



PM/85/28

PRIME MINISTERUK/Soviet Parliamentary Contacts: IPU Return Visit

1. In February this year, the Soviet Embassy approached the IPU to propose a visit to the Soviet Union by a British IPU delegation in return for that of Mr Gorbachev and his delegation last December. The Soviet side's suggestion was that such a visit would be welcome either this summer or next, and that they hoped it would be led at a high level.

2. I have spoken to Peter Temple-Morris about this, and he wishes to accept. But he has asked for advice on timing and leadership.

3. On the first point, I have suggested that he think in terms of 1986 rather than this year. The FAC will be pursuing their study of Anglo/Soviet relations in Moscow probably during this summer. It will be overloading the Parliamentary circuit to have yet another visit (albeit of a different character) to Moscow this year.

4. On the question of a leader, the Soviet side have floated a number of names, including senior figures in the Government. It is not our normal practice for a member of the Government to lead such a delegation. But in this case, I think there are good reasons to consider making an exception if this can be agreed with the Opposition parties. The impact of the visit will be enhanced. And they will get better access to the senior Soviet leadership. Conversely,

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 Prime Minister
 Agree to a visit
 in 1986?
 And to suggest to the
 Opposition that Mr.
 Biffen should lead it?
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a delegation of back-benchers even if led by say Jim Callaghan would be less well received by the Russians.

5. The leader whom the IPU favour is John Biffen; as Leader of the House he would be more likely to be agreeable to Opposition parties than any other member of the Government. I support this suggestion. I gather that John has been approached, and would be willing to be leader provided this was acceptable to you and in Parliament.

6. We may at the end of the day end up with a selection of the great and the good from the back-benches at Opposition insistence, but I think it is worth trying for something different on this occasion. Such visits are rare enough, and Moscow sufficiently sui generis, for the precedent created in Soviet minds by what I have suggested to be manageable.

7. If you are content, I would therefore intend to let Peter Temple-Morris go ahead with his soundings of the Opposition. If he can obtain their clear agreement, the way would be clear for him to reply to the Russians on behalf of the IPU that a visit in mid-1986 would in principle be acceptable and that they were thinking in terms of John Biffen leading the delegation.

8. I am sending a copy of this minute to the Lord Privy Seal.

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

15 April 1985


GEOFFREY HOWE

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