

Sproat

PRIVATE AND
CONFIDENTIAL

10th February 1982

Thank you for your letter of 3rd February, which I have shown to the Prime Minister.

I realise that you are exceptionally busy at the present time. However, when you have a moment, could you please give me a ring?

"The supreme function of Statesmanship is to provide against preventable evils . . ."

IAN GOW

Iain Sproat Esq MP

From: Iain Sproat, M.P.



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

3rd February 1982

Dear Ian,

Following our talk last night, I am putting down on paper my desperate concern that our Government's airports policy, officially and publicly stated and agreed, is likely to be blown to bits. The cause of this - if it happens - will be the re-opening of a public inquiry into whether or not to build a second terminal at Gatwick Airport. A second terminal at Gatwick is very important in itself, but it is even more important in its likely results on the current inquiry into whether to turn Stansted (Essex) into the third ^{major} London airport.

As you will recall, the inquiry at Stansted began on 29 September 1981. It is reckoned it will be the longest public inquiry ever, ~~and~~ will run until sometime in 1983, and will cost about £10 million. It is tying up vast resources at the British Airports Authority - who want Stansted, and would operate it - and it is tying up vast resources in the Department of Trade and other Departments (D.O.E., M.A.F.F., Defence, Transport).

If the Gatwick inquiry is re-opened, it would be impossible to continue concurrently with the Stansted inquiry.

There are two main reasons for this: first, if the Gatwick inquiry is re-opened, it will be because of new forecasts about likely levels of the number of passengers passing through the four "London" airports (Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted and Luton) in 1985. When the original Gatwick inquiry was held, from 29 January 1980 to 11 July 1980, the best forecast of passenger numbers was a range of a high of 61 million to a low of 55 million. Now, the Air Traffic Forecasting Working Party (A.T.F.W.P.), which includes representatives of the Department of Trade, British Airports Authority, Civil Aviation Authority, etc., has, because of judgements about the length of world recession and



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other imponderables, lowered its forecasts somewhat from a high of 51 million to a low of 45 million. (For reference, the 1981 figure of the number of passengers through the London airports was 39 million, so under any forecast figures there is going to be big expansion over the next few years. In addition to passenger traffic, air cargo traffic will also rise, and is already taking an ever-increasing proportion of our exports.) But if the Gatwick inquiry is re-opened because of "doubts" over the Gatwick figures, then protesters against Stansted will say that if we still cannot tell whether or when a second terminal at Gatwick is needed, how can we possibly decide now whether or not a vast new airport development at Stansted is needed. An adjournment of the Stansted inquiry will be called for, and, as certainly as anything ever is in such matters, granted.

The second reason why the re-opening of the Gatwick inquiry would mean the adjournment of the Stansted inquiry, is because, quite simply, the resources of the British Airports Authority - who currently run both the small, present facility at Stansted, and Gatwick - could not stretch to the man-hours necessary to prepare for, and participate in, both inquiries simultaneously.

You will recall that Stansted has already been considered twice: in 1967, it was thrown aside in order to set up the Roskill Commission; and in 1969, Roskill said no to Stansted, and said yes to Maplin or Cublington; then Maplin was abandoned in 1974. It is the best opinion of the Department of Trade that if a Stansted inquiry is abandoned yet again, it will, in practice, mean the end of the whole project.

It would be a tragic illustration of what John Nott called, back in 1979, "Years of indecision, decision, and counter-decision which reflect no credit on this country's capacity to make difficult but necessary choices".

The re-opening of the Gatwick inquiry, the effective abandonment of Stansted, would be a victory for all those evils of red-tape, bureaucracy, delay, and negative thinking, which we were elected to fight; and a defeat for the encouragement of enterprise, the growth of trade, and supply-side-led prosperity which we were elected to promote.



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The Gatwick ^{Inspector's} Report in favour of the second terminal has already been published. As far as the new forecasts about passenger traffic are concerned, the Department of Trade has written to all those who gave evidence at the original Gatwick inquiry, asking for their written comments on the new figures. This seems to me exactly the correct and appropriate level of response to the new level of information that the new - not vastly different - figures demand. That is perfectly fair and just. We propose to give other parties the opportunity to comment in writing on each other's views, and then John Biffen and Michael Heseltine jointly, will announce their decision on Gatwick. Meanwhile Stansted would go on uninterrupted.

The Department of the Environment are currently minded to say they want to abandon the written procedure, and re-open the Gatwick inquiry - not because they have any doubts about the need for the development, but because of the pressure of vested interests. For the reasons above, I believe this would be wrong and disastrously damaging. Please inform the Prime Minister. If there is anything else I can clarify about this matter, please let me know.

Yours ever,

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London, S.W.1.