

*In Cliftonville 25/10*  
 At the meeting with Don Allen, it was agreed  
 that the Minister would not become personally  
 involved at this stage. Officials (DFA and  
 CCRW) would convene a meeting with the Sports  
 Council and IFA in the next few weeks.

Secretary  
 Mr T Canavan  
 Mr J Palmer

From: R Jordan  
 Culture & Recreation Division

*25/10*

*Mr. Canavan 25/10*

23 October 1996

To: PS/Minister

*Mr. Canavan*  
*Mr. J. Palmer*

**MEETING RE CLIFTONVILLE FOOTBALL CLUB**

*25/10*

1. The Chairman of the Sports Council, Don Allen, has asked for a meeting to discuss the crisis facing football in the wake of Saturday's scenes in Portadown, when the Cliftonville supporters' buses were stoned by a hostile crowd.
2. One reason put forward for the violence was that a person on one of the buses was said to have held up a sign supporting the Provisional IRA. The laying of a wreath in August outside Loughgall RUC Station by people purporting to be Cliftonville supporters has also been cited as a contributory factor, as has the general hardening of attitudes on both sides of the community, post-Drumcree.
3. IFA President and Chairman of Cliftonville, Jim Boyce, is at pains to explain that actions such as these do not represent the views of the vast majority of the Club's supporters and that it is impossible for the Club to control the actions of a wayward minority.
4. Cliftonville is the oldest Football Club in Ireland and if, as seems possible, it is forced out of the Irish League, football as a whole would suffer. The Irish League

was weakened by the withdrawal of Derry City in the 1970s and for Cliftonville to follow suit would be serious.

*Also  
Belfast  
Celtic in  
the 1970s*

5. Saturday's incident is the second involving Cliftonville in recent weeks: the club's supporters were prevented by crowds from reaching a cup match in East Belfast in September.

6. Mr Allen would like the Minister to intervene by calling an urgent meeting with representatives of the Sports Council, the Irish Football Association (IFA) and the RUC, to stress the adverse impact of current problems on community relations more widely and to encourage the IFA to work with its member clubs, the Sports Council and the RUC to develop a positive and lasting solution to the present difficulties.

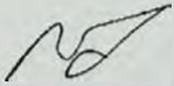
Mr Allen cites as a precedent the intervention some years ago by the Minister's immediate predecessor, Jeremy Hanley, in the difficulties then surrounding Windsor Park and Linfield Football Club.

### LINE TO TAKE

A meeting convened by the Minister would undoubtedly emphasise to the IFA how seriously the situation in soccer is viewed and it would put pressure on the Association to do something worthwhile, when otherwise it might seek to hide behind the assertion that since current problems are occurring outside football grounds, they relate to the wider political situation and the maintenance of public order, and are therefore largely beyond the influence of football.

An alternative is that the Minister might usefully speak by telephone with the Secretary of the IFA, David Bowen, (who is also a Sports Council member) to stress his concerns and encourage action to get to grips with the underlying issues.

If the Minister is reluctant to become directly involved, it still seems appropriate that something should be done to strengthen the hand of the Sports Council and put pressure on the IFA. An option is that officials could take the matter forward in the first instance, and a discussion with Mr Bowen can readily be arranged.



**R JORDAN**