Margaret Thatcher's memoir Return to Moscow

Written 16 March 1985

This memoir came to light in the Thatcher MSS only after MT had finished writing *The Downing Street Years*. MT seems not to have annotated or added to it at any point after composition, suggesting she may not even have re-read it.

Chernenko's funeral took place on Wednesday 13 March 1985. The memoir was written at Chequers that Saturday, 16 March. MT spent the day there alone, apart from an appointment with her dressmaker.

Christopher Collins

Margaret Thatcher Foundation 4 June 2015



THE PRIME MINISTER

16 th March 1985

Return to Mosion

On Honday's early normyo rews - 3BC. I heard that military news is steing broadcast in Hosses and that the previous rights broadcasting had closed down without fiving delaits of proparues for the following eday. Normand - We had had military number before format the other thing. I few days previously theorements had been made to appear on teterision of characters to receive the pupile. In booked grashy - and event to receive the pupile. In booked grashy - his actions were mechanical and walthing, one fell that he was scaraby there.

De had not long to wait. I was chaving a meeting in the Tahuel room when at short Hain the Team through that The Chementer had died. Shortly alternated - that The Kontacher had been put in change of the fueral preparations. No to feemed that he had been provided teacher for following The.

Return to Moscow

On Monday's early morning news – B.B.C. I heard that military music was being broadcast in Moscow and that the previous night's broadcasting had closed down without giving details of programmes for the following day. Most unusual – we had had military music before, but not the other thing. A few days previously Mr Chernenko had been made to appear on television at some event to 'reassure' the people. He looked ghastly – his actions were mechanical and watching, one felt that he was scarcely there.

We had not long to wait. I was chairing a meeting in the Cabinet room when at about 11 a.m. the news came through that Mr. Chernenko had died. Shortly afterwards – that Mr. Gorbachev had been put in charge of the funeral preparations. So it seemed that he had been appointed leader for following Mr.



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Anchopori, cleate The Cheverles had similarly been in charge of his freed. Before the day was out The his appointment as feculiary heread was continued and the friend friend for Wednesday.

Very soon telephone calls were coming in for Opposition parties to say they would like to one on the plane.

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Andropov's death Mr. Chernenko had similarly been in charge of the funeral. Before the day was out Mr. G's appointment as Secretary-General was confirmed and the funeral fixed for Wednesday.

Very soon telephone calls were coming in from Opposition parties to say they would like to come on the plane.

We decided that we could just complete
Questions on Tuesday afternoon and still get to
Moscow in respectable time. I took 'Questions'
in a very busy business like fashion giving short
replies – indeed we got through a record number
of supplementaries, 18 in 15 minutes. We made a
dash for Wellington barracks where a helicopter was
waiting to take us to Heathrow. The Russian Ambassador
was there to see us off. We greeted the
New Zealand High Commissioner who was coming with us



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On the plane I read and and seed

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gained at they us the pressons hearter, that wen't
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to because a rigid Comment system was the only
one he had are known:

De landed in Mossow at 10.30pm, and were met by a deputy foreign minister, a talling of cameros and a flust of cans. They jour me a very large one and as the Montamador climbed in bridgement I signedled to him willing my hand in the Thir. Was the Can bluty to be "bryged". He woulded and the Conversation proceeded carefully!

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to represent his Government in Moscow.

On the plane I read and analysed Mr. Gorbachev's Acceptance speech [no deviation from settled policies but more init initiative needed – their fundamental dilemma!] – and also a speech he had recently made at Kiev. All confirmed the impression gained at Chequers the previous December, that even if he wished to change matters he wouldn't know how to because a rigid Communist system was the only one he had ever known.

We landed in Moscow at 10.30pm, and were met by a deputy foreign minister, a battery of cameras and a fleet of cars. They gave me a very large one and as the Ambassador climbed in beside me I signalled to him circling my hand in the air, was the car likely to be 'bugged'. He nodded and the conversation proceeded carefully!



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It is a long journey with Thosas along a bey strylis road. There was still a lot of snow and it had for very duly. There were not many lyter in the shops as we went down Gonlin street. Interfer there will that number of shops were though it is He man shapping certie. We all pound into the residence where miaculomy the staff ever atthat shorthohu had everything proposed. With sevelains and records we were coule a wood. Monaprenion Occasion I had latur over maises of fresh regulates and find and Dyboh cheese became that is what they branked most.

The residence is alid perfectly - opposite the Member, on the other side of the noise. It is a major house to built by a suy a bourse sho married with the austriney and built a suitable house for such a built. The story for that the austrice and the pretured: "Something and their or shed him what style he pretured: "Something

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It is a long journey into Moscow along a very straight road. There was still a lot of snow and it had got very dirty. There were not many lights in the shops as we went down Gorki street [sic], but then there aren't that number of shops even though it is the main shopping centre. We all poured into the residence where miraculously the staff even at that short notice had everything prepared. With secretaries and security we were quite a crowd. As on a previous occasion I had taken over masses of fresh vegetables and fruit and English cheese because that is what they wanted most.

The residence is cited [sic] perfectly – opposite the Kremlin, on the other side of the river. It is a magnificent house, built by a sugar baron who married into the aristocracy and built a suitable house for such a bride. The story goes that the architect asked him what style he preferred: "Something



Of everything came the way! And so some is Plenish nome German some French, some llatrai - but all lawith and large and syreth adlamarshys. The bedroom I have her as commons balkroom/ dreining noon all parelled heavily in doubt wood and Parhibred heavily into bethros area told- in a lage spande while, manive her hipsboard and anotte shallow cupround that open out into minors.

Funerals are prechacession for meeting other Leader of jovernment, and his or three when went had about hen awanged for the monos. Therame I had Le justade on Wednesday night we had been juin a slot at 7.15 wit Th. a.

Our first duly on Wednesday was to fo to the hop- in- 11the and by a wreath. The provedure is cutil deferred from any I have known elsewhere Two soldiers preceded is each carrying a wreath, the

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of everything came the reply! And so some in Flemish, some German, some French, some Italian – but all lavish and large and superb craftsmanship. The bedroom I have has an enormous bathroom/dressing room all panelled heavily in dark wood and partitioned heavily into bathroom area, toilet in a large square cubicle, massive linen cupboard, and another shallow cupboard that opens out into mirrors.

Funerals are great occasions for meeting other heads of government, and two or three interviews had already been arranged for the morrow. Because I had to get back on Wednesday night we had been given a slot at 7.15pm with Mr. G.

Our first duty on Wednesday was to go to the lying-in-state and lay a wreath. The procedure is quite different from any I have known elsewhere. Two soldiers preceded us each carrying a wreath, the



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fist for H.M she Queen, and the other from me. The greenes of resple setting to pay their respects an obspred as virling politicions jo vis the main noom. There we body fully contained - is surrounded by barked flowers. There is playing quiety and the 2 soldier just land Lolding the wreth while the Antowador of Jane the contained figure-standing quetty for a mule or his. A the prototal offer Comer forward, we how to the open cothin and then for to see the Javily who are sitting arterite of the room - some in hans and all dury friend. It is really a levertre orded for them. This Chevrelo is much a nie woman. I shook hards with her and ste Paralis to her regulour who was agrif, saying in Whether "his sister" and then "daughters! From the heed of a Community who has no sympathy for those who disague, revolution her a family who so, now for him

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first from H.M. The Queen, and the other from me. The queues of people waiting to pay their respects are stopped as visiting politicians go into the main room. There the body - fully embalmed - is surrounded by banked flowers. Music is playing quietly and the 2 soldiers just stand holding the wreath while the Ambassador & I face the embalmed figure – standing quietly for a moment or two. As the protocol officer comes forward, we bow to the open coffin and then go to see the family who are sitting at the side of the room – some in tears and all deeply grieved. It is really a terrible ordeal for them. Mrs. Chernenko is such a nice woman. I shook hands with her and she pointed to her neighbour who was crying, saying in English "his sister", and then "daughters". Even the head of a communist country who has no sympathy for those who disagree, nevertheless has a family who sorrow for him



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Slowly we left. the noon and position to waiting frem.

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appointed places. There is a large space allowed for heads of foot immediately to the left of hermis land as you last it. It is computed, but there are no chains, in stand. Some snow had father overright so every where looked nie relean. The ilines were frey, it was levered depress

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Slowly we left the room and past the waiting queue.

Shortly after President Zia arrived at our Embassy and we talked of the problems of the Afghanistan refugees, of the increased numbers of Soviet soldiers – up to 150,000 – in that country in a <u>ruthless</u> effort to put down all opposition. But of course they will not succeed. So long as the Resistance can obtain supplies of food & equipment, they will go on resisting.

The official ceremony did not begin until 1pm but we had to leave at 12.15 to take up our appointed places. There is a large space allocated for heads of government immediately to the left of Lenin's tomb as you face it. It is carpeted, but there are no chairs, we stand. Some snow had fallen overnight so everywhere looked nice & clean. The skies were grey, it was several degrees



hos pering and fell my now. I do not noins a fur cook so melu myself as wown as possible in a wool war and fur-lived books. In my podals I cany warm packs which help a whie. Our can published the Krentin own week through the Krentin Gold to the Red Sprime to lette up our position. I recelled He previous succession when we had come to The Andreworks Jurend. Os I had paired through the Roll I Saw The Gardhi and we walked together to ompleses. Mrs. reiter of is could have form that me would no works be with us because of the assumi's builter. [S.6 26.N] and I had a guille word with him down We typus laths which were living recowered, under Lis auspiles. President- Kyminon hedben to see me and I had unjed him to accept the Sta's downerly. Th. Wellish. the Norwegian P.M. was standing close by and south he was disappointed theme had

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below freezing and felt very raw. I do not possess a fur coat so made myself as warm as possible in a wool coat and fur-lined boots. In my pockets I carry warm packs which help a little. Our cars park inside the Kremlin & we walk through the Kremlin Gate to the Red Square to take up our position. I recalled the previous occasion when we had come to Mr. Andropov's funeral. As I had passed through the Gate I saw Mrs. Gandhi and we walked together to our places. Alas neither of us could have foreseen that she would no longer be with us because of the assassin's bullet.

The first person I saw was Mr. Perez de Cuellar (S.G. of U.N.) and I had a quick word with him about the Cyprus talks which were being reconvened, under his auspices. President Kyprianou had been to see me and I had urged him to accept the S.G.'s documents. Mr Willoch, the Norwegian P.M., was standing close by and said he was disappointed that we had



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for provided to by Slepiner Jas. I med forward, spoke to President Barene of Durathure and found right in the Joseph 200 by the side of the Moroccan delegation [P.M. or Pongai Thinks) who computateled me warmly on the end of the miner's studie. I was estimated how much they lived about it.

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not proceeded to buy Sleipner Gas. I moved forward, spoke to President Banana of Zimbabwe and found myself in the front row by the side of the Moroccan delegation (P.M. & Foreign Minister) who congratulated me warmly on the end of the miners' strike. I was astonished how much they knew about it.

We still had about 35 minutes to wait & it was cold, very cold. Soon President Mitterrand & Mr Dumas came to join us. We could see George Bush and Chancellor Kohl in the crowd, President Koivisto of Finland, several others we knew & many we didn't.

On the pavement in front of us stood a line of Russian Army Officers spaced about 6 or 7 feet apart. They looked very fine young men, superbly tailored grey greatcoats, white gloves, black boots, grey fur hats. They didn't move a muscle. They were relieved by a new guard just before the ceremony began.

Facing us, the other side of the road was the band flanked by rows of well ordered people (all men as far as I



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Could see) with many is uniform scalled anope them. There were barrers of The Chementon of frequent with wards. Otherwise there were no crowds, just everyone standing situally in his appointed place, in heavy anords, all is fur hats.

Just before I p.m the band byan to Play a freed chipe. The Politors Politors and a lew others appeared on the belong as the guncarriege and excord came vils view. The office lid of the Cobin - all covered in gathered red sich - was removed and the other isself placed on the catalogue, Jamp + tilled lowards the balong. Mit dans line a closer or so others each carrier a medal one Scoulet contrion moved to flank the catalogue Two others held a lage politice y The Cheverles. The family some 30 n so moved wis porlian famp the Valory and I was thankful to see that

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could see) with many in uniform scattered among them. There were banners of Mr. Chernenko at frequent intervals. Otherwise there were no crowds, just everyone standing silently in his appointed place, in heavy anoraks, all in fur hats.

Just before 1p.m. the band began to play a funeral dirge. The Poliboro Politboro and a few others appeared on the balcony as the guncarriage and escort came into view. The coffin lid of the coffin – all covered in gathered red silk – was removed and the coffin itself placed on the catafalque, facing & tilted towards the balcony. At the same time a dozen or so officers each carrying a medal on a scarlet cushion moved to flank the catafalque. Two others held a large portrait of Mr. Chernenko. The family some 30 or so moved into position facing the balcony and I was thankful to see that



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chairs were brought for the ladies to sit on.

When I first [illegible] attended a Communist Funeral (Tito's) it had been a shock to realise that it contained no religious element whatsoever. Of course one knew that intellectually but just a final political ceremony – it seemed comfortless and matter of fact. Mr. Chernenko's funeral had a let's get it over conveyor quality about it. Except for the family for whom the ceremonial may have been some comfort.

The speeches began. The voice and command of Mr. Gorbachev in such striking contrast with the hesitancy and muffed words of Mr. Chernenko's a year previously at Mr. Andropov's funeral. There were four other speeches, one from a member of the politburo another from someone in agriculture, a third from the Academy of Sciences and a fourth representing the Komsomol. We all



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trured and found the valory asme listered uncomprehending of the returned wonds but rather routing condition of each opedur. On the prenous occasion [M. Andropous freed) I had been study by orclosy of The. Grongles - a lovely opedury voice and a natural and authority. We had rever seen him friend this that before. This time he did not opedu, but shoot next to The Cortainer, stall an obviously infruential figure.

The speeches took half an how on so. Then
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building for the intervent, which we could not see.
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turned and faced the balcony as we listened uncomprehending of the actual words but catching something of the personality and demeanour of each speaker. On the previous occasion (Mr. Andropov's funeral) I had been struck by the oratory of Mr. Gromyko – a lovely speaking voice and a natural air of authority. We had never seen him quite like that before. This time he did not speak, but stood next to Mr. Gorbachev, still an obviously influential figure.

The speeches took half an hour or so. Then the coffin was moved to the space behind the building for the interment, which we could not see. The band played the same dirge over and over again finishing with the anthem as the Politboro reappeared on the balcony.

Then, the found over the most charged of the part of the mark of the hard of the mark of the hard of the mark of the country or fook step (which we hade because of it come door but which they skill adopt) each now come doors but which they skill adopt) each now melled perfully in higher. The grand in front on an pavement was augmented for the mark of we for the part. And then it was all over save for filips part. And then it was all over save for filips

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very faciliary and reported by the other as he walked

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Then, the funeral over, the mood changed sharply as the band struck up for the march past – and very impressive it is – all officers marching in goose step (which we hate because of its connections but which they still adopt) each row matched perfectly in height. The guard in front of us, on the pavement was augmented for the march past. And then it was all over save for filing past the grave.

We moved slowly round from our enclosure – seeing and talking to other colleagues (our friends from Holland, the deputy Prime Minister and Mr van den Broek) relieved that we could move at last and get the blood circulating. A pause, a bow to the grave then back in a long winding file into the Kremlin and towards St. George's Hall for the reception. President Pertini of Italy was just ahead of us looking very frail and supported by two others as he walked

slowly in the bitter told.

Or George's Hall is unbelievely beautiful. Letts, all in white with the most majorificentchardeliers augmented by hundreds of Meeting Carolle ligher marching in continuous the just below the corne. And not a right bed fore! They one was willing! The file white stout up the long stem lan passing a nother wonderful porture Mein addressing a Youth Toyer ante lop. Before un got to that point. The protocol oficer Lad some to me las on a previous occasion de The Andrepovi firend) and said 'hadin first'-come along The T we number more you forward. Thedame I was and ter deligation to also picked out. No we Quem jusquel' right with St. aconge's thall feelings a whe fully for we British don't blie quem-jurying. We all shook Lands with the neighbor party, The astractor, the Nami Thinker and The Groungles Once your

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slowly in the bitter cold.

St George's Hall is unbelievably beautiful. Lofty, all in white with the most magnificent chandeliers dominated by hundreds of electric candle lights marching in continuous line just below the cornice. And not a single bulb had gone! Every one was working! The file wound climbed slowly up the long stair case [sic] passing a rather wonderful picture of Lenin addressing a Youth Congress at the top. Before we got to that point, the protocol officer had come to me (as on a previous occasion at Mr. Andropov's funeral) and said 'Ladies first' - come along Mrs. T we must move you forward. Madame Marcos and her delegation he also picked out. So we 'queue jumped' right into St. George's Hall feeling a little guilty for we British don't like queue-jumping. We all shook hands with the reception party. Mr. Gorbachev, the Prime Minister and Mr. Gromyko. Once again

he expressed appreciation that I had some - death they were pleased, as they had been a fran earlier. Unoving I was to see The Gorbacher Cole 1 Contréd my words to condolere und confideble. for the waiting greene was boy. Then we was the noom - ell on a way well withreless by red carpet, how to a portrul. of The Charester, the fried Janwell, pais the press and out your. In the cueve we feeled George Ruch Mesonge Shulli and charaller Kohl all still with a way to for De saw and hed a und with Ormerd Hanner and returned build to the Soluting for bunch. It ver now don't 2.40 p. .. and we were cold + Lugy!

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he expressed appreciation that I had come – clearly they were pleased, as they had been a year earlier. Knowing I was to see Mr Gorbachev later I confined my words to condolence and congratulation for the waiting queue was long. Then we cross the room – all on a way well indicated by red carpet, bow to a portrait of Mr. Chernenko, the final farewell, pass the press and out again. In the queue we greeted George Bush & George Schultz [sic] and Chancellor Kohl, all still with a way to go. We saw and had a word with <u>Armand Hammer</u> and returned quickly to the Embassy for lunch. It was now about 2.40 p.m. and we were cold & hungry!