



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

17 March 1986

Dear Stephen

**FOOTBALL BILL:
ALCOHOL IN EXECUTIVE BOXES**

The Prime Minister has seen the Home Secretary's letter of 7 March to the Lord President.

The Prime Minister is content that the Home Secretary should proceed in the way he proposes. She has however noted that everything possible must be done to keep up pressure on the football authorities to press ahead with the introduction of effective systems of membership cards.

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries to members of H Committee, Richard Tracey, Sir Robert Armstrong and to Sir George Engle.

Les
Mark Addison

(Mark Addison)

Stephen Boys Smith, Esq.,
Home Office.

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PRIME MINISTER

FOOTBALL: ALCOHOL IN EXECUTIVE BOXES

The attached letter from the Home Secretary seeks colleagues' agreement that an amendment should be made to the Public Order Bill, now in Committee, to secure the relaxation of the rules controlling alcohol in executive boxes at football grounds.

You were reluctant to agree a similar proposal from the Home Secretary earlier because the clubs had not come up with hard evidence that their finances were being affected. They have now done so, and the Secretary of State for the Environment (who shared reservations) is now content that the Home Secretary should proceed. Popplewell supported the relaxation.

The football authorities seem to be making reasonable progress as you know on safety and membership cards. And the rules about executive boxes were of course only inserted at the insistence of the Opposition front bench, who, it turns out, were completely out of touch with the rest of their own side.

Agree the Home Secretary's proposal?

Mark Addison

(Mark Addison)

14 March 1986

reasonable - how much
Yes - here must keep
pressure on
membership cards.
not



QUEEN ANNE'S GATE LONDON SW1H 9AT

7 March 1986

Dear Willie,

PUBLIC ORDER BILL: CONTROLS ON ALCOHOL IN EXECUTIVE BOXES
AND RESTAURANTS AT FOOTBALL GROUNDS

When the Sporting Events (Control of Alcohol Etc) Act was passed last summer, Ministers agreed to monitor the effect of the Act on the revenue which football clubs derive from the leasing of boxes and restaurants, with a view to the possibility of an amendment in the Public Order Bill. This was in response to substantial Parliamentary pressure from Members on all sides. We had always been aware that this aspect of the legislation would prove contentious, but the Opposition Front Bench insisted, for egalitarian reasons, (and contrary to the wishes of their backbenchers with a strong football interest) that the general controls should be extended to boxes and restaurants as part of its agreement to accelerate the Parliamentary proceedings.

Since the Act was brought into force pressure for a relaxation has continued inside and outside Parliament. I received some information from the Football League at the end of October about the financial effects, but it was difficult to form any clear view at that early stage of the season. Accordingly I asked for further information.

In his report published in January Mr Justice Popplewell recommended that the provisions of the Sporting Events (Control of Alcohol Etc) Act 1985 should be reviewed in relation to executive boxes. He made it clear that he favoured some relaxation.

As you know, I was minded to accept Popplewell's recommendation and to announce that the Government would bring forward an amendment during the Committee Stage of the Public Order Bill. However some colleagues thought that this would be premature. In particular Kenneth Baker argued that any announcement should be deferred in order to maintain some leverage on the football authorities in relation to the membership card issue. In the event, in my statement to the House on the Popplewell Report I said:

"I have asked for more information from the football authorities and will wish to consider that carefully, in the light of what Mr Justice Popplewell says, before deciding whether to allow some relaxation of the controls on alcohol in executive boxes. I shall report my conclusions to the House while the Public Order Bill is before Parliament."

There were a number of representations in favour of lifting the restrictions from both sides of the House during the exchanges following the statement.

/So far as

The Rt Hon The Viscount Whitelaw, CH, MC

So far as membership cards are concerned, Richard Tracey held a meeting of his working party (of which Giles Shaw is also a member) on 12 February, and the Football League representatives reported that significant progress was being made. The Football League have since written to Giles Shaw to say that they share the Government's view that membership card schemes have an important role to play. They have issued to all 92 clubs guidelines recommending the introduction of membership card schemes covering normally at least 50% of ground capacity. The League have assured us that it is the policy of the League Management Committee to press all clubs to introduce schemes accordingly.

I have also received further information about the financial impact of the ban on alcohol in boxes and restaurants. Clubs' main concern is not the loss of revenue from alcohol sales, but the expectation that many box-holders will not renew their leases. For example Manchester United estimate that next season they will lose between 35 and 40% of the income they derive from their boxes and restaurants. Tottenham Hotspur estimate that they will lose between 50 and 60%. In all it is estimated that First Division clubs will lose between them more than £1.2m and clubs in the other three divisions will lose £0.25m or more.

The League emphasises that executive boxes are an important part of the future marketing of the game. Football has to find new customers, and they tell us that the projected loss of income will have a serious effect on the ability of clubs to redevelop their grounds and improve safety and comfort. There is no way of checking this, and the estimates of loss of revenue are inevitably speculative, but I am in no doubt that some clubs will be seriously affected.

I have discussed this with Kenneth Baker and he agrees that we should now proceed to relax the control on alcohol in executive boxes and restaurants. For my part I should like to do this while the Public Order Bill is in Committee. This would require a decision within the next 10 days.

... As to the form of the amendment I enclose, for ease of reference, an extract from my letter to you of 7 January. Quintin Hailsham has supported this (his letter of 17 January) and I understand that Kenneth Baker is now also content. As I explained in my earlier letter this is not a general relaxation. Box-holders will still be unable to get a drink during the match, and for 15 minutes either side. But they will now be able to have a drink with a meal before the match, and this should reduce the adverse effect on revenue. As I also explained in my earlier letter, some degree of leverage will be retained, which could be used in connection with membership cards.

I hope that colleagues will now be prepared to agree that I should secure an amendment on those lines. I should be grateful for any comments by Monday 17 March.

I am copying this to the Prime Minister, other Members of H Committee, Richard Tracey, Sir Robert Armstrong and Sir George Engle.

Yours,
Douglas.

EXTRACT FROM LETTER OF 7 JANUARY FROM THE HOME SECRETARY TO THE LORD
PRESIDENT

The obvious way of permitting alcohol in executive boxes and restaurants within sight of the pitch is to extend the exemption order scheme established by the Sporting Events (Control of Alcohol Etc) Act 1985. This would however require some complicated amendments. The exemption order scheme at present applies only to the sale of alcohol, whereas at some clubs alcohol is brought in by box-holders beforehand, and no sale takes place. It would be necessary to introduce a new exemption order scheme to cover this situation, which would break new ground since the exemption would have to cover all the occupants of the relevant boxes (who would vary from match to match) instead of (in the case of sale) applying solely to the person selling the alcohol.

I am therefore inclined to take a different approach. The controls on the sale or possession introduced by the 1985 Act apply during a period from 2 hours before the match to 1 hour afterwards. In the cases of boxes and restaurants within sight of the pitch (but only in those cases) I propose to reduce this to a period from 15 minutes before a match until 15 minutes afterwards. Outside this period box-holders would be able to possess alcohol, and it could be sold (if a licence had been obtained). Inside the period no alcohol could be sold or possessed. The significance of this change would be that, while the ban would be retained during a match, box-holders would be able to entertain clients with a meal and a drink before a match, or afterwards, and the loss of revenue to clubs would be reduced. I would further propose to include in the Bill an order-making power which would enable me to reduce the period of control still further in later years (eventually to nothing) if the initial reduction, as set out in the Bill, were not abused and did not give rise to difficulties. This would provide an element of flexibility. It should also give some leverage in obtaining progress from the football authorities, for example on membership cards.

