



A professional staff association for HM Forces

Recognition campaign arrives in Parliament

The campaign for recognition of a staff association for the armed forces took an important step forward last month, with a parliamentary reception for MPs and peers in the Palace of Westminster.

The reception on May 20th was sponsored by Linda Gilroy MP (Plymouth Sutton), a member of the House of Commons Defence Select Committee. The event had been suggested by the British Armed Forces Federation ("BAFF"), one of the aims being to place parliamentarians in a stronger position to question the typical myths about military representation, should they ever reappear in Select Committee evidence or in debate in the future.

Presentations were given by Commandant Michael Geraghty of the Representative Association of Commissioned Officers (Ireland) and by Flemming Vinther, Chairman of HKKF – the Union of Enlisted Privates and Corporals in the Danish Army. While the Irish and Danish organisations had much in common, it was clear that there were national differences, as one would expect; there was no "one size fits all" solution. Unlike RACO and BAFF, HKKF was a trade union but their Chairman emphasized that like other public service unions in Denmark, they had signed up not to undertake industrial action.

In fact, no evidence has been found of any recognised representative military association or trade union in any modern country having involved itself in any kind of industrial action.

The final speaker was a senior serving officer who had previously commanded the Danish Battle Group fighting in Helmand province alongside British forces. In an unforgettable presentation, he spoke from a commander's perspective about the unit relationship with the representative organisation back home, which had helped to sustain his soldiers and their families and, in so doing, had contributed to the unit's endurance and operational cohesion.

Last month's reception sponsored by Linda Gilroy MP raised the debate to a new level. With British personnel indicating in surveys that a recognised representative staff federation is long overdue, we in BAFF acknowledge our responsibility to inform the debate and, if necessary, to challenge the myths.

DOUGLAS YOUNG
Executive Chairman, British Armed Forces Federation

• Photograph shows Danish troops training to fight alongside UK forces in Helmand province, Afghanistan



More about the recognition campaign and the presentations on May 20th can be found on the BAFF website at www.baff.org.uk/parliament