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cc: Soviet Union - leadership  
: Master Set  
Soviet Union



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

13 August 1979

Sir Curtis Keeble's Call on the Prime Minister on  
Friday 10 August 1979

As you know, Sir Curtis Keeble called on the Prime Minister on 10 August at 1230 for a short discussion before returning to Moscow at the end of his mid-tour leave.

The following is a summary of the main points which arose.

The Prime Minister asked Sir Curtis whether this year's bad harvest in the Soviet Union would increase the likelihood of an adventurous turn in Soviet foreign policy. Sir Curtis thought it unlikely that the harvest would in itself produce this result; it would, however, add still further to the load on the US/Soviet relationship. A study was in hand of the feasibility of turning the Soviet Union's agricultural shortcomings to the political advantage of the West. When the Prime Minister asked Sir Curtis how fundamental were the Soviet Union's other internal problems, such as those arising from the high birth rate of the country's Asian population, Sir Curtis Keeble said that cynicism about the leadership and its policies was widespread in Soviet society, in which the more intelligent elements fully recognised the shortcomings of the system; but that the deep patriotism of all Russians counter-balanced these feelings and prevented them from becoming socially damaging.

The Prime Minister asked whether anything could be done to aid Professor Orlov and others like him who were suffering for their attempts to monitor the Helsinki Agreement. Sir Curtis said that it was open to the UK to make direct representations to the Soviet authorities when there was a clear British connection with the case in question; and that it was also worth reminding the Russians that Helsinki gave the British Government certain standing even in cases without a UK link. In general, however, Sir Curtis thought that representations in this field should be tough but sparing; and that they were best made at the political level. It had to be borne in mind that dissidents were generally unpopular with the Soviet population as a whole who, encouraged by the regime, tended to regard dissident activity as treasonous.

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In a discussion of Brezhnev's health, Sir Curtis Keeble agreed with the Prime Minister that to some extent his physical infirmity increased the average Russian's admiration for him. Sir Curtis thought that Brezhnev's immediate successor was more likely to come from the elderly second rank of the leadership rather than from among the younger men lower down; he did not exclude the possibility that Kosygin, who was at present in exceptionally good form, might take over if Brezhnev retired or died.

Sir Curtis-Keeble gave the Prime Minister an account of some of the built in defects of the Soviet planning mechanism and of current developments in Soviet nuclear research. The Prime Minister expressed interest in the UK/Soviet Energy Symposium which is to take place in Moscow and which Sir Hermann Bondi has helped to organise.

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