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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

30 April 1986

SOVIET UNION: NUCLEAR ACCIDENT

I enclose the passage of the record of the Prime Minister's talk with the Soviet Ambassador about the nuclear accident in the Soviet Union.

I am copying this letter and enclosure to Geoff Dart (Department of Energy).

(C. D. POWELL)

Robin Young, Esq.,
Department of the Environment.

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The Prime Minister said that she wanted to express great sympathy for the accident which had occurred at the Chernobyl nuclear power station in the Soviet Union and to express her condolences to all those who had suffered as a result, although we had no precise information on numbers. Accidents tended to draw nations together. The United Kingdom was ready to offer any technical help or advice which the Soviet Union required. We had British students in Minsk and Kiev who we were anxious to get out. We looked to the Soviet Union to provide full cooperation. Mr. Zamyatin said that he would report the offer of technical advice. He could confirm that the Soviet Union would most certainly help with evacuation of the students.

The Prime Minister asked whether Mr. Zamyatin could tell her more about the details of the accident. Mr. Zamyatin said that the accident itself had happened in one of four reactors. There had been a fire leading to a radiation leak. The other three reactors had been promptly shut down. The fire appeared to be out but the nuclear reaction was continuing. A group of leading scientists were now on the spot to deal with the situation. Everyone within a 30 kilometer radius of the accident had been evacuated by helicopter and aircraft. The radioactivity in the atmosphere was at an insignificant level which would not affect human beings, although naturally a careful check was being kept.

The Prime Minister said that we regretted the Soviet Union's delay in releasing information about the accident and the continuing lack of full information of the nature of it. She recalled that the Soviet Union was a member of the Special Reporting Facility of the International Atomic Energy Agency. She hoped therefore that the Soviet Union would provide the fullest details promptly to other countries concerned and allow IAEA inspectors to visit the scene of the accident. There was criticism in this country of the lack of openness and a feeling that something very serious had happened and that the rest of us had not been told enough about it.

Mr. Zamyatin said that his Embassy had conveyed such information as was available to the Foreign Office that morning, although they still did not have many specific details. He repeated that a Commission was now operating which included people connected with the IAEA. Inevitably a certain amount of time was required to assemble the information but he would ensure that the British side was kept fully informed.

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The Prime Minister enquired whether other reactors of a similar type in the Soviet Union would now be closed down. Mr. Zamyatin said that they were continuing to operate normally.

(C. D. POWELL)

Colin Budd, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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