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25 May 1962
41-10182-10075
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SUBJECT: Debriefing of Defector from the USSR

On 17 July 1962, undersigned was able (through the courtesy of SA Division) to meet and debrief Dan WEBSTER, an American defector who left the USSR last May. Webster is a plastic engineer who went as a guide to the Sokolniki Fair in 1959, fell in love with a Russian girl, and defected to live with her, although he had a wife and family in the US. According to Webster's story, he decided to defect when he learned that his mother had suffered a mental breakdown, presumably caused by his defection. He also states that he was "homesick" and claims not to have been taken in by Soviet ideas. During most of his sojourn in the Soviet Union, Webster was living with his Soviet cousin-in-law wife and her family in Leningrad, where he had a job in a plastic laboratory. Webster appears to be intelligent and observant, but politically or ideologically unsophisticated. His contacts were chiefly with fellow workers and his mistress's social circle. Questions from undersigned were chiefly designed to elicit information on current Soviet attitudes. Webster's views on various Soviet attitudes are reported below.

1. Soviet nuclear test series. Soviet citizens were aware of the series, but knew no details.
2. Attitude towards Americans. Little or no hostility to American people, who are believed misled by their rulers.
3. Attitude towards Germans. Fear and distrust; many Leningraders still remember the siege, of course. Webster was strongly conscious of building in anti-German propaganda over the last year.
4. Attitude towards Jews. Webster was very conscious of widespread anti-Semitism, such as he believes was once common in some areas in the US, but which has largely disappeared here. (Webster, incidentally, does not appear to be Jewish himself.)
5. Attitude towards Negroes. Webster said there were a few negroes in Leningrad; he knew of no instances of anti-negro feeling.
6. Attitude on religion. Religion has largely disappeared among the younger generations; the old people occasionally still go to church.

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9. Attitude towards Americans. The Soviet people take a great interest in the Americans. They were the first to hear of the new American. The flight of the American from the Soviet Union, especially General Chen's escape, was given wide coverage in the Soviet press, and drew the Soviet attention.

10. Attitude towards the West. In Webster's own field, the Americans are the best. They are generally trying to do the best for us, even with they could do so. In Webster's view, the Americans are the best, and many tended to "go for" them when the supervisors were not watching. In fact, last night's clients would be able to get out work needed to make a good report.

11. Attitude towards Stalin. The Soviet people are conscious of the improvement in their standard of living since Stalin's death.

12. Social cleavage. Webster did not believe that there was any cleavage between the party elite and the rest of the population. (He thought it did not exist. Webster understood what would be meant by "social cleavage.") Ordinary party members were no different from the rest of the people. Webster had no contact with party "officials" since they realized how difficult it was.

13. Social behavior. Though no alcohol, Webster was certainly not happy about the prevalence of drunkenness in Soviet society, which led to many deaths. A common practice in the evenings was to have a bottle of vodka to wash down the liquor and eat officers who come to "go in" on a bottle; they then adjourn behind a building and drink it up. Soviet laws for curbing drunkenness are ineffective. Language is extremely crude. Webster did not think that there was personal friction in normal social contacts, for example in the street cars.

14. Western radio. Once he had decided to defect, Webster spent a lot of time listening to western radio broadcasts, as well as reading English-language books, which were available in a special library in Leningrad. He could hear the western English language broadcasts, but all Russian language programs were jammed out. (He believed YOA was jammed all over the place.) He thought BBC news casts were the most interesting, because they seemed to be propaganda. (Webster did not mention Radio Liberty.)

15. Western tourists. Many of these are second-rate, and they do not do a better job in coming first class tourists to the West. A significant minority are extremely interested in all kinds of American music, though they

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... is not distinguished between classical jazz and popular dance music. Webster evidently has strong feelings on the subject of visiting entertainment, and has ideas he hopes to pass on to someone concerned with the Cold.

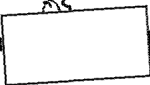
14. Attitudes in Baltic countries. Webster and his mistress took a bus trip to Estonia and Latvia. He was impressed with the contrast between these republics and Muscovite Russia, and says that they reminded him of Pennsylvania, making him homesick. He did not see any overt anti-Soviet feeling, but in the stores give preference to those who speak the local language, or to Russians who are polite enough to attempt to speak it.

15. Pasternak. Webster was vague about Soviet views of Pasternak and Dr. Zhivago. (It appeared that Webster's contacts were probably not glibsters for literary culture.)

Since Webster appeared to be quite articulate, undersigned asked him if he had considered writing up his experiences for publication, perhaps in a magazine article. He said that he had thought of it, but had given up the idea out of concern for his mother.

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(25 July 68)

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To: Rudy Balaban

From: Ned Bennett

Subject: Dan Webster
(11c - Bcb)

Reference: Attached memorandum for the record; telephone conversation of this date. (31 Jul 62)

1. I am sorry to say that, because of a deadline I had to meet, the memo for the record was not written until several days after my meeting with subject. It may be incorrect on some details of W's history, which you would of course know all about. If the story in the first paragraph does not perfectly match what W. has told you, the fault is probably mine, not W's; you might call me if you see any ~~XXXXXXXX~~ inconsistencies on Soviet attitudes.
2. Generally speaking, the information W. gave [^] does not seem to me inconsistent with what I have seen from other sources. On the questions of social friction and religion, his reply was more "pro-Soviet" than ^{some} information ~~XXX~~ from [^] other sources. On the other hand, his answers on anti-Semitism and his statements on drunkenness certainly did not cast any very favorable ~~XXX~~ light on Soviet society. One interesting answer which I neglected to include in my memo indicated the continuing existence of pro-Stalin sentiment.
3. In the first paragraph of the memo, I state that W. seemed "politically or ideologically unsophisticated." It probably would have been more correct to say that he was uninterested, or uncommitted, rather than ~~XXXXXX~~ unsophisticated, though that was also true. Such negative references as he made to Soviet ideas (and there were not many such references) seemed a little intended to satisfy me; they were mainly made in the first part of the interview, before any rapport was established. If he was unhappy in Leningrad, it seemed to be because he felt himself an alien, and because he was homesick for the good old USA, not because there was anything wrong with Communism, or anything good about American political institutions. He presented himself somewhat as the ordinary guy who tries to get along; a lit-

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He is provincial or even puritanical in making moral judgments on others, even while obviously exposed to moral criticism himself. He described the news of his mother's condition as having been a real shock to him, and this seems consistent with his tendency to criticize drunkenness, bad language, slipshod work, and so forth in others. He commented, rather approvingly, that Soviet children really mind when they are scolded by total strangers, whereas American children (he thought) would not. I would expect that he would be a good reactor when submitted to a polygraph. Perhaps because he had already been questioned for several hours, he seemed to be little guarded and jumpy, especially when any of my questions seemed to stray from the subject of Soviet public attitudes. On the other hand, he volunteered a quite a few remarks about his own case, his own problems. He appeared to be worried about his chances of finding a job, and mentioned that one old friend (who had stuck by him "all the way") was trying to help him in this.

When the time came for me to depart, i.e. when I had asked all the questions I could think of, he asked if anything further was to happen that day. I said that all I knew was what you had told us when you left, that there was nothing further set up, and that I could simply leave when finished. He offered me a drink, which I declined, saying I wanted to get home. I think he rather enjoyed the interview, or at least the chance to spout off his views. As my memo indicates, I was impressed by his articulateness, which probably resulted from his saying things he had thought out and prepared himself to say. I did not really cross-question him, in the sense of trying to catch him out, or probing his own motives; he was willing to run on and I was willing to let him, asking new questions when he had said all he could on old ones.