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INTERNATIONAL REPUBLICAN INSTITUTE
TRIP REPORT FOR OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER MISSIONS
October 1-23, 1993 Tashkent, Uzbekistan and Ashgabat, Turkmenistan
November 15-23, 1993 Tashkent, Uzbekistan

I. Introduction

In October and November 1993, IRI successfully conducted workshops and seminars in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan for youths and adults. IRI's work in the region is based on the Youth Leadership and Democracy program, funded by the Agency for International Development (Grant #CCS-0007-A-00-2021-00). IRI's innovative program breaks new ground in its approach to democracy-building efforts. It enables people to take initiative and effect change at the grassroots level. The program emphasizes democracy as a process, one that depends on citizen commitment and responsibility.

As a result of its efforts, IRI has been able to create a growing network of activists for democratic change in a part of Central Asia where hopes for reform are otherwise rapidly diminishing.

A. Background

The breakdown of the Soviet Union has thrust enormous political, economic, and social challenges on the governments of Central Asia. In reaction to independence, these countries have chosen different approaches to leadership and government. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are introducing tentative democratic reforms, whereas Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan remain predominantly authoritarian.

Proponents of democracy have been silenced effectively under the regimes of Islam Karimov in Uzbekistan and Saparmurad Niyazov in Turkmenistan, which have suppressed the formation of opposition parties with brute force. Through press censorship, these governments blatantly manipulate popular opinion to reconcile the population to the dictates and decrees of single-party government. In both Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, citizens remain excluded from the political process.

In these countries, however, the era of glasnost and perestroika has had an impact. Some Central Asians are drawn to the idea of democracy, because democracy offers self-determination on two levels: freedom for the individual and independence of the nation state from russian imperial rule. They hope to free themselves of state hegemony and, simultaneously, to check the rise of religiously inspired alternatives. Both of these alternatives

threaten to plunge these countries further into stagnation and backwardness.

B. IRI Workshop Participants

Individuals with concerns as these have taken part in IRI workshops and seminars. Participants have included teachers, psychologists, educators, and leadership specialists. These individuals draw inspiration from the workshops, because they seek to improve their society for themselves and future generations. They seek alternatives to the current choices of totalitarianism. Despite the odds, such people continue to believe in democracy and strive to spread educational programs and community projects inspired by IRI.

C. Community-Building, A Future For Democracy.

IRI workshop participants fervently support projects that unite the community. They have begun to change their basic perceptions of the citizen's role in society and politics. As in all former Soviet urban centers, community relations are relatively non-existent. Since there are no venues for citizens to air independent views or to meet fellow citizens with similar concerns, there are virtually no means to take action.

By creating opportunities for community-building, IRI has tapped a tremendous resource in its efforts to strengthen democracy. Surprisingly, citizens are ready to make a positive difference in their communities rather than wait impatiently for the government to attend to these matters. IRI has worked with people who eagerly take steps toward local problem-solving. They have demonstrated ability and determination in carrying out local projects that give them a small measure of control over their environment. It is a sense of urgency and self-worth that drives them to work together and inspire others to join their efforts. With each training mission, IRI has found new supporters who willingly commit themselves to work in their communities for a better future.

D. IRI's Work Over the Year

1. Two Schools

Over the last year, IRI has been seeking ways to sustain a democratic voice in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. IRI introduced democracy workshops to high school students in the capitals, Tashkent and Ashgabat and has broadened its activities to suit local needs. In December 1992, both schools, Tashkent's High School #17 and Ashgabat's International Business School, accepted IRI's offer to run leadership and democracy workshops for their students. From this modest beginning, IRI has been able to expand its outreach and to establish a foundation from which to launch more comprehensive
programs that involve students, parents, teachers and others.

2. Focus on Youth
IRI's concentration on youth is a driving force behind the successful integration of these different players. As the program enlarges its base, the focus will remain on young people, especially in the progressive schools that encourage and cultivate democratic leadership programs. In fact, adults who have trained with IRI are drawn to these schools and the opportunities that they provide to integrate democracy into the curriculum. This is particularly true for School #17 in Tashkent that is currently establishing a new student government as a result of the mock election exercise that IRI conducted in November.

3. Change in Attitude
When IRI began its work in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan a year ago, they were met initially by fear, skepticism, and suspicion. Because of the systematic suppression of democratic ideas in these countries, few were willing to risk partnership with IRI. Within a short time, however, IRI Youth Leadership and Democracy workshops became popular with students and teachers. The latter, in turn, convinced other teachers and, eventually, the administrations of the schools. The workshops have not only proven to benefit young people but also have overcome bureaucratic resistance within the school. For the many people involved in this process, these developments provide valuable experience and, by implication, sustain the hope for the application of democratic principles beyond the confines of the school.

II. IRI's Workshops in October and November

A. Overview
In October and November, IRI conducted several workshops for adults in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The first of these, IRI's "Training of Trainers" workshop, proved to be one of the most effective means of creating group cohesion and of inspiring people to work for change in their community. The program focussed on group leadership techniques and democratic values.

Later in the month, the graduates of this program continued to explore their options in an IRI workshop on community-building skills. These trainers have maintained contact with each other and are active in IRI projects, as well as projects that they have created themselves. For example, the group is working with students at School #17 in Tashkent after IRI trainers from Washington, D.C. carried out a mock campaign for the school in mid-November.

This nascent non-governmental organization has emerged as a direct result of IRI initiatives and currently works in schools and in neighborhoods to motivate others to effect change at the grassroots level. IRI's future programming goal is to increase the group's outreach an to solidify its organizational basis.

1. Participants
From October 1-8, 18 teachers, psychologists, and leadership experts from the former Komsomol organization participated in IRI's "Training of Trainers". A group of six teachers and youth workers also travelled from Turkmenistan to take part in the workshop series.

The participants had heard that IRI's program prepared young people for life in a democratic society. They wanted to learn how to instill positive values, strengthen self-reliance, and encourage an appreciation for diversity. They expressed a desire to impart these values to young people, because the former structures for youth leadership had collapsed. The former communist structure, the Komsomol, no longer had any influence in the schools and students were left with no organized opportunities to gain leadership experience.

Teachers see this as a way to inspire student creativity and problem-solving ability which are otherwise stifled by authoritarian schools. Above all, participants believed that these workshops would alter their own perceptions on life's possibilities. Judging by their subsequent activism, they were not disappointed.

2. Facilitators
The Training of Trainers workshop was held at a former Pioneer Camp near Tashkent. It consisted of a three part series. In the first of these, trainer George Lakey of "Training Center Workshops" in Philadelphia, taught the basic skills of workshop facilitation. Charlie Watson, a trainer for "Project Adventure", led adventure-based youth leadership workshops. And finally, Natasha Mirimanova of the Russian-American Humanitarian Initiative in Moscow shared her expertise in a workshop on "Understanding Cultural Differences", which draws on universal values and their ability to unite people of different cultural backgrounds.

During the training week, both Charlie Watson and Natasha Mirimanova conducted additional demonstration workshops with Tashkent school children. The children came to the Pioneer Camp on two different days to take part in problem-solving group activities and to explore sources of conflict between different ethnic groups.

B. The Workshops
In the "Training of Trainers" workshop the adult trainers engaged in and practiced several workshop activities. These included simulation games, group challenge exercises, listening and communication exercises, and group process activities.

1. George Lakey's Workshop
George Lakey's workshop concentrated on imparting the skills necessary for guided group work. On the first day, he led a variety of activities, after which the group was asked to make

observations from the point of view of prospective trainers. On the second day, the participants began to lead exercises themselves. They practiced their facilitation skills by setting up an activity and, later, by leading a discussion or so-called "debriefing" of a workshop exercise. The trainers honed their abilities first by making a self-critique of their presentation, and then followed this work with observations and feedback from their peers.

The workshop established an uncommonly tight bond among the participants. They reacted with enthusiasm to the introduction of new techniques for group interaction. The workshop demonstrated that democratic leadership strategies enable groups to function well through active participation of all group members, constructive dialogue, active listening, open discussion of differing points of view, and group problem-solving.

In the workshop, trainees struggled to take on a new role as trainers. The substance of the workshop was so new and exciting to them that it was difficult for them to shift to the detachment required to assume the role of the trainer. In addition, it was difficult to change ingrained leadership habits in the course of two days. The group recommended that Mr. Lakey return in several months for an advanced training of trainers.

2. Charlie Watson's Workshop

The training commenced with Charlie Watson's workshop that emphasized youth activities and group challenges. The participants eagerly applied their understanding of democratic leadership to the exercises. An unexpected development occurred. A heated discussion took place between proponents of individual over collective rights and those who argued for the primacy of groups needs. The final draft of the groups's cooperative agreement included freedom of choice for participants as long as that choice did not obstruct the goals and work of the group.

3. Natasha Mirimanova's Workshop

The workshop on "Understanding Cultural Differences" conducted by Russian trainer Natasha Mirimanova further accentuated the ability for people to change their point of view. Participants engaged in activities that stressed the value of cooperation and that highlighted the universality of human values. They rewrote fairy tales from the perspective of the "bad guy", shared events in their lives when they had experienced prejudice, and explored the group's commonalities and differences to underscore the importance of diversity in society.

4. Conclusion

The reaction to the Training of Trainers was overwhelmingly enthusiastic. The introduction of IRI's youth leadership and democracy workshops for adults as potential trainers produced a close-knit group interested in working together in the future.

Those who lived in Tashkent agreed to meet regularly and to include others in a network of youth activists, who would be willing to engage proactively in the development of youth leadership programs.

Such programs would mean working with school principals and other authorities, such as the Ministry of Education, to promote the cause of democracy education. The participants expressed a desire to begin applying their skills in their work, to gain more experience as trainers, and to impart their experiences to others. The participants from Turkmenistan invited IRI to conduct workshops in their schools and hoped to introduce new ideas and approaches in the classroom.

On the whole, the workshops imparted a new outlook on life and work to those who attended. Participant evaluations reflect the excitement and interest that the workshops generated. One representative statement reads, "I hope that participation in this program will change my life. I am looking for these changes. I will tell everybody about this experience and try to infect them with these ideas." Another participant writes, "I would like to found a club for teenagers in the neighborhood. Thank you very much for the opportunity to learn something about myself, other people, democracy. And the most important thing is that now I can do something." At the end of the workshop, the majority of participants expressed a desire to engage themselves in community or youth work. They did not have to wait long for IRI assistance in commencing in this work.

C. "Community-building" workshop.

1. Overview

From October 13th-221st, IRI offered "Community-building" workshops with Jeff Bercuvitz, President of Community Innovations, in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Mr. Bercuvitz worked with students from School #17 in Tashkent, with students at the International Business School in Ashgabat, with the graduates of the "Training for Trainers", and with a group of Pioneer leaders.

2. School #17 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan

The students at School #17 in Tashkent worked with Mr. Bercuvitz as a continuation of their training with him in June. The workshop emphasized the development of community-building through projects that are self-generated. The specially designed workshops take participants through a series of exercises that first establish individual strengths and later explore the possibility of sharing these talents with others. The workshops create an awareness that the community is an extension of the self. Any personal investment in uniting the community is deeply connected to self-interest.

As a result of these workshops, students have developed projects to

benefit their school and to promote cooperation between the school and the larger community. Students conceptualized business services that would be established at the school, such as beautification projects and volunteer services. In some instances, the projects could not be carried out due to lack of resources. For example, the students had planned to paint a mural in the school yard, but a lack of paint and inclement weather prevented them from completing the project. However, students meet with IRI Youth Center Coordinator, Stella Protzenko, on a regular basis and volunteer at a local orphanage. The group continues to implement workshop techniques to maintain dedication to community-building.

3. Interntaional Business School in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan
The International Business School in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan has hosted IRI workshops throughout the year. The school has expanded dramatically and now offers a full curriculum for the 9th and 10th grades. Students may leave their local high school to complete their studies and receive a diploma at the business specialty school.

In one weekend, Jeff Bercuvitz conducted workshops with each of the classes at the International Business School. In some ways, this schedule minimized the impact of his program. Many steps of the workshop were omitted in the interest of time. However, the students in Ashgabat are interested in business development and were attentive to the creative process suggested by the mini-workshops. An integral part of the workshop involves a creative process that allows participants to reassess community assets and resources. The students excelled at these exercises. For example, in an exercise that instructs students "to create opportunities out of problems", they demonstrated an ability to change their preconceptions and to think creatively.

As a result of this workshop, students had an opportunity to reevaluate their assumptions and perception of the world as it had been passed on to them by their teachers and their society. for budding entrepreneurs and future bulwarks of the community, no tool could be more valuable.

As an unanticipated outcome of the workshops, the teachers changed their perceptions about their students. Earlier, the teachers at the school had been apologetic that the student groups composed solely of Turkmen students would by necessity participate, but would perform badly. They stated that these students were integrated into the school by decree of the government, but that they were "not as intelligent" as the other groups. Typically, classes included Turkmen, Russians and other non-Turkmen minorities, but the classes are always conducted in Russian.

The Turkmen student groups were naturally included in the "community-building" workshop. The performance of the Turkmen

students not only met the IRI facilitator's expectations, but exceeded them. According to Mr. Bercuvitz, the Turkmen students were impressively creative, even more so than those of the other groups.

IRI had encountered such prejudice among teachers in Uzbekistan as well. As in Turkmenistan, it was often the indigenous group of students that shone in these workshops. In its work at these schools in Central Asia, IRI hopes to continue to break down the walls between ethnic groups.

4. Graduates of the "Training of Trainers"
In Tashkent, Jeff Bercuvitz conducted "community-building" workshops for adults on behalf of IRI. Participants included graduates of "Training of Trainers" workshops and their colleagues and friends, to whom the graduates had spoken enthusiastically about IRI workshops.

Participants of the "Training of Trainers" workshop were primed to work intensively with Mr. Bercuvitz. Many had projects and ideas that they brought to the table. Mr. Bercuvitz emphasized the affective qualities that lead to success in carrying out a project.

Exercises stressed that negatives can be turned into positives, obstacles can be reformulated as opportunities, and weaknesses can sometimes be seen as assets. In addition, Mr. Bercuvitz paid particular attention to specific project proposals, offering tools for their execution and evaluation. The group continued to preserve its cohesion. It worked in pairs, in small clusters, and as well as together as a group to analyze, critique, and support sample projects.

The participants did not wait to start their work. One woman immediately began to knock on doors in her neighborhood and to organize a unique neighborhood action group. Others rejuvenated groups that had been moribund and initiated new projects for them to take on.

5. Pioneer Leaders
An introductory workshop for Pioneer leaders was organized at the suggestion of a teacher from School #17. It was conducted for 12 young women who work with students in Tashkent schools and organize extra-curricular activities.

Even though these young women seemed to be on their guard about the IRI workshop and its implications for democratic change, they were also excited to be given serious attention and have an opportunity to talk about their work. However, the workshop was monitored by a supervisor who insisted on interrupting the students and monopolized the discussions.

One problem was that these students had not gone through the

process which allows them to concentrate on community-building techniques. They were distracted by the invasive tactics of their supervisor. This experience shows that participants are more prepared to absorb the community-building programs when they have participated first in the other workshops.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, IRI projects have brought about two main constructive developments. First, a cohesive group of citizens has been formed by the participants of the "Training of Trainers" workshop. Secondly, community projects are proliferating. These are community projects that involve more people and that promise to expand exponentially.

D. Mock Election

1. Overview

In November IRI ran a mock election for High School #17 in Tashkent The endeavor's success can be measured in terms of the support this activity received from the school, the performance of the students, and the practical results of the election.

The idea for holding an election for the student body of School #17 originated with the IRI Women's Conference in Novgorod in June 1993. Upon their return from the conference, the Tashkent participants were motivated to share their experiences with others. One woman, Elena Galant, happened to be a teacher at School #17.

As the organizer of a student leadership group, Elena Galant has been almost single-handedly filling the void left by the communist pioneer organization. In her opinion, young people today lack direction and leadership opportunities because of paucity of organizations that serve this purpose. Determinedly, Elena Galant had worked with promising youth from her school to teach them responsibility and to cultivate their leadership skills. Ms. Galant had been skeptical when IRI conducted its first leadership and democracy workshop almost a year ago. She had kept a cool distance from the workshop, and only joined in at its conclusion. It was the enthusiasm and change of attitudes among the students that convinced her that IRI accelerated her ambitions. In fact, she began to articulate her goals in terms of "democracy", since it supported her belief that young people need to develop self-sufficiency, independent thinking, and social responsibility.

IRI has held five workshops at School #17 and Elena Galant's leadership group expanded. The group has metamorphosed into a non-governmental youth organization within the school which calls itself the Boys and Girls Union. After Ms. Galant's return from Novgorod, she had a new goal in mind. She wanted to organize an election for the president of this club as IRI had done at the conference. This

activity would educate the students on the elements of a free and fair election and it would give the club greater visibility in the school.

2. The Mock Election Exercise

From November 19-21st, IRI conducted the mock presidential election for School #17 with the full trappings of a democratic election. IRI trainers Blair Thomas, David Nummy and Clair Sechler, experienced in this process from previous Republican campaigns, devoted their energy and enthusiasm to this exciting opportunity to teach young people in Uzbekistan about democracy.

The training began in the week prior to the electoral campaign, when the IRI team met and worked with the presidential candidates, the election commission, journalists, and other interest groups. IRI trainers acted as "campaign managers" for the candidates and worked on speeches, platform development, and strategies. The Americans tutored the election commission, other interest groups, and journalists on their roles.

The campaign and election took place at Camp Semurg, a former Pioneer camp, in the foothills of the Aktash Mountains near Tashkent. One hundred and twenty students took part, ranging from 13 to 18 years old. Ten teachers from the school supervised the participants. The students were attentive to the campaign speeches, the debates, and the press conference, since the platforms addressed real issues such as corporal punishment of students and the representation of students' interests in the school.

In addition to the above activities, IRI trainers conducted workshops on the American political process and government, free and fair elections, conflict-resolution, and public speaking. As students rotated through these seminars, the electoral candidates campaigned during the breaks, during meals, and in the dormitories before bedtime. Not a single student was left out of the process.

3. Results

The election and the campaign period represented a unique opportunity for the participants. They learned about the importance of a free press by listening to the sharp and pointed questions of the journalists. The electorate quizzed the candidates themselves on the implications of their platforms. Students learned about the mechanics of elections, experienced a run-off campaign, and dealt with the bitterness of defeat. As the young voters cast their secret ballot, their proud and happy faces attested to the feeling of power that this act of participation gave them. This is a feeling they will not soon forget.

As everyone knows, after the election, the real work begins. At School #17, the new president has formed a cabinet of ministers. The main actors of the campaign met with the school principal and

teachers to explain the election at Camp Semurg and to propose a course of action for the new student representatives. Since then, there have been many positive developments. The new student president chose to appoint the losing candidates to her cabinet of ministers and to incorporate their ideas into her proposed program. The students have taken positive steps to solidify their legitimacy with the school administration. The challenge of the future lies in the continued ability of the Boys and Girls Union to offer leadership in real terms.

For IRI, this series of events led to a remarkable development. Earlier in this report, participants of the IRI training program in October were described as psychologists and teachers deeply concerned with the responsibility of the education system to assist in the transition to democracy. The same participants of these workshops now saw an opportunity at School #17 and work with the young leaders of the Boys and Girls Union. For them, the developments at School #17 represent a new beginning and a sign of hope. They want to help the students establish leadership roles and have the opportunity to practice this leadership and to exercise the responsibility bestowed upon them by the student body.

E. Conclusion

In Central Asia, particularly in the countries that remain authoritarian, there are few official means to promote democracy. The current leaders had gained their positions in the earlier communist era and now use the former structures to maintain control and power.

As the economies of these countries worsen and the governments resort to crisis management, the people grow increasingly impatient. In the period of Soviet rule people expected the government to plan their lives from cradle to grave. Although there are those who regret the passing of this era, there are others who welcome the opportunity to do things for themselves. In Tashkent, in particular, IRI has begun to help people take action, and infect others with enthusiasm for activism.

IRI's work in Central Asia is about people and their desire to take part in the construction of a safe and prosperous future. It is about those who value the spirit of democracy and who are willing to work toward a future of hope and opportunity for themselves and for the generations to follow.