

CONFIDENTIAL

*Hold on  
POL 9.*

F [redacted] APS/SECRETARY OF STATE (B)  
1 NOVEMBER 1989

cc PS/Sofs (B&L) - B  
PS/Mofs (B&L) - B  
PS/PUS (B&L) - B  
PS/Sir K Bloomfield + B  
Mr Stephens - B  
Mr Burns - B  
Mr Spence - B  
Mr Thomas - B  
Mr A P Wilson - B  
Mr Bell - B  
Mr J McConnell - B  
Mr L Brown, DENI



Mr Miles - B

*2. Hold for  
further pps.*

**GAELIC SPORTS**

The Secretary of State has seen your minute of 20 October in which you tendered advice about his possible attendance at a Gaelic sporting event.

The Secretary of State has agreed to await your further consultations before raising with the GOC and the Chief Constable the point about the GAA Constitution. He has however requested that we explore the possibility of his attendance at a school event and I should be grateful if you would arrange for advice from PAB/DENI about a suitable event which we could include as part of a PSG visit programme by the Secretary of State.

Signed

**M PATTERSON**  
Private Secretary

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JB/SOFS/1092

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2. POL 9

ROM/895/89/SH

FROM: R O MILES  
US(Pol)

20 October 1989



cc PS/MofS (L&B) - B  
PS/PUS (L&B) - B 2) / r  
1. PS/Sir K Bloomfield - B  
Mr Burns - B  
Mr Stephens - B  
Mr Spence - B  
Mr Thomas - B  
Mr A P Wilson  
Mr Bell - B  
Mr J McConnell - B  
Mr Len Brown, DENI

PS/SofS (L&B) - B

#### GAELIC SPORTS

The Secretary of State asked for advice on whether he might attend a Gaelic sporting event.

2. On balance I strongly recommend that he should. Gaelic sports are an important manifestation of the life of the nationalist community in Northern Ireland. (I speak as an expert, having seen Co Tipperary beat Co Mayo at Camogie, and having played one of the less painful sports myself in my youth).

3. There are difficulties however. The main one, as ever, is security; some locations would be altogether impossible, and even at best there would be problems about a heavy security presence, given the nature of the event and the involvement in Gaelic sports of the extremist Republican element. A second difficulty is the rule in the Constitution of the Gaelic Athletics Association excluding members of the security forces from membership. This rule goes back to the year dot, and is of course a symbol of just those divisions in Northern Ireland society which we would like to break down. I am sure that the way to break them down is to go ahead, not to wait for the GAA Constitution to be amended.

#### Recommendation

4. In view of the difficulties I suggest this should be taken slowly. I would like to consult further in particular with Dr Maurice Hayes (the NI Ombudsman) who is prominent in Gaelic sports. I also suggest that before going ahead, the Secretary of State might mention to the GOC and the Chief Constable the point about the GAA Constitution.

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5. I attach a background note and a letter from Sir N Fenn about his recent attendance at the All-Ireland Hurling final, which gives some of the flavour (though Gaelic sports in the North are even more problematic than Gaelic sports in the South). I am sorry the background note is longer than I would have wished, but I understand this submission must be with the Private Office today and, as the man said in the story, I did not have time to write a shorter one.

[signed]

R O MILES

Ext 507 (SH)

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PAB/5584/RN

BACKGROUND NOTE

GAELIC ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION

1. You asked for advice and background information in relation to whether the Secretary of State (or presumably any Minister) should attend Gaelic sporting events. I have already seen Mr Stephen's note of 10 October and also Mr Blackwell's of 13 October on this issue as well as consulting officials in (a) the Department of Education (whom I believe may have also spoken directly to Mr Miles) which administers grant aid to the Gaelic Athletic Association in the Province and (b) our own officials in SPOB.

Factors against attendance

2. There are essentially two strands against ministerial attendance - the physical security aspects and the GAA's ban on members of the security forces participating in Gaelic sports events. The fact that we would probably also be faced, (predictably enough) with criticism from Unionist sources as and when Ministers attended sporting fixtures of the ilk, does not, in my view, seriously constitute a third strand however it should not be overlooked either.

Low Profile GAA type events

3. Taking the GAA absolute ban first, Rule 13 of the present "Revised Rules - Official Guide" under the heading "Membership" states "British Soldiers, navy men and police shall not be eligible for membership of the Association (GAA)", although Rule 7 somewhat earlier in the regulations states "the Association shall be non-political and non-sectarian". The basis of Mr Stephen's argument is that Ministers should not support or attend a GAA fixture if there clear evidence to suggest that the event is being

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held under the auspices of the GAA as this may cause offence to many members of the security forces and a "good many other people". Officials in DENI have informed me that they believe all events at all- Ireland, Provincial, County and Club level are held (as they are in similar circumstances in the game of Rugby Football in Ireland under the IRFU) under the direct control of the GAA. Therefore on this basis Ministers supporting the view that substantial offence could then be caused by attending higher profile GAA events, could only be present at a gaelic sporting fixture if it was part of an inter-school/college tournament or the visit was to an educational establishment which regularly fielded teams in hurling, Gaelic football etc and a match was already taking place.

4. Mr Stephen's in his 10 October minute welcomes attendance by the Secretary of State or one of his Ministers at a gaelic sporting event along these lines, and these can quite clearly be presented as a normal "out and about" Ministerial visits. Provided the usual procedures were adopted in advance by the RUC the physical element of risk is likely to be no greater or lesser than any other outside visit. There is as far as one can determine no binding connection with events organised at this level and the GAA constitution.

5. Officials in DENI have already informally sounded out Jim McKeever present Vice Chairman of the Northern Ireland Sports Council (and also Manager of Derry GAA) as to ministerial attendance at events at this level. His view was that it was unlikely to create difficulties on the GAA side or for that matter for Ministers. Taking all these factors on board the way would appear to be reasonably clear for Ministers to take this type of low profile "Gaelic" event into consideration when future programmes are being drawn up.

Higher Profile events

6. However both dimensions (ban and security) are accentuated when consideration is given to ministerial attendance at club, county, provincial and all-Ireland level. The physical security aspects are distinctly more important, the likelihood of a Minister visiting

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Casement Park in West Belfast or the Crossmaglen GAA facilities or a good many other locations for the duration of a game needs no further comment here, but there is no doubt that if a higher profile approach is adopted exact locations of games etc would require carefully screening and any advance notice given to organisers would also require particularly careful handling.

7. However on the other side of the coin the slightly more difficult aspect to accurately assess is to what extent attendance at a higher profile "GAA" fixture would cause offence to the security forces. For example do RUC personnel, members of the British Army/Navy really wish to play GAA sports?. Would these people as a body (not as individuals) really view ministerial attendance as openly offensive? Would attendance give the impression that Ministers were in some way giving less support to the security forces in their difficult and demanding task? Is any outcry likely to manifest itself in a concerted campaign from their quarter against the few occasions, where ministerial attendance might take place?. Perhaps at the end of the day security force commanders, might, on occasions take the view that increased costs in terms of manpower and resources to protect the Secretary of State and/or Minister at this type of events represents a misguided policy. In some nationalist minds it may do little to enhance the image of Government Ministers hiding behind a "ring of steel".

8. My view is that although there may well be some political downside in attendance and ripples within the security force fraternity, these should not outweigh the more positive aspects/indicators of occasional attendance at "GAA" events; namely the potential benefits in community relations terms of Ministerial recognition of another sporting and cultural tradition which is a part of (a) Northern Ireland and (b) the Irish community. Continued non-attendance could just as easily imply a lack of interest on the part of Government and to some other more extreme views an implicit indication that the GAA and its members are not actually interested in sport but perhaps have more sinister connections.

9. Whilst there has been, to my knowledge, no overt criticism of Ministers not attending gaelic sporting events to date nor do I

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believe there is any possibility that occasional attendance by them is likely to cause the "GAA" to re-think their strategy on the security forces ban the arguments for attendance still outweigh those against. Given the position whereby a Northern Ireland Government Department grant aids the "GAA" and this organisation to some degree keeps youth in the community interested in sport etc and consequently off the streets, this in itself represents a reasonably strong case for ministerial attendance. In reality are we being any better morally and politically for not attending GAA events than the GAA is for banning certain members of the security forces?

Summary and Recommendation

10. Any attendance by the Secretary of State and/or Ministers might, I recommend in the first instance, be organised at the school/college level and developed further by attendance in the Republic (if this can be arranged through either the IC meetings or the Secretariat) perhaps initially by the Secretary of State or Minister of State at a higher profile GAA event perhaps at Croke Park. Another potential avenue for development (presumably in the slightly longer term) is the broadening out of the conference agenda into the involvement of Ministers with other portfolios. This would allow Ministers from each side with a responsibility for sport in the island of Ireland to come together at a mutually convenient date to discuss, bilaterally, matters of interest and over a period of time attend a selection of various events in both NI/ROI.

11. Although there are compelling arguments on both sides my own view is that Ministers should, beyond the college/school level, occasionally attend a higher profile gaelic fixture in the interests of community relations and recognition of Irish Culture. However attendance initially might be better organised, for tactical and political reasons, through Irish counterparts at an Irish venue to enable a further view to be taken of any comment or public outcry in NI before proceeding further.

RN/4071

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BRITISH EMBASSY,  
DUBLIN.

5 September 1989

Mr T J B George  
RID  
FCO

*Dear Timothy*

ALL IRELAND HURLING FINAL AT 'CROKE PARK

1. I report for the record that I attended the Final of the All-Ireland Hurling Championship at Croke Park on Sunday 3 September.
2. We had recommended that a NIO Minister should consider attending since Antrim was contesting the final for the first time since 1943, in order to demonstrate our even-handed interest in the sporting activities of both communities in Northern Ireland. Dr Mawhinney preferred not to do so and had in any case a previous engagement. The question then arose as to whether I should go. The NIO was sceptical and the FCO helpfully agnostic (not an invitation to further theological debate!).
3. We telephoned the GAA and asked if I might attend: I had been looking for an opportunity to witness hurling at senior level; as Ambassador to Ireland, I should familiarise myself with such a central part of Irish life; I was not trying to make a political point - I thought it might be fun; I would not press the point if it would cause them any embarrassment. After three days of horrified silence they produced a courteous letter of invitation and four complimentary tickets.
4. I learn (from the improbable source of the Leader of the Irish Labour Party) that the GAA were thrown into confusion by our approach. Although one of my predecessors (Sir Ian MacLennan 1959-64) had been a regular and enthusiastic patron of hurling, there was no record of a British Ambassador attending since that time. Some members of the Cumann had objected in principle: others had not wished to snub me; others again had simply thought why shouldn't he come? Mr Spring said that the question had been referred for resolution by the Taoiseach!
5. In the event I was received with courtesy. My neighbour in the VIP enclosure was Dr Michael Woods, Minister for Social Welfare, who explained the intricacies of the game to me as it went along. At the reception following the game I was able to talk to senior members of the GAA, to President Hillery, to Des O'Malley, to Alan Dukes, to Commissioner Crowley, to

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Lt General/

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Lt General Tadgh O'Neill, to Cardinal O'Fiaich and multitudinous senior clergy (including Dean Victor Griffin of St Patrick's Cathedral, apparently the sole representative of the Church of Ireland). I also met former Taoisigh Jack Lynch and Liam Cosgrave and several members of the present Cabinet. The Taoiseach himself went out of his way to say how glad he was to see me there.

6. Hurling is a fast and exciting game and it was played with great skill (otherwise people would have got killed!). Antrim were no match for Tipperary and were outclassed from the beginning. The Tipperary wing forward (fortunately named Nicholas English!) was a veritable Houdini, scoring points with unerring accuracy even when surrounded by three or four saffron jerseys. But Antrim never gave up. The final score was decisive but not humiliating: Tipperary 4-24: Antrim 3-9 (to the Sassanach 36-18).

7. Two demonstrators climbed to the roof of one of the stands and displayed a long banner inscribed in English and Irish "No Extradition". They ignored repeated appeals over the loudspeaker to come down in the interests of their own safety. They were summarily removed by the Garda Siochana at half time.

8. The GAA invited me to come back to Croke Park for the Irish football finals on Sunday 17 September. Alas I cannot go - because I shall be reading the lesson at St Patrick's Cathedral for the Annual Service in Commemoration of the Battle of Britain. Irish irony!

9. There was little publicity for my attendance: a photograph and caption in the Irish Press recorded my presence without comment. This is as it should be. Dick Spring tells me that some of the GAA feared that I would seek to present myself as the Ambassador for Antrim. Of course I made no such point. The smiling face of Neil Kinnock is in all the morning papers because he attended the match at the end of his meetings with the Irish Labour Party (which we are reporting separately). Unusual prominence is given to his presence at Croke Park because of his escape from a serious motor accident on his way to the airport. Irishmen know that there was a British interest in their hurling final.

10. As it happens, I was at Lords on Saturday for the final of the NatWest cricket championship, and at Croke Park on Sunday: the tribal rites of two nations at one weekend.

11. Not a very important story. Nevertheless a marker has been put down and a precedent established and one more small Anglo-Irish barrier has been broken.

*Yours ever,*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nick", written over a horizontal line.

Nicholas Fenn

cc

Mr Brian Blackwell  
SIL NIO(L)

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C O N F I D E N T I A L

FROM B A BLACKWELL, SIL  
13 October 1989

cc: PS/PUS (L&B) - B  
① PS Sir K Bloomfield - B  
Mr Burns - B  
Mr Thomas - B  
Mr A P Wilson - B  
Mr Bell - B  
Mr J McConnell - B  
Mr Coulson - B  
Mr Johnston, DENI

533/10

② B/F 20/10

MR MILES - B

### SPORTING FIXTURES

As the originators of the advice which has caused comment from the Secretary of State, it might be helpful for you to have the SIL point of view in coordinating a response to PS/Secretary of State's note of 9 October. I have seen Mr Stephen's note of 10 October.

2. I accept the weight of Mr Stephens' argument that Ministerial attendance at GAA fixtures, while the bar against membership by those serving in the British Army or the RUC remains, might cause offence to the Security Forces. But to wait for the other side to make the first gesture of reconciliation is for HMG to adopt the posture of both sides of the community in Northern Ireland of which we so frequently despair and seek to change. Because of this I do not think that fact should be allowed to outweigh the potential benefits in community relations terms from Ministerial recognition of the sporting traditions of the other part of the Northern Ireland and Irish community. Ministerial attendance at GAA fixtures would moreover expose the unfairness of the ban and might be a more effective way of bringing about its eventual removal than continuing to ignore GAA activities.

C O N F I D E N T I A L

SIL/GH/13409

C O N F I D E N T I A L

3. At the recent hurling final featuring Antrim, the Ambassador in Dublin attended. After some initial confusion within the GAA he was offered free tickets and welcomed warmly. Advice from the Embassy is that Ministerial attendance would not cause any insurmountable problems, and would in fact be welcomed by a large number of people. However, even if the GAA were to refuse to allow Ministers to attend, this could only reflect badly on them, whilst showing that HMG is even handed in its support of the various traditions in Ireland. It would, I believe, be a most unfortunate step were we to decide that Ministers could not attend any major Gaelic sporting events on the grounds of the GAA constitution.

B A BLACKWELL  
SIL Division  
13 October 1989  
Ext OAB 6587

C O N F I D E N T I A L

SIL/GH/13409

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DUSB/7679

FROM: A W STEPHENS  
10 October 1989

381/10  
cc PS/PUS (B&L) - B  
① PS/Sir K Bloomfield - B  
Mr Burns  
Mr A P Wilson - B  
Mr Bell - B  
Mr J McConnell - B  
Mr Blackwell - B  
Mr Coulson - B  
Mr Johnston, DENI  
Mr May - B

② B/F 23/10

MR MILES

#### SPORTING FIXTURES

You have been asked to offer coordinated advice on the desirability of the Secretary of State (or, presumably, any Ministers) attending Gaelic sports events from time to time. In doing so, I hope you will emphasise the distinction which Mr Leach touches on in his minute of 9 October: namely, whether the event is held under GAA auspices or not.

2. Where it is not, I see every reason for treating Gaelic sports no differently from other sports. Thus I was strongly in favour of the decision that was taken two or three years ago to permit a Gaelic sports event to be held on the Civil Service (Maynard Sinclair) sports ground at Stormont and to disregard the objections that were voiced from some Unionist quarters. By the same token, I am sure there would be positive benefit in Ministers attending and being seen to attend such an event.

3. It would be "nice" if we could extend the same attitude to events held under GAA auspices. But for so long as the Association maintains the absolute bar in its constitution against accepting as a member anyone who is serving not only with the British Army but also with the RUC, I do not see how we can. For Ministers to patronise GAA events while this remains the situation would undoubtedly cause considerable and understandable offence to the

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police and the Army - and to a good many other people - which, in my estimation, would substantially outweigh such political benefit as might accrue. I believe we should continue to say so quite openly and to make it clear that, while Ministers very much regret the present impasse, they are in no doubt that the responsibility for bringing it about and the onus to change it lie squarely with the GAA. (Following your unkind strictures of recent weeks I am at pains to avoid saying that the ball is squarely in the GAA's court - though Michael Bentine will shortly be here, during the Festival, to remind us that it is a square world.)

Signed AWS

A W STEPHENS  
SH 511, SC 244

GLN 13791

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FROM: PS/SECRETARY OF STATE  
9 OCTOBER 1989

cc PS/Sofs (B&L) - B  
PS/Dr Mawhinney (B&L) - B  
① PS/PUS (B&L) - B  
PS/Sir K Bloomfield - B  
Mr Burns - B  
Mr Stephens - B  
Mr Wilson - B  
Mr Blackwell - B  
Mr Bell - B  
Mr Coulson - B  
Mr Johnston, DENI  
Mr J McConnell - B  
Mr May - B

HELD  
34010  
-9 OCT 1989

② B/F  
23/10/89

Mr Miles - B

SPORTING FIXTURES

1. The Secretary of State has seen Mr May's submission of 28 September (not to all) advising on Dr Mawhinney's attendance at international rugby matches in Dublin and has noted the comment in para 5 that:

"[the] continued attendance of British Ministers at rugby matches, but not at hurling or gaelic football matches may be noticed and used as a sign of continued unwillingness on HMG's side to recognise the traditions of the [minority] community."

2. The Secretary of State has commented that, if a volunteer is required to watch hurling or gaelic football, he would be quite happy to undertake this role (if only out of curiosity).

3. I should be grateful if you could advise on the practicalities of pursuing this idea. Given the hostility to the security forces which is written into the GAA's constitution, there would presumably be sensitivities about the Secretary of State attending any game held under GAA auspices. In addition, the security aspect would need to be carefully considered. But on the

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other hand (as suggested by Mr May) there might well be considerable political and symbolic benefit in the Secretary of State attending a hurling or gaelic football (or even camogie) match. I should be grateful if you could offer co-ordinated advice on this by, say, 20 October.

Signed

S J LEACH  
Private Secretary

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