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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

31 July 1985

Her Grace

The Prime Minister, accompanied by the Home Secretary, the Secretary of State for the Environment, the Secretary of State for Transport, Mr. Richard Luce, Mr. John Stradling Thomas, the Minister for Sport and Mr. Allan Stewart met representatives of the Football Association, the Football League and the Football Trusts yesterday. The Football Association was represented by Mr. Bert Millichip and Mr. Glen Kirton. The Football League was represented by Mr. Jack Dunnett, President, Mr. Graham Kelly, Secretary, and Mr. David Dent. The Football Trusts were represented by Lord Aberdare, Chairman of the Football Trust and by Mr. Tom Wharton, Chairman of the Football Grounds Improvement Trust. Mr. David Teesdale and Mr. Hartley Booth were also present.

The Prime Minister welcomed the representatives of the football authorities to the meeting. With the new season now only just over two weeks away, it was important to take stock of the progress which had been made in taking steps to combat hooliganism and improve ground safety.

The Prime Minister said there were four preliminary general points she wished to make. The first was that the responsibility for the safety of those admitted to football grounds lay clearly with the clubs; the Government could not and would not take that away from them. Second, she feared there was already a tendency to set aside the lessons of Brussels, Bradford and Birmingham; but it was vital that these were never forgotten. Third, she expressed her concern at the decision by the FA to lift the penalties imposed by the original commission of inquiry after the Luton/Millwall match; it was difficult in view of that for the public to have faith that the authorities took their responsibilities seriously. Finally, the size of transfer fees still being paid suggested that football had resources which could better be devoted to tackling the problems of hooliganism and safety; it was a matter of choosing the right priorities.

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The Prime Minister then identified the key measures the Government had already undertaken. The Sporting Events (Control of Alcohol) Bill would be in force at the beginning of the season. The public order legislation next session would strengthen the hands of the police. The Home Secretary had designated all grounds in divisions 3 and 4 of the football league; the orders would come into effect on 9 August. The Government had published the interim report of Mr. Justice Popplewell; his analysis and recommendations deserved the closest scrutiny. Three Home Office photographic vans were now available for deployment at matches together with high-definition cameras. The Government had also taken a number of other measures, including on the international front.

Mr. Millichip in response stressed that he fully shared the Government's objectives to stop hooliganism and improve safety. There would be more all-ticket morning matches, and the need to identify likely troublesome matches and to consider alternative locations was fully appreciated. He believed, however, that the decision by the FA disciplinary committee in the Luton/Millwall case was the right one. Clubs who had properly discharged their responsibilities should not be disciplined; but when they failed to do this, the Association would deal with them severely. It had to be remembered that the Luton/Millwall match pre-dated the tragedy at Brussels. On membership cards he noted that the FA had submitted their report to the Government as had been requested. That report had concluded that a national scheme was probably impractical and would be costly. The Football League had now set up a working group to consider the matter further. There was no question that the FA was refusing to take part in that group. The Association traditionally dealt with disciplinary matters, but left administration to the Football League. The FL would be reporting back to the Association on the outcome of these discussions in due course.

Mr. Dunnett said his determination to deal with the general problem of hooliganism was as strong as ever. He agreed Popplewell was a first-class report, though he did not accept the force of the recommendations on membership cards. He believed there to be a misunderstanding about transfer fees. Only about five clubs had sufficient resources to pay high fees. This money did not leave the game; on the contrary it was recycled to the poorer clubs who needed extra resources to pay for, among other things, safety and ground improvements. He accepted however that perhaps 10 per cent of those fees went to the players themselves and was accordingly "lost"; it was noted that the amount of money paid out in transfer fees had fallen from some £28 million five years ago to perhaps £8 million a year today.

Discussion then focussed on the following issues:

MEMBERSHIP CARDS

Mr. Dunnett agreed that, if it were possible to

introduce one, a comprehensive national scheme should offer an effective way to keep out undesirable supporters, though no system of cards seemed likely to be able to stamp out organised hooliganism completely. He had looked at many schemes, but he had not yet seen a practical one. The League had however been urging clubs to develop their own systems. As a next step, once the small number of clubs with a history of trouble at away matches had developed such a scheme, it would be possible to require that their away matches should be all-ticket, with the away supporters being able to buy the limited number of tickets only if they possessed the appropriate card.

Mr. Dunnett said he was writing to clubs asking for lists of those who had been associated with violence and arranging for the lists to be circulated to clubs generally. He accepted that such a system could only have an impact, however, if there were effective arrangements such as a card system for controlling access to the ground.

The Prime Minister accepted that a membership card system might not be 100 per cent effective; that was no reason for not trying it. She knew that some clubs were considering going further, and prohibiting away supporters completely. Home fans might then watch the game on large video screens, at their own ground, where other entertainments for the whole family could be laid on.

The Home Secretary said he would be prepared to consider giving the courts powers, perhaps through the Public Order Bill, to impose orders excluding those convicted of offences connected with football matches from attending matches in the future. This could only be done if such orders could be enforced. A pre-requisite for that would be the introduction of an effective national system of membership cards. Government would then be able to buttress the action being taken by the clubs to keep hooligans out of grounds. Mr. Dunnett believed that such an arrangement would enable the authorities to reconsider their position on membership cards. The police would then be able to take steps to keep out those excluded by such orders. This would pave the way for the FA to rule that clubs failing to implement a system of cards to control access could not be deemed to have taken all reasonable precautions to prevent trouble. The weight of FA disciplinary proceedings could then be brought to bear on them. Mr. Dunnett and Mr. Millichip said, in the light of the Home Secretary's proposal, that they would be urging a fresh approach on their associations, with a view to introducing a comprehensive national scheme. Mr. Dunnett would aim to bring forward the date on which his working group would be reporting to the FA.

The Secretary of State for the Environment said that the CCTA had taken a preliminary look at a national computerised scheme, and concluded that a relatively cheap system could be introduced. He urged the FL to consider the practicalities of this with the CCTA, in the League's working group. He accepted that there could be difficulties

over the illicit transfer of cards, and in turning back those with invalid cards at the point of entry to the ground. There might be some short-term reduction in gates. But in the longer term, attendance at matches could be expected to rise as those who had previously been deterred by the reputation of the game came back to it.

Summing up this part of the discussion, the Prime Minister welcomed Mr. Dunnett's and Mr. Millichip's view that the Football League Working Group would now urgently consider a comprehensive system of cards for all clubs, in the light of the Home Secretary's proposal. The Minister for Sport would arrange for the CCTA to discuss their ideas for such a scheme with the League.

CCTV

Lord Aberdare reported that 12 clubs already had closed-circuit television installed. Work was under way in a further eight. The aim was to cover the 44 clubs in the first and second divisions, though the resources of the Football Trusts which had been allocated for the purpose - £500,000 - would only stretch to 35. The Prime Minister stressed that installation of CCTV at those grounds most at risk in time for the first fixtures of the season was of the utmost importance. She was concerned that, in particular, there should be no delays on account of equipment delivery difficulties, and she would be arranging for this to be looked into as a matter of urgency. Meanwhile, the authorities and the trusts should consider as soon as possible the possibility of obtaining private sponsorship if necessary so as to allow CCTV coverage to be extended more widely.

Lord Aberdare said that Strathclyde Police seemed reluctant to operate such a system of CCTV; Mr. Stewart was aware of the difficulty and was following it up.

FINANCING OF IMPROVEMENTS

Mr. Wharton said he had now submitted reports from his surveyors to the Minister for Sport's working party. FGIT were clear that funds should only be allocated to improving club facilities where their capacity was used; they were not being made available to cover for exceptional attendances. Mr. Wharton was however concerned about costs of necessary improvements at those grounds which were already designated.

PUBLICITY

Mr. Millichip said the FA would be mounting a publicity campaign for the new season. Its main aim would be to seek the help of the public in combating hooliganism, particularly by identifying the individuals involved. The Prime Minister noted the importance of good conduct by the players in encouraging good conduct by spectators.

In closing the meeting, the Prime Minister thanked Mr. Millichip, Mr. Dunnett and the Football Trusts for their constructive contributions. The future of the game was in question and every possible step had to be taken to rid it of violence and to ensure that clubs effectively met their responsibilities for the safety of spectators.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Len Appleyard (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Hugh Taylor (Home Office), Rachel Lomax (Treasury), John Graham (Scottish Office), Richard Allan (Transport), Colin Williams (Welsh Office) and Phil Dykins (Minister for Sport's Office).

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