Minutes of a meeting of the Russia Committee regarding the Soviet situation in Germany, dated 21 July 1948

RUSSIA COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday, 21 July 1948

[…]

MR.ROBERTS[[1]](#footnote-1) described the discussions regarding Germany. The new Three Power draft note to the Soviet Government suggesting the holding of talks not merely on Germany but on all European problems was designed not only to meet the present Berlin situation but also to recapture the peace initiative. Mr. Roberts explained that the representatives of the Western Powers at The Hague had shown themselves critical of American uncertainty and had been relieved to find that the Secretary of State had a definite policy which they all approved. With regard to a suggestion made by the American Ambassador in London that the note should be presented to Stalin by the senior Ambassador at Moscow, SIR MAURICE PETERSON stated that this would merely give the Russians an opportunity to distort the approach as they had in the recent conversation a few months ago between General Bedell-Smith[[2]](#footnote-2) and Mr. Molotov.

SIR MAURICE PETERSON also said that in his opinion we should not localise the Berlin issue but should find other ways to take action against the Soviet Union. He suggested the following:

(i) To break off the trade negotiations. The fact that they were being held at a time when we were having diplomatic interchanges with the Soviet Government weakened our case.

(i) MR. MAKINS[[3]](#footnote-3) pointed out that to do this would, in fact, only be a gesture since trade negotiations had not in fact begun in earnest. We and the Americans should make a separate peace with Japan, providing for continued occupation by the American forces.

iii) More visits by warships to Baltic ports and the Black Sea.

(iv) Closing the Kiel Canal to Russian shipping.

(v) A blockade on Russia Pacific ports.

(vi) We should seek to make use of Marshal Tito by pressing the Italians to make an agreement over Trieste compensating them if necessary in Tripolitania.

(vii) Secure the departure of France and the entry of Spain into the United Nations.

(viii) Take such economic sanctions as were open to us. In this connexion MR. JEBB said that at The Hague M. Bidault had mentioned an approach by the French Ambassador in Washington to the State Department on the same question. The State Department official had apparently given as his opinion that the Americans could not do much beyond refusing to load or unload Russian ships in American ports and asking H.M.G. not to sell rubber to the Soviet Union.

(ix) To refuse transit visas to all unofficial Soviet or Cominform travellers.

MR. ROBERTS pointed out that if we could get on without the benefits we derive from Russia, the Russians could do likewise. Economic sanctions could hardly therefore be a decisive weapon. At the present time we had some indications that the Russians were anxious that the present situation should be reduced. One object of any approach to the Soviet Government would therefore be to widen the horizon of negotiations. If the Russians did not react as we expected or their reply was unsatisfactory, the position would change and we might have to consider further action. MR. MAYHEW said that it was useful to calculate the points where we could bring pressure and that there might well be a case for using them later on.

The meeting discussed and approved a draft summary of indications of Soviet Foreign Policy No. 10 subject to certain amendments. In the course of discussion reference was made to reports from Czechoslovakia suggesting that the Russians were either preparing for war or to invade the country. MR. HANKEY[[4]](#footnote-4) pointed out that we had received reports of this kind intermittently from all the Orbit countries during the last two years, and suggested it was very largely a matter of war of nerves either on the local or international plane. The Russians were, we know, using the situation in Czechoslovakia to frighten the French, whom they believed to be the weak link in Western Union.

MR. HAYTER[[5]](#footnote-5) said that there were still no signs of preparation for war within the Soviet Union itself, though the J.I.C. were now to review the situation weekly. SIR MAURICE PETERSON said that as far as the Embassy could ascertain, no air raid precautions were being taken in Moscow.

[TNA, FO 371/71687]

Keywords: post-war Germany, great power relations, post-war USSR

1. Roberts, Sir Frank K. (1907 - 1988) - British diplomat. Head of the Central Department, Foreign Office (1942 - 1945), Minister at the British Embassy in Moscow (1945 - 1947), Principal Private Secretary to the Foreign Secretary (1948 - 1949), Deputy High Commissioner to India (1949 - 1951), Deputy Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs - Political (1951 - 1954), Ambassador to Yugoslavia (1954 - 1957). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Bedell-Smith, Walter (1895 - 1961) - US General and diplomat. US Ambassador to USSR (1946 - 1948), Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (1950 - 1953). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Makins, Sir Roger M., 1st Lord Sherfield (1904 - 1996) - British diplomat. Assistant Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs - Economic and Commercial (1947 - 1948), Deputy Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs - Economic (1948 - 1952), Ambassador USA (1953 - 1956). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Hankey, Robert, 2nd Lord Hankey (1905 - 1996) - British diplomat. Counselor at the British Embassy in Warsaw (1945 - 1946), Head of Northern Department, Foreign Office (1946 - 1949), Minister at the British Embassy in Madrid (1949 - 1951), Minister at the British Embassy in Budapest (1951 - 1953), Ambassador to Sweden (1954 - 1960). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Hayter, William (1906 - 1995) - British Diplomat. Assistant Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs - Defence and Intelligence (1948-1949); Minister at the British Embassy in Paris (1949-1953); Ambassador to USSR (1953-1957). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)