



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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Tim Austin

6 June 1990

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Dear Charles,

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Support for Mr Gorbachev

With popularity, and potentially power, apparently ebbing from Mr Gorbachev we have started to consider whether our support in future might be directed more to the particular areas of Soviet reform favoured by the West, and less to Mr Gorbachev personally. The Foreign Secretary thought that you might like to see the enclosed, preliminary thinking by officials.

Yours ever,

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SUPPORTING SOVIET REFORM DOES NOT NECESSARILY MEAN
SUPPORTING GORBACHEV

Threats to Gorbachev's Leadership

1. The immediate problem is Yeltsin who is not however challenging for Gorbachev's position as Union President. His programme amounts to seizing for the republics virtually all powers except defence and foreign policy - and even then not all foreign policy would remain at Union level. He is however not yet Executive President of Russia. He had to forge a kind of coalition to be elected Chairman of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet. He will have to do the same to get his policies adopted, or to be elected Executive President. So far brave and challenging words are very much in Yeltsin's style. But he knows that he cannot ride completely roughshod over Gorbachev, or more importantly over the Soviet constitution. But equally he knows that he is the man with the public support and Gorbachev is not. Both are looking for a modus vivendi.

2. The right wing are not capable of making an effective constitutional challenge at present. They could, if the present decline towards chaos accelerated which would also increase the possibility of an unconstitutional move. The right are unlikely to stage an effective come-back at the Party Congress in July. The expected split in the Party then will face Gorbachev with a further dilemma of which faction he should associate himself with.

3. The other radical reformers do not have their political or economic platforms together enough to amount to an effective challenge. The two main leaders emerging at the moment are Popov, Mayor of Moscow, and Sobchak (whom the Secretary of State met over lunch in Leningrad), now Mayor of Leningrad. Neither yet have a national following but they or others yet to emerge could well do by the 1995

elections.

4. Gorbachev's constitutional position is strong. Until the 1995 elections he can only be removed by the Congress of People's Deputies for unconstitutional activity. This would require a two-thirds vote.

5. But undoubtedly power is slipping away from Gorbachev:

- (a) he has no popular mandate and would probably not now get one;
- (b) he is still General Secretary of the increasingly split and discredited CPSU. He persists in calling himself a convinced Communist;
- (c) he is blamed for the current chaos and declining living standards;
- (d) he has pulled back from full-blooded market reform and is too associated with the latest "Ryzhkov" reforms to escape criticism when they collapse (several republics are refusing to implement the price rises which are an essential part of the reform).

6. Apart from being voted out, Gorbachev could fall in three ways:

- (a) he could resign if it became clear that he was unable to implement his policies. He has threatened to on a number of occasions;
- (b) he could call an early election and lose;
- (c) unconstitutionally.

Both (a) and (b) depend in large measure at the moment on how hard Yeltsin is prepared to push and on whether Gorbachev can use Ryzhkov as a scapegoat and move quickly to more radical reform. At best there will be a continued period of uncertainty with a real possibility of Ryzhkov's early replacement by a more radical alterantive, and with Yeltsin consolidating and (by his standards) biding his time. In the longer term the chances of Gorbachev winning the 1995 election are fading and the possibility of things coming to a head rather earlier than this must be mounting

in proportion as public perceptions of who has the answers shift from Gorbachev to the radicals and in particular Yeltsin.

7. We should therefore do well to distinguish more in our support for reform between its substance and Gorbachev's personal position. We do not want (yet) to be seen too publicly to be hedging our bets. The Embassy in Moscow has its lines out to the leading factions. The Prime Minister has seen Yeltsin and will be seeing Popov, and on the other hand the top Soviet military. The Foreign Secretary has met Sobchak. The main differentiation for the moment will be in forms of words:

(a) Whilst we can ascribe to Gorbachev the credit for changes so far we should avoid linking his name to the future without however too conspicuously "backing off".

(b) We could shift slightly the issues we address. Up to now we have tended to support "Mr Gorbachev's far-sighted reforms" and "perestroika". In point of fact perestroika as such is in effect dead as "restructuring" is no longer what is recognised as being necessary in the Soviet Union. What is needed is in practice demolition and a new start. Leading Soviet economists have been saying so for some time. We could therefore reasonably but gradually drop perestroika from our vocabulary of support and focus on the issues - the introduction of a full market economy and its benefits including the ways in which the West can cooperate with the Soviet Union if the move to the market is made - the workings of Parliamentary democracy and the rule of law, and again the West's possibilities of cooperation.

(c) We can perhaps be a little less influenced in future by our assessment of the effects on Gorbachev of particular lines of policy eg on Lithuania. We would need to strike a balance between appearing to take advantage of Gorbachev and/or Soviet weakness to fish in troubled waters, and very

proper Western interests. But we have been greatly inhibited up to now by concern not to rock Gorbachev. If we see Soviet public opinion moving away from him in directions more helpful to us in some regards we could take a more robust line.

(e) We can take a carefully balanced view of other potential leaders and their policies. We have been right to see Yeltsin, Sobchak and Popov at top level. We do not want to be sucked into internal rows between factions/republics about policy. But we should avoid too publicly being thought always to take Gorbachev's side.

Eg at the Prime Minister's Moscow press conference:

What do you think of Yeltsin/his policies?

- Not for me to discuss alternative policies for the development of Russia. I have long stressed our strong support for reform policies which will bring greater prosperity and happiness to all the people of the Soviet Union. For me, as you know, this means an open society and a free market. But the form which this takes in the Soviet Union is for its people to decide through the democratic process. We have Mr Gorbachev to thank for the fact that the peoples of the Soviet Union now for the first time have the possibility of deciding their own future.

If Yeltsin confronts Gorbachev it leads to chaos doesn't it?

- Again I do not want to be drawn into debating alternative roads for the Soviet Union. My understanding has been that there is a consensus in the Soviet Union in favour of reform towards an open democratic society and market economy. I happen to believe that this is the right road. It will take far longer to achieve than most people want. Consensus is hard to hold together when the going gets tough. But the goal is worth the effort.