

From: Alan Haselhurst, M.P.

✓ See Press
✓ I.G.



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

6th October, 1981

My Dear Prime Minister,

C7/10

Having read the transcript of Day 2 of the Stansted Airport Public Inquiry and received Constituency reactions to Press reports of it, I feel obliged to write to you to express my extreme concern about the Government's attitude towards the Inquiry.

I understand, of course, that the Government are entitled to have a policy towards airport development - even though I may think it mistaken - and equally entitled to hold to that policy in the absence of any better alternative being proved. Nevertheless I had always believed the assurance, given both on the record in the House of Commons and in other ways, that the Public Inquiry to follow the initial statement of policy would be "genuine and wide-ranging". It is very hard to see confirmation of this aim in the contribution on Day 2 of the Government's Counsel, Mr. Michael Barnes.

Mr. Barnes seems to have gone out of his way, on behalf of the Government, to rule out the alternatives which the Inquiry is testing. He used such emphatic terms that the Inspector was clearly placed in a difficulty. I must say that in view of all the protestations of good faith which have preceded the Inquiry, I think the Government could have instructed its Counsel to speak with moderate language, if not detachment, in order to uphold the commitment that they would be paying serious regard to the proceedings. As the record now stands few people think this is any longer the case. Counsel's action has fuelled the suspicion that the outcome of the Inquiry has all along been a foregone conclusion.

Mr. Barnes appeared to indicate to the Inspector that he would be seeking further instructions. I appeal to you to ensure that the various Departments of Government involved so present themselves that charges of irretrievable bias cannot be maintained. What is surely needed is an unequivocal declaration that the Government are not discounting in advance any option which the Inspector may be persuaded to recommend. Without this the Inquiry as a whole is diminished.

I hope you will be able to deal with this as a matter of some urgency and provide me and, more importantly, the Inspector with the necessary reassurances.

Yours sincerely,
Alan

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