

HONE COMMANDS - POLICE BLINK

Opinion piece on the illegal roadblocks, by Derek Stubbs

The Police and Government condoned and provided implicit support for the vigilante political activists who initiated and operated illegal roadblocks during the Covid- 19 emergency. Their unlawful actions were quickly replicated by other 30 – 50 other Iwi around the country.

Some of the vigilantes may have held sincere views about the vulnerability of and the perceived need to protect their elders from the virus by setting up the roadblocks but this of itself does not entitle them to take the law in to their own hands.

At first glance, isolating parts of NZ has some logic and the roadblocks were supported by many people. NZ's borders are sealed for the same reason. But it is important to look more carefully at why and how the roadblocks came about.

Self-appointed political separatists initiated and organised the first roadblocks seemingly more as a show of power and political independence rather than a genuine attempt to maintain the health and safety of their isolated communities.

Evidence supporting this view includes:

- The display of the independence flag at the roadblocks.
- The self-proclaimed title as the Tai Tokerau Border Control
- The Police Commissioner's comment to David Seymour that the Police didn't want to *"deploy a much larger section of Police resource to manage a protest situation"*

While the Police Commissioner (and the Prime Minister)) have renamed the roadblocks as 'checkpoints', and talked about *"working with local communities"* the facts are that the Police were just playing 'catch-up' by trying to legitimise the illegality of the roadblocks by police presence.

The Prime Minister and Commissioner were quoted as (wrongly) stating that the roadblocks always had Police present, but the road-blockers were indifferent as to whether or not there was a Police presence and carried on regardless.

The Police and the Government have been out-thought and out-maneuvred by the actions of separatist activists who have disguised political separatism aspirations under the banner of a good cause.

General Police policy to try and reduce confrontations is commendable but there were other alternatives they could have taken other than to submit to and support the organised roadblocks.

The Commissioner said in his reply to David Seymour that he chose the alternative to deploying a larger Police resource to the roadblocks but in the context of a total shutdown of the NZ economy the cost would have been relatively insignificant.

Questions needing answers:

- Why were measures designed to protect the population not deemed effective for elders in isolated communities?
- Why were the protesters not advised that the best way to help their communities was to educate their elders and communities about the personal steps (keep in the bubble, wash your hands regularly, and STAY HOME) that were good enough for the rest of the population and then sent home like the rest of us?

- If those communities were at greater risk, why did the Commissioner not ask the Government for extra resources so the Police could take over the task of manning the checkpoints?
- Why were the vigilantes not sent home just like the rest of us?
- Why did the Deputy Police Commissioner say that gang members were not involved when there was plenty of photographic evidence to the contrary?
- How could the Police Commissioner condone actions that he had allegedly described as “probably illegal”, especially as they affect the rights of other citizens?
- Has the rate of Maori (and Pasifika) infections of Covid – 19 been proportionally greater than the rest of the population?
- If there is doubt about whether the Police themselves had the legal authority to operate the checkpoints how could the Iwi road-blockers’ actions possibly have been legal?

The activists have once again reinforced their claims in the public mind that:

- They control the ‘border’s in their respective regions.
- They were at liberty to take the law in to their own hands if they felt it was warranted.
- Iwi have authority in their own regions equivalent to that of Government.

By gaining the Government and Commissioner’s approval, they have advanced their own political agenda without any evidence that they have made their communities any safer than they would otherwise have been.

The roadblocks are a dangerous precedent that challenges the concept of equality of everyone before the law.

History tells us that whenever people seize power successfully by intimidation and unlawful means, they ALWAYS demand more power and often disregard the controls/behaviour they demand of others. (e.g. Hone Harawira’s alleged trip to Auckland and back during level 4.) When governments and police acquiesce the problems inevitably escalate and become harder to solve.

Comments on the Police Commissioner’s (A.C.) responses to David Seymours questions.

A.C. *“the impetus came from communities who were concerned for their wellbeing.”*

Comment: All communities were concerned for their wellbeing which is why NZ’ers were so compliant with the rules.

A.C. *“In deciding to deploy a very small police resource to these locations we have acknowledged the particular vulnerability of those communities”.*

Comments: Was there any evidence that police had to support the hypothesis that those (undefined) communities were any more vulnerable to Covid-19 than others IF THEY FOLLOWED THE SAME RULES? (The situation is different from 1918 in that nobody has immunity from Covid-19)

The Commissioner later admitted that they wanted to avoid managing a ‘protest situation’. i.e. capitulation to the demands of the protesters.

A.C. *“we are going on a journey with these communities to help them understand..... that checkpoints are [sic. now] not warranted.”*

Comment: The ‘journey’ could have involved more face to face education with the communities and sending the vigilantes home to persuade the communities to follow the rules like everybody else.

A.C. *"if the alternative is having to deploy a much larger section of Police resource to manage a protest situation because we'd failed to understand the strength of feeling in a particular community.."*

Comment: A backdown in face of a challenge and the real reason for the police actions.

A.C. *"These judgements..... are happening in a situation where people don't have a bandwidth or presence of mind to bring the kind of rational approach that we are applying in this committee"*

Comment: This is a very patronising statement. To suggest that the initial organiser and spokesperson, a previous member of parliament and a very astute political activist did not understand the situation beggars belief.
