



INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

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HAUSMAN: Thanks so much. This is David Hausman and I'm here in Ulaanbaatar on December 15th, 2009 with Mr. Dashyondon. Mr. Dashyondon, have you agreed to this interview?

DASHYONDON: *Yes I do.*

HAUSMAN: Great, I wanted to start by asking you a bit about your background and about the jobs that brought you to your central role in the transition here in Mongolia.

DASHYONDON: *Between 1979 and 1984 I worked as the Director at the party school. Starting in 1984 I worked as Deputy Head of Department in the Central Committee of the MPRP (Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party). And I continued in that capacity at the turn of 1990 when the transition began. After that I worked as the head of the party committee of the Metropolitan Party committee for one year. That was until 1991.*

Starting in 1991 I worked as the Chairman of the Central Committee of the MPRP. Actually the position of the leader of the MPRP was renamed from the Chairman of the Central Committee to the Secretary-General of the MPRP. And so I led the MPRP and actively participated in the reform process until 1996. I think since that time maybe it is not very important for you, the period after that.

HAUSMAN: Great, I'd like to start by asking you some fairly general questions about the transition. I wonder if you could describe how the first momentum for elections began?

DASHYONDON: *So let me say this first. So I usually talk about, I usually focus on two things when I talk about the transition. First, the first thing is about the overall transition that involved the whole country, and the second thing is about the reform and change within the MPRP because at that time the MPRP was in power and if, unless the party is receptive to reform processes within itself, it cannot take a part in the overall reform process in the country.*

It means that if the Party cannot change within itself it will not allow the overall reform process to take place.

HAUSMAN: Great. So I'm particularly interested in the second of those two things. And I wonder if you could describe how the call for elections and for the transition to a market economy first became part of the agenda within the MPRP?

DASHYONDON: *In the mid 1980s the socialist bloc led by the Soviet Union was plunged into a social and economic crisis. And the Soviet Union became aware of this crisis, and they introduced perestroika. All the socialist countries in Europe, they followed the Soviet Union in an attempt to initiate reforms. The same happened also in Mongolia. In 1986 the political leader of the central committee of MPRP developed a proposal for reform. This proposal was about changing and improving the ideology and internal organization of the MPRP. At that time I served as deputy head of a division within MPRP. I was personally involved in the development of that document.*

So the main reason for the development of this document was that at that time the work of the Party itself and the affairs of the State were mixed up. So the Party was heavily involved in just economic affairs, etcetera, so this was the main reason for that. So in other words, Party organizations were heavily involved in economic affairs and administrative affairs, and this led to too much workload for those Party organizations.

On the other hand, this kind of involvement of the Party organizations in the economic and the state affairs, actually created obstacles to an efficient and more effective handling of those issues. And at that time the party was actually directly managing the civil society organizations. So I mean these youth organizations, trade unions, Red Cross, etcetera. So all these organizations were directly controlled by the Party. So this kind of direct control from the MPRP was also creating obstacles to creative activity on the part of these organizations.

This was, I think this situation resulted from the influence of the command system that existed in the Soviet Union, the totalitarian regime. This kind of total control over the society and the economy on the part of the MPRP was dictated by the desire to implement the socialist ideology. Because of this totalitarian regime of the socialist countries, including Mongolia, we began to lag behind other countries which we, at that time, used to call capitalist countries.

So then the whole idea of the document I mentioned before was to give freedom to the civil society organizations, the economic institutions and the state institutions to do their own job. So in order to do this we needed to change the ideology of the Communist Party. At that time also the government formed by the MPRP was preparing to introduce a system, an economic system, a more liberal economic system for the state enterprises.

So this initiative came from the younger members within the Party, but the leadership of the Party was delaying the implementation of these ideas. This led to an unpleasant atmosphere in the society. That's why these youth, these social movements began to appear.

HAUSMAN: Could you say a little more about how you and other young leaders within the Party built support for these initiatives and were able to overcome resistance from the leadership?

DASHYONDON: *So the first tactic was to publish newspaper articles criticizing the sluggish process within the Party. The next tactic was to get support from the reform-minded members within the political bureau. The third step was to establish a group of scholars at the Research Institute which was run by the MPRP for the purpose of rewriting the Party's program and other policy documents. Fourthly, we pursued the policy of taking a liberal stance towards these newly created movements and their various meetings and other measures. So we basically took a liberal stance on that.*

What I mean by this liberal stance is that we would be receptive to the demands of these movements when we find them to be legitimate. When we had doubts about their demands then we would have discussions and try to reach some mutual understanding. Finally these new political movements put forward this demand that the political bureau resign. The MPRP accepted that demand. Then all the members of the political bureau resigned.

The Chairman of the People's Great Khural changed the Prime Minister, replaced the Prime Minister with a new person. The newly created political parties were officially registered with the state registry. That's how we held the first multi-party election in 1990.

HAUSMAN: Could you say more in detail how you went about getting support from the reform-minded members of the politburo step by step?

DASHYONDON: I would like to talk about one person whose name is Tiran Dashrin Namsrai. So this person at that time was both a member of the politburo and the deputy chairman of the People's Great Khural. At that time also we had many young people heading these various departments and divisions within the central committee of the MPRP. So we had a common understanding with these young people. But we never demanded that the politburo resign. So we did not raise this demand by ourselves. We just showed support for the demand raised by these political movements. These are two different things as you can imagine.

So in other words we never tried to change the leadership of the Party or kind of coup d'etat. We just tried to introduce reforms within the Party. Because at that time the reform purposes, the objectives of the reform of the Party and the objectives of the reform defined by the political parties were very close, almost the same. So that same, that shared purpose of the MPRP and these political parties was to change socialism within itself. Because of that shared understanding, it was easier for these two sides to reach a common solution.

The existence of this shared objective made it easier for us to overcome the most difficult times in the political system. Starting in 1990, the original purpose of change in socialism within itself, went beyond its own boundaries and then ultimately both the MPRP and the new political parties decided to give up socialism.

In 1991 the MPRP held its regular session and officially decided that the MPRP would no longer pursue socialism as a goal. At that time I was heading the Central Committee of the MPRP. In 1991 we developed this new constitution, which was adopted in 1992.

HAUSMAN: Thanks. Going back a little bit in time, do you remember any specific examples where you and others within the MPRP overcame opposition from older members of the MPRP?

DASHYONDON: I can't give you any specific examples. So the process of overcoming the resistance from the older leadership did not occur in ways that would create conflict between the older and younger members of the Party or some kind of fighting between these two sides. So this kind of thing never happened. We just tried to achieve our goals by changing the Party program and doing the other stuff like I have described.

HAUSMAN: I also wonder whether you know how the decision eventually got made within the politburo about whether to resign.

DASHYONDON: I should explain to you first something called the plenary session of the Central Committee of the MPRP, which would make decisions between the Great Party Khural sessions which would occur regularly. At this, the plenary session, the chairman of the MPRP made a speech and then the politburo resigned voluntarily.

HAUSMAN: Do you know whether the decision to resign was unanimous or whether there was disagreement? Do you know any details about how the decision got made?

DASHYONDON: There were not many people opposing this position. So that plenary session was the eighth plenary session of the Party and it was held on the 12th of March 1990. Then we appointed a new politburo.

HAUSMAN: How did that process work?

DASHYONDON: So the chairman of the Central Committee would nominate individuals for a membership in the politburo and then the plenary session would conduct a vote and then that's how the politburo is appointed.

HAUSMAN: So one issue that my program is very interested in is the issue of competitive processes which in many countries cause violence. So when I say competitive processes I particularly mean things like elections. Was there concern that violence would accompany the 1990 elections and did you take measures to prevent that?

DASHYONDON: So at that time I was already appointed as the Chairman of the Party committee, the Metropolitan Party committee. So we didn't have any idea about the possibility of violence. So there was no concern about possible violence during the election. So on both sides—. So the election took place just as usual, but with the only difference that there were many more candidates.

I don't know, maybe it was just because it was the very first democratic election. There were no complications, no provocations of violence. But I have heard one or two cases where in some electoral districts the candidates from the competing parties had some kind of misunderstanding, but that was nothing compared to the overall picture.

HAUSMAN: Next I'd like to ask about the decision that was made to move to a market economy so quickly. I'm very interested in how that decision was made within the Party and what your role in it was.

DASHYONDON: I have maybe not much to say about this. So the idea to move to the market economy and multi-party political system and pluralism within the society was already made a Party line, a main political line of the Party. It was recognized widely within the Party. Because we were able to quickly adopt this new constitution. So everything was easy because we would have to do everything according to the constitution. Sixty percent of all the members of the People's Great Khural which actually adopted this constitution were from the MPRP. I headed at that time the MPRP group within that People's Great Khural.

As you know we discussed the draft of the constitution for 76 days and the final product was the new constitution.

HAUSMAN: In that case let me go back then to the process of convincing the leadership of the MPRP to begin reforms. You said that this process went forward in a kind of collegial way that didn't create conflict. Could you say a little bit more about how that happened? Were there any particular moments that you remember of persuasion?

DASHYONDON: First of all we should understand that it was not that the politburo never understood the need for reforms. The only problem was delays. Just given the fact that in the other socialist countries of Europe the ruling parties were either dissolved or they changed their names. For example, (Nicolae) Ceausescu in Romania was shot dead. So given this fact it was, you could not imagine the politburo resisting change. So it would have been better if the older leaders within the politburo who were very slow to adapt to the idea of market economy, so these old leaders should have been replaced early on, but that did not happen and that is why the decision making took longer than it should have.

HAUSMAN: Why do you think the change happened when it did and not earlier or later?

DASHYONDON: It is difficult to give any reasons for that. That's how the process just went on. As I told you we should have replaced this old conservative part of the leadership early on. So even if the decision was delayed, the process of transition to market economy would have taken its own course.

HAUSMAN: Let me go back and ask you in more detail about a couple of the other things you listed as tactics for getting support. You said that you had established a group of scholars to rewrite the Party's program. Can you say more about that and how that happened?

DASHYONDON: It was a voluntary endeavor of fifteen scholars who gathered together at the Institute of Humanities. So this group of scholars worked on redrafting the charter of the MPRP as well as the Party's program. And the drafts they developed were in principle supported by, approved by the politburo.

HAUSMAN: Was there any opposition to the work of these fifteen scholars within the Party?

DASHYONDON: There were some people who believed that this kind of work should be done by the Central Committee, not by these scholars. Nevertheless, there was a majority who supported this. So as I told you before, our Party worked very hard to reach a common understanding with the new political movement. So this person for example was very actively involved in that process of reaching a mutual understanding with political movements, so he represented the Party. His name is Jantsan.

JANTSAN: *Maybe it is not related to your work but he was just rewarded by a very high award, state award, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the democratic revolution.*

DASHYONDON: So Mr. Jantsan was head of a division within the MPRP at the time. So he was in charge of, as I told you, the Party controlled all the state institutions, etcetera. So he was, for example, responsible for that control over all the law enforcement bodies, police and other institutions.

JANTSAN: *Even though we had the full political power to, for example, crack down on the hunger strikers or to arrest or to detain them, but it was very clear at that time that we would not take that kind of decision.*

HAUSMAN: Why was that clear?

JANTSAN: *That's because at that time we were very much cognizant of the worldwide movement to destroy the totalitarian system. We knew that there were serious movements taking place in Soviet Russia and other socialist countries of Europe like Poland, Hungary, and Romania.*

HAUSMAN: Thanks, just one last question since I know you're running out of time. If you had to give advice to other people in similar positions to yours in liberalizing a party in another country, what sorts of advice would you give?

DASHYONDON: The ruling Party must change by itself. But events may take place differently in different countries. I think there cannot be a universal solution to many different circumstances in many different countries. The only thing I can say is that the Party itself must liberalize and change.

HAUSMAN: All right. Thank you so much.