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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

4 October 1985

EDP 4/x.

Dear Richard,

Invitations from the Soviet Ambassador

Thank you for your letter of 30 August drawing attention to the invitation Mr Heseltine received from the Soviet Embassy to lunch with Mr Popov in October. Subsequently, numbers of other similar invitations have come to our attention, and it is clear that we are faced with the same Soviet social overkill as last year (my letter to you of 4 October 1984).

In the wake of the expulsions, the Foreign Secretary has agreed the need for a return to business as usual, but he regards the stress as being on business. He is therefore asking colleagues to follow scrupulously the advice in Roger Bone's letter to John Coles of 16 April 1984, ie that purely social contacts with the Soviet Embassy should continue to be avoided.

The Foreign Secretary does not wish the Soviet Embassy to be ostracised following the expulsions, but equally he does not wish us to be seen as the demandeur for early contact in a way which might imply that we felt embarrassed about the expulsions. There is another aspect of this. As I wrote to you last year, an element of reciprocity in Moscow has to be a relevant factor, and the beginning of Sir Bryan Cartledge's ambassadorship is the right moment to get this message over to the Russians. Mr Popov should not feel he has carte blanche for access to any senior member of the Government he cares to invite without ensuring that Sir Bryan Cartledge at least has better access than his predecessor.

The Foreign Secretary would therefore be grateful if Mr Heseltine would agree to temporise with the Soviet Embassy, suggesting that the matter be looked at again later in the year. Sir Geoffrey Howe has replied in a similar sense to an invitation to him.

Lord Whitelaw, who is to lead the IPU delegation to the Soviet Union next May, will clearly need to get to know the Ambassador. However, unless he is already committed to a date in October, the Ambassador's lunch for him might better be deferred to later in the year, or in the New Year.

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There is a strong case for Mr Channon to accept his invitation for October, with the Anglo-Soviet Joint Commission coming up on 31 October, several major contracts in the pipeline, and so far no Soviet hint that the expulsions have poisoned business relations.

The Foreign Secretary would be grateful if for the time being other colleagues who receive invitations would consider accepting these only if they have current business to discuss with the Soviet Embassy (eg a forthcoming visit or a UK commercial interest). If there are signs that senior British visitors to Moscow and our Ambassador are getting better access, I shall write again to colleagues to suggest a relaxation of these guidelines.

I am copying this letter to Charles Powell at No 10, to the Private Secretaries to all members of the Cabinet, the Private Secretary to Mr Channon at the DTI and to Michael Stark in the Cabinet Office.

Yours ever,

Le Appleyard

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