



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

Mr. Dayley.

Please keep in hand
in case the issue arises

16 April 1984

CF: please keep A.J.C. 16/4
on file.

For John, Dms
17/4

No-Passport Excursions: France

As you know, the French told us last summer that they were unhappy about what they alleged were abuses of the Anglo-French No-Passport excursion arrangements, and wished to amend these. Matters may come to a head on this in the next few days. You may therefore like a note on the present state of play.

Under the arrangements, which have been in existence for nearly thirty years, British and Commonwealth citizens have been enabled to make short trips to France and back on production of a special card issued by carrying companies and/or travel agents. The French told us last summer that people not entitled to benefit from these arrangements were entering France and they turned back a number of excursionists whom they believed failed to qualify. The press made great play of the fact that all those turned back were coloured, and Parliamentary interest has continued to concentrate on this aspect of the French action. The French explained to us that their concerns were about two aspects of the arrangement. One was that in covering all Commonwealth citizens, it included citizens of Independent Commonwealth countries who would ordinarily require a visa. The other was the ease with which the cards are obtained. They are in fact issued on the basis of a personal declaration of identity and nationality without production of documentation in support.

We have had several rounds of discussions with the French with a view to meeting their concerns. The last of these took place in February, between Mr Whitney and the Secretary-General of the French Foreign Ministry. Mr Whitney put forward proposals which would have limited beneficiaries of the scheme to British citizens, and tightened up procedures for the issue of excursion cards, which would in future be stamped by our Immigration Officers. The French gave these proposals a good initial reception, and we had hopes of amending the arrangements along these lines. In the last few days, however, there have been further exchanges with the French, in which they made it clear that their Ministry of the Interior was unwilling to accept excursion cards unless they were issued by the British Government and certified the nationality and identity of the passenger.



We had already explained to the French that to do this would involve the procedures which people have to follow when they apply for an ordinary passport, including the payment of a fee. This would undermine the whole purpose and spirit of the no-passport excursion arrangements, which is to provide cheap and easy travel to France. We have emphasised that ending the existing arrangements would have damaging consequences commercially, both here and in France, and is likely to be represented by the media as a new Anglo-French row of the sort we should both be concerned to avoid. The Foreign Secretary has himself stressed these points on a number of occasions with the French, the latest being in Luxembourg last week, when he spoke to M. Dumas. We have of course kept in close touch with the commercial carriers.

Sir Antony Acland has spoken this morning to the French Ambassador and Mr Whitney has been in touch with the Secretary-General at the Quai d'Orsay in Paris to encourage the French to reflect carefully on the proposals we had made. Gutmann told Mr Whitney, however, that the fact that the cars would still be issued by the carriers and not by the British Government remained a basic problem for the French. In addition, a senior Home Office official has been in Paris today for meetings with the French Ministry of the Interior. The French attitude is therefore not yet entirely clear, and we hope that the French will now pause and reconsider. But there is, in our view, a possibility that the French may move to a fairly early denunciation of existing arrangements to which, under the terms of the agreement, would amount to two months' notice of their termination.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries to the Home Secretary and the Minister of Transport.

(R B Bone)
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq
10 Downing Street

16 JUN 1964

