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Government Involvement in the Repatriation of the remains of
Peter Barnes and James McCormick, July, 1969

Peter Barnes and James McCormick were executed at Winson Green Prison in February, 1940, after having been convicted of causing an explosion in Coventry in August, 1939, in which five people were killed and many others injured.

In February, 1969, we were informed by the British Embassy that a brother of Peter Barnes and a sister of James McCormick had applied to the Home Office to have the remains of these men repatriated to Ireland. The Home Office had no objection to this, but wanted to know if we had any comments to make.

The Minister spoke to the British Ambassador about the matter and told him that while we would not raise any objection in principle, the British Government should carefully consider the possible effects vis-a-vis the situation in Northern Ireland (where a general election was due to be held shortly).

The Department of Justice, who were consulted felt that it would be entirely inopportune if the remains were transferred to Ireland that year (1969).

It appears that the British Government did delay repatriating the remains, presumably because of our advice, and this resulted in a series of pickets by various Irish associations in New York and at the U.N. who were protesting at the lack of activity by the Irish Government in having the remains repatriated.

When, eventually, the remains did arrive in July, 1969, there was no Government representation at either the procession from the airport to the Pro-Cathedral, or at the funeral mass in the Pro-Cathedral. Flags were not flown at half-mast.


B. Ó M.
28/10/1970