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10 DOWNING STREET

Prime Minister

Roscoe Visit

I feel bound to draw to your attention the attached notes of:

- discussion of your visit by the Conservative Foreign Affairs Committee

- Alfred Sherman's views.

But there is nothing very new or edifying.

CDP 1/3



FROM: J HOUSTON

DATE: 4 March 1987

Secretary of State

CONSERVATIVE FOREIGN AFFAIRS BACKBENCH COMMITTEE MEETING:  
TUESDAY, 3 MARCH 1987

1. This was a good meeting with a lively discussion and, rather surprisingly, a fair degree of consensus. Sir Peter Blaker chaired, and over 20 MPs and Peers (including Prime Minister's PPS) attended. Peter Blaker opened by saying the purpose was to give the Committee an opportunity to send its views to the Prime Minister while the Moscow visit was still at the planning stage.

2. Rather than give a blow-by-blow account of the discussion, it may be useful to try to extract the points on which there appeared to be general agreement, as follows:

- the visit is of high political importance;
- the regard of Mr Gorbachev for the Prime Minister, her standing in the US, the current state of the US Presidency, and the particular juncture in East/West affairs, all combine to focus attention on and raise expectations about the visit;
- Mr Gorbachev's latest concessions put quite a new complexion on the visit, and make its handling much more difficult and politically dangerous;
- political/electoral build-up concerning the visit was unhelpful;
- the key issue was what role Britain could play on arms control;
- of the 3 main options (a messenger for Washington, an honest broker, or the spokesman for Europe), only the third was attractive;
- that preparing the ground with the Europeans would be a delicate but highly important exercise;

/- that we are

- that we are right to draw attention to conventional, chemical and SRINF imbalances, but if we press that too far or appear to insert new conditions, we lose out politically;
- if we could do anything to bring positions on SDI closer together it would be of crucial importance. SDI deployment was dangerous for Europe;
- that as far as internal Soviet changes are concerned we should strike a balance, including giving some credit and not pressing Mr Gorbachev too far into a position where he could not respond helpfully;
- that HMG should demonstrate more interest in trade opportunities.

3. I am fairly confident that the above was generally supported by the politically wide-ranging participants. Several of the points were repeated by successive speakers.

4. I hope this is helpful.



JOHN HOUSTON  
Special Adviser

CONSERVATIVE PARLIAMENTARY FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Report of a Meeting held on Tuesday, 3rd March, 1987  
to discuss the Prime Minister's forthcoming visit to  
the Soviet Union

The meeting was opened by Nicholas SOAMES, who drew attention to the severe Soviet economic difficulties exacerbated by their need to spend double the proportion of GDP on defence which the United States spend. Against this background, he was convinced that Gorbachev was trying to make profound and real changes from the centre, with "openness" and "restructuring" as genuine attempts at real reforms.

He believed that the Prime Minister's agenda should concentrate on four topics. First, on arms control, the UK Government should get down to serious and detailed negotiations on the Gorbachev initiative and its implications. Secondly, on trade, the UK should develop the opportunities here more forcefully and deliberately. Thirdly, the scope for a Middle East peace settlement should be the major plank in our foreign policy discussions with the Soviet Government. Finally, on human rights, the Prime Minister should give the Soviet Union credit for having made some real improvements, but there was much more to be gained. It would be best to pursue this by private rather than public pressures.

Ray WHITNEY expressed some misgivings about the prospects for arms control. As a result of SDI, in which Britain had no role, we could no longer act as broker between the two giants. We had therefore to look rather warily at the INF negotiations between the US and the USSR, welcome though the Gorbachev initiative was, because Europe would be profoundly affected but might have little say in the outcome.

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Peter TEMPLE-MORRIS echoed what Ray Whitney had said, and underlined the real advantage to the Soviet Union of a nuclear-free Europe. He believed that the UK might have a positive role in helping with the development of the ABM Treaty.

Julian AMERY thought that the Prime Minister must link any progress on arms control with progress in solving some of the regional problems, where the Soviet Union had exerted pressure and made advances, eg Afghanistan. He again echoed the misgivings of earlier contributors about the uneasiness which might be caused by a nuclear-free Europe. Was it conceivable that the US would defend Europe by missiles launched from the American continent? If not, there would be growing pressure, eg in Germany for further European independent nuclear deterrents.

Nigel FORMAN was opposed to any linkage being insisted upon between the elimination of INF weapons, and the shorter range tactical weapons. He thought that the public reaction to trying to make any strings attached to progress on INF would be one of hostility. He thought that the missiles to be eliminated under the INF agreement should be not just removed, but destroyed.

Jim LESTER emphasised how much the Soviet Union had already moved on eg human rights, Afghanistan, the Middle East and on trade matters. He believed that the principle of adequate mutual defence as opposed to inescapable mutual destruction should be pursued, with a reasonable balance as a goal.

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David HEATHCOAT-AMORY believed that the deployment of SDI weapons or technology by either the US or the USSR, or both, would be against Europe's best interests.

David CROUCH referred to the Soviet Union's current economic difficulties, particularly in agriculture. He believed that Britain had a positive role in offering to help improve Soviet agricultural productivity, and Michael Jopling's recent Moscow visit was a move in the right direction. On human rights, he thought that we should recognise the noticeable progress recently made, and should be careful not to box in Gorbachev by excessive public pressures.

Geoffrey JOHNSON-SMITH thought that, whilst the Prime Minister should talk positively and constructively about Gorbachev's INF initiative, she should link progress here firmly to reductions in Soviet conventional capacity. He thought too that the Prime Minister should speak for Europe when she went to Moscow, and should not aim simply to "bring home the bacon" for an improved Conservative electoral prospect.

MICHAEL ALISON

6.3.87

MR. POWELL

I imagine that the Prime Minister will have a superabundance of background briefing for her Moscow visit. I attach a contribution from Alfred Sherman, and leave it to your discretion as to whether or not you put it in her weekend box.

I know that she attaches quite high value to the Thoughts of Sir Alfred.

MA

MICHAEL ALISON

5.3.87



From: Sir Alfred Sherman

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WITH COMPLIMENTS

Dear Michael, 20/2/87  
I hope these few brief  
noticings will be of help. Thanks for  
your attention,  
Alfred.



Thoughts on Gorbachev.

London. February, 1987.

False Dawns.

When you study the history of Western views on the Soviet Union, you will see an infinite succession of false dawns. Everyone was always prophesying a turn for the better, from Lenin's NEP, to Stalin, to the new constitution in 1936, to Khrushchev, Brezhnev, etc., etc. Remember how good that monster Stalin was at taking in Western bien pensants!

25 years have passed since I contributed a chapter to a study on "The Soviet Union in Western Eyes" which listed folly on folly by so many people, not all of them Socialists by any means. My main conclusion was that the phenomenon owed more to the soft-centred Western establishment's compulsive propensity for self-deception than to Soviet propaganda skills. (You are welcome to a copy to read in the plane.) Nothing has happened since then to change my view or invalidate the material, but much has confirmed them.

Epictetus's Dictum: "No man wishes to sin."

The Greek philosopher Epictetus argued that no one wishes to sin, but really meaning that no one would sin if he could achieve his ends without sinning. Gorbachev would doubtless like to abolish poverty, bribery and corruption, drunkenness, death camps, mass persecution, repression and many other ugly features of the Soviet system. So would all his predecessors since Stalin - who was a criminal psychopath. But they had no means of doing so, since all these features are systemic. A propos, successive Soviet governments have denounced corruption and punished proteges of the outgoing clique and small fry for that sin.

The question is whether Soviet society is amenable to reform. (One could ask the same question of Moslem society. History is littered with the dry bones of social orders, societies, cultures and civilisations which were unable to reform, and hence suffered stagnation and disruption.)

I should not hazard an answer to that question off the cuff. I can only say on the basis of my study of Yugoslav and Chinese experience that the vested power-structure is such that the apparat is always strong enough to resist reform. Stalin and Tito had enough power to murder and destroy wholesale, but not to reform. A machine which is set to do one thing is not necessarily adaptable to doing its opposite.

### The Reformer's Dilemma.

Any reformer-from-above of the Soviet system finds himself in basically the same predicament as any would-be reformer of an overgrown socialist or statist regime, only more so. He (or she) generally has to take away privilege expressed in power and material benefits from some well before he is able to give it back to others. He also has to tell how bad it really is without being able to compensate for the shock by promising any quick improvement. The response tends to be: "We already have more than enough problems, we don't need any more; we need solutions." To escape from the horns of this dilemma would require one or more of several possible preconditions.

First, that the leader is of such compelling personality and record of achievement that people of all classes will follow him through fire and water. A few leaders like Ataturk achieved this. But G., who rose to the succession through a well-established ladder is not in this category. That the ruling class is sufficiently far-sighted to realise that renunciation of some privileges now is the best safeguard for the future. I do not see signs of this among them so far, but of course, I am not as close to them as to the Yugoslavs, where stasis has supervened. A second possibility is that the masses grow so threatening that the ruling class decides tht reforms are a better bet than increased repression.

### Declining Faith in Communism leaves a vacuum.

In one sense, the decline of belief in Communism in the Soviet Union cuts both ways: it could as easily make his task harder as easier. When Titq stood up to Stalin and destroyed a considerable portion of his party at all levels in the process - many were killed, many shipped off to camps under unspeakable conditions - he relied on the fact that those Communists who stood by him really believed in communist ideas lock, stock and barrell, no less than in his infallibility in applying them, just as Luther's support for his reformation was based on devout Christian believers who believed implicitly in what was to be reformed. But in the Soviet Union, fewer and fewer people actually believe in Marx-Leninism. The Party, KGB and Government are simply the basis for social status. It does not matter what people believe, so long as they conform. But conform to what? So long as Gorbachev seems to be firmly in the saddle, he has the conformist vote. But if he appears to be taking on the establishment and in danger of overthrow for that reason - as Krushchev was in 1964 - his power to reform is correspondingly less, and he must use commensurately more of what power he has in order to buy support, leaving him less to use in bringing about change.

The only state organisation which shows evident faith in

its role is the armed forces. So far, they have remained on the fringe of politics. Their main interest lies in a high share of national resources, freedom from KGB interference - as they suffered under Stalin - and an expansionary foreign policy. This does not make them a force for reform. Of course, in theory they should want economic reform because that would increase their resource-base; but there is no sign that their thinking has gone in this direction.

G. has not given any sign of how he intends to reduce the Party's monopoly of decision-making or the state's monopoly in economic life. "Glasnost" is just a drop in the ocean. People wish to be allowed to be frank for themselves and to act on their views. Until he shows that the system is capable of reform, there is not much point in speculating. But certain considerations are worth indicating.

G.'s inbuilt ignorance of his own society.

G. knows much less about the USSR than you know about Britain. In the USSR the natural human tendency to cover up in all branches of life, economic, educational, military, is not counteracted as it is here by the effects of the market. In addition, statisticians are under an obligation to "partinost" (partyiness) in their statistics; "objectivism", i.e. truthfulness, is actively discouraged. This tendency to abuse statistics for propaganda purposes is compounded by the inadequacy of their economic theory which gives no effective basis for measurement. (I have misgivings enough about our own Keynesian system of "National Accounts", but their system or non-system is worse still.)

Descriptive sociology (which would entail analysis of social strata) polling, measurement of opportunity and achievement between classes and regions is still taboo. The free discussion which is an essential element in understanding society is still outlawed. Even comparisons with Yugoslavia are strongly in the USSR's disfavour.

It is human nature to tell a leader what he wants to hear. In the Soviet Union, penalties for truthfulness and rewards for sycophancy are commensurately greater. So everyone waits for the next man to stick his neck out first. I know how they feel; some of them who feel the need to get it off their chest - will be franker with me than they would dare be with each other. ("Se io credesse che mi risposta fosse a persona che mai tornasse al mondo ...." - I quote from memory.)

As a result of all this, the picture available in the centre is wholly inadequate.

For all I know, G may already have worked out a strategy

for change and be keeping it very secret. You will be better placed than I am to find out. I can only say that if I were asked to advise him on the "what" and the "how" I should not know where to start, whereas I could advise the British Prime Minister without difficulty about where to go from here, what to do next and how to do it.

Any questions? - about G., I mean.

End.