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Prime Minister
(see para 3)
Mr. W. Watt
Mr. Sharkey
Mr. Callaghan
Mr. Mervin
19/6/80
18/6/80

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OUR TELEGRAM NO 9 SAVING: PREPARATION FOR THE OLYMPICS

1. As the opening day nears, the Soviet press has been devoting more and more space to articles about the Olympics, all telling the same story of successful preparations in Moscow and the world's athletes readying themselves for the contests ahead. Public mention of the boycott has virtually dropped from view, and efforts are being made to foster the impression that the Olympics will be both a triumph of Soviet organisation and an unsurpassed festival of sporting achievements, an occasion in which every Russian can take full pride. In a clearly emotive appeal to Soviet patriotism, cinema newsreels have shown members of the Soviet Olympic team taking their oath in the Volgograd (ex Stalingrad) War Memorial Complex.
2. Many of the physical preparations now seem to be complete, and Moscow town centre is in good shape. The new (and architecturally impressive) international airport, Sheremetievo-2, is also finished, although a West German maintenance team remains on site to put right problems that may arise, and the airport is presently working well below capacity, with only a few airlines having transferred from the old airport. There have been long delays to the processing of incoming flights on occasion, with both immigration and customs officials taking their time to examine passengers and bags, supplementing the new X-ray equipment with extensive physical examination of luggage. Most of the Olympic sites are now claimed to be ready, and although there is evidence that several are in fact running

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slightly behind schedule, "Shock work" will doubtless ensure that they are operational by the appointed day. Essentially, therefore, it now only remains to tidy up. Pravda of 7 June noted that the workers of many areas had declared June a month of campaign for preparing amenities, and Saturday 28 June a town-wide "subbotnik" - a day of unpaid 'voluntary' work, which will presumably be devoted largely to clearing up, cleaning, touching up paint, planting flowers etc. Other workers, including academics have already been drafted in to work on last minute cleaning and polishing. This should ensure that everything is neat and tidy well before the main groups of tourists arrive.

3. The round-up of dissidents is also continuing: another member of the Helsinki Monitoring Group, Yuri Yarym Agaev, was detained in Moscow two weeks ago and ordered to emigrate by the opening of the Olympics. The trial of another Group member, Viktor Nekipelov, opened on 11 June. Only six members of the Moscow Helsinki Monitoring Group now remain at liberty: they are understandably demoralized and expecting arrest at any time, although, given the arbitrariness of Soviet actions in this field, it is hard to predict what will happen. The same aim of 'shielding' foreign visitors from any unfavourable impression of Soviet society continues to affect other fields as well: the long-awaited stockpiled goods have yet to appear but out-of-town visitors are now refused entry to Moscow and buses have been commandeered to take many of the children out in convoys.

4. It is increasingly obvious these preparations are being made for the sake of what may be a disappointingly small number of foreign visitors. The Italian Travel Agency which secured the Olympic concession is for example being told by the Soviet authorities it must purchase the tickets for 15,000 people it originally contracted to buy

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(54,000 tickets in total) though as a concession the Agency has been told it need pay for the tours only of the 5,600 Italians actually coming. Canadian visitors are now expected to total only 300, as opposed to 6,000, and British tourists seem likely to number only around 2,000. There are even rumours that some East Europeans are staying away because Intourist is driving too hard a bargain and although some Russians claim that increased interest from Latin America and India will make up some of the shortfall it is evident enough the Games will not bring in anything like the hard currency income the Soviet Union expected.

5. The Soviet authorities will clearly continue to do all they can to present the Games in the most glowing colours possible, and to obscure the degree of dissension they have aroused. The organisers have made it clear they will fly the flags of countries whose National Olympic Committees will be sending teams, whatever the position of the Governments of those countries, and have even suggested they may fly the flags of all members of the International Olympic Committee, including the Stars and Stripes. It must in any case be doubtful whether the ordinary Soviet citizen will draw clear conclusions from the official positions of countries whose Governments have urged a boycott, but are represented by teams sent by National Committees, whose athletes they will therefore tend to regard as composing national teams in the full sense. The picture has meanwhile been further blurred by what appear to be officially encouraged stories that major boycotting nations like Japan may after all send teams.

6. The Russians are experts at making illusion appear real, as Potemkin proved with the fake villages he showed to Catherine the Great, and the Soviet authorities showed more recently during President Nixon's visit. They may well enjoy a considerable degree of success in persuading their

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own public that the Games are well up to standard and foreign visitors that the Soviet Union is a clean and orderly, well provided for, society. But the Soviet public remain well aware of widespread opposition to the Olympics, the shortfall in foreign visitors cannot be totally ignored, and there will be a marked decline in coverage by foreign media. The Olympics will not be the triumph the Soviet authorities planned.

Keeble

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