

# AT THE HARRIMAN INSTITUTE

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*This is the first issue of AT THE HARRIMAN INSTITUTE, which will be appearing twice a month during the academic year. Each issue will summarize one of the lunch seminars or special events held here. We hope that this newsletter will help keep you informed of what is happening at the Institute and in the Soviet studies field.*

## Robert Huber: Soviet Views of Congress

On September 22, Robert Huber spoke to the faculty and students of the Harriman Institute on Soviet views of the United States Congress. Dr. Huber is a Staff Consultant to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, and has worked on Capitol Hill in a variety of capacities. He noted that his views are personal.

### Origins of Soviet Congressional Study

Dr. Huber discussed the history of the topic, saying "Soviet studies of Congress developed in tandem with overall development of American studies." The first writing on the subject in the Soviet Union appeared in 1924-25, and a 13-volume set on the U.S. in 1928 included references to Congress. In 1942 and 1946 two handbooks on the American political system were published, but the Cold War ended serious study. The opening of the World Economic Institute in 1957 marked a renewed commitment to academic research of American government; incidentally, that same year Anatolii Gromyko, currently head of the USSR Academy of Sciences' Institute of Africa, completed his Ph.D. ("Kandidat") dissertation on the U.S. Congress.

Dr. Huber identified two milestones in altering Soviet conceptions of the Congress. These were 1) the sweeping changes in Soviet social science research starting in 1966-1967, highlighted by the creation of the Institute on the USA and Canada, and 2) the Jackson-Vanik Amendment in Congress in 1974. The Jackson-Vanik Amendment, in which Congress legislatively linked U.S.-Soviet trade to Jewish emigration from the U.S.S.R. against the wishes of the Nixon Administration, proved to the Soviets that Congressional activism could harm their interests. Dr. Huber remarked that the "Jackson-Vanik Amendment showed the Soviets that Congress could have direct policy relevance on an issue of central importance to the Soviet Union and sharply reminded the Americanists at the time that from a Soviet perspective, Congress could have a negative as well as a positive element in its activities."

### Changing Perceptions of Congress

Beginning in the early seventies, the Soviets intensified their study of the legislative branch. According to Dr. Huber, "the Soviets made a real attempt to understand Congress's role." A number of books in the field were published by Institutes in the Academy of Sciences. Currently there are about a dozen full-time Congress specialists in the Soviet Union.

The Soviets have difficulty fully understanding the concept of separation of powers. They see this separation in tactical terms: Both Congress and the Executive serve the ruling class, but represent opposing monopolistic interests. The tension between these interests is played out in Washington political battles. The Soviet view of bipartisanship has a certain "schizophrenia" about it. In the late sixties, the Soviets believed that bipartisanship enforced the status quo; it was seen as a Republican-Southern Democrat coalition aimed at sustaining a cold-war foreign policy. However, in the late seventies, when the ratification of the SALT II agreements was delayed in Congress, the Soviets complained that there was not enough bipartisanship. The shift in Soviet attitudes reflects the changing nature of the link between a particular issue involving the Congress and Soviet interests.

The Soviets have several sources of information-gathering and analysis on Congress. The Ministry

of Foreign Affairs has its own experts, and the Soviet Embassy keeps "direct, sustained contact" with members. In addition, the Supreme Soviet has sponsored informal parliamentary exchanges during which three House Speakers, the Senate leadership, and numerous House and Senate Committee chairmen have gone to the Soviet Union. The Soviets benefit from these visits in intelligence collection and alternate channels of communication, which have been particularly important in recent years. From 1979 to 1986 there were no summit meetings, but Soviet General Secretaries regularly met with leaders of Congress. They sometimes used these meetings to launch foreign policy initiatives. When former House Speaker Tip O'Neill visited Moscow in 1985, Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev announced his support for the nuclear freeze, a position supported by many members of O'Neill's delegation.

#### Recent Developments

Dr. Huber believes that Gorbachev is savvier about Congress than former Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, who saw the legislators as ceremonial and dismissed their independence. Brezhnev and other top officials had little understanding of the foreign policy powers of Congress. (Former Politburo member Grigorii Romanov, when told by

Senator Glenn that Congress might reject SALT II, asked "Why can't you discipline these people?") Gorbachev has a "most impressive" understanding of Congress and tends to appreciate its role in policy-making, although he doesn't always perceive Congressional views as being much different from the policies of the Reagan administration. On several occasions, he "has stated that it is difficult to tell the opposition from the Administration."

In conclusion, Dr. Huber said that Soviet analysts and leaders have "come a long way" from a rigid ideological view of Congress based on simplistic economic determinism to an understanding of pluralism and the influence of various political groups. The quality of study is still mixed and "ex post facto analysis is still common," but Soviet leaders now believe that Congress has significant foreign policy power and seek to involve and sway members. Huber noted, "Under Gorbachev there has been a full-court press on the U.S. Congress through a variety of means. The challenge for Congress is to keep in mind, as it pursues its foreign policy responsibilities, that the Soviets are devoting considerable resources to evaluating the 'Congress factor' in U.S.-Soviet relations."

*Reported by Paul Lerner with assistance from Rob Monyak.*

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