

PRIME MINISTER

MEETING WITH ROBERT CONQUEST

You are seeing Robert Conquest tomorrow afternoon. I have placed in the folder the two papers on the Soviet Union which he recently sent you.

You will want to get Robert's assessment of developments in the Soviet Union since your visit. Has his scepticism about change, very evident at your seminar, increased? Does he detect serious opposition to Gorbachev?

You will want to reassure him about your welcome and encouragement for Gorbachev's reforms. This is not starry-eyed. It is based on a belief that anything which enlarges human liberty and choice, and which however imperfectly promotes initiative and enterprise should be welcomed. You are under no illusion that Gorbachev plans to slacken Communist Party control. The interesting question is: can you contain or reverse change once it starts?

The main theme at the session of the IDU Conference which you will attend in Berlin is East/West relations. You will be expected to intervene. You might invite Robert to contribute some thoughts or alternatively comment on the first draft of your speaking notes which I have prepared (copy in the folder). I have included some of his ideas.

CDP

CDP

8 September 1987

JALBMG



10 DOWNING STREET

Prime Minister

You will want to see Robert Conquest's

latest piece.

He is of course right to sound a strong note of caution.

But his analytical framework is a very rigid one; he does not for instance allow any importance to the pressure

which may come
from the Russian
people for more,

once they start to
take the benefits of

even limited liberalization

I think the situation

in the Soviet Union is

more complex & more

fluid than Robert's

note suggests. I

remain convinced that you

are right to encourage
what Gorbachev is doing.

CD 31/8

PRIME MINISTER

BA/ 1730 on 2/10/87

Mr. Conquest
informed.
C.D.P. 1/ix.

ROBERT CONQUEST

Robert Conquest will be over here between
7 - 10 September. I think you might well
find it worthwhile to have a brief word
with him.

Agree to find half-an-hour in the diary?

C.D.P.

If possible

(C. D. POWELL)

28 August 1987

copy

HOOVER INSTITUTION

ON WAR, REVOLUTION AND PEACE

Stanford, California 94305-2323



August
25 ~~September~~ 1987

Dear Prime Minister,

I am enclosing a piece on the principles and practice of Western-Soviet relations in the new period; together with a short note on Soviet social realities as compared with propaganda claims.

On another basic point: the rather neglected reason why it may be impossible radically to reform the Soviet economy under the present system is that they may in principle be able to bankrupt incompetent enterprises and secure the necessary exits from the economy, but there is no plausible way in which they can arrange the necessary entries -- of new, innovative small enterprises such as have been crucial to Western technological progress.

As I have written Charles Powell, I shall be in London for some days after September 6; and I would, of course, love to see you if you have a moment to spare.

with warmest wishes, as ever, from both of us to both of you,

Robert Conquest

Soviet Developments & the West

It may be helpful to look at the foreign policy problems presented us by the Gorbachev regime schematically. There are, in effect, four possible conditions of the future Soviet Union:

1. A weak and friendly Soviet Union
2. A weak and hostile Soviet Union
3. A strong and friendly Soviet Union
4. A strong and hostile Soviet Union

Only the fourth variant should worry us.

If the reconstruction of the Soviet Union is successful, the outcome will be either 3 or 4. But which?

Some commentators just assume that a strengthening of the Soviet economy is bound to lead to the abandonment of that hostility in principle to other political orders which has marked the USSR from its beginning. What is there to justify this assumption?

Those who cast a cool eye on Soviet developments are charged -- by Archie Brown, for instance -- of thinking that the Soviet system "cannot change". On the contrary, most serious observers of the Soviet regime have always maintained that (in Orwell's words) the USSR must

"either democratise or perish" -- or if not democratise, at least somehow evolve from being a closed society based on force, fraud, and dogma. And if we envisage an eventual Russia which has so changed, then it is obvious that, between the present Soviet Union and that later entity, there must be some form of transition.

No one sees as probable an imminent revolution putting into power anything resembling democracy. There is no plausible political movement, no political leadership, nor any serious possibility of one readily emerging -- in Russia proper at least. (As Alex Ginzburg, has said, almost none of the dissidents is capable of ruling the country). All political experience is within the present party and governmental machine. Mere administration could not be carried out without them. For the moment, then, it is the Party, and the Party leadership, which must be the agent of change.

Democracy as such is thus not the immediate issue. But it is true that the Soviet economy cannot be seriously reformed without the withdrawal of party and state from its total monopoly of economic and political power, to a minimum of something like a limited autocracy which is yet a Rechtstaat, with a largely market economy. And, whatever decentralisation of the state machinery may take place, so long as the Party itself remains centralised there will be a disciplined plenipotentiary representative of the centre in every level and locality.

It is equally true that there is no sign of accepting any restriction of party power in even the most reformist section of the leadership. Gorbachev, in his July 15 speech, said that the West was more frightened of Soviet 'democratisation' than of Soviet nuclear weapons. But if democratisation meant the beginnings of dismantling the despotic-socialist state and the totalitarian ideology, the West would of course be delighted. The West would only be 'frightened' if the intention of the Gorbachevite 'democratisation' were to strengthen the Communist order in its doctrinally mandated struggle against our own: and this is what he appears to mean.

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Thus, if the proposed or probable changes in the USSR were inevitably to lead in the long run to an open and unaggressive society, regardless of the present intentions of Gorbachev, we should welcome them unreservedly. But there is no such inevitability.

At present the more radical of the reformers, that is to say Gorbachev and his adherents, wish to modernise the economic system while retaining Leninist socialism, and the one party state. Formally speaking, this is impossible. Various adjustments between these contradictory aims can be made, but only up to a point.

Gorbachev wishes, in effect, to square the circle.

If the reform programme goes ahead (and is not, in practice at least, effectively shelved), then a contradiction faces the leadership. If they do not introduce a market economy, then the country will be ruined; if they do introduce such an economy, then the all-pervading power of the party will have to withdraw from a major social area, and cease to have total control. The trouble with planning and thinking in contradictory terms is that sooner or later the facts blow up in one's face. It is normal for such transitional rulers to find, when the crunch comes -- but not until then -- that they are pursuing incompatibles.

At that point Gorbachev, or some successor, must in practice (if not in theory) break out of the mould of Leninist doctrine: or fail in his economic aims.

If so faced with giving up Marxism-Leninism, the one-party state and the socialist state-controlled economy, or proceeding with real radical change, which would Gorbachev and the others chose?

Everything they say, and everything we know of them suggests that they would preserve the Communist order. Gorbachev himself has laid down that reform does not include political pluralism. Of course, it may be that the pressures of the continuing issues, becoming ever greater as such a choice approaches, would work in the by then split and confused minds of the leadership and bring them, half-concealing it even from themselves, to at least

the beginnings of a true evolution forward. More likely still, their successors, emerging in a shaken and disrupted apparatus, might grasp the nettle; or their successors.

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A further and highly refractory problem is that of nationalism in the peripheral republics and in Eastern Europe. Any 'opening' to hitherto heretical ideas must also open the issue of national rights, even of self-determination. Any genuine "democratisation" must liberate the powerful forces of nationality. In an important sense a 'liberal' (even a 'liberal communist') Soviet Union could not exist; for if 'liberal' it would no longer be a Soviet Union. The peripheral republics, and even their party leaders, have long tended to seek more autonomy than Moscow grants; and given the opportunity some at least of them would seek at lowest the level of independence of Mongolia or Poland.

It is an interesting slip of the tongue that in a speech last year Gorbachev twice referred to the USSR as 'Russia' -- and on Ukrainian soil at that.

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What then, in the international context, has the

current struggle for glasnost, 'openness', been about, and where is it leading?

There has been much frankness about present day social and economic horrors, with a view to their amendment. And we have seen the beginning of an attack on Stalinism, as economically and politically misconceived, and practically criminal.

Here the point at issue has been the extraordinary, demoralising falsehoods on which the regime has stood for fifty years. The traditionalists want them to be preserved, or at least only unsubstantially amended. The 'reformists' want:

- (a) to repudiate the faked trials of the 1930s
- (b) to condemn Stalin
- (c) to restore the rest of the revolution's leaders to the status of comrades, even if mistaken ones
- (d) to question the economic policies of the 1930s, including collectivisation -- not as such, but as to the Stalinist methods of its fulfilment.

By Soviet standards this is a huge clean-up; but it does not in any way question the Leninist one-party state. As Gorbachev has said, 'Glasnost should further socialism ... it is not intended to undermine socialism and our socialist values'.

Still, if they admit the awfulness of the Stalin regime, then they should admit that the West was right in defending itself against its expansion. At present, as in other spheres, they attempt to square the circle by the thesis that Stalinism was abominable, but that it was nevertheless socialism, and therefore empowered to assault and defeat 'imperialism' -- i.e. the West -- as far as it could.

This ties in with current foreign policy. Is 'Socialism', Soviet style, still essential for the world? Or is it to be admitted that other political social orders have a legitimate right to exist? And this is not to be solved by mere rhetoric about 'peaceful coexistence', which was equally spoken of by Stalin and Brezhnev and all earlier Soviet rulers. It must, if we are to have peace, be admitted in principle as well as tactically. So far, there has been no abatement of the claims of Moscow's socialism as the only legitimate model for the world.

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Of course, the reformists may simply be defeated, and the group which merely wants a sort of semi-streamlined Stalinism may succeed. And apart from that, Gorbachev himself may press change as far, and no further, than it begins to affect the Marxist state, and settle for a fully streamlined Stalinism. Indeed the USSR

may be entering a period of social and political instability, where all sorts of possibilities could emerge.

The economic reforms will cause intense social strains, both for the bureaucratic caste, and for the working class which now relies on heavy food and other subsidies. The potential for fresh developments is great. Yet politically the attraction of a Western-style evolution seems largely confined to the intelligentsia, while the forces of an archaic nationalism seem to have more profound roots, and more potential dynamism, with large sections of the Russian population. Even if a formal Communist facade is maintained, we may see a military-bureaucratic dictatorship, or a sort of Russian national fascism (the influence of the new rightwing crackpots is already astonishing: for example, they have been accused of 'taking over' Soviet institutions in Novosibirsk), or a combination of the two. A military-nationalist Russia (perhaps within the Soviet forms) would not be a comfortable associate in a world community. But it might at least have foreign policy aims which, unlike those of Marxism-Leninism, were at least not unlimited as a matter of principle.

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But if we assume that the 'reformers' triumph

completely, at what point might the social and political order be such that it does not regard Western democracy as its enemy and destined prey?

If the USSR does eventually take the steps necessary to bring it into the civilised world, then we must welcome it, and adjust our policies accordingly.

Meanwhile, we can pursue negotiations as we have in the past. And we can make the best of any Soviet retreat, even if considered in the Kremlin as a 'breathing space' and made with a view to advance later on. These were, or should have been, our policies with previous Soviet governments.

Another side of the West's role in the past continues to be important. The present revulsion of, probably, the majority of the educated class is the result of two things. First, the plain failure of the system. Second, the years of devoted work by a small number of dissidents who have placed the rest of the intelligentsia in an impossible intellectual position; but above all, the constant intrusions of real facts and knowledge over the foreign radios, including the BBC.

It has always been clear that for a genuine participation by Moscow in a cooperative world order the main condition we seek must be the abandonment of global and absolutist claims, and that this should be reflected, for a start, in the free movement of people and ideas.

Until Moscow takes such steps, we should not

prematurely accept, or encourage our public to accept, that it is no longer irremediately hostile.

This is not to be too schematic about the point at which we can assume genuine co-operation. Our attitude can change pasi passu with Soviet evolution, as and if it actually takes place; but our criteria must be based at every point on careful assessments of the reality. And we should encourage a reformist Soviet regime precisely to the degree that it fulfils those criteria.

Robert Conquest

It has been publicly stated in the Soviet press that the USSR ranks 35th in life expectancy;¹ (the average age of death of a Politburo member is 15 years higher than that of an average Soviet male). And when it comes to infant mortality, the Minister of Health himself rubbed it in that the country is, as he put it, 50th, "after Barbados and the United Arab Emirates".² In addition, there have been a number of Soviet articles describing incompetent, and insanitary -- even rat-ridden -- hospitals. And the proportion of Soviet national income spent for health is far lower than the British or American.

When it comes to unemployment, only local figures have been printed. But these are remarkable: a million unemployed in the Uzbek republic (population c.18.5 million);³ 250,000 in Azerbaidzhan (population c.6.7 million);⁴ one-fifth of the population in the 1.7 million inhabitant industrial city of Baku.⁵ There is, of course, no unemployment pay, except in special circumstances of re-apprenticeship.

Soviet leaders, including Gorbachev, still maintain to Westerners that though their economy is admittedly behind, their social services 'from cradle to

grave' are much superior to ours. (Indeed Gorbachev said this to a group of American visitors on August 6th). At the same time they often criticise our unemployment as something unheard of in the USSR.

They should not be allowed to get away with this.

1. Les Nouvelles de Moscou 1 March 1987.
2. Literaturnaya Gazeta no 18, 1987.
3. Pravda Vostoka 20 March 1987; Sel'skaya Zhizn 24 March 1987.
4. Sotsialisticheskaya Industriya 27 March 1987.
5. ibid.

Telephone. Office 415-723-1647 . Home 415-493-5152

HOOPER INSTITUTION
ON WAR, REVOLUTION AND PEACE

Stanford, California 94305-2323



25 August 1987

Dear Charles

I'm enclosing a letter to the Prime Minister , and a new, rather general, piece on Western Policy and the Soviet Future , (together with a short note on the contradiction between the Soviet line on socialist social superiority, as put even by Gorbachev, and a few of the facts.)

I'll be over for Dahrendorf's conference at Leeds Castle, and before going there will be in London from September 6 to the night of September 11. If the Prime Minister would like to see me, could you perhaps let my sister Charmian Hartley (352-2334: 45 Shawfield St, SW3) know ?

In any case, I will ring you. - I've lately had much and strange conversation with Soviet officials and others concerned with what's going on in Moscow , and it would be good to hear your views.

I expect to be over again in November.

Yours ever

Robert C

Robert Conquest

Charles Powell Esq.

* Stanford is a Mecca for these ...

6 - 11

NIT CF

HOOVER INSTITUTION

ON WAR, REVOLUTION AND PEACE

Stanford, California 94305-2323



19 June 1987

CBM 236

Dear Charles

I only got your kind letter of 12 May, asking me to look in for an account of the Russian trip, after I had got back here. As it was, I thought I wouldn't bother you during that superbusy period. (I did see John O'Sullivan; and we stayed over for the splendid result - and I did indeed have to translate Hat Trick for Americans and others.)

As to the Chequers meeting, it was, of course, only one or two of the Soviet experts I thought pretty mediocre, not the rest of those assembled...

John Fretwell is a splendid appointment.

We'll be over in September, and I do hope to see the Prime Minister, and yourself, then. Will give plenty of notice. -- By then things may have begun to happen in Moscow. It rather looks as though Gorbachev, to keep the political initiative, will have to make a big set-piece attack on Stalinism, comparable to the 1956 Secret Speech, and with unforeseeable consequences.

Yours ever
Robert

Robert Conquest



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10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

12 May 1987

Many thanks for your letter of 8 May enclosing one for the Prime Minister, together with a note on the present position in the Soviet Union. I have passed these on to her. As you can imagine, it is unlikely that she will be able to see you in late May since the Election Campaign will be in full swing. But if I can be of any help in giving you an account of the Moscow visit, do let me know.

C D POWELL

Mr. Robert Conquest

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'Rho' or similar, located in the bottom right corner of the page.

HOOVER INSTITUTION

ON WAR, REVOLUTION AND PEACE

Stanford, California 94305-6010



8 May 1987

Dear Charles

I enclose a short letter to the Prime Minister. (Also a briefish note on the present position in the USSR, perhaps of some use). I expect you will be in mid election when I'm there - I'm trying to explain to Americans the headline they will, one hopes, find in London papers: HAT TRICK. None of them know it.

The Moscow visit was terrific !

you ever

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Robert Conquest". The signature is stylized and somewhat cursive.

Robert Conquest