

SECRET  
FM MOSCOW  
TO FLASH FCO  
TELNO 834  
OF 202321Z MAY 89

MY TELS 830, 831, 832: EXPULSIONS: COMMENTS AND FURTHER ACTION

1. THE MOST IMMEDIATE ISSUE CONCERNS THE PRESS HANDLING ON WHICH I SHALL NEED YOUR COMMENTS OR ASSENT BY 210400Z IF POSSIBLE (EG BY A SHORT TELEPHONE CALL TO H OF C ON 202-3724): SEE PARAS 5-6 BELOW. AS FOR MORE GENERAL PRELIMINARY COMMENT, I ASSUME THAT THE REFERENCE TO THE 'LEADERSHIP' (RUKOVODSTVO) IN KOVALEV'S SPEAKING NOTE IS THE NEAREST WE SHALL GET TO A REPLY TO THE PRIME MINISTER'S MESSAGE: BUT THAT IT IS AN INDICATION THAT, OTHER THINGS BEING EQUAL, THE RUSSIANS INTEND TO PERMIT NORMAL BUSINESS TO CONTINUE WITHOUT FURTHER GESTURES SUCH AS THE CANCELLATION OF PLANNED VISITS. BEYOND THAT, THE RUSSIANS HAVE GONE FOR SOMETHING CLOSE TO A MIRROR IMAGE, EXCEPT ON THE CEILING WHERE THEY HAVE ACTED TO REPAIR WHAT THEY HAVE ALWAYS SEEN AS AN ANOMALY. AS IN THE PAST, THEY HAVE PICKED ON SOME PEOPLE WITH AN ESPECIALLY CLOSE INTEREST IN AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE SOVIET UNION: ADAM NOBLE (AN INTERNAL AFFAIRS SPECIALIST FROM RESEARCH DEPARTMENT) ANGUS ROXBURGH OF THE SUNDAY TIMES, (A SOVIET EXPERT BEFORE HE BECAME A JOURNALIST) AND TO SOME EXTENT HELEN PICKERING AND NIGEL SHAKESPEAR (BOTH OF WHOM HAVE A NUMBER OF SOVIET FIRENDS AND A GENUINE INTEREST IN THE PLACE).

2. IN SOME RESPECTS THE LIST IS MARGINALLY LESS DAMAGING THAN IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN. ALL 3 JOURNALISTS HAVE BEEN HERE A FAIRLY LONG TIME. WO PURFIT IS DUE TO LEAVE IN AUGUST. NO GREAT DAMAGE IS INFLECTED BY THE LIST OF THREE STAFF BARRED FROM RETURNING (HARE HAS INDEED RESIGNED FROM TSD). MOST CONSPICUOUSLY, MY DEFENCE AND AIR ATTACHE IS NOT NAMED, ALTHOUGH HIS SOVIET COUNTERPART WAS EXPELLED.

3. THIS DOES NOT DIMINISH THE FACT THAT THE EXPULSIONS ARE A SEVERE PERSONAL BLOW TO THE INDIVIDUALS AND THEIR FAMILIES (WHOSE INTERESTS WE MUST TREAT WITH THE MAXIMUM OF SYMPATHY) AND TO THE EMBASSY AS A WHOLE. WE SHALL CONSIDER THE STAFFING IMPLICATIONS IN DUE COURSE.

CEILING

4. WE RECENTLY SENT YOU FIGURES FOR BRITISH REPRESENTATIVES AND SOVIET EMPLOYEES IN MOSCOW, AGAINST THIS EVENTUALITY. IMPOSITION OF A SOVIET CEILING IS WHAT WE FEARED. THE CRUX IS HOW IT WILL WORK.

IF TAKEN LITERALLY, A CEILING OF 205 FOR ALL BRITISH RESIDENT REPRESENTATIVES AND THEIR LOCAL STAFF WOULD INFLICT GRAVE DAMAGE (THE EMBASSY ALONE WOULD COME CLOSE TO THIS NUMBER). BUT IT SEEMS IMPROBABLE THAT THE RUSSIANS WILL WISH TO EXPEL LARGE NUMBERS OF COMMERCIAL REPRESENTATIVES AND JOURNALISTS, OR REMOVE THEIR STAFF. WE SHALL HAVE TO FEEL OUR WAY (WITHOUT OF COURSE ASKING DIRECT QUESTIONS) AND REPORT FURTHER.

ACTION WITH THE PRESS

5. I RECOMMEND THAT WE MAINTAIN OUR STRATEGY OF KEEPING OFFICIAL STATEMENTS TO THE ESSENTIAL MINIMUM AND OF NOT HEAPING FUEL ON THE FLAMES. THIS IS CONSISTENT WITH THE LINE IN THE PRIME MINISTER'S MESSAGE. IT WILL IMPROVE OUR - PERHAPS SLIM - CHANCES OF PERSUADING GORBAHCEV TO IMPOSE A DIFFERENT LINE IN THE FUTURE. WE CAN ASSUME THAT THE CORRESPONDENTS AND THEIR EDITORS WILL MAKE THE RIGHT POINTS WITHOUT TOO MUCH OFFICIAL ASSISTANCE, SO LONG AS IT IS MADE CLEAR TO THEM THAT THE RUSSIANS HAVE ACTED PURELY IN RETALIATION AGAINST A NECESSARY AND JUSTIFIED ACTION BY THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT.

6. BUT THE STORY WILL BREAK AS SOON AS I BRIEF ROXBURGH, HARRIS AND GLOVER-JAMES (IF HE IS HERE: HE MAY BE IN BUDAPEST). I PROPOSE THE FOLLOWING:

A) AT 210400Z (IE 0800 LOCAL) WE INVITE THE THREE JOURNALISTS TO CALL AT THE EMBASSY AN HOUR LATER.

B) 210500Z: I TELL THE THREE THAT THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT HAS REQUESTED THEIR DEPARTURE: THAT CERTAIN MEMBERS OF THE EMBASSY ARE ALSO LEAVING. THIS IS AN ACT OF STRAIGHT RETALIAITON AGAINST INNOCENT PEOPLE. I CANNOT GIVE DETAILS OF THE EMBASSY STAFF AT THIS STAGE BECAUSE THEY HAVE NOT YET HAD A CHANCE TO INFORM THEIR RELATIVES. THEY MUST ADDRESS ANY ENQUIRIES ABOUT WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN LONDON TO NEWS DEPARTMENT.

C) THIS MEANS THAT THE STORY WILL BEGIN TO BREAK ON THE BBC ETC BY 0700Z. IT WOULD NOT BE FEASIBLE TO EMBARGO THE INFORMATION. AND FOR CREDIBILITY AND GOOD ORDER TO BOTH YOU AND I WILL NEED TO SAY SOMETHING FURTHER DURING THE DAY.

D) AT 1100Z YOU DEPLOY SUCH FURTHER DETAILS AS YOU ARE GOING TO GIVE. I SHOULD SIMULTANEOUSLY CONVENE ALL THE BRITISH CORRESPONDENTS IN MOSCOW, AND GIVE THEM THE COMPLETE LIST OF NAMES. I SHALL EMPHASISE THAT THIS IS RETALIATION AND REFER ALL FURTHER ENQUIRIES TO YOU. (THEY WILL GET THE NAMES ANYWAY, SO THERE IS NO SENSE IN NOT VOLUNTERING THEM).

NAVAL VISIT

7. HMS BRISTOL IS DUE IN LENINGRAD ON 26 MAY. ALTHOUGH RUSSIANS

HAVE YET TO GRANT DIPLOMATIC CLEARANCE, THIS IS NOT UNUSUAL AND NOTHING HAS BEEN SAID TO SUGGEST THAT THEY ARE CANCELLING THE VISIT.

8. TWO OF MY THREE NAVAL ATTACHES ARE BEING EXPELLED. HOWEVER, THE VISIT WILL HAVE BEEN ACCOMPLISHED WITHIN THE 14 DAYS. I SHALL DISCUSS THIS FURTHER WITH MY DEFENCE STAFF IN THE MORNING, AND WILL THEN TELEGRAPH AGAIN.

PNG LIST

9. YOU WILL OBVIOUSLY WISH TO CONTACT THE THREE PEOPLE NAMED AS BARRED FROM RETURNING. GRATEFUL FOR INSTRUCTONS ON WHETHER I SHOULD ALSO GIVE OUT THEIR NAMES AT 1100Z TOMORROW.

BRAITHWAITE

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CABINET OFFICE

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