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SUBJECT

cc Martin Set

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

12 November 1981

Dear Helen

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL

The Prime Minister held a meeting this morning at 0930 to discuss the question of the Holocaust Memorial. The Home Secretary, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, your Secretary of State and the Secretary of State for Defence were all present.

Your Secretary of State opened by saying that in November of last year he had explained to the Board of Deputies of British Jews that their original proposal to site the Holocaust Memorial outside the North front of Richmond Terrace was not acceptable. Since then the Board of Deputies had waited calmly and quietly for the next move by the Government. Mr. Heseltine had hoped to be able to discuss with them possible sites in the Royal Parks, but he was aware that the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary had raised a point of principle about the use of Crown Land for a foreign memorial.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that, in his view, the Holocaust Memorial should not be sited on Crown property. The Memorial had nothing to do with Britain. That we should allow this Memorial to be constructed on Crown Land 35 years after the Second World War could well be offensive to the Federal Republic of Germany. He would much prefer the Board of Deputies to buy or lease their own site in London, and either to erect a Memorial or preferably to create something useful like a park or playing field. However, Lord Carrington recognised that discussions with the Board of Deputies might have already gone too far for the Government to refuse an offer of Crown Land. He hoped that if Crown Land were to be offered to the Board of Deputies it would not be seen as a precedent for the establishment of foreign memorials on Crown Land, although he acknowledged that the Yalta Memorial might be said to have already established this precedent.

The Prime Minister said that her main concern was that a site in a public park would be open to desecration. If Mr. Heseltine was to open discussions with the Board of Deputies about the siting of the Memorial in a public park, he should make quite clear the Government's concern about the possibility of vandalism. The Home Secretary confirmed that he could not guarantee the security of a site in a public park, and acknowledged that such a site might well be more open to desecration than a private memorial, but pointed out that no site, private or public, could be protected from vandalism.

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The National Front would have a particular interest in desecrating a Holocaust Memorial. If the Memorial were to be sited in a public park, the Metropolitan Police would favour a site in Hyde Park close to the police station.

In discussion, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary suggested that the Memorial might be sited in the gardens of one of the many squares in West London, and could be protected from vandalism by being placed within a building. However, Mr. Heseltine pointed out that this proposal would almost certainly arouse opposition from the local residents, who would be worried that the Memorial would attract vandals to their area. It would also create traffic problems in the area. These objections applied to many other private sites.

In conclusion, it was agreed that the Secretary of State for the Environment would explain to the Board of Deputies of British Jews that the Government was sympathetic to their proposal for a site in a public park. He should say that the Government had not ruled out the possibility of siting the Memorial in Hyde Park. But he should make clear the Government's concern that such a public site would be more exposed to desecration. He should encourage the Board of Deputies to consider whether they wished to take the risk of having a site that could be difficult to protect from vandalism. He might suggest some alternative sites in the Urban Development Corporation in the East end of London, which would not be such an obvious target for anti-semitic feeling.

I am sending copies of this letter to Andrew Jackson (Home Office), Roderic Lyne (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), and Jonathan Dawson (Ministry of Defence).

yours
Willie Rickett

Mrs. Helen Ghosh,
Department of the Environment.