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Apathy Over Brezhnev's U.S. Visit

In less than a week, Leonid Brezhnev will arrive in this city for a long visit, to be mainly devoted to talks with the President. The absence of advance interest in this remarkable event is a measure of the near-insanity produced by the Watergate obsession.

The whole country, please remember, was passionately excited by Nikita S. Khrushchev's visit in President Eisenhower's time. Yet the Khrushchev visit was strictly atmospheric. Neither side attempted to enter into substantive negotiations. The only result was the much vaunted "spirit of Camp David," which had no detectable effect on the course of history.

In sharp contrast, the Brezhnev visit has excited no one. Yet if you trouble to look into the facts, you are forced to conclude that we should all be intensely excited. For the facts plainly indicate that the Brezhnev visit will be altogether different in basic character from any previous Soviet-Western summit meeting—with the sole possible exception of President Nixon's visit to Moscow.

So much is plain from the mere nature of the preparations. These had no precedent in the whole strange, difficult history of Soviet-American relations. Even the place where the work was done was unprecedented; for no Western emissary had ever before seen the Politburo's huge hunting lodge at Zavidovo, where Dr. Henry A. Kissinger was received by Brezhnev and his foreign minister, Andrei Gromyko.

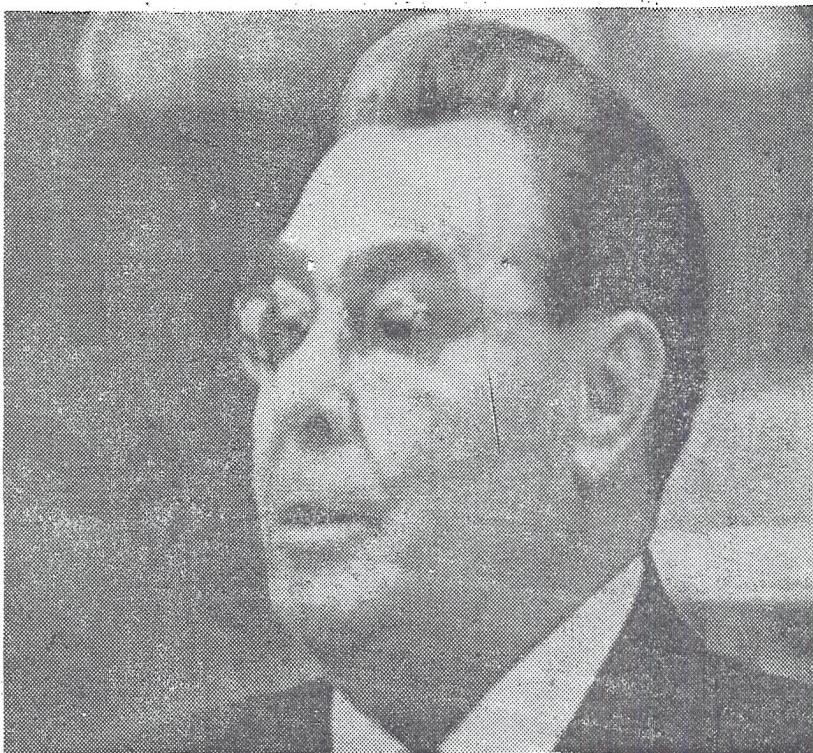
The character of the work done at Zavidovo also had no precedent. No Western chief of state—let alone a mere emissary like Dr. Kissinger—had ever been given four entire days of the undivided time of any of the successive bosses of the Soviet Union. This is not the sort of thing that overburdened national leaders do for mere atmospheric purposes.

The purpose was in fact hard, preparatory work on the forthcoming meeting between Leonid Brezhnev and Richard M. Nixon. In sending Kissinger to Zavidovo, the President recognized the simple principle that ill-prepared meetings between heads of state are never very useful, and can even be dangerous. In giving so much time to Kissinger, Brezhnev recognized the same principle.

Brezhnev will therefore come to Washington with the main lines already laid out, for prolonged, complex and deeply important negotiations of the most substantive character. If all goes well, the result will be no empty "spirit of Camp David." The result will instead be a series of solid, carefully drawn up agreements, probably numbering six in all, between the American President and the Soviet General Secretary.

The subjects to be covered—the progress of the SALT talks, economic and technological relations between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R., and so on—are all sufficiently obvious. But another aspect of the forthcoming Brezhnev visit is less obvious, yet vastly more significant.

In brief, if all goes well, the Brezhnev visit's main result may well be an historical turning point in the Soviet Union's over-all relations, not just with the U.S., but with the whole of the rest



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of the world. Such a turning point is possible and even likely, because practical circumstances are slowly forcing the Soviets to make a novel kind of choice, of the deepest historical significance.

The nature of the choice is best summed up in Max Hayward's shrewd remark of long ago, that "in the Soviet Union, nothing really works except, alas, for the armed forces." By slow stages having nothing really work except the armed forces has been getting more and more troublesome and even dangerous for the Soviet leaders. The acuteness of the resulting trouble is best symbolized by the huge Soviet wheat purchases in this country.

If only your armed forces really work, you can of course try to solve your problems by exploiting this un-

doubted asset. Using the armed forces to produce a new world situation more favorable to themselves is plainly in the minds of some of the Soviet leaders. That is the only possible meaning of such signs as the huge Soviet military preparations along the Chinese frontier, and the new Soviet naval base being built at the head of the Persian gulf.

But there is another choice open to the Soviets. This is to import Western technology, Western capital and Western goods, thus beginning to make all the things work that do not really work today. The forthcoming visit of Leonid Brezhnev points toward this second choice. So this visit is hardly a trifling matter, of less interest than the latest Watergate headline.

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