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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

15 January 1985

Dear Robin,

Commemoration of the Anniversary of VE Day

You asked in your letter of 14 January for advice on a number of possibilities for the commemoration of the 40th Anniversary of VE Day; and for advice on the line which the Prime Minister should take at Parliamentary Questions today.

/ / I enclose a line to take and notes for supplementaries for Question Time. This reflects discussion with Richard Mottram in the Ministry of Defence, who are responsible for any domestic arrangements to commemorate VE Day.

The line recognises that there should be a national commemoration of the 40th anniversary, giving due prominence to the theme 40 years of peace and reconciliation. The various possibilities mentioned in your letter will no doubt need further consideration. The Foreign Secretary personally sees some attraction in the idea of adapting the annual British Legion Service of Remembrance.

On the international aspects of VE Day, we have consulted our closest allies. None of them has in mind an international commemoration. The German Government are, however, thinking of holding a domestic Service of Thanksgiving in Cologne Cathedral, and there will be a special session of the German Parliament. It is also likely that President Reagan will stay on in Germany for a few days after the Bonn Economic Summit, which would give the opportunity for a German-American gesture of reconciliation if the two leaders wished to follow the example of Kohl and Mitterrand at Verdun.

The Foreign Secretary believes that, while we should continue to keep abreast of the plans being developed by our allies, we have no interest in proposing that there should be a large scale international commemoration of VE Day sponsored by the Western allies. Any such event would raise difficult problems about how to involve the Russians without causing deep offence to the Germans (whom the Russians are almost daily accusing of 'revanchism' and militarism). The Germans would have no reason to object to a purely domestic British

/ commemoration ...

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commemoration of VE Day. What they would resent would be any hint of triumphalism or association with 'revanchist' charges. Our objective should therefore be to ensure that any commemoration takes as its theme reconciliation and looks towards the future; and that the memory of the dead is suitably honoured. It would of course, as the draft replies to supplementaries suggest, be entirely appropriate to use the forthcoming 10th Anniversary of the CSCE Final Act to develop the theme of reconciliation. The 30th Anniversary of the Austrian State Treaty (15 May) will offer another occasion.

The Russians are taking soundings about attendance by their wartime allies in the major celebration which they plan on 8-9 May, and which they are likely to use to promote their propaganda charges of revanchism. If an invitation does issue, we shall consult carefully with the US and France on whether to accept, keeping the Germans fully informed. Chancellor Kohl will wish to discuss this question in detail with the Prime Minister on 18 January.

We shall wish to speak quickly to the German Ambassador after the Prime Minister has spoken in the House today, to explain our thinking.

[REDACTED] A supplementary reply reflects this.

I am copying this letter to Janet Lewis-Jones (Lord President's Office), Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence), David Morris (Lord Privy Seal's Office), Alex Galloway (Paymaster General's Office) and Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours ever,
Len Appleyard

(L V Appleyard)
Private Secretary

Robin Butler Esq
No 10 Downing Street

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PRIME MINISTER'S QUESTION TIME : 15 JANUARY

40TH ANNIVERSARY OF VE DAY

Line to Take

Entirely right that everyone who wishes to have opportunity to recall the sacrifices of the War, and commemorate not just victory but also 40 years of peace in Europe. We are considering the form of a national commemoration which will both honour the dead, and point to reconciliation and reconstruction that has been achieved; and will make an announcement in due course.

Supplementaries

An International Commemoration

No proposal for this. There will be occasions such as the 10th Anniversary of the CSCE Final Act to mark the theme of peaceful reconciliation and to look to the future.

Soviet Wartime Achievement

We have always recognised the immense achievement and sacrifice of the Soviet people during the War.

Soviet Invitation for this year

No formal invitation has yet been received. If invited we will consider carefully and coordinate with our wartime allies. We shall also take account of the nature of what is proposed, which should commemorate peace, reconciliation and reconstruction.

The German Position

No question of a German 'veto' on British arrangements. Entirely for us to decide. But it is my firm view that nothing that is done should be done in a triumphalist or anti-German spirit.

Normandy Landings 40th Anniversary

The French Government issued an invitation. Clearly right to accept.

Involvement of Germans/Italians/Russians in British National Ceremony

Something to be considered in due course.



Have you changed your position?

The question of a national commemoration is a matter for us to decide. We have not said that we were opposed to this. On the contrary, can see why there is strong feeling in the country in favour. Theme of reconciliation is one which would be welcomed by other governments (so no question of being put off by the views of others).



lines would have the merit of not distorting history it would hardly do justice to the realities of present-day politics and our flourishing post-war partnership with Germany, Italy and Japan.

An opinion poll carried out in 1983 indicated that many people in Britain now regard the Germans as our best friends in Europe. I think we need to take account of this evolution in popular attitudes in our approach to the anniversaries of 1985. We do not want to neglect either our own achievements, or the achievements of others, including the Soviet Union and Poland. We will look with an open mind at any opportunities to honour these achievements without polemics and without distortions of either the wartime or the post-war facts of history in Europe. But I am afraid we have yet to see any evidence that the Russians are approaching the occasion in the same balanced way: their propaganda alleging present-day German 'revanchism' suggests just the opposite. In the circumstances, I see a real risk that any official British international celebration confined to wartime allies could appear at best nostalgic, and at worst anti-German, unbalanced and open to historical distortion by the Soviet Union.

Your friends

Diana Young

Baroness Young

M. Anderson

World this Weekend - Interview with Lady Young - 13 January 1985

Bill Frost:

Lady Young: I would like to make it absolutely plain that the Government recognise that we won a very great and remarkable victory in 1945, that our forces were magnificent and thanks to their courage we are now able to live in peace and freedom. But the fact is that we have peace today not just because of victory in 1945 but because of NATO and political developments in Europe, notably the Community. And fortunately we are now allies and friends of our former enemies, a fact we must recognise and welcome. And therefore we do need to consider what our friends think.

Bill Frost: So you're willing to be involved in but not to sponsor or organise such ~~RR~~ events.

Lady Young: Well, what we have said is that we look to these sort of events, we would be glad to be involved in celebrations organised by the British Legion. We also considered the possibility of other events in the course of the year, for example the Economic Summit in Bonn, which will take place early in May, the likely high level meeting in July and August to mark the tenth anniversary of the Helsinki Accord. There are a number of events in the course of the year in which we could mark the 40th anniversary.

Bill Frost: >I think what Mr Cartwright and others wanted was an official British celebration. What's the real objection to that when so many would seem to want it?

Lady Young: I cannot of course speak for what the German Government might say, but the fact was that they were

concerned about what happened last year for the 40th anniversary of the Normandy Landings. And I think we have to take into consideration their view. And the fact of the matter is that on these matters we want to do two things. We want in considering anniversaries like VE Day first to honour our war dead. But we also need to look forward and not back. And I do think we need to avoid encouraging or joining in what the Russians are saying about German militarism.

Bill Frost: You said in your letter to Mr Cartwright that such celebrations could be open to what you called historical distortion by the Soviet Union. Do you not think that that threatens to jeopardise the relationship between Britain and Russia which seems to be improving so dramatically following Mr Gorbachev's visit?

Lady Young : No I think we have to consider both arguments. We have of course to consider the arguments of the celebration and the recognition of Russia's contribution in the Second World War. But we also have to consider the political realities of Europe today.

cc PS
PS / Lady Young
PS / Mr. Ripford
PS / Mr. Renton
PS / PUS
Mr. D. Thomas
Mr. Jenkins
WED
Samed Dept
FED

News Dept
(Copies All)
No. 10 Press Office

15 JAN 1985



Subject "master"



M.F.J.

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

14 January 1985

Dear Len,

Celebration of the Anniversary of VE Day

The Prime Minister did not have an opportunity to raise with the Foreign Secretary at lunch this morning the widespread criticism of the Government's decision not to arrange a celebration of the 40th anniversary of VE Day.

The Prime Minister, however, did refer to this matter in a discussion with other colleagues before lunch, and a number of possibilities were mooted, with various advantages and disadvantages.

It was generally recognised that a national Service of Thanksgiving in St. Paul's Cathedral would raise difficulties about those to be invited as well as security problems, and would also give rise to controversy about the contents of the service as had happened over the Thanksgiving Service for the Falklands campaign. A joint session of Parliament in Westminster Hall, at which representatives of the Armed Services, ex-servicemen's organisations and the bereaved could be present, would diminish some of these problems but there might be pressure to arrange a similar event to mark the anniversary of Victory over Japan next year. An alternative, which could also cater in due course for Victory over Japan, would be to use the annual British Legion's Service of Remembrance at the Albert Hall. Other possibilities which were mentioned were an open air service on Horse Guards organised by the armed forces or a repeat of the service in St. Margaret's, Westminster, which, in the recollection of some of those present, the House of Commons had attended when Victory in Europe was announced in 1945.

The Prime Minister would be grateful for further advice from the Foreign Secretary on whether, in the light of the reaction to the announcement so far made, any of these possibilities should be further considered. I am afraid that we will anyway need your urgent advice on the line which the Prime Minister should take on this matter in case it is raised at Parliamentary Questions tomorrow: Tim Flesher has commissioned briefing on this. The subject is also likely to come up in the bilateral meeting with the German Government on Friday.

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I am copying this letter to Janet Lewis-Jones (Lord President's Office), Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence), David Morris (Lord Privy Seal's Office), Alex Galloway (Paymaster General's Office) and Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours ever,

Robin Butler

Len Appleyard Esq
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

MJ2ABG