



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

11 October 1982

Prime Minister

To see.

See Lady Fieldhouse

A.J.C. - <sup>12</sup>/<sub>10</sub>

Thank you for your letter of 5 October about Sir Harold Wilson's proposed visit to the Soviet Union in late November.

Mr Pym has considered this suggestion very carefully. He does not doubt that Sir Harold Wilson's experience of the Soviet Union and the regard in which he is held by the Soviet leadership would lead to interesting and senior-level discussions in Moscow, which might well offer useful insights into Soviet thinking. However, Mr Pym is concerned that now might not be the appropriate time for Sir Harold to visit Moscow in his capacity as President of the GB-USSR Association.

The Association is, of course, largely funded by HMG, and a visit to Moscow by its President would inevitably be regarded by the Soviet Government as to some extent involving and having the specific approval of HMG. In view of Sir Harold Wilson's decision to cancel the visit which he had arranged in January 1980 (which would also have been in his capacity as President of the Association) because of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, a visit by him now might convey the wrong signal to the Russians, implying that Britain no longer took so serious a view of their actions in Afghanistan and also of their complicity in the declaration and maintenance of martial law in Poland. As you know, the Government's policy remains to avoid high-level political contacts except where these are deemed particularly advantageous.

A further point is that, as we understand it, Sir H Wilson would be going to Moscow primarily as part of the exchange of specialists on international affairs envisaged in the Association's present programme with its Soviet counterpart. Since the Soviet visitor to the UK under this exchange was a Pravda journalist, for Sir H Wilson to go in return would add to the impression that a major signal was intended, which makes it all the more likely that the Russians would seek to give the visit a strong political character.

/Mr Pym's





Mr Pym's advice would therefore be to defer any visit by Sir Harold in his capacity as President of the GB-USSR Association for the time being. A British academic or journalist could fulfil the exchange of international affairs specialists, and the programme discussions between the Association and its Soviet counterpart for 1983 could be adequately conducted by the Association's Director and/or Sir Fitzroy Maclean.

The above considerations would not of course apply in the same degree to a visit by Sir Harold in a personal capacity. When Sir Fitzroy Maclean rang the junior minister responsible for East/West relations last week to ask how things stood, I gather that Mr Rifkind spoke to him on these lines. Mr Rifkind asked whether, if Sir Harold were particularly keen to go, it might not for instance be possible to revive his previous invitation from the Soviet Union for May 1981, which we gather was a purely personal one and which was not in the event taken up. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary would have no objection to a visit of this style provided that ways could be found to make its personal nature clear to the Russians.

We should be grateful to hear what Sir Harold finally decides. Mr Pym would of course be happy to discuss the matter further with him personally should he so wish.

*Yours sincerely*  
*Robert Bone*

(R B Bone)  
Private Secretary

Lady Falkender  
Private Secretary to the Rt Hon  
Sir Harold Wilson KG OBE FRS MP  
House of Commons  
LONDON SW1A 0AA



From the office of

Rt.Hon.Sir Harold Wilson, KG OBE FRS MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

5th October 1982

*J.H.L.* 2. EESA for advice +  
off reply for PS per in  
consultation with ERD.  
PS/R.R.J.L.D  
CRD  
all 6/10.

Dear Private Secretary,

Sir Harold Wilson has asked me to write to you about a request which has come to him to visit the Soviet Union.

Sir Harold has been asked whether he would be able to undertake a visit there on behalf of the Great Britain-USSR Association, of which he is President.

I think it is proposed that Sir Harold would be accompanied on the visit by other members, including Sir Fitzroy Maclean. It would be Sir Harold's intention to undertake the visit from the 27th November to the 2nd December.

However, before making any decision about this invitation, he would very much welcome the Foreign Secretary's advice and comments.

Sir Harold is at the moment, as you will know, on a visit to the United States and is not back in the United Kingdom as from Monday, the 11th October.

Yours sincerely,

*Narcis Falkender*

Private Secretary.

Private Secretary to  
The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.