

PRIME MINISTER

SEMINAR ON THE SOVIET UNION

The Seminar is next Friday at Chequers. It will follow the normal format. A session with academic participants from 1000-1300, continuing over lunch: a meeting with officials to discuss the policy implications in the afternoon: I attach a list of participants.

You will find in the folder some background papers and a note on Professor Bialer's book (which I will leave in the flat).

You need to reach a judgement on how far Gorbachev really intends to change the Soviet system and what his prospects of doing so successfully are. A great deal else depends on that judgement, including how you handle your talks with him and how we present your visit. The Seminar is intended therefore to focus on this aspect, and the academic participants are in the main experts on the internal affairs of the Soviet Union.

I suggest that you cut out introductory statements by the participants, and work instead through a list of questions. The main ones (which do not match exactly with the agenda circulated in advance) are:

1. Change in the Soviet Union

- has the existing system reached a point of crisis where change is unavoidable? Or can it muddle on almost indefinitely?

- Is Gorbachev simply trying to galvanise people to make the existing system work better? Or does he want real changes to the system?

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- Is it just a question of change being imposed from above? Or is there genuine popular demand for it?
- Is one motive for change a deliberate attempt to present a more favourable picture of the Soviet Union abroad, in the hope of weakening Western resolve? Or is it driven entirely by internal considerations?
- How real is economic reform so far? How far is it likely to go? As far as some Eastern European countries? To the extent of allowing a role for market forces? At what point does economic reform threaten the system of Communist Party control?
- Can economic reform which does not fundamentally change the system actually produce worthwhile results?
- Can there be significant economic reform without political change? How significant are glasnost and the introduction of 'elections'? Will the latter be as devoid of significance in practice as they are in Eastern Europe?
- How significant is the change of policy on emigration and the treatment of dissidents?
- What is the risk/likelihood that political and economic change will awaken forces that the leadership will be unable to control? How far can the leadership go before that becomes a real risk?

2. Opposition to Change

- where does the opposition to change come from (given that Gorbachev seems to have stacked the leadership with his own supporters)? Is it principally sullen resistance and passivity? Or is there real argument/struggle going on within the Communist Party?

- What evidence is there that Gorbachev is in practice being held back from going as far and as fast as he wants? Or is the talk of opposition largely tactical?
- Is it conceivable that opposition to change will put Gorbachev's own position at risk?

3. External Aspects

- will change extend to the Soviet Union's external policies? Will it be just a change of style, or also of substance?
- Will proselytising and the triumph of Communism world-wide remain Soviet goals? Or will attention be switched exclusively to strengthening the home base? Will the Soviet Union be ready to pay with concessions for a quiet life?
- Is internal change likely to make the Soviet Union more or less aggressive and expansionist in its external policies?
- Will a relatively more 'liberal' Soviet regime continue to need the notion of the West as a threat to legitimise its rule?
- How vulnerable are Gorbachev's domestic aims to external pressures? Can his hopes for the Soviet economy be derailed by the threat of a further spiral in the arms race? Will defence spending continue to enjoy absolute priority?
- How far can change in the Soviet Union be influenced, if at all, by Western policies? Are pressures from outside more likely to inhibit further change than to accelerate it?

4. The West's Interests

- how far does 'liberalisation' in the Soviet Union make it more difficult for Western governments to maintain support in their own countries for strong defence policies?

- Do we have a greater interest in seeing reform in the Soviet Union succeed or in seeing it fail? Is a more liberal Soviet Union likely to be a more satisfied power which is easier to deal with?

- What should the public response of the West be? Will welcoming and encouraging change make Gorbachev more reasonable to deal with? Will failure to give credit for change discourage him, and make him more likely to pursue harsher policies towards the West?

- Will public expressions of support by Western governments for Gorbachev's efforts at internal reform 'disarm' our own public opinion, thus making it more difficult to sustain support at home for nuclear weapons and defence spending?

5. Implications for your Visit

- what will be Gorbachev's main interest in your visit? What will he hope to achieve from it?

- Will he be interested in you in your own right as Prime Minister of the UK? Or principally as a guide and mentor to what is happening in the US, and as an alternative channel of communication to the Americans?

- There is a risk on the one hand of seeming to perpetuate hidebound attitudes towards the Soviet Union; and on the other of encouraging unrealistic expectations in the UK about the nature and extent of the changes which are taking place. Which is the greater risk?

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- What message should you try to convey to the Soviet people, e.g. through television?

- How can you most effectively influence the Soviet leadership at this juncture? By welcome for what they are doing? Or by scepticism about how genuine it yet is and pressure for more?

- Is this the moment to emphasise firmness particularly on issues such as SDI? Or to suggest willingness to be flexible, if they are prepared to reciprocate?

CHARLES POWELL

20 February 1987

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Participants

A. Academic

Professor Ronald Amann (Head of the Centre of Russian and East European Studies at Birmingham University)

Dr. Archie Brown (Fellow of St. Antony's College, Oxford)

Mr. C. N. Donnelly (Head of the Department of Soviet Studies at Sandhurst)

Dr. Peter Frank (Reader in Soviet Studies at the University of Essex)

Professor Sir Michael Howard (Regius Professor of Modern History)

Lord Thomas of Swynnerton

Professor Seweryn Bialer (Professor of Political Science at Columbia University)

Mr. Robert Conquest

B. Official

Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary

Sir Percy Cradock

Sir Bryan Cartledge

Mr. David Ratford (Under Secretary in the FCO; formerly Minister in Moscow)

Mr. Martin Nicholson (has succeeded Malcolm Mackintosh as Soviet expert in the Cabinet Office).

File

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PRIME MINISTER

**FRIDAY 27 FEBRUARY:
ALL DAY SEMINAR AT CHEQUERS**

Your last engagement on Thursday
26 February is an informal talk
with Brian Walden and Bernard
at 1800-1900. Would you like
to go down to Chequers after
that? The seminar the following
day starts at 1000.

MRS. TESSA GAISMAN

18 February 1987