

Prime Minister

Ref. A085/269

MR BUTLER

I suggest that you should see Mr. Heseltine's suggestions before agreeing to putting them on the Cabinet agenda - we do not want him to create another row in Cabinet. We are trying to get an advance copy for you.

40th Anniversary of Victory in Europe
~~We are promised a copy tomorrow morning.~~

At Cabinet on 24 January, the Secretary of State for Defence said that he would put proposals to colleagues very shortly ^{FEB} about the arrangements to mark the 40th Anniversary of the ending of the Second World War in Europe. The Prime Minister made it clear that she wished to reach a final decision on this issue as quickly as possible and in any case within the next fortnight. A decision is therefore needed quickly on the way in which the Secretary of State for Defence's proposals should be addressed. 28.1

2. The Defence and Overseas Policy Committee would normally be an appropriate forum for such matters; but given the high degree of Parliamentary and public interest in the matter, and the difficulty of getting together a meeting of OD in the near future, I think that it would be best to add it to the agenda for the Cabinet itself for either 31 January or 7 February, depending on when the Secretary of State for Defence circulates his proposals.

3. If the Prime Minister agrees with this approach, I shall make the necessary arrangements for the Secretary of State for Defence's proposals to be taken in Cabinet.

REA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

I should prefer to discuss them with

The Queen first. May we see them please

28 January 1985

We may have allowed him to offer

28.1

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WITH

THE COMPLIMENTS OF THE

PRIVATE SECRETARY

We spoke. I attach the draft ^{with} of Mr Kee's speech for the Adjournment Debate this evening for your information. Anne Bennett
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Jan19.1et

I welcome the opportunity presented by the Hon Gentleman initiating this debate to explain a little more fully the Government's thinking on this very important issue.

We have stated on a number of occasions over the past week that we have decided that the 40th anniversary of the end of the Second World War should be ^{appropriately} marked by ~~national commemorative celebrations~~. We are particularly conscious of the high degree of public interest that there has been on this question and understand and sympathise with the feelings that have been expressed.

We are still considering the form that the ^{commemorative} ~~commemorative celebrations~~ should take and a number of options are being ~~closely~~ studied; we presently envisage, however, that the commemorations will include a Service of Thanksgiving at which those who gave their lives will be honoured and the spirit of peace and reconciliation will be stressed ~~would no doubt be~~

In planning these celebrations we are also carefully considering the nature and extent of representation from other countries. We shall of course taken into account the views that have been expressed to us from various quarters including those of the Hon Gentleman before taking any decisions. My Rt Hon Friend the Prime Minister has already announced that there will be many representatives of foreign and commonwealth governments to whom we shall extend invitations to take part in the commemoration, either as High Commissioners or as Ambassadors, including those from the Federal Republic of Germany and the Soviet Union. We shall, of course, wish to ensure that this does not become a divisive issue, or give grounds for offence to our allies, past or present. As the Prime Minister has said we will need to consult widely and determine the form of celebration before making final decisions.

We shall, as always, remember the contribution made by our Allies in the Second World War and our joint victory over tyranny [if appropriate - not least immense Soviet achievement, referred to by Mr Cartwright].

[If Mr Cartwright strongly pursues theme of Soviet wartime achievement - The Hon Member referred to the Soviet wartime achievement. We have always recognised the immense sacrifices of the Soviet people during the War. It is striking that the Soviet Union seems reluctant to recognise the reconciliation and changes that have been achieved by these sacrifices. Indeed in contradiction of present-day realities, they have in recent months pursued a campaign accusing the leaders of the Federal Republic of Germany of harbouring militarist and revanchist ambitions. It is particularly sad that they have stressed this theme in their approach to the 40th anniversary, which we all feel should be an occasion for commemorating the achievements of 40 years of peace.]

However, as the Prime Minister said in the House on 15 January, we will aim in the commemorative celebrations to focus not only on the anniversaries but also on the achievements of the last 40 years in preserving peace with freedom. We shall, of course, have very much in mind the reconstruction and reconciliation that has been achieved in this time. As we approach this 40th anniversary of the end of the Second World War we are very mindful that our adversaries at that time are now our Allies and conscious of the considerable efforts that have been made to build constructively on the sacrifices of the war years and the achievement of reconciliation.

As my Rt Hon Friend the Prime Minister made clear after her discussions with Chancellor Kohl, we see 1945 as a year which saw a new rebirth of freedom: a freedom which we must preserve for future generations.

I would also stress, and this will be reflected in the tone of the celebrations, that VE day did not mark the end of the Second World War and our commemorations will focus on the ending of war both in Europe and in the Far East and on the heroic sacrifice of the Allied forces in all theatres.

[Hon Members have expressed the view in this House that those who fought in the Far East should not be forgotten. I can reassure them that the gallantry these men displayed and the suffering and privations they underwent are not forgotten; and that they will be equally honoured in our commemorative celebrations].

However, the Hon Gentleman has specifically referred in this short debate to Victory in Europe Day, and I believe it would be appropriate to spend a few moments considering the events which have followed that victory.

In 1945 Europe had been torn apart by the devastating conflict which had embroiled its nations for six years. This year we are able to celebrate 40 years of continuous peace in Europe. It is not by chance that the longest period of peace in Europe this century has coincided with the existence of the Atlantic Alliance.

The quintessential purpose of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation is the preservation of the principles of freedom and democracy. Its strength lies in the determination of its signatories to do all in their power to safeguard peace and international security, and in their willingness to work together in a wholly defensive alliance. It is a measure of the remarkable success that NATO has had in meeting its objectives that the thirty five years of its existence have been marked by an unbroken period of peace in Europe. This has been at a time when we have been faced with the advent of weapons of unprecedented power. There has been conflict and

unrest in one or more parts of the world more or less throughout the entire period, and there has been no weakening, indeed the opposite, in the challenge posed by the Soviet Union and her Warsaw Pact allies.

What then has been the key to the continued effectiveness of our transatlantic Alliance? There have, of course been difficulties and differences of opinion - this is natural in an Alliance of independent nations. But it is the main strength of NATO that its members, with common aims and interests, can discuss and resolve their problems together. NATO is an association of free States, joined together to preserve their security by collective self-defence, and to strengthen peace by means of constructive dialogue. Our solidarity does not conflict with the ability of each country to pursue its own policies. We are a partnership of equals with none dominant and none dominated, but we are committed to close consultation and cooperation in pursuit of our successful aims.

In addition to guaranteeing our security, we of course see the need to build the foundations of lasting peace, to develop balanced East-West relations and to contribute to peaceful progress worldwide. We shall continue to pursue these ends with our allies in NATO.

DEFENSIVE BRIEFING - Q & A

- Q. Will the Government accept any Soviet invitation to their celebrations in Moscow?
- A. We have not yet received an invitation from the Russians. If we do, we shall have to balance a number of factors before deciding on our final response. We shall have in mind the immense sacrifice of the Soviet Union in the last war, but the progress at present in the anti-German propaganda campaign in the Soviet Union is something else of which we shall have to take account.
- Q. Will the government be attending other international events associated with the end of the Second World War (eg the anniversary of the Dresden bombing)?
- A. We shall consider invitations to commemorative events case by case and in consultation with our friends and allies bearing in mind our view that any event of this sort should honour the sacrifices of the war in a spirit of reconciliation, and avoid polemics.
- Q. How has the attitude of Germany affected the government's position on this question?
- A. Of course, it is entirely a matter for us to decide how to commemorate this anniversary but I firmly believe that nothing should be done which is triumphalist or anti-German in spirit. This subject was raised in discussions between the Prime Minister and Chancellor Kohl and I believe that the Chancellor wholly shares our view that this commemoration should aim to honour the dead whilst stressing the themes of peace and reconciliation.
- Q. Is the Government considering military parades to mark the anniversary?
- A. The form that the celebrations will take has yet to be decided.

Q Will the government consider arranging the commemorative events so that they will involve ordinary people rather than diplomats or political leaders?

A. As I have said we have yet to decide on the form that the commemoration will take; [I believe, however, that it is most likely and fitting that representation from overseas will take the form of High Commissioners or Ambassadors as appropriate]

Q. Will there be celebrations for both VE and VJ Day?

A. We shall commemorate the 40th anniversary of the end of the Second World War and the peace that has ensued. This will naturally include the ending of the conflict in all theatres.

BACKGROUND

US of S(DP) will be aware of the considerable Parliamentary and press interest in the question of celebrating the 40th anniversary of VE Day.

This question first arose in the House of Commons on 15 October during Prime Minister's Question Time when the PM agreed that the Government would arrange national celebrations. She was subsequently asked about the commemoration of the War in the Far East: the representation of the Soviet Union in any commemorative events and the need to keep celebrations international in character (the last by Mr Cartwright) (relevant Hansard extracts attached). She has agreed that the celebrations will include victory in the Far East as well as Europe and that the celebration will be essentially national with involvement from overseas and commonwealth countries. The subject was also brought up in the press conference following the Prime Minister's discussion with Chancellor Kohl last week (extracts from the press conference are attached).

There is not a great deal that can usefully be said at this stage about the proposed celebrations as the form that they will take is still being discussed. I attach a submission from DCDS(Prog & Pers) to S of S outlining a number of possible options which are still under consideration by the Secretary of State. In particular it is understood that he is giving further thought to levels of representation and the question of a parade. Further briefing will be submitted if necessary before the debate.

It has been agreed throughout that the commemoration should take the form of a celebration not only of victory but of the achievement of reconstruction, reconciliation and retention of peace with freedom for the last 40 years.

There has been some controversy about the level of Soviet involvement appropriate to any celebrations in view of their considerable contribution to the War in Europe. The line taken has been that we are very aware of their contribution but that we deplore any attempt to exploit the occasion by fostering anti-Germany feeling or attributing totally unsubstantiated claims of German revanchism. An invitation to attend celebrations in the Soviet Union has not yet been received but a supplementary is included to cover any questioning on this point.