

E. R.

PRIME MINISTER

SOCCER VIOLENCE

This note summarises the discussion at lunch today with Robert Maxwell and his editorial team on soccer violence. [I am doing a separate note on drugs.]

You made it clear in the course of discussion that if necessary the Government would take reserve powers. The implication was that if the FA did not show willing the Government would act, but that your preference was for soccer to put its own house in order. Nonetheless, expectations of Government action have been raised.

These expectations are all the greater in the Mirror because Mr Maxwell made it clear that he had no faith in the FA, or in Mr Millichip (Chairman) and Mr Ted Croker (General Secretary). But Mr Maxwell made it clear it was the FA which had the authority, with minimal (one) representation on its Governing Council of the Football League.

You raised a number of ideas which were discussed, including:

- identity cards: Mr Maxwell strongly supported these and urged you not to be put off by claims that they would be expensive or impractical. In fact, he said, it was perfectly possible to recruit more volunteer supporters to open more turnstiles. Moreover, the advent of identity cards would facilitate control of fans overseas (on which Joe Haines advocated endorsement of passport or card). But Mr Maxwell said that the clubs would be resistant because it gave them responsibility for control - ie withdrawal of cards.

- family stands: Jimmy Reid made the point that he could not take his daughters to matches because facilities simply were not available, at least in Scotland.

- drink for fans in transit, in the vicinity of a ground (who compensates the publican?); and in the ground. Here Mr Maxwell seemed all in favour of controlling drinks outside the ground and everywhere in the ground except in VIP/Directors' areas (and don't forget the increasing tendency towards VIP boxes at football grounds). He strongly urged you to get in touch with Jack Dunnett, ex-MP and Chairman of Notts County, who is reputed to make £150,000 a year out of drinks at his ground. How this profit was made was not clear.

- protective fences around grounds: Mr Maxwell agreed with these, but he did not address the problem of the poor clubs which only exceptionally have trouble - eg Halifax Town.

- closing of grounds: this as a permanent thing was not taken seriously. But the idea led on to the discussion of clubs which had attracted a bad following - eg Millwall and Chelsea - which, the Mirror claimed, was in part National Front inspired, orchestrated and led. There were a number of stories told of NF involvement; there was, of course, no proof. [It is interesting that the militant Right is always branded with inspiring soccer violence whereas the militant Left is much the more active and opportunist.]

- banning of rail/bus specials - these apparently found favour with Mr Maxwell on the ground that they made it difficult for fans to get to away games. [But they become less important if there is an identity card system.]

Apart from identity cards Mr Maxwell made one other major point:

- since the FA is the authority, but not the real authority in soccer, threaten them with requests for action by the Football League - ie the 92 Clubs. He believed this would galvanise the FA.

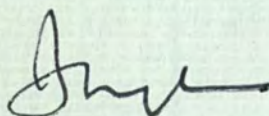
Summary/Comment

I believe that Mr Maxwell had some good points. But I also believe he was venting his ire on the FA, which may be richly deserved. But he cannot get out of it so easily.

It is on football grounds - ie club premises - that games are played and mayhem occurs. The clubs have a responsibility too. And does anyone imagine that Mr Maxwell would ever hesitate to exercise his authority?

My own view is that the FA and the FL should be roasted; should be told in no uncertain terms that it is their game and they must act to make it wholesome; that the Government stands ready to help them; and that the Government requires them to come back within a month to tell you what they propose to do for 1985-86 season.

In the meantime, if they do nothing, you will in June announce your intention for action for the next season. And any incidents for the rest of this season will count ill against them.



BERNARD INGHAM
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