

Prime Minister



9th March 1984

## Conversations with the Russians

The following note comes to you from the Soviet Group of the Centre for Policy Studies (Professor Hugh Seton-Watson, Dr. George Urban, Dr. Dominic Lieven, Dr. Anthony Polonsky, Dr. Iain Elliot and Lord Thomas.)

We congratulate you on your firmness during the months of continued agitation against the bringing into place of the Cruise Missiles. The establishment of these missiles and the Pershings in Germany have begun to restore the Western position in Europe. It has shown the Soviet leaders that European public opinion can stand behind decisions taken by its elected leaders in consultation with their American allies.

This strengthening of Britain's international position follows the psychological recovery in the nation on which you have embarked at home.

Given the continuance of public concern over nuclear weapons, and the obvious catastrophe which would ensue were those weapons to be used, we recognise that there are many advantages in your being seen to talk to the new Russian leaders. There may also be future benefit in exposing as much as possible of the Politburo, most of whose members have very little experience of the outside world, to direct contacts with tough-minded and realistic Western leaders. We do not, however, expect the replacement of Andropov by Chernenko to lead to major changes in Soviet foreign policy. Nor do we want either Moscow or European opinion to believe that British policy towards the USSR is deviating from the calm realism of the last five years.

\* In our opinion any meeting with the new Russian leaders would best be in the West or in a neutral country rather than in Moscow. Western visitors to the USSR have in the past been easily presented on Soviet media as suplicants. Meetings have gone wrong at the last minute and have placed visitors in an undignified position (e.g. Mr. Macmillan's visit in 1959).

Western leaders should still not feel inhibited (even if they talk to Russians) about continuing to criticise the Soviet ideology. Western Statesmen are only respected in the Soviet Union if they do not let their ideological guard down. Our Soviet interlocutors will not do so. They will continue to attack us, revile us and denounce capitalism and imperialism etc., whether they believe their own propaganda or not. It is worthwhile to remind Western public opinion of this fact, and of the bad influence of this one-sided propaganda as regards both Soviet public opinion and international peace and order.

Of course, agreement to have discussions with the Soviet Union should not necessitate criticism of the US nor of NATO. You will know from what has happened in the past that there is a danger that public opinion (on the continent as well as in Britain) will feel that your interest in such discussions means:-

- ~
- (a) that you have come to the conclusion that you were wrong to criticise the Soviet Union in the past; and
  - (b) that we want to distance ourselves from the US in matters of security.

This presumably will be borne in mind.

Hugh Thomas  
March 9 1984

Premie Minister

MF

You may like to know  
that Mr Malcolm  
Maclean's concerns  
with the general  
line of this paper  
& in particular the  
point asterisked \*

Hugh  
March 9.