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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

21 January 1985

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Dear Charles,

Supreme Soviet Visit: UK/Soviet Relations

See PC 3
We have now had a chance to digest the numerous records, speeches and reports on various aspects of the supreme Soviet visit. Judged by our objectives, both general and specific set out in my letter of 19 November to you, our assessment is that the visit was a success.

The Russians will probably have come to the same conclusion. Gorbachev was well received. Press coverage was extensive and favourable. The Communist with the human face (and his wife) will have much improved the Soviet image in the UK. His message about the Soviet Union's desire for peace and progress on arms control was widely reported.

From our point of view Gorbachev was given a concentrated introduction to Parliamentary, government and commercial life in the UK.

The fact that the Prime Minister gave him some 6 hours of her time, as well as the direct but friendly way in which she spoke, made a real impression on Gorbachev. He referred to his meeting with the Prime Minister and his subsequent talks with Sir Geoffrey Howe on numerous occasions. If he succeeds Chernenko as General Secretary, it would be useful that he will have had personal contacts with the leaders of all the parliamentary parties in this country as well as a wide range of parliamentarians. Parliamentary contacts with Gorbachev may be continued when Sir Anthony Kershaw takes the Foreign Affairs Committee to Moscow for a visit, possibly in April.

The visit will have raised UK standing in Gorbachev's eyes. The coverage it was given in the Soviet media will also have raised the UK's profile more widely within the Soviet Union. Within the UK, the visit has also served to refocus attention on the Soviet Union. Hostility to Soviet policies, for example in Afghanistan and above all on human rights, will (rightly) continue. But informed public debate may also now take account of the timescale involved in any possible change within the Soviet Union and need for exploration of areas of common interest if the climate of East/West relations is to

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improve.

On the fundamental question of security, the visit proved an important opportunity for straight talking. The Russians will have been impressed by the Prime Minister's acknowledgement of legitimate Soviet security interests and her view that we wanted security on both sides to be enhanced through balance at a lower level of weapons. Her emphasis on the importance of avoiding an arms race in space will have been registered. Gorbachev may have hoped that the distinction between research and deployment drawn by the Prime Minister might open a gap for some wedge-driving. He will have been disabused by the Prime Minister's agreement with President Reagan on this point, reflected in her statement 5 days later in Washington and subsequently in comments from the President and Secretary Shultz.

On the commercial front Gorbachev's visit will have refocused Soviet attention on what the UK has to offer. Through the presence in the delegation of Mr Komarov, effectively the Soviet Union's Foreign Trade Minister, the message would have been lodged where it really matters. Specifics will be followed up on the official side at an agro-industrial exhibition to be held in Moscow in February and attended by Mrs Fenner and in a series of framework talks with Soviet trade officials leading up to the next joint commission to be held at trade minister level in London in June. A number of visits by Soviet trade and economic Ministers and deputy Ministers are also planned. Individual British firms will continue their negotiations for small and large contracts (including two of the largest ever in the petrochemical field) in the knowledge that the bilateral political omens are more favourable than for a number of years.

We should be able to use the visit to build our contacts at all levels with the Soviet Union. Indeed, Mr Gorbachev himself said that what was needed now was "a process". As far as the leadership is concerned, Mr Gromyko's return visit to London is planned (but not yet confirmed) for May. Thereafter we will be looking to invite another member of the Politburo, from the new generation of Soviet leaders, possibly Aliev. Talks between experts on security and regional issues will continue. We will be looking to increase our programme of cultural events in the Soviet Union.

/ Finally, I enclose notes on Mr and Mrs Gorbachev from Mr Bishop and Miss Horner who accompanied them during the visit.

We are inclined to agree with Koivisto's remark to the Prime Minister just before the visit, that Gorbachev would have risen to the top of the political tree in most countries. His confidence and ability to debate points in a genuine argument are certainly unusual in the Soviet system. But for all that he is still very much a product of that system and one of the architects of current Soviet policy. He would not have achieved

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his position at his early age had he shown any real signs of heterodoxy. Mr Bishop's judgement that Gorbachev would, if necessary, be ruthless, confirms that together with a well-trained mind and a relative openness in debate there co-exists a tough nationalistic, Soviet Russian.

Five days before his visit to London, Pravda reported Gorbachev as saying in a major speech on ideology - "we uphold the historical correctness of the great ideas of Marxism-Leninism and come out together with all mankind's revolutionary and peace-loving forces for social progress, the cause of peace and security for all peoples." While most of the rest of the speech was about the need for economic improvement and incentives, it would be as well as remember the starting point from which these will be approached.

All this constitutes a development of the general policy of defence and dialogue. During the coming year the US-Soviet Geneva arms talks negotiations will be the central focus of interest. Alliance unity will be essential if they are to succeed. But on the basis of a firm and united Western stance we should also be able to pursue our policy of talking frankly to the Soviet leadership and, albeit even if in the very long-term, of influencing the Soviet people through the spread of Western ideas and values.

I am copying this letter to Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office), Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence) and Callum McCarthy (DTI).

Yours ever,

Len Appleyard

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Private Secretary

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