

FROM : JENNIE MURPHY
SEU/SIL DIVISION
22 SEPTEMBER 1995

*View re
National
Memorial
to
Troubles
(1995)*

ASSTJ
SEC 17010
22 SEP 1995
C.C.R.U.

M. Cross...
A. see a file...
S. 26
9..

- cc PS/Secretary of State (L&B) - B
- PS/PUS (L&B) - B
- PS/Sir David Fell - B
- Mr Spence
- Mr Legge - B
- Mr Thomas - B
- Mr Watkins - B
- Mr Steele - B
- Mr Bell - B
- Mr Canavan 22.9 - B
- Mr McKervill - B
- Mr Pope - B
- Mr McCormick, DOE

MR BRAMLEY

PA

M. Cross
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26
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WAR MEMORIALS

You chaired a meeting in the VCR on Wednesday 20 September to discuss proposals for a National Memorial to mark the ending of hostilities in Northern Ireland. Messrs. Watkins, Steel, McKervill, Pope, Canavan and McCormick were present. Private Office has asked to be kept informed.

National Memorial

The original impetus for the proposal were letters in 1994 and earlier this year there was a letter from Mr Bethell to the Prime Minister. This sought HMG's agreement to a national memorial to all service personnel who had died in the Troubles since 1969. The idea of a memorial of some sort received some sympathy from the PM but he stalled the issue by acknowledging that there was some difficulty in the proposal and that the time was not yet right. The PM went on to dictate that officials would look at the matter contingently:- 'The Prime Minister has, however, asked the main Whitehall Departments

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involved to study the possibility of taking the idea forward once developments in the peace process have progressed sufficiently to allow this'.

The consensus of the meeting was that the time was still not right for such a memorial but that it would be useful to establish some principles surrounding the issue. The NIO could then speak with one voice at the proposed interdepartmental meeting on a national memorial to be held with other interested Whitehall departments.

There was much discussion about the purpose of any proposed memorial. All those from the RUC and Prison Service who have been killed over the last 25 years are commemorated at their respective establishments. The members of the Army are similarly recorded in their Regimental Headquarters. MOD have made it clear that they do not support a memorial on the lines of those for WW1 and WW2 since the activity in Northern Ireland is not classified as a war. There was some concern that the MOD might come under pressure to change this view in the light of the ceasefires and the considerable depth of feeling such a demand could evoke. It was the belief of those present that the MOD could be persuaded that any deviation from their first reaction would be very damaging and cause us real problems. A national memorial could more promisingly be for a wider net of people and the least controversial way of doing that would be to commemorate all those who have lost their lives (this will inevitably include terrorists amongst others). This would put a different slant on the subject but it could be regarded as a symbol of reconciliation rather than a divisive one.

The siting of any memorial would also need careful consideration. If it were to be London it could hardly be claimed to be symbolic of the prospect of a peaceful Northern Ireland. Most of the lives that have been lost over the last 25 years have been in Northern Ireland and on that basis any memorial to all those killed should be sited in Northern Ireland. However it was agreed that any memorial or

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symbol should not have names or even an inscription on it as that would divide opinion and risk causing offence to one side of the community.

Local Memorials

There was some discussion about local councils in Northern Ireland putting the names of local people killed on their existing war memorials. Permission from DOE(NI) is required and to date there have been no formal requests. Under an 1890 Act the councils could build a new memorial without needing permission but it was thought unlikely that they would do this since it would not be supported by all sides and would cost them money. David Trimble had asked a while ago about adding the names of UDR and RUC officers killed to local memorials but he has not revisited this issue recently, nor was he likely to. His letter was written in March 1994 and predated the ceasefires the situation is somewhat different now and it was thought that Mr Trimble would not peruse this further. The DOE(NI) were aware of the difficulty this issue could create and were more than willing to leave well alone until such time as they received formal requests for permission to add names to existing memorials, if that should occur they would endeavour to keep the NIO informed.

Conclusions

The conclusion of the meeting was that a memorial for certain sections of the community only should be ruled out and that if there were to be a memorial it should be symbol of reconciliation placed in Belfast and should contain no inscription at all. This would form the agreed NIO line at the forthcoming inter-departmental meeting on a national memorial. It was also resolved that there would be no official NIO support or approval for local memorials in Northern Ireland.

(signed JCM)

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