

THIS DOCUMENT IS THE PROPERTY OF HER BRITANNIC MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

C(82) 23

COPY NC

83

14 May 1982

CABINET

SPORTING CONTACTS WITH ARGENTINA:
THE WORLD CUP

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Environment

BACKGROUND

1. Given the present situation in the South Atlantic, Her Majesty's Government now faces the question of the attitude we should adopt towards the participation of United Kingdom teams in the final stages of the World Cup. This competition attracts more worldwide public interest than the Olympic Games. It begins in Spain on 13 June. 24 countries are competing, including, for the first time since 1958, England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Argentina are the current holders. The organisers are the world governing body of football, the Federation of International ~~de~~ Football Associations (FIFA), which comprises 2 main power groups from Europe and South America. The General Secretary is Swiss; the President Brazilian.
2. The British teams are not in the same first round group as Argentina. It is, however, possible for Scotland to meet Argentina in the second round, beginning on 28 June. Given the groupings, England or Northern Ireland could meet Argentina only in the Final, on 11 July. The British teams have to submit their final lists of players before 4 June.

SPORTING CONTACTS WITH ARGENTINA

3. The Government has discouraged any sporting links with Argentina at representative, club or individual level in the United Kingdom or in Argentina. No action has been taken to discourage British sportsmen competing in third countries in competitions which might involve Argentinians. As for the World Cup, Ministers have argued publicly that the United Kingdom teams should not be penalised by withdrawal, given Argentina's role as aggressor in the Falklands. However, it has been emphasised that the situation will be reviewed in the light of events in the South Atlantic.
4. FIFA have said that there is no question of banning Argentina from the competition; and that they expect the British teams to compete. If the British teams are withdrawn, they will be replaced with other nations.

THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT VIEW

5. In Britain, some footballers/administrators have already expressed concern at playing in a competition with Argentina. There is some feeling in our own party that this would be unacceptable. We have, as yet, no clear impression of public opinion generally. Even if we knew public opinion now the situation could change rapidly if hostilities worsen, and especially if there were to be more British casualties.
6. One important factor could be the actual physical pressure of British teams, and supporters, in Spain. There could be provocation of British supporters, and demonstrations of anti-British feeling by Spanish spectators - though the Spanish government is anxious for our teams to attend. Scotland play Brazil on 18 June; and Spain play Northern Ireland on 25 June.
7. The Government has no powers to ban sporting contacts (although this could change in the event of a state of war). However, the football authorities have so far adopted a highly responsible attitude and have indicated that they would follow a government call for a boycott. If this happens, it should be made at senior political level. Our judgment is that the football authorities are unlikely, unless the external situation changes considerably, to withdraw independently. But there would, of course, be merit in the football authorities being seen to take their decisions without government pressure, if that were possible.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF WITHDRAWAL

8. Government pressure to withdraw is likely to be seen by the Spanish government and people as a gesture against Spain (as a consequence of Spanish attitudes over the Falklands) with implications for tourism. This could have adverse effects on British interests over the opening of the Gibraltar border, due to take place on 25 June. This risk could be reduced, of course, by presenting the decision as a measure directed against Argentina and not Spain.
9. Withdrawal by United Kingdom teams would undoubtedly be greeted with pleasure in Argentina, who would regard it as a moral victory over the United Kingdom.
10. The financial consequences of a withdrawal are considerable for the 3 Football Associations. There could be a ban on competing in the 1986 World Cup; a heavy FIFA fine; the possibility of compensation; the cancellation of travel and accommodation arrangements; and players' contracts would have to be met. The Scottish and Northern Ireland Football Associations could be bankrupted. Whilst there might be no legal obligations on Her Majesty's Government for compensation, there could be a moral one. It is difficult to estimate the amount that might be claimed.

11. The position of Sportsworld Travel Ltd - the sole sources of tickets in the United Kingdom - is less clear. They have contract arrangements which they would have to meet. Legal advice would be necessary on whether there was liability for compensation from Her Majesty's Government.

CONCLUSIONS

12. This paper is designed to inform colleagues of the problem, and of the possible implications should the 3 British teams be asked to withdraw. In the present international situation I believe that Ministers can continue to argue strongly that Argentina is the aggressor nation and that the onus of withdrawal lies in that direction and not with us. My present view is that Her Majesty's Government should not yet suggest withdrawal to the football authorities, but that we should be ready to adopt that course, at short notice if the situation worsens, and in the light of public opinion. We have not sought so far to discourage Anglo/Argentine sporting contacts in third countries, but I suggest that we adopt a similar approach in any such cases.

13. I would welcome the views of colleagues on i. the policy to be adopted towards sporting links with Argentina, with particular reference to the World Cup; and on ii. the action Her Majesty's Government should take in the event of a worsening of the situation in the South Atlantic between now and 3 June.

M H

Department of the Environment

14 May 1982