



a Master

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

31 May 1985

Jean Phil,

The Prime Minister held a series of meetings today to discuss the events in Brussels at the European Cup Final on Wednesday and the response to these events. Your Minister was present at all these meetings. This note summarises the major points to emerge at each.

Meeting with sports journalists

The Prime Minister met a number of sports journalists who had been present at the European Cup Final. They were: Peter Jones (BBC Radio), Jeff Powell (Daily Mail), Charles Burgess (Guardian), John Keith (Daily Express), Peter Went (Press Association), Mike Ellis (Sun) and Brian Glanville (Sunday Times). The journalists described their view of the events leading to the deaths of some 40 football supporters and explained their (occasionally very differing) views of measures to combat football hooliganism. Some of the points to emerge were as follows:

I Football hooligans were for the most part unreachable in any real sense. They saw themselves as being alien and outcast and their aspirations were measured in territory won and injury and damage caused.

II It might be possible to clean up the game of football by the kind of stringent measures to which the Prime Minister had been referring. Because football hooliganism was however a social phenomenon rather than a football phenomenon it would reappear elsewhere. The Prime Minister commented that this might be so but if it did it might be in a more easily controllable fashion.

III Measures to prevent specifically football hooliganism could be successful. The journalists broadly favoured proposals to impose a ban on visiting spectators, which could be achieved by a club

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membership system. It would also make considerably easier the control of transport. Even if this was not done there should be an end to cheap fares on football special trains and there should certainly be no charter flights to cities in which the England football team were playing.

IV The journalists shared the common view amongst those present that preparations for the game by UEFA and the Belgian authorities had been appalling. The policing was non-existent and the standard of facilities at the stadium would not have received a certificate under British legislation. The journalists joined the Prime Minister in lamenting the very small number of arrests. It was a traditional practice of continental police forces to administer on the spot physical punishment rather than to go to all the trouble of an arrest. It was essential that troublemakers were arrested and in this context the journalists endorsed the Prime Minister's attempts to persuade ordinary spectators to take a stand against the hooligans. The trouble was that they were terrified. The Prime Minister thought that this might prove possible: the example of the recent miners' strike showed that ordinary people were often prepared to stand up and be counted in the face of appalling violence and intimidation.

V Nevertheless the journalists agreed with the Prime Minister that nothing was to be gained at this stage by seeking to put the blame other than on British football supporters. Those who spoke favoured a voluntary withdrawal by the Football Association.

VI In a brief discussion of National Front participation in football violence the journalists said that this was an element but there was no question that the numbers involved went far beyond a small politically motivated fringe.

Meeting with Mr. John Smith

The Prime Minister met Mr. John Smith, the Chairman of Liverpool Football Club and the Sports Council. Mr. Smith said that he had already decided to withdraw Liverpool from European competition for the next year and would be making a statement to that effect afterwards. The Prime Minister praised his decision. Mr. Smith went on to make a number of other points as follows:

I The policing of the match had been wholly lamentable; if the events had happened at a British ground the police would have stopped it within a few

minutes.

II The arrangements for the match were totally inadequate. For example tickets had ended up on the black market and spectators had been able to enter the ground without tickets at all. This had contributed to the crush in the Liverpool end.

III There was substantial evidence of National Front activity including a large number of union jacks of a kind which were never shown at Liverpool matches normally. He himself had been accosted by six hooligans who appeared to be members of the National Front and who claimed to be proud of their night's work.

IV He would be prepared to consider the introduction of club membership cards and would be investigating the possibility himself. He was also broadly in favour of a ban on visiting spectators. He was in favour of a ban on football specials in any event.

V He was very much in favour of the Government's proposals to ban alcohol from football grounds and from transport to football grounds.

VI In his capacity as Chairman of the Sports Council he was looking at the possibility of a football levy board along the lines of the Horse Race Betting Levy Board. The Prime Minister said that this possibility should by all means be considered, but football already had a substantial income from other sources.

Meeting with the Football Association

The Prime Minister met Mr. Millichip, Mr. Croker and Mr. McMullen of the Football Association. She thanked Mr. Millichip and Mr. Croker for returning from Mexico at such short notice to deal with the consequences of the events in Brussels. Mr. Millichip said that the Football Association had decided not to submit the names of any English clubs for any European competitions next season and he proposed to announce this immediately. The Prime Minister commented that she was sure that this was the right decision.

The Prime Minister went on to say that there was now a demand, which would not be denied, for urgent action. The Government itself hoped to introduce legislation this session for a ban on alcohol at football grounds and on transport to football grounds. She hoped as well that the Football Association would reconsider their opposition to a system of membership cards as well as the possibility of a ban on visiting spectators. Mr. Croker said that the

Football Association remained sceptical about a national system of membership cards which, they considered, would be too easily abused. A local system might well however, have merit. In addition the Football Association were convinced they would now have to take a more direct influence over the planning of individual matches, for example, by insisting on all ticket matches more frequently and insisting on more games played in the morning. At this stage nothing was ruled out and the Association looked forward to further discussions with the Government. The Prime Minister welcomed the Association's determination to take the kind of tough decisions which would be necessary.

The Prime Minister enquired about the number and nature of supporters travelling with the England team in Mexico, especially in view of the forthcoming match with Italy. The Association replied that there seemed to be about 80 English fans but the Mexican police had announced their intention of dealing firmly with any potential trouble. The names of the travelling supporters were known since they would have had to apply for visas.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Janet Lewis-Jones (Lord President's Office), Peter Ricketts (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Nigel Pantling (Home Office) and Richard Allan (Department of Transport).

Timothy Flesher

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