Veto of Warsaw Blamed on Rostow

By Drew Pearson and Jack Anderson

The Administration's turndown of Warsaw as a negotiating place after President Johnson had repeatedly stated he would go anywhere at any time to talk peace can be attributed in large part to LBJ's foreign affairs adviser, Walt Rostow.

Dr. Rostow is a personable, highly intelligent professor from Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who acted as one of John F. Kennedy's early braintrusters, later became one of Kennedy's top foreign affairs advisers. He is now completely at odds with brother Bobby Kennedy regarding the war in Vietnam but has been able to make his ideas on Southeast Asia stick with Lyndon Johnson.

The veto of Warsaw as a meeting place caused a sour reaction in the diplomatic corps, due to the fact that the United States has been meeting with the Communist Chinese in that city for many years. One reason the North Vietnamese picked Warsaw was so they could tell the Chinese—who don't want them to talk at all—that, since the Chinese had been talking in Warsaw, they couldn't object to the North Vietnamese talking there.

In addition, the Poles have been cooperative in supporting the United States regarding peace talks. They are now going through student sit-ins and internal problems somewhat similar to those of Czechoslovakia; so the atmosphere for East-West peace talks should not be unfriendly.

Despite this, the United States, on the advice of Dr. Rostow, reneged on the President's repeated pledge to go anywhere at any time to talk peace.

Rostow's Problems

Around the State Department it's said that Walt Rostow suffers from two things: First, he has been trying to live down the fact that his father was a Socialist; second, Walt Rostow was the man who originally recommended to President Kennedy that he send large scale troops into Vietnam. Ever since, Rostow has been trying to prove this policy was no mistake.

It was only natural, therefore, that Rostow was not enthusiastic about the President's olive branch to North Vietnam. Hence his negative advice on Warsaw.

Rostow was born in 1916 just as Eugene Debs, Socialist candidate for President, was jailed by the Wilson Administration. Walt's father, an admirer of Debs, named one son Eugene Debs Rostow and the other son for the socialist poet of Civil War days, Walt Whitman. Walt Rostow has had a brilliant scholastic career, but is also regarded as something of a bumbler.

He was a Rhodes Scholar, took a doctor's degree at Yale, taught American history at both Oxford and Cambridge, and economic history at MIT.

He also was an OSS agent aboard the British tanker Empire Mersey when it was sunk by a German submarine in 1942. Rostow managed to save his life but not his luggage, though later Rep. Ellsworth B. Foote (R-Conn.) introduced a bill whereby Congress voted him $585.50 for his lost suitcases.

His most serious loss, however, was when he left behind a confidential memo during conferences between President Kennedy and Prime Minister Diefenbaker of Canada. On the memo Kennedy had written the initials SOB, referring to Diefenbaker. Diefenbaker didn't take kindly to this and the incident strained Canadian-U.S. diplomatic relations.

JFK Was Irked

It also strained President Kennedy's patience regarding his special assistant for national security affairs. Kennedy had suffered a serious setback in Vienna during his talks with Premier Khrushchev when Rostow advised him to be tough. Khrushchev, however, was in a much better position to be tough. Kennedy returned to the United States so distraught that his old back ailment returned.

Out of that meeting came the Berlin Wall, the calling out of American Reserves and the lowest ebb in American-Soviet relations.

It was on the heels of this diplomatic defeat that President Kennedy sent Rostow and Gen. Maxwell Taylor to Southeast Asia. They came back with a recommendation that American troop strength in South Vietnam be increased from 1000 men, where Eisenhower had kept it, to 18,000 men. Kennedy, smarting from his failure in Vienna and the Bay of Pigs fiasco and needing to recoup his prestige, bought the idea.

This is how the United States first got seriously involved in South Vietnam.

It was only three months after accepting Rostow's advice on this major step that Kennedy demoted the man who had given it to him. Rostow was transferred from the White House, where he was at the President's elbow, to the policy planning council of the State Department.

No one who knows Rostow questions his integrity. But they do question his judgment. They feel that it has been influenced by his triple failure to receive a security clearance during the Eisenhower Administration. This was the beginning of the famous Otepka case.

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