

PRIME MINISTER

We are trying to commemorate  
those who died - not to commit  
those who can no longer answer for  
their decisions. I have tried to help  
Yalta Victims Memorial Appeal Nicholas Bethell - surely  
he can now move some way  
downwards  
us.

You will remember seeing papers six weeks ago about the proposal to erect a memorial to those who were repatriated to the Soviet Union at the end of the last war. You decided then that the memorial could be erected on Crown land provided that the inscription on it was uncontroversial and avoided imputing guilt to previous British Governments.

The attached letter from Mr. Heseltine's Private Secretary summarises the exchanges which have since taken place between the Secretary of State for the Environment and the Memorial Appeal Steering Committee. Deadlock appears to have been reached.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (who have been advising Mr. Heseltine) would be prepared to recommend to you an inscription reading as follows:

"This memorial was placed here by Members of Parliament of all Parties, and others, to commemorate the thousands of innocent men, women and children from Russia and other Eastern European nations, who were imprisoned and died at the hands of Communist Governments after their repatriation at the conclusion of the Second World War."

After  
the  
inscriptions

However, Lord Bethell and Sir Bernard Braine are not prepared to accept the phrase "after their repatriation". They would be prepared to accept instead the words "after being returned to their homelands at the conclusion of the Second World War". They insist on these words, or similar words, in order to make it clear that the "Yalta victims" were returned against their will. Sir Bernard Braine would not, for instance, be prepared to accept the words "after their return to their homelands" since these are

/ ambiguous

ambiguous and could imply voluntary action. The intentions of the Steering Committee are plain from the fact that Sir Bernhard Braine in his meeting with the Secretary of State for the Environment on 17 March referred to the need for an "act of atonement" by the British Government and British people. He also referred to the historical event in question as a "war crime", and a "wickedness" which was "contrary to international law".

The immediate question is whether or not you agree with the Secretary of State for the Environment that any further debate with the Steering Committee should be conducted by a Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister. The longer term question is whether, given that the Steering Committee seem unlikely to move, you would regard the Steering Committee's text as "uncontroversial".

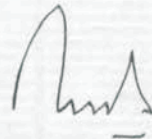
You will recall that the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary felt strongly that this was not a foreign policy issue: it was a question for decision by the Government as a whole and for which the Secretary of State for the Environment should be responsible.

If you agree, I will write to Mr. Walden saying that you do not wish to insist that the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary should take up the cudgels, but that you would welcome his advice as to whether or not the Steering Committee's text is or is not acceptable. I would copy the letter to the Home Secretary's Private Secretary seeking his advice also. You might then have a small meeting with both Ministers and with the Secretary of State for the Environment to consider how to proceed.

My own view is that the text as a whole, if it included the words "after being returned to their homelands" would be controversial and would, taken together with the word "innocent" earlier in the text, impute guilt to a previous British Government. However, before taking a final view on this, it might be worth arranging a meeting between, say, the Home Secretary and Sir Bernard Braine to see whether they would not be prepared to accept that the

words "after their repatriation" or "after their return" are sufficiently ambiguous for the Steering Committee's purposes.

Do you agree that I should proceed as in the penultimate paragraph above?

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'A. M. S.', with a horizontal line underneath the final letter.

31 March, 1980.



2 MARSHAM STREET  
LONDON SW1P 3EB

My ref:

Your ref:

31 MAR 1980

*Dear Michael*

MEMORIAL INSCRIPTION PROPOSED BY "YALTA VICTIMS MEMORIAL APPEAL STEERING COMMITTEE"

We spoke about this matter on 28 March, and I said that I would write to you setting out my Secretary of State's views.

Following the Prime Minister's letter to Lord Bethell of 21 February, Mr Heseltine has twice written to Lord Bethell (on 28 February and on 5 March) and has met Lord Bethell, Sir Bernard Braine and the Hon John Jolliffe (on 17 March) in an effort to agree an inscription which would be uncontroversial and did not impute guilt to previous British Governments. You have received a copy of my letter of 17 March to Colin Munro in Mr Peter Blaker's office, in which I recorded the view which Lord Bethell expressed at the meeting, that the inscription proposed by the Appeal Steering Committee was completely factual and therefore uncontroversial. Lord Bethell and Sir Bernard Braine were insistent that their Committee would not agree to the use of "repatriation" or "return" (as a noun) in the inscription.

My Secretary of State has now seen Colin Munro's letter to me of 26 March, setting out Mr Blaker's view that the inscription proposed by Mr Heseltine on 17 March is as far as the Government is able to go. Mr Heseltine considers that Mr Blaker's view signals an impasse in the discussion with Lord Bethell's Committee, and he wishes to propose that, since this blocks the prospect of an agreement on the wording which the Prime Minister held out in her letter of 21 February, Mr Blaker should now take over the role of explaining the Government's view to Lord Bethell's Committee. He hopes that the Prime Minister will agree.

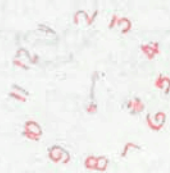
I am copying this to Colin Munro (FCO) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

*Yours sincerely*  
*Paul Bristow*

P N BRISTOW  
Private Secretary

Michael Alexander Esq

31 MAR 1960





Home Affairs  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

B/F 31/3

26 March 1980

Dear Paul,

Thank you for your letter of 17 March.

I understand that, during the meeting with Mr Heseltine on 17 March, Sir Bernard Braine, referred to an 'act of atonement' by the British Government and British people, and that he also referred to the historical events in question as a 'war crime' and a 'wickedness', which was 'contrary to international law'. Against this background, Mr Blaker sees a danger that the Memorial Appeal Steering Committee may seek to present in the same light any decision by the Government to allow the memorial to be erected on Crown Land. This would be a misrepresentation of what Mr Blaker understands the Prime Minister's position to be. Mr Blaker therefore thinks that, if the Government's agreement to the inscription and therefore the memorial is now given, the Government should make it clear in writing when conveying their decision to the Steering Committee that their consent does not imply any judgement on the complex and disputed historical issues involved and, in particular, does not imply any imputation of guilt to previous British Governments.

It is, of course, a matter of judgement precisely how far we can go regarding the wording of this inscription. In view of Sir Bernard's remarks Mr Blaker believes that the use of the word 'repatriation' in the inscription proposed in my letter to you of 14 March represents the limit of what is wise and what Sir Bernard and Lord Bethell can reasonably ask. Mr Blaker is not

/impressed

P N Bristow Esq  
Private Secretary to the  
Secretary of State  
Department of the Environment



impressed by Lord Bethell's argument that 'repatriation' is not an appropriate word because some of those sent back to the Soviet Union at the end of the war were not Soviet citizens. He thinks the word makes the point the organisers of the appeal wish to make perfectly well, and considers that the fact that a strict interpretation of the word may exclude a small number of the persons involved is not significant. Mr Blaker's view is that the formula 'after being returned to their homelands' points the finger more directly at previous British Governments than is desirable. Mr Blaker therefore believes that Lord Bethell and Sir Bernard Braine should be told that the inscription proposed by Mr Heseltine at the meeting on 17 March is as far as the Government is able to go.

Given the sensitivity of the issues involved, Mr Blaker thinks that Mr Heseltine may wish to inform the Prime Minister of his views on these matters before any decision by the Government is given to Lord Bethell and Sir Bernard Braine.

I should add that, in giving his agreement to the inscription in my letter to you of 14 March, Mr Blaker is assuming that the design of the memorial remains as in the artist's impression enclosed with your Secretary of State's letter to Lord Carrington of 20 December 1979. This appears to show that there is nothing in the design of the memorial which is controversial or which imputes guilt to previous British governments, and which might not therefore fall within the Prime Minister's guidelines.

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I am copying this letter to Michael Alexander (No 10) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

*Yours ever,*

*C A*

C A Muñro  
PS/Mr Blaker