From Richard Faulkner

Walkden House
10 Melton Street
London NW1 2EJ
Telephone: 01-388 7738

Private and Confidential

Bernard Ingham Esq
10 Downing Street
London SW1

4 September 1985

Dear Bernard.

As we discussed, I am sending you in strict confidence, the draft of the paper which I have written for Friday's meeting of the Football League working party on membership cards.

Could we please have a word about this on Friday morning?

Yours

Richard Faulkner

- good tone
- clear acceptance of football's responsibility for tackling the problem
- problem of excluding supporters, having a comprehensive system, and living up with exclusive system, not reduced.
- casual supporter analysed.

REPORT OF THE FOOTBALL LEAGUE WORKING PARTY ON MEMBERSHIP CARDS

Introduction

1. The first request for the football authorities to consider a national membership scheme was made by the Prime Minister at a meeting in Downing Street on 1st April 1985, called following serious incidents of crowd violence during cup matches at Chelsea and Luton. The suggestion had also been put forward in the Official Working Group report on Football Spectator Violence in August 1984.

2. The Football Association, after consultation with the Football League, responded to the Prime Minister's request by submitting a report which concluded that "a nationwide identity card scheme would do little to solve the underlying problems manifested through football hooliganism, and that its introduction could well have a seriously adverse effect on Association Football as a spectator sport."

3. The final weeks of the 1984/85 season then, however, produced two further appalling incidents of spectator violence - at Birmingham City on 11th May, and in the Heysel Stadium in Brussels on 29th May 1985. A further meeting with the Prime Minister took place on 12th June, and it became clear that the Government was determined to see far more effective means introduced of controlling spectator access to football grounds.

4. The Football League Working Party, under Mr. Kelly's chairmanship, was established as a direct response to the Government's request.

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5. Supporters of a national membership or identity card system (the two terms are virtually synonymous, although we understand there is some political sensitivity to the concept of "I.D." cards) received a powerful boost following publication of Mr. Justice Popplewell's interim report on 24th July 1985. Paragraphs 6.22 and 6.50 from his report are reproduced in Appendix A. The Working Party was bound to pay particular attention to his recommendation that "urgent consideration be given by football clubs in England and Wales to introduce a membership system so as to exclude visiting fans."

6. On 30th July 1985 the football authorities again met the Prime Minister and senior ministers. It was agreed that the following steps would be taken in concert:

a) The Football League agreed to consider a membership card scheme and recommend it to clubs, concentrating in the first instance on the first and second divisions.

b) The Football Association agreed to consider enforcing a membership card scheme through the use of their disciplinary powers.

c) The Government would introduce in the proposed Public Order Bill a provision for exclusion orders on football offenders, provided that this would be enforced through the membership scheme.

7. At the meeting the Government offered the assistance of the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency to the League's Working Party.

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After a preliminary meeting with the Chairman, the C.C.T.A. compiled a confidential feasibility report which was presented to the fourth meeting of the Working Party on 22nd August 1985.

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The Scale of the Problem

8. English professional football is fighting for its life. The damage inflicted upon the game by the violent activities of a relatively small number of individuals who attach themselves to football, and take advantage of the opportunities it presents for criminal activity, is incalculable. Declining gates, loss of sponsorship income, reductions in advertising revenue are all due, to a greater or lesser extent, to the perception that football and violence are inexorably linked. This has been underlined by the recent opinion poll conducted by Market and Opinion Research International and published by the Sunday Times on the 18th August 1985.

9. The behaviour of English fans abroad - those attached to club sides playing in European competitions, and to the England national team - besmirches the reputation of our country in the eyes of foreigners, and also contributes substantially to the poor image of the game at home. The lifting of the U.E.F.A. ban on English clubs competing in European competitions depends on the action taken by the football authorities in the 1985/86 season and the results achieved.

10. The Working Party wholeheartedly support the efforts being made by all political parties to take legislative steps to help tackle the problem, and are conscious that, whilst there is undoubtedly an underlying social malaise in Britain which could well manifest itself in other sports and social activities if we were successful in ridding football of spectator violence, the football authorities are expected to do their utmost over the coming months to put their own house in order.

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11. We recognise that we are no longer able to put forward the argument (if we ever were) that football spectator violence is a matter for the law enforcement agencies, not for the game. Neither can we fall back on statistics which demonstrate that crowd disorder takes place at only a tiny minority of the 2,500 competitive fixtures involving Football League clubs (only eight Football Association Commissions in the 1984/85 season). It requires crowd violence at only one Luton Town versus Millwall or Chelsea versus Sheffield Wednesday cup tie, or one Birmingham City versus Leeds United League fixture to destroy the results of all patient work undertaken by the game through the year, and at the end of last season football had all these to contend with, plus the slaughter in the Heysel Stadium and (unconnected with hooliganism) the Bradford City fire tragedy.

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Objectives for a Membership Card Scheme

12. The Working Party was asked to consider how the membership card scheme could contribute towards tackling the problem. One objective would clearly be to use cards to exclude those individuals whom football clubs did not wish to admit to their grounds, e.g. those who had been convicted of causing violence at, or on the way to or from matches, those who offended against club rules, such as taking part in racist or obscene chanting (both utterly offensive behaviour, rightly condemmed by Mr. Justice Popplewell) and those who infringed the new alcohol legislation.

13. A further, perhaps equally important, objective of membership cards would be to encourage the creation of a more friendly and amenable environment at football grounds including, for example, the establishment of family areas, accommodation set aside for children and young people, possibly special sections for minority groups such as the disabled, as well as areas for other accredited home supporters.

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A National Membership Scheme

14. Many football clubs have in recent years carefully considered how to attract desirable groups of spectators, such as families and children, to attend their matches. (It is a misconception to speak of "getting the families back" - a football ground was traditionally a male enclave where the only family group attending were father and son.)

15. To this end, accommodation has been set aside for these groups, and often admission to them is controlled by the use of membership cards. (The Working Party invited clubs to submit details of the schemes they had in operation, and the results are reported in Appendix B.)

16. In addition, numerous clubs have established supporters' membership schemes, open to individuals of good character who are not eligible for membership of family or children's schemes, and for season ticket holders.

17. Safety of Sports Grounds Act regulations lay down strict guidelines for segregation of rival supporters, and these structures greatly facilitate the creation of reserved areas for members of particular schemes. At many clubs, facilities have been specially improved to cater for these groups - particularly refreshment bars, lavatories, additonal seating and so on.

18. A particular benefit of schemes of this sort is that the club and its supporters can be confident that in those areas of the ground where admission is controlled by membership, the liklihood of disorder is minimal. If offences do occur, membership is withdrawn and the individual banned from the ground. The task of clubs and the police in achieving this would

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be greatly enhanced if a legal system of exclusion orders were in force. Additionally, such orders provide security for the customers concerned in helping to keep existing support and attract new business.

19. The question of away travel is one which exercised the Working Party. We were mindful of Mr. Justice Popplewell's view that the extent of violence caused through clashes between rival groups of supporters was such that the time had now arrived for away fans to be excluded altogether. We received details of some outline proposals by clubs to bring this about in their own grounds through restricting admission to home supporters only, but we noted that none has in fact taken this step for the season which has just commenced.

20. We also took account of the view that a ban on away travel would be hard to implement, unless it were backed by a new Act of Parliament and enforced by a level of police activity such as occurred in the attempt to prohibit the movement of pickets during the mining dispute.

21. Given that football is 'on probation' for this season, we believe that every attempt should be made to introduce arrangements which will obviate the need for banning away supporters from attending matches.

22. It is thus necessary to consider how a membership system could help solve the away travel problem. The answer clearly lies in building on the success of the individual club schemes, and extending the privileges which membership confers at home matches to away games. To achieve this will require a high degree of compatibility between one club's scheme and another's.

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23. The first step, therefore, will be for all clubs to have a membership scheme, the basic principles of which will be common to all. In our view these should cover:-

a) The categories of membership (e.g. season ticket holders, families, young people and/or children, accredited supporters, etc.).

b) The specification of the membership card.

c) A photograph on the card and a duplicate held by the club (except for season ticket holders for whom this may not be necessary).

d) The length of time for which a card is valid. We recommend that they should be renewed each season.

e) The information about the applicant to be supplied on the form requesting membership (e.g. full name, address, date of birth, place of occupation or education).

f) Agreement with the clubs on the proportion of the ground capacity to be covered by membership arrangements. We recommend that this should normally be not less than 50%. In view of the fact that some clubs are contemplating the introduction of electronic readers at turnstiles, it will be important to see that the electronic data on cards (presumably in the form of a magnetic strip) also conforms to a common standard.

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24. To ensure that these criteria are complied with, we recommend that the Football League issue guidelines to all clubs to be included in the arrangements, thus establishing the concept of a 'Football League approved membership scheme'. Clubs should be encouraged to provide reserved and safe accommodation at their ground for away supporters who are members of approved schemes.

25. Whilst we do not recommend that every match should be 'members only', for reasons we explain below, we believe it would be possible through the use of reciprocal membership arrangements to reduce the likelihood of crowd disorder at difficult games by insisting that not only are these 'all ticket' but also that tickets are to be sold to members only. We envisage that in due course, as membership schemes gain increasing acceptance, more and more areas in football grounds become reserved enclosures, to which only 'home' members, or 'away' members are admitted.

26. We do not see a need at present for the membership records for all schemes to be stored in a central computer. It will, however, be necessary for clubs diligently to circulate 'blacklists' with photographs of persons expelled from membership and banned from grounds. This information should be made available to the police as well as to other clubs. It may well be considered appropriate for turnstile operators and stewards to be rewarded moderately for spotting banned persons attempting to enter grounds. (If such individuals are the subject of legal exclusion orders, they would, of course, be committing a criminal offence if they tried to gain admission).

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27. It may be possible eventually for every ground to be equipped with sophisticated electronic equipment to scan cards as they are presented. We hope, however, that it will never be necessary to refuse admission to persons of good character, who for whatever reason, are not members of the home or away team's scheme (the so-called 'casual' supporter, who perhaps only attends a handful of games in a season, or likes to visit a number of clubs, or who has conscientious objection to being in a membership scheme).

28. The implications for football of such a draconian step go far beyond the financial loss which clubs would undoubtedly suffer. Throughout this report we have taken the view that no proposed measure should be rejected on grounds of cost; ridding the game of spectator violence will bring football and the country a reward which far exceeds the forseeable burden which any of the ideas for membership schemes may impose.

29. Having taken the view that 'casual' supporters should not be excluded from all matches (but recognising that an increasing number of difficult games will become 'members only' and 'all ticket') the Working Party had to consider how they should be catered for.

30. It is plainly unacceptable to create, in effect, a 'hooligans enclosure', where all the 'ne'er-do-wells', and those expelled from membership schemes foregather. Indeed, there must not be 'no-go' areas at football grounds - places where ordinary decent people are frightened to watch from - as the whole purpose of what we are seeking to achieve is to improve the total environment at matches.

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31. We recognise that this is a difficult problem, but the solution may lie in the enhanced ability of the police to recognise and apprehend or exclude known trouble-makers, especially through the widespread use of closed circuit television and video recordings. Legally enforced exclusion orders would clearly have an important part to play as well.

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The C.C.T.A. Report

32. The Working Party much appreciate the help it received from Mr. Skinner and the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency. The C.C.T.A. Report (reproduced as Appendix C) provided invaluable information on how a national computer-linked scheme could work.

33. Whilst some members of the Working Party were sceptical as to the feasibility of certain of the findings, (for example, the ability of a turnstile operator to turn away a group of individuals holding invalid cards five minutes before the start of a match, and with a large queue behind them), we were satisfied that the technology exists to permit the introduction of an all-embracing national scheme. Whilst there are obvious - and very substantial - cost implications for individual clubs (up to £100,000 each) and for the football authorities (in financing the national computer data base and the necessary on-line capability), we do not reject the C.C.T.A. proposals on the basis there is no money in the game to finance it - if it would solve the problem of spectator violence it would be the best investment possible for football.

34. Our deliberations were much influenced by the views of the Sub-Committee on Hooliganism at Sporting Events of the Association of Chief Police Officers, some of which were contained in a letter to the Chairman of the Working Party on 16th August 1985 (reproduced as Appendix D). In particular, the inability of the police "to pass information held confidentially by them about suspects or offenders, or to verify identification or determine the suitability of applicants" seemed to us an important issue.

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35. As the benefits of a complicated and comprehensive scheme along the lines of that proposed by the C.C.T.A. did not appear to be overwhelmingly greater than the national scheme based on individual membership at clubs - bearing in mind the many potential objections to it and the enormous cost - we do not feel able to recommend it at this stage.

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Conclusions

36. The Working Party concludes that it is possible to establish a national membership card scheme for Football League clubs which does not require extremely expensive computer-based electronic equipment at each ground, or which totally excludes away supporters or decent football fans who are not members of schemes from the great majority of matches which are expected to be trouble free.

37. We recommend that the Football League urgently draws up guidelines for 'inclusive' membership schemes (following the advice given in paragraph 23 of this report) with a view to ensuring their compatibility with one another and at the same time providing guidance, with the help of the C.C.T.A., to clubs wishing to instal electronic equipment to check cards.

38. We recommend that clubs devote further efforts in establishing areas of their grounds for the use of their members, and for visitors who belong to compatible schemes with normally at least 50 per cent of the ground's capacity reserved for this purpose.

39. We recommend that the Football Association enforces membership schemes on clubs through the use of its disciplinary powers.

40. We recommend that the Government includes in its proposed Public Order Bill a provision for exclusion orders on football offenders, to back up membership schemes, and for clubs and police to redouble their efforts to prevent undesirable non-members from entering their grounds, including the circulation of blacklists of banned persons.

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41. The Working Party believe that if these recommendations are followed the system introduced will comply with the agreement reached between the Government, the Football Association and the Football League at the Downing Street meeting on 30th July. The national membership card scheme should impose little financial burden on clubs, and indeed provide some commercial opportunities for them as a result of their obtaining more information about their customers.

The successful operation of the scheme will, in addition, provide a measure of security and reassurance for the decent supporters who continue to be the backbone of English professional football, as well as a demonstration to U.E.F.A. and F.I.F.A. that English football is determined to put its house in order.