

PRIME MINISTER'S INTERVIEW

WITH

PETER RUFF, BBC RADIO

BRITISH EMBASSY, MOSCOW: 14 FEBRUARY

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INTERVIEWER: PRIME MINISTER, DID YOU RECEIVE WHAT YOU WOULD DESCRIBE AS A POSITIVE REACTION FROM THE NEW SOVIET LEADER?

MRS. THATCHER: YES, I THINK SO, WE WERE VERY COURTEOUSLY RECEIVED, I THINK THEY WERE PLEASED THAT WE HAD COME FOR THIS OCCASION OF THE FUNERAL OF MR. ANDROPOV AND THE TALKS WERE CONDUCTED IN A SPIRIT OF CO-OPERATION.

INTERVIEWER: WHEN I MEAN 'POSITIVE' I'M REALLY LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: DID YOU GET THE IMPRESSION THAT HE TOO IS LOOKING TO A NEW ERA, A CHANGE OF EMPHASIS BETWEEN EAST AND WEST?

MRS. THATCHER: I THINK THAT WE'RE ALL REALISING THAT THE STATE OF WEAPONRY THAT WE HAVE NOW IS VERY HIGH, THE PEOPLE ARE DISQUIETED ABOUT IT AND THAT WE WANT TO KEEP OUR SECURITY, KEEP OUR OWN FERVENT BELIEF IN OUR OWN POLITICAL SYSTEMS, AT A LOWER LEVEL OF ARMAMENTS AND WEAPONRY AND THE QUESTION IS HOW TO ACHIEVE THAT. THERE REALLY ARE THREE WAYS - YOU CAN DO IT BY THE SEVERAL DISARMAMENT TALKS, BUT SOMETIMES, AS YOU KNOW, THOSE GET A BIT TECHNICAL, AND THEN YOU CAN DO IT BY ACHIEVING A BETTER UNDERSTANDING ON A MUCH WIDER FRONT BETWEEN THE LEADERS OF THE SEVERAL COUNTRIES AND, THIRDLY, YOU CAN DO IT BY TRADING RELATIONS AND BETTER BILATERAL RELATIONS BUT YOU'RE MUCH MORE LIKELY TO GET SOMEWHERE ON THE DISARMAMENT TALKS IF YOU HAVE THE WIDER UNDERSTANDING AND THAT REALLY I THINK IS WHAT WE'RE WORKING FOR NOW.

INTERVIEWER: DID YOU PRESS HIM THEN ON THIS BUSINESS OF THE DISCUSSIONS AT THE MOMENT BEING TOO NARROW AND THAT THEY SHOULD BE WIDENED TO TAKE IN OTHER ISSUES?

MRS. THATCHER: DID ONE PRESS? ONE PUT ONE'S VIEW, LOOK, IT'S BEEN A VERY EMOTIONALLY EXHAUSTING DAY FOR THE SOVIET UNION AND A VERY PHYSICALLY TIRING DAY FOR SOME OF THE LEADERS. THEY'VE HAD THIS GREAT FUNERAL CEREMONY AND THE NEW GENERAL SECRETARY IS SEEING A NUMBER OF PEOPLE. WHAT ONE WORKS THEREFORE FOR AGAINST THAT BACKGROUND IS THE BASIS FOR CREATING A BETTER UNDERSTANDING AND I THINK IT WAS ACCEPTED IN THAT SPIRIT, YOU CAN'T GET INTO DETAIL, BUT YOU PUT WITH ALL THE SINCERITY AND CONVICTION AT YOUR COMMAND, THAT ALTHOUGH WE ARE ON TWO DIFFERENT SIDES OF A POLITICAL DIVIDE, ALTHOUGH WE BELIEVE PASSIONATELY AND FERVENTLY IN OUR VIEW AND WILL DEFEND IT AND DEFEND IT IN ARGUMENT AND WILL DEFEND IT IF IT'S ATTACKED - AND THEY BELIEVE THEIRS - IT'S IN OUR COMMON INTEREST TO ENSURE PEACE WITH SECURITY AND IN OUR CASE PEACE WITH FREEDOM AND JUSTICE, FOR AS FAR AS WE CAN SEE, AND THE TIME IS SHORT AND WE MUST GET ON WITH IT.

INTERVIEWER: IT WILL HAVE COME AS NO SURPRISE TO YOU, I KNOW, THAT PEOPLE WILL SEE YOUR VERY PRESENCE HERE, THE WOMAN WHO THE SOVIET MEDIA DESCRIBED AS 'THE IRON LADY' TO BE HERE AT ALL MUST SIGNIFY SOME SORT OF CHANGE OF ATTITUDE ON YOUR PART.

MRS. THATCHER: I THINK IT SIGNIFIES WHAT WE'VE BEEN WORKING FOR FOR THE LAST FIVE OR SIX MONTHS, THAT WE REALISE THAT THE DISARMAMENT TALKS AREN'T GOING AS WELL AS WE WOULD WISH, AND THAT IF THEY ARE TO GO BETTER WE NEED A WIDER AND BETTER UNDERSTANDING. I HAVE BEEN SIGNALLING THAT IN MY SPEECHES FOR SOME TIME. OF COURSE IN MY JOB YOU DO NEED A TOUCH OF IRON BUT YOU DO NEED OTHER THINGS AS WELL.

INTERVIEWER: DO YOU DISMISS THE IRON LADY NICKNAME COMPLETELY....

MRS. THATCHER: NO, NO, NO, OF COURSE I DON'T.

INTERVIEWER: YOU ACCEPT IT ...

MRS. THATCHER: .. I ACCEPT IT

INTERVIEWER: ... IN THE WAY IT WAS MEANT?

MRS. THATCHER: I DO INDEED.

INTERVIEWER: DO YOU SEE ANY CHANCE AT ALL NOW THAT THE WORDS SEEM TO BE BECOMING LESS ABRASIVE, OF TURNING THE SITUATION INTO MORE POSITIVE ACTION AND I'M THINKING PARTICULARLY PERHAPS OF SUMMIT MEETINGS?

MRS. THATCHER: I THINK YOU'RE GOING TOO FAST IF YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT A SUMMIT BETWEEN PRESIDENT REAGAN AND MR. CHERNENKO. I THINK YOU'LL FIND WE HAVE TO GO STEP BY STEP, I THINK ONE OF THE PROBLEMS IS THAT WE'VE BEEN WORKING RATHER HARD FOR DISARMAMENT NEGOTIATIONS - WITHOUT GIVING ENOUGH ATTENTION TO THE WIDER UNDERSTANDING. NOW A WIDER UNDERSTANDING DOESN'T COME BY MAKING A GREAT LEAP TO THE TOP, IT COMES BY STEADILY BUILDING UP SOMETHING, BY LONG AND PATIENT TALKS, BY MANY PATIENT VISITS, BY UNDERSTANDING THE OTHER'S VIEWPOINT, NOT ANY ROSE TINTED SPECTACLES, NOTHING OF THAT, BY UNDERSTANDING BUT THEN SAYING - ALL RIGHT, WE HAVE OUR VIEW, IN WHICH WE FERVENTLY BELIEVE. THEY HAVE THEIR VIEW, IN WHICH THEY FERVENTLY BELIEVE. IT'S IN THE INTERESTS OF THE PEOPLES ON BOTH SIDES OF THE POLITICAL DIVIDE TO LIVE IN PEACE AND SECURITY. LET'S START ON THAT BASIS AND TRY TO BUILD UP.

INTERVIEWER: YOU TALKED TO ME TONIGHT IN MOSCOW, NOT MANY PEOPLE I THINK BELIEVED THAT THEY WOULD SEE YOU HERE SO SOON, CIRCUMSTANCES HAVE MADE IT THUS, HAVE YOU CHANGED YOUR VIEW OVER THE LAST 24 HOURS IN ANY WAY THAN WHAT IT WAS BEFORE?

MRS. THATCHER: NO, I HAVE BEEN TALKING FOR FOUR OR FIVE MONTHS ABOUT THE NEED TO BUILD A WIDER UNDERSTANDING, WE STARTED WITH THE VISIT TO HUNGARY, THIS UNEXPECTED EVENT HAPPENED AND I DECIDED TO COME HERE. I'M VERY PLEASED I DID, WE WERE VERY COURTEOUSLY RECEIVED AND I VERY MUCH VALUED THE OPPORTUNITY OF HALF AN HOUR'S TALK WITH MR. CHERNENKO THIS EVENING, AND I BELIEVE THAT THAT IS THE FIRST STEP AND I BELIEVE THAT IT WILL BE A LITTLE BIT EASIER TO GO FORWARD FROM THERE, THAT IS ALL. BUT IT IS SOMETHING.

INTERVIEWER: PRIME MINISTER, THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

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