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THE SUNDAY TIMES

P.O. Box 7 200 Gray's Inn Road London WC1X 8EZ Telephone 01-837 1234 Telex 22269

Harold Armstrong,
Deputy Secretary,
Dept of the Environment,
Parliament Buildings,
Stormont,
Belfast.

29 March 1978.

Dear Mr. Armstrong,

I understand that Alan Burnside, one of the Information Officers, has mentioned I would be writing to you. This letter is personal from me. I am not fishing for a story and if you answer it fully and frankly and ask that it be kept confidential I will respect that. It is written in a constructive fashion in the hope that the difficult task of balancing security against amenity can be contributed to. I speak as one who uses the airport, inwards and outwards, at least 30 times a year. I am afraid that security there has become an umbrella for bossiness, inconsistency, lack of common sense and small minded bureaucracy. I include Securicor and British Airways local staffs in that.

Enclosed you will find copies of complaints I made in July 1976. McGarry's pompous reply provided little information and he neither acknowledged nor replied to my second letter on 17 July 1976. Since then I have largely seethed in silence but have maintained a watchful eye on the situation. Two incidents recently have prompted this outburst.

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On the morning of Wednesday 22 February I travelled from Manchester to Belfast. The search area at Manchester examined a small tape recorder and asked me to operate it, the standard procedure. At the aircraft side I surrendered my briefcase and travelled to Belfast with the tape recorder in my pocket inside the plane.

That night the searcher at Belfast in the primary search hut failed to find it in my pocket so cursory was the pat down my body. But at the gate search it was seized, wrapped in polythene and handed into the cabin baggage. The BA duty officer said he would ask the Captain if I could carry it on board but no such request was made to the Captain. Question - How is it a security risk one way and not the other? Isn't the risk to Belfast terminal equal from passengers travelling inwards or outwards? This is the same point that McGarry failed to answer in 1976.

Last Saturday (25 March) an aerosol can of shoe shine cream was seized. The attached letter to Mr Cook of Securicor refers. Now this particular can had come into Belfast from London only the previous Wednesday and has been in my luggage for several months in and out of Belfast. From time to time searchers have lifted it out, read the label and returned it. I was told aerosols were ok but that shoe shine cream was inflammable. I accept that but nobody told me I couldn't carry it. There is no way I have of finding out, no guidance leaflet, no list, no notice. If they do not allow inflammable material on board why is there a bar? All I have to do to start a fire is pour whisky on the aisle and light it. They don't have coffee, which is non-inflammable, because of security. As I understand it the NIA pays for the search hut operation and BA for the gate search. Why not have random searches in the 'sterile' terminal and provide more people in the hut. Could the floor not be strengthened for Rapidex or something similar to supplement the search. That way streamlined amenity and effective security might meet.

My views about Securicor are in the other letters. Why has NIA not followed the lead of other mainland airports and recruited their own officially screened force. I know for example that nobody searches Securicor personnel turning up on shift, a fact I have established from several separate sources.

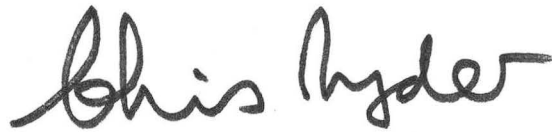
Contacts in airline security tell me that outside Tel Aviv Belfast is the highest risk airport. Certainly it is the highest risk airport in the UK yet it is not designated, in terms of the Policing of Airports Act, and as I understand it no plans to do so exist.

Perhaps you would explain to me the philosophy of the 'Sniffer' in use at Belfast and other airports. Why is it 'random' and am I not entitled to feel affronted that Securicor should mount 'random' checks? Who insists on the Sniffer, the authority or British Airways?

It seems to me that the highly restrictive measures in force at Belfast, designed firstly to protect the terminal and secondly the aircraft in flight, should be communicated in simple language to the travelling public forcefully by leaflet and poster and matched by equally restrictive and enforced conditions on the other side. I remind you that the Trident incident was the most serious breach of security and that took place on the mainland. If such consistency, supported by a knowledge of the rules, existed I would have no cause for complaint and anger. Basically I feel the Belfast thing is ludicrously rigid. Flexibility and common sense are as effective as Rapidex or a frisk with a trained security operator. I've seen screaming kiddies deprived of a teddy bear and that sort of thing is certainly taking security too far. Unfortunately that is the rule at Belfast - fiddle about with shoe shine cream and teddy bears while failing to keep up with the reorganisation and updating of other airports.

I expect there are very good reasons. Perhaps you could tell me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Chris Ryder". The letters are fluid and connected, with a prominent "C" and "R".

Chris Ryder.



Please Reply to: Thomson House, Withy Grove, Manchester M60 4BJ—Tel: 061-834 1234

7th July 76

Mr. D. Melrose,

Unofficial.

Northern Ireland Airports Ltd.

Aldergrove Airport.

Belfast.

Dear Sir,

Last Saturday evening on my way out of Belfast Airport the Securicor searcher seized an aerosol can of shaving cream from my luggage. His supervisor, who refused to give his name, and his supervisor, who also refused to give his name for security reasons, told me the decision was as a result of new orders and had been publicised in the Belfast Telegraph. Asked if there was a notice in the search area I was directed to a small typewritten list in the private office of the Canadian staff.

It is not just good enough that these unaccountable morons from Securicon should refuse to give their names, if security is a factor, and I accept that, then why could they not wear numbers like the police. Regulations effective at Belfast should be displayed for passengers prominently. I fail to see how a can of shaving cream carried in a suitcase from Manchester to Belfast on Tuesday and then to be returned on the following Saturday can be a security risk one way and not the other. Without any explanation publicly or otherwise I must say that this latest unannounced, secretly introduced 'security initiative' is unrealistic. Next thing you'll be banning the soda fairs exported in such huge quantities by ^Ulster men. I would welcome an explanation, confidential perhaps, of just what the risk ^{is} and perhaps a notice for unwary passengers. I had to do with ^{it} out a shave on Sunday.

Yours faithfully,

Yours faithfully,

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Reg. No. 894646 England

C. Rydner.



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Please Reply to: Thomson House, Withy Grove, Manchester M60 4BJ—Tel; 061-834 1234

For the past three years at least, usually weekly, I have carried the same size aerosol can of shaving cream through the airport without query. This despite your statement that aerosol containers other than jumbo, family or economy measures were originally excepted, until your more recent specific ruling. I fail to see the relevance of the representations from the Ulster Chemists Association on the question too.

I do not accept the whole security regulations spectrum has been publicised adequately enough - as I recall the ruling was introduced without notice and led to a flood of criticism. Perhaps apart from a notice a leaflet available to prospective travellers in Britain and Ulster explaining the system and giving hints on ways to make the search as speedy as possible with the least inconvenience would be a good idea. It would help not only passengers but your hard pressed staff for whom I have a considerable deal of sympathy.

However, as far as Securicor is concerned, I am not questioning their justification in carrying out your instructions. What I am concerned about is the arrogant anonymous attitude they adopt. I base that on my experience of extensive UK air travel and brushes with them at several airports. I do not accept they are accountable - numbers on their uniforms would make them so and afford them the necessary anonymity to protect them in the special circumstances of Ulster. Why, I wonder, if they are so wonderful, are several mainland airports proposing to phase them out and recruit their own specialised search teams.

What disturbs me most about your letter is your willingness to cite the prevailing security situation, which is appalling as we all know, as an umbrella for ill considered, fire brigade precautions that are ineffective against determined terrorist because they are inconsistent. I think a more imaginative approach blending the mechanical aids and human resources available would give you a more effective security screen and promote less strain on the public. At the very least you could provide small scales to weigh suspicious aerosols - which would be cheaper than burdening the police with warehousing the contraband. I am passing these observations onto the Assistant Secretary at the Dept.

Yours faithfully,

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Telephone 0232 29271 Airport Director J D Melrose DFC

Northern Ireland Airports Limited

Belfast Airport, Belfast BT29 4AB Northern Ireland

Registered Address: As above

Registered Number N.I. 8030



Your Ref

Our Ref

NIA/SEC/12/1

Date

13th July 1976

Mr. C. Ryder,
The Sunday Times,
Thomson House,
Withy Grove,
MANCHESTER,
M60 4BJ.

Dear Mr. Ryder,

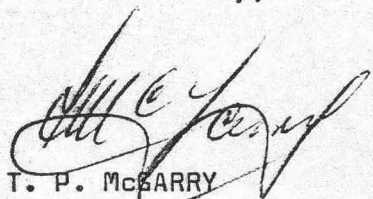
I am replying to your letter of 7th July addressed to the Airport Director.

The Securicor staff at the time in question were acting without discretion in accordance with instructions issued to them by this Company. In the prevailing security situation we do not permit any package or container whatever to be brought into the Terminal Building unless its contents can be positively identified. The reasons for this restriction should need no elaboration, but clearly it does make life tedious for users of preparations packaged in aerosol cans. Accordingly, we originally excepted such containers other than in "jumbo, family or economy sizes", so balancing the risks involved against the amenities of passengers. Unfortunately, it transpired that our definition of size was not sufficiently precise so, on representations from the Ulster Chemists Association, we agreed an upper limit of 250 grams in weight of contents. I take it that your container exceeded this limit.

Details of our security restrictions as they affect intending passengers have been afforded good publicity by local press and radio, and are well known to the travel industry. I take your point on posting a notice in the Search Hall, albeit it would serve only to justify the action of Securicor staff on whom I think you are being harsh as they are not responsible for the restriction but only for its application. They are held accountable for their actions and, in the Ulster context, they are justified in withholding their identity from strangers.

We all regret the necessity for irksome restrictions but we do endeavour to limit these to what is essential to the safety of passengers and the maintenance of air services to and from this airport.

Yours sincerely,



T. P. McGARRY
Airport Security Executive

TPMcG/ml



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Please Reply to: Thomson House, Withy Grove, Manchester M60 4BJ—Tel: 061-834 1234

Unofficial.

17 July 76

Mr. T.P. McGarry,
Airport Security Executive,
Northern Ireland Airports Ltd.

Dear Mr. McGarry,

Thank you for the most unsatisfactory reply to my letter of 7 July which reached me today.

My job entails me studying and therefore knowing a little about security so I am fully aware that Securicor were acting without discretion and in accordance with instructions issued by your company when they seized my aerosol container of shaving cream. That is why my letter was sent to your company and not to Securicor.

You say that you do not permit any package or container into the terminal until you positively identify its contents. So you are admitting that the measures you recently introduced are partial. For if I want to introduce an explosive substance into the terminal building at Belfast all I have to do, because of the lack of aerosol restrictions on this side of the Irish Sea, is bring my aerosol bomb over from London or Manchester. What you have failed to explain is how the containers are a security risk one way and not the other. As you are probably more aware than me the most serious breach of airport security affecting Belfast was achieved by introducing a letter bomb type device onto a Trident at Heathrow with the intention that it would go off while the aircraft was on the ground in Belfast. The purpose of my niggling now is to force you to consider parity in security measures otherwise the overall effort is wasted.

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Reg. No. 894646 England

To: Mr Cook
Securicor Ltd.
Bfs Airport

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29 March 1978.

Dear Sir,

At Table 7 in the outside terminal search hut last Saturday at about 4.15 - 4.30 pm I was deprived of an aerosol of shoe spray by the two search personnel, one male, one female. For reasons I explained to the Supervisor on duty and the Airport Police Officer, he brought into the Terminal after me, I used what is colloquially called bad language to the couple, who were in no way abusive to me. The attitude of the man checking tickets at the entry door though was different. He said I was always causing difficulty.

The Supervisor told me that the lady officer was upset and I asked him to convey my sincere apologies to her. I expect he did so but I would like you to show her this letter and accept, in writing, my apology. I do fully realise she was only doing her job and a difficult one at that. My frustration at the repeated inconsistency of the security procedures was unfortunately taken out on her and I am now directing my complaint to the rightful quarter.

I should add that I have had previous abusive, intrusive and lackadaisical encounters with Securicor staff throughout the UK and that I have deep reservations about the company, its business, virtually that of a private army, and most of all its accountability. One main criticism is that staff cannot be identified in a complaint situation. The obvious security difficulty about giving names in Ulster could be overcome by them wearing numbers. In this case a number would have allowed me to apologise to the female officer direct.

Yours faithfully,

Chris Ryder.