

To: Mr. Stiller ^{Review papers}
Mr. Bell - pl p.a. with earlier ffs ^{on 1st of Dec}
on the impact of check-points ^{on the}
or tourism.

CM/00918/91
~~MC NIO~~

CONFIDENTIAL

PAB/6864/WKL/RM

DEPARTMENT OF
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
04 FEB 1991
RECEIVED
BRANCH

DUP
952
- 1 FEB 1991

257/91
512

FROM: W K LINDSAY, PAB
DATE: 31 JANUARY 1991

- 1. Mr McNeill [Agreed DMCN 31/1/91]
- 2. PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B

- cc PS/Paymaster General (B&L) - B
- PS/Minister of State (B&L) - B
- PS/PUS (B&L) - B
- PS/Sir K Bloomfield - b
- Mr Pilling - B
- Mr Ledlie - B
- Mr Alston - B
- Mr Wilson - B
- Mr Thomas - B
- Mr Bell - B
- Mr Hill - B
- Mr Cooke - B
- Mr McKervill - B
- Mr Pope - B

① cc: PS/Mr. Needham - the
Minister will be interested in this -
particularly see para. 8.

② Fine pvcps

cc Mr Hill
Mr Sence
Mr Minnis
Jim 2/2

made: to see esp. para 8

THE SITUATION IN WEST FERMANAGH

It may be helpful in advance of the Secretary of State's meeting with the Free Presbyterian deputation next week to report on recent PAB contacts in West Fermanagh. The area runs from Kesh to Belleek, is bounded by Lower Lough Erne to the south and the border and Pettigoe to the north. Since the closure of the Boa Island PVCP at night we have had a number of letters and telephone calls from both communities there and Fermanagh's only DUP Councillor Bert Johnston recently forwarded a petition to Ministers in relation to this checkpoint. Mr Watson and I spent a day in the area this week speaking to a number of local people who themselves have wide contacts in both communities - an SDLP councillor, veterinary surgeon, postmaster, district nurse and a hotel owner.

2. There are two PVCP's in the area - one at Rosscor Bridge just outside Belleek on the A46 road to Enniskillen, the other at Boa Island about 8 or 9 miles from Belleek on the A47. This latter PVCP

CONFIDENTIAL
-1-

C O N F I D E N T I A L

Some of those now closed at night. Unlike the position in South East Fermanagh we found unanimity among all those to whom we spoke, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, that Boa Island PVCP was sited in the wrong place, was not seen to serve any useful security function and could be by-passed, though at some inconvenience, by those who wished to evade it. Most of those to whom we spoke said to us that its existence not only placed the lives of soldiers and locals at risk but also caused considerable inconvenience and community aggravation.

Protestant/Unionist viewpoint

3. Mr Billy Stewart is the postmaster at Leggs Post Office and store about two miles from the checkpoint. He is a protestant, was formerly in the security forces and his wife is a district nurse. Through their work, they are in regular touch with people in both communities and move around the area daily. They claimed that they and other protestants in the area did not derive any comfort from being so close to the checkpoint when it effectively excluded them from the rest of Northern Ireland. Their next door neighbours daughter Gillian Johnston was killed by the IRA a few years ago though cross-border attacks on protestants have been fewer here than in other parts of Fermanagh. The Stewart's have to go through the checkpoint to get to church, to visit their son, for social activities and shopping trips and in the summer, with more motorists using the scenic route, there can be long queues of traffic in both directions with delays of 1/2 or 3/4 hour commonplace. The night-time closures have added to their feeling of isolation. A few weeks ago the couple were returning from a church meeting just after 10 pm, tried the intercom at the checkpoint but did not get any response and had to take a 25 mile detour through Pettigoe to get home.

4. Mrs Stewart pointed out that people she termed republicans (rather than nationalists) have told her that they would not think of negotiating Boa Island Checkpoint but instead use the Tullyvogy road (BCP 212) which has remained open. Protestants are less happy

C O N F I D E N T I A L

-2-

C O N F I D E N T I A L

at taking this alternative route because they regard the area it passes through as "hostile". The Stewarts argued that this particular road should be rendered impassable, and queried also why the Pettigoe-Kesh road had no checkpoint on it. It is apparently the only border crossing point with a customs post which does not have a PVCP.

5. Ross Veterinary Service is a large practice based in Belleek and covering most of the West Fermanagh area. We spoke to Mr and Mrs Ross and their son Brian, who is also a partner in the firm. Brian Ross' home overlooks Boa Island checkpoint about 400 yards from it. He told us of occasions during summer months when he has had to negotiate long queues of daytrippers to get to an urgent call and is now fearful of what might happen in the spring when he would anticipate getting additional calls during the night. In the past few weeks he has had two such calls - on one occasion he got through the checkpoint, on the other he did not. The wife of another partner, Richard Lyons, is completely paralysed and requires constant attention. If Mr Lyons arrives home after 10 pm those looking after his wife, who live on the other side of the checkpoint face a long detour to get home themselves if the soldiers decide not to let them through.

6. Mrs Ross (Senior) made a more general point about security in the Belleek area. Police, she said, would not come out if called at night and army or police patrols were hardly ever seen in the area. She felt they were living in a 'no mans land' and no-one really cared. She said that the security forces only seemed concerned about protecting themselves.

Catholic/nationalist viewpoint

7. In Belleek we also spoke to Councillor Tommy Gallagher (SDLP Education Spokesman and Westminster candidate) and Tom O'Brien, owner of the Carlton Hotel which is situated opposite the Belleek Pottery on the banks of the River Erne and only yards from the border. The hotel has been bombed several times. Both men went out of their way to stress that the nationalist community accepted the need for a security force presence in the area but felt that both

C O N F I D E N T I A L

C O N F I D E N T I A L

Checkpoints (particularly Boa Island) were ineffective, could be bypassed and were a significant disincentive to the tourist industry, which provided a lifeline for the whole area. Both maintained that patrolling and spot checks would provide more effective cover. They pointed out that the last bombing in Belleek town could not have been stopped by action at either of the PVCP's but particularly Boa Island, which is 8 or 9 miles from the border. The other PVCP at Roscor could also be bypassed by using either of the mountain roads through Derrygonnelly or Garrison to Enniskillen.

Conclusion

8. The views in West Fermanagh differ from those in the south east of the county in that the people to whom we spoke in both communities agreed on the removal of a checkpoint. Local people say that Boa Island PVCP provides little deterrent to the terrorist yet inconveniences the law abiding population who live in the vicinity of it and who must use it frequently or face a long detour. Night-time closure has added to this ongoing problem as people do not know whether they will be allowed through or not from one occasion to another. The presence of the checkpoint and its appearance in an area of scenic beauty is incongruous and we were told that the tourist trade is being adversely affected - a local chalet owner has shelved a planned extension to his complex.

9. The feeling of isolation, particularly by the protestant community, is very noticeable in this area. There is wide support for the idea of increased patrolling by the security forces and some sympathy, particularly on the protestant side, for the view that both PVCP's should be replaced by one at the border in Belleek provided all other border crossing points were rendered impassable.

[Signed R Neill for]

W K LINDSAY
Political Affairs Division
Ext 2266 SH

RN/6426

C O N F I D E N T I A L