

FROM: J G GRAHAM

DATE: 1 November 1999

TO: MISS BEATTIE

**EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES WHITLEY COMMITTEE MEETING ON THURSDAY 4
NOVEMBER 1999 - FLYING OF UNION FLAG ON GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS IN
NI**

The attached briefing has been cleared by Central Secretariat (Terry Smyth). I have also checked with Derek Smith (EOAD) that it meets his needs.



**J G GRAHAM
ECPD**

**BRIEFING FOR EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES SUB COMMITTEE MEETING ON
THURSDAY 4 NOVEMBER 1999**

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FLYING OF UNION FLAG ON GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS

Background

Mr Jim McCusker has written on several occasions referring to a decision by the NIPSA Executive Committee to seek to have the flying of the Union flag on Government buildings in NI restricted to the same number of days as in the rest of the UK. (At present the flag is flown on 5 additional days in NI - New Year's, St Patrick's day, Easter day, 12th July and Christmas day. St Patrick's day has parallels in England, Scotland and Wales where the Union flag is flown on St George's day, St Andrews day and St David's day respectively.) Copies of Mr McCusker's original letter of 1 October 1998, Mr Hunter's most recent response (18 August 1999) and Mr McCusker's formal tabling of the issue for discussion at the EO Whitley Committee (27 August 1999) are attached.

Mr McCusker has already been advised (on several occasions) that the matter is under consideration by the Secretary of State and that Central Secretariat have been made aware of NIPSA's views.

Although Mr McCusker has referred to flag flying as a matter for the management of the NICS this is incorrect. The days on which the Union flag is flown on Government buildings in the UK are designated by The Department of National Heritage, the "additional" days in NI are of long standing and result from decisions taken by the then NI Government in 1927 and 1933. It is not within the power of either DFP, CPG or individual departments and agencies to either fly the flag on days which are not designated or to refrain from flying the flag on designated days.

The Union flag is also flown on other occasions - e.g. at half mast as a mark of respect on the death of certain individuals - members of the Royal family, foreign heads of state etc.. In all such cases the flag is flown at Her Majesty's command. NIPSA have not made any reference to these occasions, and we have no indication of whether or not the practice is regarded as contentious in some quarters. However as any decision to fly the Union flag on such occasions will apply throughout the UK and not just in NI the issue may not be particularly contentious.

It is probable that NIPSA are only pressing this matter because they are being pressed in turn by their Executive Committee. They may feel a need to be seen to press DFP - however they will also be aware that any reduction in the days on which the flag is flown will not meet with the universal approval of all of their members.

LINE TO TAKE

Advise NIPSA that, as already indicated in correspondence, the issue is not within the remit of CPG, or indeed any NI department or agency, to decide on. It is currently a reserved matter and as such is for the Secretary of State to determine. Under a devolved administration decisions relating to flying the Union flag on NI government buildings under the control of the administration would be a matter for that administration.

Remind NIPSA that we have already drawn the issue to the attention of Central Secretariat on a number of occasions.

Acknowledge that the issue is of concern to NIPSA members and that there are strong feelings - but these feelings are not all one way.

Stress the need to avoid raising the profile of this issue which has the potential to cause disharmony in the workplace.

Undertake to write to Central Secretariat reminding them of the concerns of NIPSA on this issue and stressing that there is considerable strength of feeling on the part of the Executive Committee.

IF DESIRED

Suggest that any further discussion at this time is pointless.

IF NIPSA RAISE THE ISSUE OF FLYING THE UNION FLAG ON OTHER DAYS

Advise NIPSA that the Union flag is only flown on other days at Her Majesty's command.

YOUR REF

OUR REF

A/JMcC/KW

nipsa

The Leading Public Service Union

Jim McCusker General Secretary

Mr J Hunter
Director of Personnel
Central Personnel Group
Department of Finance and Personnel
Rosepark House
Upper Newtownards Road
BELFAST
BT4 3NR

Miss Angus

27 August 1999

*I presume that this is the
most appropriate Committee.
Please note*

Dear John *Jim 31/8*

Thank you for your letter of 18 August 1999 about flying the Union Flag on government buildings.

While we appreciate that the issue has been referred to the Central Secretariat, in my letter of 1 October 1998 to you I raised it as a personnel issue. Nothing in the intervening 11 months has dissuaded us to the contrary. Consequently we have no alternative but to table this issue for the next meeting of the Equal Opportunities Committee of the Central Whitley Council.

Yours sincerely

Jim McCusker
J McCUSKER
General Secretary

27081

Miss Beebe o/r

Mr Graham 20/9

*Debbie Smith " Contact to include this
on the EO Committee of which a meeting
is being organised. Debbie will be asking for
briefing*

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Mr J McCusker
General Secretary
NIPSA
Harkin House
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18 August 1999

Dear 

FLYING OF UNION FLAG OVER GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS

Thank you for your letter of 12 August.

As I advised you in my letters of 30 November 1998 and 11 March 1999, the question of the flying of the Union Flag on Government buildings is under consideration. That is still the position and final conclusions have not yet been reached.

As you will appreciate, decisions on this issue do not fall within the remit of Central Personnel Group but I can assure you that Central Secretariat is aware of Trade Union Side's views.

I can only repeat my earlier undertaking to give you a substantive reply as soon as I am able.


J G HUNTER


Mr. Graham
Co-PA please
Monitoring as you have
been doing
SA 23.8