



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

21 October 1983

Prime Minister

To be aware.

A.J.C. 21/10.

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Dear John

Soviet Defector: Mr Oleg Bitov

The Prime Minister may wish to be aware of the facts of this case. We are under pressure to announce that Bitov is in this country and has been granted asylum, and we have it in mind that News Department should do so on Monday, 24 October.

Bitov contacted H M Consulate-General in Venice on 9 September claiming to be a Soviet journalist wanting to defect. He was interviewed in Rome and, in the light of what he had to say, brought back to this country for further interview. It appeared that his reason for defecting was primarily ideological in that he had become increasingly antipathetic to the Soviet system; the shooting down of the Korean aircraft had apparently been the last straw. He had also been influenced by professional frustration in that he found genuine self-expression to be impossible under the Soviet system. He expressed deep regret at leaving behind his wife and daughter in the Soviet Union but hoped that at some point in the future the Soviet authorities might allow them to join him.

In these circumstances it has been agreed that he should be granted defector status and permission to remain in this country.

Meanwhile there has been growing press interest in his disappearance and whereabouts, including speculation that he may have been murdered on the CIA's orders. The Italian authorities, who are aware that Bitov is now in London, are coming under pressure to say something about the case. Moreover, he himself is concerned that his wife may believe that he is dead and he is anxious to reassure her. For these reasons the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary has agreed that FCO News Department should respond on

/Monday

S E C R E T



Monday, 24 October, to the questions which have been asked about the case. They will confirm that he is in this country, that he has asked for asylum and that his request has been granted. The following day he will issue (through a solicitor) a statement of his own explaining the reasons for his defection.

I am copying this letter to Tony Rawsthorne (Home Office) and to Sir Robert Armstrong (Cabinet Office).

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'mks'.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'A. J. Coles'.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'B. J. P. Fall'.

(B J P Fall)
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq
10 Downing Street

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S E C R E T



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JUR

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

24 October 1983

Soviet Defector : Mr. Oleg Bitov

The Prime Minister has noted the contents of your letter of 21 October and the fact that your News Department may announce today that Bitov is in this country and has been granted asylum.

I am copying this letter to Tony Rawsthorne (Home Office) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

A. J. COLES

Brian Fall, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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