



Members' Brief

Hi-AJ eds
No. 3
23rd February 1984

EAST-WEST RELATIONS

The Prime Minister visited Moscow on 13th and 14th February 1984 to attend the funeral of President Andropov and had talks with the new Soviet leader Mr. Constantine Chernenko. At the beginning of the month she paid an official visit to Hungary. These talks were the latest steps in moves by the Government to lay the foundations for an improvement in relations between East and West. In a statement in Moscow on 14th February, the Prime Minister explained the background to the current contacts:

'It was plain to me and the Foreign Secretary last summer that the time had come for a serious review of relations with the East. The build-up of arms - the increasing number of SS20s - and the West's need to respond with Cruise and Pershing had created disquiet. The various arms control negotiations were getting nowhere and contacts between East and West were so limited that the risk of misunderstanding was grave'.

Mrs. Thatcher emphasised that the Government's policy does not in any way mean a weakening in its commitment to the defence of the Western way of life. She said that:

'I believe as strongly as ever in basic Western freedoms - and I make it plain to all in the East privately and publicly that I will defend them anywhere any time'.

The Soviet Record. 1983 was a particularly bad year for East-West relations. The Russians did not negotiate seriously in the various disarmament negotiations and in November unjustifiably walked out of the Geneva talks on Intermediate Nuclear Forces. They maintained their oppression in Afghanistan, where over 100,000 Soviet troops still fight to prop up the puppet Karmal regime in the face of fierce popular resistance. They continued to ensure that all vestiges of freedom in Poland were crushed. The international situation became particularly strained in the days following 31st August, when the Soviet Air Force shot down a civilian South Korean airliner, which had strayed into Soviet airspace killing all 269 passengers and crew.

The Madrid Agreement. A modest step towards better East-West relations came on 9th September 1983, with the formal signing by 35 foreign ministers of a document concluding the Madrid review meeting on the implementation of the Helsinki Agreement. The participants undertook once more to implement its provisions, which have all too often been flouted by the Soviet Union and its allies, particularly in the field of human rights and contacts. For example, Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union fell from 51,000 in 1979 to 2,600 in 1982 and declined still further in 1983. As the Foreign Secretary, Sir Geoffrey Howe, commented in his speech at Madrid on 7th September:

'Liberty does not consist in mere general declarations of the rights of men. It consists in the translation of these declarations into definite actions'.

The Stockholm Conference. Various further meetings were arranged for the next few years at the end of the Madrid Conference. The most important of these opened at Stockholm on 16th January 1984. This is now considering military confidence and security building measures, such as observation and inspection of military activities, prior notification of manoeuvres and steps designed to reduce the risk of surprise attack. Although the Conference is concentrating on such specific and detailed questions, its opening provided an opportunity for fresh attempts to improve East-West relations on a wider front. This was particularly important in view of the recent suspension of both the Strategic Arms talks (START) and the Intermediate Nuclear Force talks (INF) at Geneva as well as the Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction talks (MBFR) at Vienna.

In his speech to the conference on 20th January 1984, Sir Geoffrey Howe said that
'The dialogue between East and West must be widened and given more substance.
We all exist in one world. We have to live together for good or ill, and, to
achieve that, we need to know and understand each other better. The British
Government, for its part, will do all it can to that end'.

The Deployment of Cruise Missiles. The Soviet Union alleges that a prime reason for
the poor state of East-West relations is the first deployment of Cruise and Pershing
missiles in Western Europe in accordance with NATO policy, including the first 16 Cruise
missiles at Greenham Common. It cannot be repeated too often that this deployment is a
response to the massive Soviet deployment of SS20 missiles. 378 of these missiles, each
with three warheads, of which two-thirds are aimed at Western Europe, have been deployed
since 1977. It is vital that the Soviet Union soon returns to the various arms control
talks and negotiates seriously on multilateral and balanced disarmament. As the Prime
Minister said in Budapest on 3rd February:

'This is no time for empty chairs in Geneva. This is the time to talk. The time
to negotiate. The time to succeed'.

Political Will and Mutual Respect. Mrs Thatcher went on to outline how disarmament
negotiations should be handled:

'We shall need political will as well as mutual respect. Political will - because
arms control agreements do not make themselves. Mutual respect - for it is useless
to suppose that East or West will agree to dismantle weapons unless at every stage
we are left with a balance which preserves our security'.

'We must both be ready to adopt practicable measures. We must both be ready to have
them verified. We must each recognise the other's need for security. If all accept
this approach, there could be fewer nuclear weapons, fewer conventional weapons,
and for a start perhaps chemical weapons could be abolished altogether, as Britain
has already done'.

The Contrast with Labour. The contrast between Mrs. Thatcher's and Mr. Kinnock's
activities last week could hardly be more marked. While the Prime Minister was engaged
in realistic moves to improve East-West relations, the Labour leader was
visiting Washington explaining to baffled listeners his support for total, one-sided
nuclear disarmament for Britain and the unconditional removal of all American nuclear
bases from Britain.

- * He had an undignified row with the United States Secretary of State, Mr. Shultz,
who told him that his one-sided views on Central America were misinformed and
misguided. He later remarked somewhat obscurely that Mr. Shultz had 'got out of
his pram'.
- * He preposterously compared his performance in Washington with that of the skaters
Torvill and Dean.
- * Last year, when asked whether he considered the Soviet Union a greater threat to
world peace than the United States or Britain, he replied: 'there is an almost
miserable equality of threat' (Times, 29th August 1983).

Steady Progress. The Prime Minister has emphasised that it would be unrealistic to
imagine that there will be a rapid breakthrough in East-West negotiations. As she said
in Moscow:

'It will be at best a long slow task ... But I am absolutely sure that all Western
leaders are prepared to work for this goal. I am not looking for instant and
ephemeral success but steady and sustainable progress'.