev-Hyde, I used the term *nyet problema* to mean "no problem."

A problem: I used the nominative case, *problema*, but after a negative, the genitive

case is called for in proper Russian. Louis Jay Herman of New York City advises that the correct form is *nyet problemy* (pronounced *pro-BLEM-ee*), adding parenthetically, "assuming, of course, that a Russian would attempt a literal translation of this particularly American colloquialism."

The fact is that Russians do use this expression: I have heard them with my own ears, and it comes out *nyet problema*, which we can all agree is grammatically wrong. Could it be that this is an idiom, in which case all rules of grammar are suspended? ("It's me," says the idiomatic American; "*Nyet problema*," replies the idiomatic Russian.)

The phrase appears in Serbo-Croatian as *nema problema*, and may be traveling along the route taken by the world's most widely adopted Americanism, O.K. "On a trip to Kenya this past September," writes Bill Abbott of Westport, Conn., "we were astonished to hear the American phrase from a Masai warrior when our van stopped at a village to take pictures and bargain over beads and spears. But there it was in reply to my offer of half the asked-for shillings: