



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

21 March 1985

Dear Andrew,

Football Spectator Violence

The Prime Minister held a meeting this morning with the Home Secretary, Secretary of State for the Environment, Secretary of State for Scotland, Secretary of State for Transport and the Minister for Sport about football hooliganism.

The Minister for Sport said that he had just received the report of the Football Association requested by the Prime Minister on 14 March. It was an unsatisfactory document, and he would be telling the Football Association so. It made the interesting point that there was no limit to the punishment that could be imposed on clubs found guilty of misconduct by the Commission, but the defence of "reasonable precautions" had had the result that few clubs had been found guilty. It was, of course, open to the Football Association to change their rules.

The Prime Minister said that the contacts which she had had with leading figures in football had supported the view that decisive action was necessary and expected. In discussion of the proposals in the papers before Ministers, the following points were made:-

- (i) A special offence for misbehaviour The Secretary of State for the Environment said that the police had a problem in securing evidence of an established offence, since their first priority was to maintain control. It had been suggested to him that a new offence of "tumultuous behaviour" might enable police action to be more effective by making it an offence simply to be part of a disorderly group. The Home Secretary said that people taking part in such activities could be charged with threatening behaviour. His advice was that there was no shortage of offences on which the police could make charges, and his public order review would increase the police's powers in dealing with disorderly crowds. He recognised however that the police could be urged to deploy specific effort in obtaining evidence and he had asked the Association of Chief Police Officers to assist in this. Evidence collected by closed

circuit television could be used and the suggestion that the Football Trust might assist in providing closed circuit television as a priority in problem grounds was helpful. He was also considering an approach to the Magistrates Association to encourage the imposition of non-attendance at matches as a condition of bail and the greater use of attendance centres.

(ii) Safety of Sports Ground Act The Home Secretary said that all First and Second Division clubs had been designated under the Safety of Sports Ground Act since 1979: he had powers to designate all Third and Fourth Division clubs, and this could provide a useful lever in ensuring that adequate precautions, such as perimeter fencing, were provided. Guidelines on the terms and conditions imposed by local authorities on sports grounds were issued by the Home Office and it was open to him as Home Secretary to take account of any history of crowd disorder. He would re-examine the guidelines with these points in mind. The Prime Minister said that it would be necessary to consider whether a power should be taken to impose sanctions on those local authorities which did not comply with the guidelines.

(iii) Alcoholism The Secretary of State for Scotland said that the opinion of the Scottish police was that alcohol was the main contributory factor to crowd violence and this ran contrary to the scepticism which had been expressed in the south. The Scottish legislation applied to designated sports grounds, and all grounds where major football events took place, including rugby grounds, had been designated. The Home Secretary said that it would be open to the Football Association now to ban the bringing of alcohol into football grounds and those who refused to comply could be charged with a breach of the peace or obstructing the police. The Prime Minister doubted whether it would be sufficient to rely on the Football Association on this matter without legislation; licensing authorities might also be asked to make it a condition of licences that alcohol was not sold within a stipulated radius of a football ground before a match.

(iv) Travel to away matches The Prime Minister said that it had been suggested to her that those clubs whose supporters had caused trouble should be banned from organising special trains or coaches for travel to away matches. It was for further consideration whether the Football Association could be relied on to impose such a ban or whether further powers would be needed. It was noted that the police had powers to stop people travelling for the purpose of taking part in an activity likely to cause a breach of the peace. The Secretary of State for Transport said that the British Rail police were not on the same radio network as the police at the destination of special trains: the Prime Minister asked the Home Secretary to look into this.

(v) Power to cancel matches It was pointed out that there was a serious risk of trouble in connection with the England versus Scotland match at Wembley on Bank Holiday Saturday, 25 May, which the Football Association had so far been unable to reschedule. This would need to be further pursued with the Football Association. Consideration would have to be given to taking powers for the police to cancel matches either on their own authority or after application to the Home Secretary; the Home Secretary commented that the police might well not wish to have such powers at this stage.

(vi) Overseas matches The Prime Minister said that it had been suggested to her that charges for offences committed overseas might be heard in British courts; but it was recognised that there would be difficulties about the provision of evidence in this respect. Further thought would need to be given to effective sanctions against misbehaviour in connection with overseas matches.

Summing up the discussion, the Prime Minister said that the Department of the Environment and the Home Office, in consultation with other Departments concerned, should work up proposals for discussion at a further meeting of Ministers as soon as possible, to be followed by a meeting with the representatives of the Football Association and the Football League. The Government could not appear to rely entirely on the Football Association and the police: they must be prepared to legislate for any additional powers which were necessary. In particular, the Home Secretary should consider further whether the police had sufficient powers to bring charges against those who took part in disorderly behaviour or trespassed on football pitches. He should also consider whether further powers were needed to oblige local authorities to enforce guidelines issued under the Safety of Sports Ground Act on local authorities; whether the Scottish legislation on alcohol should be applied in England and Wales; whether section 15(1) of the Police Act 1964 needed to be amended to enable the Chief Constable to decide how many officers to send to each match and charge appropriately; and whether further powers were needed to restrict travel or ban matches. Other points which needed to be followed up were the links between the British Transport Police and police at the destination of special trains, and the date of the England versus Scotland football match scheduled for 25 May. Finally, further consideration should be given to action against misbehaviour by British supporters overseas, and a Foreign Office Minister should be invited to the next meeting of the group.

I am copying this letter to Rachel Lomax (HM Treasury), Len Appleyard (FCO), Hugh Taylor (Home Office), John Graham (Scottish Office), Richard Allan (Department of Transport), Phil Dykins (Department of the Environment) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Allberry, Esq.,
Department of the Environment.

Robin Butler