

# HOOVER INSTITUTION

ON WAR, REVOLUTION AND PEACE

Stanford, California 94305-2323



20 March 1988

*Prime Minister*

*Dear Prime Minister,*

*CBN  
3/3*

your last speech on the subject admirably  
set out the main immediate issues of Soviet present-day armament,  
and the absence of any true guarantees of future Soviet conduct.

I am enclosing a note simply on the essentials  
of perestroika and of our attitudes to it. With luck, whatever  
the subjective intentions of the Soviet leadership, it may mark  
the beginning of the end of the totalitarian system -- though  
there is a long way to go yet.

Bukovsky, I was glad to see, agrees with me  
that perestroika must either fail or lead to an unravelling  
of party control, and that we should help by denying the Kremlin  
the option of maintaining the old system on Western subsidies.

*It was good to see you, however briefly.  
With warmest wishes  
as ever,*

*Robert*

Robert Conquest

### Perestroika & Western Policy

Our primary long-term interest is of course the emergence in the USSR of a system which no longer regards all other political (and general) views as totally hostile either internally or externally, the two being fundamentally linked; and the best criterion would be the withdrawal by the Communist Party from its claim to complete control over its own citizens and society, the beginnings of autonomous civic life and the free movement of people and ideas.

Within this general framework, what is the role of the planned economic perestroika in the USSR, and what should our attitude to it be?

In the present condition of the Soviet Union, the first steps can only be taken within the system -- indeed can only be enforced or sponsored from above. Democratisation, in any real sense, is not on today's agenda. But economic and social crisis has produced at least a marginal withdrawal of party omnipervasiveness, in both the economic and the intellectual spheres. These are inadequate from our point of view. They are also inadequate from the point of view of internal progress as envisaged by the leadership.

The intention of the Politburo is to use perestroika to strengthen but not change the system. In theory this could make the USSR more dangerous. But in practice perestroika, as at present envisaged, cannot succeed within that conception.



The programmes announced in January were at once criticised by several Soviet economists as not, in fact, doing anything adequate to produce the necessary mechanisms of the market economy. (A friend of mine, in Moscow the other day, was told by a Soviet economist that without the total restoration of capitalism the country would be ruined!) And in fact, basically, there is so far no provision whatever for genuine market criteria by which enterprises, however much theoretically 'reformed' in their accounting, can be judged.

The present leadership, including Gorbachev, so far shows no signs of wishing to go substantially further than current decrees and announced plans for the future, such as end of food subsidies. But while as now envisaged perestroika may make insubstantial improvements, it cannot succeed in its professed aims. When the initial plans fail to revive economy and society, the leaders will be in a position where they will have to go further or fail. They will have shaken the system to a point where further evolution becomes the only alternative to Stalinist, or militarist, counter-revolution.

A full neo-Stalinism, going far beyond the semi-Stalinism of the Brezhnev period, could indeed prove effective in the short run, by a totally coercive belt-tightening. As Khrushchev said, a far larger harvest became necessary after Stalin's death, because Stalin could make the country live on starvation rations and his successors couldn't. But it seems doubtful, whatever their attitudes, if there are now any potential leaders with the

nerve or willpower to try this. Half-measures won't work. And in the long run the country would only face its crisis of the system a little later and in worse condition.

So the probable eventual choice seems between not very slow decay and system-shaking reforms. Or perhaps, more accurately, between decay marked with partial, inadequate and sporadic ameliorative action, and a serious full scale attempt, even if partly misconceived, to face the true problem.

Thus, if neither standing pat nor perestroika within the system can succeed, the mere process of perestroika is nevertheless to be welcomed, as bound (if pursued) to lead to a systemic evolution unforeseen, and unwanted, by the Party leadership. This may, indeed, be a prolonged process -- and the situation in Yugoslavia and Hungary is instructive. But it is in our interests that the long-term changes take place without violent upsets, (or with as few of these as possible). We should therefore favour evolution, as far as we can; and this should be part of our general policy vis a vis the USSR. (Of course, it is perfectly possible that change will not be peaceable: that Russia and the Soviet nations will go through a convulsion or series of convulsions. Our policies would then depend on unpredictable circumstances, and require cool and careful assessment. But even then our long-term criteria need not change).

There may not in fact be a great deal we can do positively to encourage reforms. But the logic of the



situation is that at least we should do nothing to slow it up. It follows that we should not grant economic or other concessions which would make perestroika unnecessary (or make it appear unnecessary to the leadership). Any such advantages we can give should be strictly with the aim of forwarding reform and be tested by that criterion.

This does not in the least affect our immediate duty to be clear and firm about the military and armament situation. On the contrary, a favourable Soviet evolution can only be helped by denying Moscow the prospect of expansionism; and by standing firm on the issue of the free movement of ideas. (And one gets the impression that at least some of the Gorbachevites, whatever they say publicly, know this; though our analysis of internal probabilities is different from, and sounder than, what theirs can be).