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*File to
be PC*



10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

20 February, 1989.

Dear Steph.

Your Secretary of State minuted the Prime Minister on 17 February to seek her views on the idea of encouraging a visit to Northern Ireland by the Soviet Ambassador. The Prime Minister is thoroughly opposed to this, commenting that a visit would do no good and a lot of harm. I think she has in mind in particular the effect it would have to see armed soldiers and police deployed so extensively, and the propaganda use which could be made of this. She hopes that no more will be heard of the proposal.

I am copying this letter to Stephen Wall (Foreign and Commonwealth Office).

*Yours sincerely,
C.D. Powell*

(C.D. Powell)

Stephen Leach, Esq.,
Northern Ireland Office.

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do No - it is a
little shock to see
soldiers at street
corners carrying
guns. Such a sight
would do no good.
a lot of people
agree that we should
offer to arrange a visit
for Zamyatin?



PRIME MINISTER

copy ①
Prime Minister
agree that we should
offer to arrange a visit
for Zamyatin?
CBD
17/2

This letter seeks your views on encouraging a visit to NI by Soviet Ambassador Zamyatin.

Soviet reporting of NI events is, as you know, biased and distorted, and the new atmosphere engendered by President Gorbachev has not affected this. In February last year Mr Shevardnadze handed Sir Geoffrey Howe a list of 400 "political prisoners" (all of whom turned out to have been sentenced for serious criminal offences), and similar allegations were made in November at a press conference given by Mr Gerasimov.


In the light of this, I have suggested to Geoffrey (who supports the idea) that we should encourage Ambassador Zamyatin to visit NI for himself, to expose him at first hand to the realities of NI. Zamyatin is free to visit NI whenever he wishes and to speak to whomsoever he pleases, though neither he nor any of his recent predecessors are known to have done so. If we were to offer him a programme, thus ensuring that at least he hears our side of the story, we would be placing him on the spot (if he accepted he might be inclined to ensure that Soviet reporting did not go too far out of line with reality, and if he did not accept then future Soviet protestations would ring hollow).

It is of course possible that Zamyatin might try to turn the suggestion to his advantage by refusing an official programme but organising one on his own account, or accepting our programme but requesting that we also arrange meetings with Sinn Fein and other unacceptable groups. To stand in his way would be counterproductive, and the best line to take here would simply be to allow him to make his own arrangements, only offering assistance where it seems appropriate to do so. FCO believe in any case that Zamyatin would want to be circumspect here, since he

would be reluctant to give the impression that the USSR supports or promotes terrorism, and he also values his good access to you. Recent instances of nationalism and communal strife within the USSR may also dispose him towards caution.

On balance, both Geoffrey and I feel that there is much to be gained from offering a visit, but there is no point in taking things any further until we have your views. If you are content, my officials would ask their colleagues in FCO to float the suggestion with the Soviets in the context of their continuing exchanges on human rights issues.

A copy of this letter goes to Geoffrey Howe.



TK

17 February 1989