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Prime Minister

Shall I minute to Lord Carrington's
Private Secretary on these lines?

Yes please
ms

ms
- 19/2

PRIME MINISTER

YALTA VICTIMS MEMORIAL

You asked for my advice on a personal basis about the erection of a memorial to those repatriated to the Soviet Union at the end of the last war.

I should be inclined strongly to oppose the erection of a memorial on Crown Land, if that carried the proposed wording which implies guilt on the part of this country.

Indeed, it would clearly be preferable if the memorial could be on land other than Crown Land. But as the chosen site is on Crown Land, I would advise against an attempt now to prevent it being erected on the proposed ground.

In the circumstances, therefore, I would favour allowing the memorial to be erected on the proposed site on Crown Land, but only provided that the sponsors first agree to amend the inscription on the lines proposed in the letter of 7 February from Peter Carrington's Private Secretary.

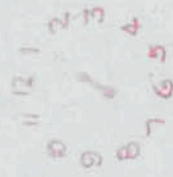
Attache's

Wohls

19. February 1980



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cc OOG
CO

MS
Home
Affairs

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

21 February 1980

Yalta Victims Memorial

The Prime Minister has seen your letter to me of 7 February about the proposal that a memorial should be erected on Crown Land to those who were repatriated to the Soviet Union at the end of the last war.

The Prime Minister has decided that it would not now be right to try to prevent the erection of the memorial on Crown Land. However, it is also her view that it would not be acceptable for a memorial to be put up with the inscription at present proposed. The Government's agreement is conditional on the amendment of the inscription along the lines proposed in the final paragraph of your letter under reference.

The Prime Minister has written to Lord Bethell informing him of her decision. I enclose a copy of her letter. As you will see she has not conveyed to Lord Bethell the proposed new wording for the inscription. The negotiation of the wording with the organisers of the appeal is unlikely to be altogether easy. I imagine that you will wish to keep in touch with David Edmonds about this.

I am sending copies of this letter to David Edmonds (Department of the Environment) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

M. O'D. B. ALEXANDER

Paul Lever, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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Home Affairs ^{DFG}

Free
~~BF 22.2.80~~

15 February 1980

YALTA VICTIMS MEMORIAL

I enclose copies of two letters about the erection of a memorial to those who were forcibly repatriated to the Soviet Union at the end of the last War. I hope that the letters, taken together, are self-explanatory.

The Prime Minister's present inclination is to decide that the memorial may be erected on Crown Land provided that the inscription is changed in the manner proposed in Paul Lever's letter. However, before taking a final view, the Prime Minister would be grateful to receive, on a personal basis, the advice of the Home Secretary.

M. O'D. B. ALEXANDER

John Chilcot, Esq.,
Home Office.

DFG

Yalta Victims

File



(1)

10 DOWNING STREET

Ronnie Minister

Two decisions :-

- (a) Should the memorial be on Crown land? Lord Lamington thinks not (a personal recommendation rather than a departmental one). Do you agree? You may like to consult one or two other colleagues e.g. the Home Secretary before deciding.

Yes mi.

If you decide that the memorial should be on Crown land then

- (b) Should the inscription be changed?

An alternative text is proposed in the attached letter.

Consult Home Secretary.

Provided the inscription is changed as indicated - I have difficulty in having the memorial on crown land ^{stz} out



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

7 February 1980

Dear Michael,

Yalta Victims Memorial

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Prime Minister had a word about this on 4 February.

Few of the facts about this sad story are not in dispute. It is clear, however, that over one million Russians were repatriated to the Soviet Union between 1944 and 1947 from various parts of liberated Europe by the British authorities (30,000 of them from the UK itself), in accordance with the policy of the Government of the time and with the Yalta Agreement. A relatively small minority of these were returned against their will, including some women and children. Many were subsequently sent by the Soviet regime to labour camps and some were shot.

There is no doubt that this was one of the grimmest episodes at the end of a grim war. But the conflicting and uncertain evidence would require further research before specific and conclusive judgements could be attempted. In particular Count Tolstoy, in his book, "Victims of Yalta" gives very little weight to a number of considerations surrounding the repatriation, notably the then Government's concern that British citizens under Soviet control should promptly be returned home; the importance attached at that time to co-operation with the Soviet Union wherever possible; and the fact that many of the repatriated persons had fought on the German side and thus were traitors to an ally (whatever view we may now take of the nature of that ally).

Although there will no doubt be Russian and Eastern European reactions if the monument is put up, Lord Carrington believes that the matter is not really one of foreign policy. The question is whether Crown Land should be used for a permanent memorial which would both imply criticism of the British Governments of the period, bearing in mind also that some of the Ministers and others concerned (or their widows and other relatives) are still alive, and also making a controversial political point on a subject where historians and the general public are by no means unanimous. It is, of course, for the Prime Minister herself to judge how compelling the arguments are against imputing guilt to previous British governments, bearing in mind that it was the government of Mr Churchill who signed the Yalta Agreement. But Lord Carrington's personal view is that Crown Land should only be used for monuments to events about which there is a broad national consensus. He would prefer the sponsors of the memorial to be told that they ought to look for another site.

/If

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If, however, the Government decided to allow the memorial to be built on Crown Land, Lord Carrington suggests that the Secretary of State for the Environment might require that at least the inscription on the memorial should be uncontroversial. We understand from Sir Bernard Braine that the present draft of the inscription reads:-

"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 delivered against their will by Britain and her allies to imprisonment and death at the hands of communist governments between 1943 and 1947."

This text is open to objection. The people who were returned to the communist countries were not all innocent, since many had fought for the Germans. They included other Soviet nationalities besides Russians. It is not known that all suffered imprisonment and death. And the phrase "delivered against their will by Britain and her allies" implies criticism of the British Governments of the day. A possible text might read:-

"This memorial was placed here by Members of Parliament of all parties and others to commemorate the thousands of men, women and children from the Soviet Union and other Eastern European nations who suffered unjustly after their return to the communist countries between 1943 and 1947".

I am sending copies of this letter to David Edmonds (Dept of Environment) and to David Wright (Cabinet Office).

Yours etc

Paul

(P Lever)
Private Secretary

M O'D B Alexander Esq
10 Downing Street
LONDON

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FROM
NICHOLAS
BETHELL

TELEPHONE
01-402-6877

73 SUSSEX SQUARE
LONDON W2 2SS

By Hand

The Prime Minister,
10 Downing Street,
LONDON S.W.1.

28th January 1980

Dear Margaret,

*earlier
comes to
Pol office* { You may remember that on January 29th you wrote me a very kind letter about our all-party project to erect a memorial to the innocent victims of forcible repatriation to the Soviet Union in 1944-47. And you sent an anonymous contribution of £10 to our appeal fund.

Our project has progressed well since then. We have enough money to construct the memorial, which will be in the form of a fountain, and we are on the point of commissioning a well-known sculptor. We have outline planning permission to erect it on a piece of Crown land near the Victoria and Albert Museum and the matter is with the Department of the Environment for final decision. I thought that we were home and dry - until this morning.

It seems that the Department of the Environment thought it appropriate to consult the Foreign and Commonwealth Office before giving us our final approval. And now, so I gather from private conversations, FCO officials are advising Peter Carrington to prevent the memorial from being built on Crown land. Our site, of course, is on Crown land and we believe it thoroughly appropriate that this should be so, since it was in the name of the Crown that a large number of innocent men, women and children were sent to their deaths in Russia.

This morning Bernard Braine, chairman of our appeal, was telephoned by a FCO official, who told him that an answer to our request for planning permission would not be long delayed, that a decision by the Foreign and Commonwealth secretary would soon be taken, but that before this he would

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The Prime Minister

28th January 1980

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have to consult with "colleagues", presumably the Cabinet.

At this point, although until now I have not bothered you with this small matter and of course I have preserved the anonymity of your personal contribution to the fund, I feel that I must write and appeal to you not to allow FCO objections to destroy our work and kill our project. You will appreciate, I know, what the effect of a refusal would be, in this week of all weeks, on the many people in this country who feel strongly that a terrible decision was made in 1944 and that much injustice was done in Britain's name, injustice which should now be atoned for as far as is possible.

With all best wishes,

Yours,

Michaelmas

