

Soviet Union



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

9 August 1979

Dear Bryan,

Call on the Prime Minister by HM Ambassador,
Moscow

Sir Curtis Keeble is due to call on the Prime Minister at 12.30 pm on 10 August.

Sir Curtis Keeble has been Ambassador in Moscow since April 1978. He had previously been Deputy Under-Secretary in the FCO with responsibility for the administration of the Diplomatic Service and, before that, the first British Ambassador in East Berlin. Sir Curtis's earlier postings included Washington, Berne and Canberra.

/ I enclose some short notes on the present situation in the Soviet Union.

Yours etc

P Lever

B G Cartledge Esq
10 Downing Street

9 11 12 1
8 7 6 5 4 3

- 9 AUG 1979

SOVIET LEADERSHIP

1. President Brezhnev (who is 72) may last one more winter, but not two. There is, however, no sign that his authority is under challenge. He has pursued cautious domestic policies throughout his 15 years in power and is closely identified with detente (as the Russians interpret it) in foreign policy. It is hard to know who will succeed him. A number of the older members of the Politburo, including Kirilenko and Kosygin are credible candidates to take over, at least for a short period. It is unlikely that there will be abrupt changes in Soviet domestic or foreign policy in the early stages of a new regime, particularly if the initial succession is of an interim nature. The new leader(s) will be faced with the same constraints in Soviet policy arising particularly from internal conditions (para 2 below). But the average age of the Politburo is now 68 and younger men will come to prominence in the next decade. If they have little experience of foreign affairs, Soviet foreign policy could become more unpredictable and uncertain and this could carry danger.

SOVIET ECONOMY

2. The Soviet economy is faced with many serious problems.

In particular:

- (a) chronic difficulties persist in agriculture. There is likely to be another poor harvest this year and it is estimated that the Russians will have to purchase about 30 million tons of grain, mainly from the US, Canada and Australia;

/(b)

- (b) some major targets of the present 5-year plan (1976-1980) will not be realised. Problems of poor labour productivity and low quality of production persist. The Central Committee of the Communist Party and the Council of Ministers adopted a decree at the end of last month on ways of improving economic planning with a view to solving these problems. However, none of the ideas put forward are new and the decree does not seem likely to herald radical economic reform. The decentralisation which would be a necessary component of major changes has always been rejected in the past, apparently for political reasons;
- (c) it is generally agreed that the rate of increase in Soviet oil production will slow in the early 1980s. This will mean either that the Russians are unable to meet the energy demands of Eastern European countries, or that they will be unable to export much oil to the West for hard currency, or both;
- (d) the nationalities problem. The birth rate among non-Russian peoples of Soviet Central Asia has for many years far exceeded that in European Russia. The problems which changing demographic patterns will pose for centralised control from Moscow are potentially great.

/DISSIDENCE



- 3 -

DISSIDENCE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

3. There is no sign of any fundamental relaxation in Soviet policies on human rights matters, although there is some evidence of a (possibly temporary) relaxation in some areas for tactical reasons. For example, Jewish emigration has been running this year at the record level of about 4000 successful applications a month. This can probably be explained by a Soviet desire for ratification of the SALT II agreement and for a favourable international climate in which the 1980 Olympic Games can be held. Human rights movements in the Soviet Union were savagely repressed last year but dissidence is reappearing in new contexts (eg among workers). There is however no evidence that dissent poses any real threat to the Soviet regime.

8 August 1979

Eastern European and Soviet Department
Foreign and Commonwealth Office



BFR. 3. A

~~Secret Union~~

10 DOWNING STREET

Byan, ~~Requested for~~
9 August

Any briefing for this?

Andy.

1

PRIME MINISTER

HM AMBASSADOR IN MOSCOW

Our Ambassador in Moscow, Sir Curtis Keeble, is shortly coming home on mid-tour leave and would be very grateful if you could agree to see him briefly for a short talk on the present situation in the Soviet Union. Sir Curtis is an acute observer and I think you would find half-an-hour with him useful.

May I arrange a call at a convenient time?

Yes

Yes

18 July 1979

Miss Stephens
CP. 23/7

*1230
10 July Aug*

1230, 10 August. (I have told him)
18 Jul 1979