

From: Sir C Tickell

Date: 7 March 1989

ccs: PS
 PS/Mr Waldegrave
 PS/Lord Glenarthur
 PS/Mr Patten
 PS/PUS
 Sir J Fretwell
 Mr Bayne
 Mr Beetham, MAED
 Mr Hemens, Soviet Dept
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ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES: SOVIET VIEWS

1. I gave Mr Ivanov (Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs) lunch today. He came with a message from his Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Petrovsky, in response to some environmental points I had raised with my Soviet colleague in New York.

Ozone Layer Conference

2. Mr Ivanov said that he had been sent to London as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs representative - and minder - of Mr Zakhovov, the Head of the Soviet Delegation to the Oxone Conference and the Deputy Chairman of the State Committee for Hydrometeorology and Control of the Environment. Mr Zakhovov was, he said, a technician rather than a politician and occasionally allowed his own views to override his instructions. In his speech to the London Conference, Mr Zakhovov had been too negative. We should know that Mr Zakhovov and he had sent a telegram to Moscow last night recommending a more positive - and openly positive - Soviet attitude towards the early elimination of chlorofluoro-carbons. Mr Ivanov added that a lot was already being done in Soviet industry to reduce the use of CFCs, and he had little doubt that allowing for the present "internal turmoil" in the Soviet Union, the Government would come along with other industrial countries. He added that we would understand that anything which made consumer items more scarce or more expensive could gravely embarrass the Government, the more so as a "range of price increases" was already on its way.

/The Hague

The Hague

3. Mr Ivanov said that the Russians had been kept well informed about preparations for The Hague Conference from the beginning. One of their friends had passed on the papers. Last autumn the French Prime Minister had briefed the Soviet Ambassador in Paris. In response the Soviet Government had clearly expressed its misgivings. The Russians had no concerns about a fresh cry of alarm about the state of the environment, nor about the need for appropriate global institutions; but it objected to the way in which the French, limply followed by the Dutch and Norwegians, had set about preparing for the Conference, including the curious guest-list. On substance, the Russians had grave doubts about the wisdom of calling for a new institution which would have qualified voting, would be able to impose sanctions on offenders and would call for compensation for victims. Although the Russians had queried all these points, they had had no coherent answer to them from the French.

4. Mr Ivanov said that the Russians had also had approaches from the Dutch and the Norwegians. In particular the Dutch were visibly embarrassed by the course events have taken. In reply to my question, Mr Ivanov said that at no time had his Government received an invitation to attend. I said that at the last moment the hosts had asked one or two other Governments to attend, including the United States, but no-one wanted to come as an afterthought. Indeed many of those invited had substantial doubts of the same kind as the Soviet and British Governments about the proposed Declaration.

5. Mr Ivanov said that his Government would be very glad to hear about the Prime Minister's firm stand today at her press conference. It would make things easier for the Soviet Government and perhaps other Governments as well. Whatever happened at The Hague, he understood that the French would pursue their ideas at the UN General Assembly. Indeed he expected President Mitterrand to raise them with Mr Gorbachev when he visited Paris in May.

The Environment

6. Mr Ivanov said that the Russians were anxious to have higher level international treatment of environmental issues generally. They had had a thorough look at UNEP, and Mr Petrovsky had visited the UNEP headquarters in Nairobi. Their conclusion was that, although UNEP could be made to function more efficiently and could have its mandate extended here and there, it would not be equal to the demands which the Soviet Government foresaw should be made of it. Like the Prime Minister, Mr Gorbachev wanted to build on existing institutions. But no-one knew exactly how to do it. The Russians had considered but now discarded the idea of converting the existing virtually moribund Trusteeship Council

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into a Trusteeship Council for the Environment. They were now wondering whether some sort of Council, with the same membership as the Security Council, might be devised to co-ordinate UN activities across the whole environmental field.

7. I said that we would certainly think about this idea, but I had my doubts if it was really workable. Such a Council would inevitably be something new, and the problems of representation on it would be horrendous. We had already had comparable problems in - unsuccessfully - trying to reform ECOSOC. Moreover, the creation of such a Council, if it were different from the Security Council, might lead to unwelcome attempts to change the composition of the Security Council itself. Mr Ivanov replied that he well saw the difficulties. We then discussed whether some means might be found by which the existing Security Council might discuss environmental issues in addition to its existing mandate. Mr Ivanov pointed out that "the maintenance of international peace and security" begged the question of what "security" really meant. Could not "security" be liberally interpreted? I said we would have to look at the Charter. In the meantime I warned him against trying to involve ECOSOC, which had a residual environmental aspect, as one of the most hopeless of the UN bodies.

8. Mr Ivanov said that his Ministry would like to discuss this range of issues with us in much more detail. It was very important that we should exchange ideas and stick together. 1989 would be the formative year so far as environmental matters were concerned. He added that he thought that Mr Gorbachev would certainly wish to raise environmental matters when he visited Britain next month. Apart from the general institutional problem, he would probably raise two other points: first, his idea of creating a UN Environmental Disaster Group, which would have the responsibility of helping to manage both long and short term disasters (an idea mentioned in Mr Gorbachev's December speech to the General Assembly); and secondly his idea of holding a preliminary summit meeting of selected Heads of Government to prepare for the 1992 World Conference on the Environment.

Conclusion

9. Mr Ivanov said that his Government had given high priority to environmental matters, but its thinking in almost all areas was still at a formative stage. In some respects we had the most to contribute. Although the new US Administration was full of good ideas and good intentions (Mr Reilly in particular made an excellent impression), its views were likewise relatively unformed. For that reason it was most important that we should take maximum advantage of the next few months to respond to widespread public pressure for action on the environment, and together work out more clearly which was the right way to go.

PP 50.
Sir C Tickell