

FOOTBALL TRAGEDY

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TELEGRAM NUMBER 1721 OF 31 MAY

INFO PRIORITY BRUSSELS, BIS NEW YORK. ROUTINE OTHER US POSTS

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EUROPEAN CUP FINAL TRAGEDY: US MEDIA COVERAGE

1. THE EUROPEAN CUP FINAL TRAGEDY HAS BEEN A MAJOR NEWS STORY IN THE US PRESS AND ON TELEVISION AND RADIO FOR THE PAST FEW DAYS. WE AND OTHER US POSTS RECEIVED MANY HOSTILE CALLS FROM MEMBERS OF THE US PUBLIC SHORTLY AFTER DETAILS OF THE TRAGEDY BECAME KNOWN HERE BUT THESE TAILED OFF ONCE IT BECAME CLEAR IN REPORTS FROM LONDON THAT THE PRIME MINISTER HAD CONDEMNED THE INCIDENT AND THAT THE GOVERNMENT INTENDED TO TAKE SWIFT ACTION TO DETER THIS KIND OF VIOLENCE IN THE FUTURE.

2. WHILST THE US MEDIA ASSUME THAT BRITISH FANS WERE LARGELY IF NOT ENTIRELY, RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT HAPPENED IN BRUSSELS, THE PROBLEM OF SPORTS HOOLIGANISM AND VIOLENCE IN GENERAL IS SEEN IN MOST PAPERS HERE AS BEING AT LEAST A EUROPEAN IF NOT A WORLD WIDE PROBLEM - BUT WITH BRITAIN REGRETTABLY AT THE FOREFRONT AS FAR AS SOCCER HOOLIGANISM IS CONCERNED. THE PRIME MINISTER'S IMMEDIATE CONDEMNATION OF WHAT HAPPENED IS WIDELY REPORTED AND HER STATEMENT THAT IT HAD BROUGHT 'SHAME AND DISGRACE TO THE COUNTRY AND TO FOOTBALL' IS QUOTED IN MOST REPORTS, AS IS THE GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO TAKE IMMEDIATE STEPS AND IN PARTICULAR TO CONTRIBUTE TO A DISASTER FUND FOR THE FAMILIES OF VICTIMS.

IN A HELPFUL AND MEASURED EDITORIAL, THE WASHINGTON POST DESCRIBES THIS DECISION AS 'AN UNUSUAL ACT OF NATIONAL APOLOGY' ADDING THAT 'IF THE BRITISH REPUTATION FOR TRANQUILITY IS SPURIOUS, THE BRITISH REPUTATION FOR DECENCY IS ENTIRELY GENUINE'. THE POST CONCLUDES:

'IT WAS THE KIND OF DISASTER THAT SUGGESTS AN EROSION OF THE FUNDAMENTAL CODE ON WHICH A SOCIETY PRIDES ITSELF - NONE WITH GREATER REASON THAN THE BRITISH. THERE IS NO COUNTRY BETTER EQUIPPED, BY ITS OWN LAWS AND TRADITIONS, TO REPAIR THE DAMAGE'.

3. THERE HAS BEEN MASSIVE COVERAGE OF THE DISASTER ON US TELEVISION NOT ONLY ON THE NEWS PROGRAMMES BUT IN THE LEADING CURRENT AFFAIRS/DISCUSSION PROGRAMMES SUCH AS PBS/MCNEIL LEHRER REPORT AND ABC NIGHTLINE. BIS OFFICIALS HAVE GIVEN BRIEF INTERVIEWS TO LOCAL TV AND RADIO STATIONS AND ON THE RECORD STATEMENTS DRAWING ON EXTENSIVE COI MATERIAL SENT TO POSTS.

4. PREDICTABLY, THERE IS A GOOD DEAL OF ANALYSIS OF THE REASONS WHY SOCCER VIOLENCE IS SO PREVALENT IN BRITAIN WITH THE LEVEL OF UNEMPLOYMENT, LIFE IN THE INNER CITIES AND BOREDOM AMONGST YOUTH HIGHLIGHTED IN MANY PAPERS. THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, IN ITS DETERMINATION TO FIT ANY EVENT FROM THE CREATION TO A NUCLEAR HOLOCAUST INTO THE PROCRUSTEAN COUCH OF ITS ECONOMIC POLICY APPROACH, SEES THE PROBLEM OF VIOLENCE IN MAINLY ECONOMIC TERMS. THE JOURNAL COMMENTS THAT THE WELFARE STATE IS A CENTRAL PART OF THE PROBLEM IN CREATING AN 'UNDEREMPLOYED, UNDERCLASS THE POSITIVE SOLUTION IS FOR EUROPE TO MAKE THE TRANSITION FROM A WELFARE SOCIETY TO AN OPPORTUNITY SOCIETY'. IT ACKNOWLEDGES THAT BRITAIN AND SOME OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES HAVE MADE A START IN THIS DIRECTION BUT THAT MORE NEEDS TO BE DONE TO STIMULATE PRIVATE INVESTMENT AND ECONOMIC GROWTH TO GIVE THOSE PRONE TO VIOLENCE MORE OF A STAKE IN SOCIETY.

5. THERE IS SOME SPECULATION IN THE AMERICAN PRESS THAT BRITISH TEAMS MAY BE BANNED FROM PLAYING IN EUROPE AND THE SPECIFIC DECISION BY THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT TO BAN THEM FROM PLAYING IN BELGIUM UNTIL THE THREAT OF VIOLENCE BY BRITISH FANS IS ELIMINATED IS PROMINENTLY REPORTED.

6. A SELECTION OF CUTTINGS OF US COVERAGE IS BEING SENT BY BAG TO FCO, DOE AND NUMBER 10.

7. FOR US POSTS ONLY: IF LOCAL COMMENT IS AT VARIANCE WITH THE ABOVE SUMMARY, PLEASE REPORT BY TELEGRAM NEXT WEEK TO WASHINGTON AND BIS NEW YORK ONLY SO THAT WE CAN IF NECESSARY SEND ANOTHER ROUND UP FROM HERE.

8. FCO PLEASE ADVANCE TO INFORMATION DEPARTMENT AND NEWS DEPARTMENT, TO THE DOE AND NUMBER 10.

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