

E.R.

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cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L)
PS/PUS (B&L)
PS/Mr Bloomfield ✓
Mr Brennan
Mr Buxton
Mr Merifield
Mr Chesterton
Mr Gilliland
Mr Carvill
Mr G Hewitt
Mr Reeve
Mr Coulson
Mr Bickham

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NOTE FOR THE RECORD

CREGGAN POST OFFICE

I was able to have a word with Mr Dan Carty on the telephone yesterday morning. I explained that, since we had last spoken on this subject, there had been a number of further discussions about it between NIO and the Derry Council. The Mayor and his colleagues agreed with us in recognising that it was unrealistic to hope that the security problems involved in reopening this post office - especially that of transporting money for benefit payments to the Creggan at regular intervals - could be solved for some time to come. They nevertheless felt that it would be helpful to the cause of responsible politics in the city if the Post Office authorities could give a public assurance that the aim was still to reopen the post office as and when circumstances permitted. Since Mr Carty had (they claimed) already said as much to the Mayor in private, they hoped that it would not be too difficult for him to go public to the same effect. However, any such statement would need to be made before the forthcoming local government elections if it was not to run the risk of being exploited by Sinn Fein as a post-election coup on their part.

2. I added that we in NIO were quite aware that the Derry Council had been ill-advisedly abrasive in some of their dealings with Mr Carty. In particular, we held no brief for their claims to be entitled to conduct policy discussions with subordinate members of his staff behind his back. However, we did share the Council's concern to avoid making a propaganda gift to Sinn Fein, however inadvertently. The timing of any statement of intent about the future of the post office would therefore require care. Was he in fact contemplating any such statement?

3. Mr Carty told me that he most certainly was not. For one thing, he would have supposed that it would be somewhat improper for him to make a public utterance, on what was clearly a controversial subject,

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shortly before an election. But his main point was that any credibility which such a statement of intent might otherwise have had at this time had been well and truly undermined with the hijacking about a week ago of the van which was (discreetly) used to distribute cash to the remaining post offices in the city. Whilst he did not wish to seem unhelpful, he could not help feeling that an announcement in the immediate aftermath of this incident that he was looking forward to the day when he could reopen the Creggan post office would strike a lot of people - and not just his own staff - as distinctly inopportune.

4. I told him that I could quite see his point of view on both scores. The matter was of course his responsibility anyway; we were grateful that he was obviously giving it continuous thought. He readily agreed to keep in touch with us about it.

5. It seems clear that at best it will be a matter of months rather than weeks before a satisfactory basis can be found for reopening this post office. Regrettable as this is - not least in relation to the Irish Government's pot-and-kettle charges of policing inadequacies in parts of Northern Ireland - it seems unlikely to provide PSF with any scope for claiming credit. I would not rule out the possibility of a statement of intent from the Post Office once the combined dust of the election campaign and the recent hijacking has settled. (But the further hijacking of a Post Office van in Newry last night is scarcely helpful.)



A W STEPHENS

14 May 1985