

FROM: CIARAN MEE

Date: 6 March 2001

TO: PS/Minister

**MEETING WITH IFA RE SECTARIANISM: WEDNESDAY 7 MARCH 2001,
12-1 PM, INTERPOINT**

1. The Minister has agreed to meet with Jim Boyce, David Bowen and David Currie of the IFA to discuss sectarianism in soccer. I attach briefing as follows:
 - a) Background Note on Sectarianism in Soccer
 - b) Key Personality Notes
 - c) Agenda - 1 item only (ie Sectarianism in Soccer)
 - d) Line to take
2. This meeting has been called in response to the behaviour of some spectators towards Neil Lennon at last Wednesday's Friendly International soccer match at Windsor Park between Northern Ireland and Norway.
3. The meeting will be attended by David Bowen, Jim Boyce and David Currie from the IFA and Eamonn McCartan from the Sports Council for Northern Ireland.
4. Mr Carson, Dr Rooney, Mr Palmer and I will attend the pre-brief and the meeting.

Ciaran Mee

CIARAN MEE
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cc. Secretary
Mr N Carson
Dr E Rooney
Mr J Palmer

SECTARIANISM IN SOCCER

BACKGROUND

The Sports Council for Northern Ireland and Association Football, through the IFA, are committed to the removal of sectarianism from the practice of sport in Northern Ireland. There is an identified need to provide an environment which values and enables the full involvement of all people, regardless of religious belief, political affiliation or cultural identity, in all aspects and at all levels of sport and physical recreation.

While sport, both in the context of specific sports and in a generic sense, has made a significant and long-standing contribution to building bridges between communities over a long period of time, the ugly face of sectarianism is a reality and shows itself all too frequently. The events at the Northern Ireland v Norway friendly international match at Windsor Park on 28 February 2001 are a case in point.

Sport in Northern Ireland, due to the political situation, inherits many problems of wider society and in no sport is this more evident than in soccer. The problems in Northern Ireland are, in many areas, exacerbated by the poor infrastructure and the geographical location of grounds, many of which are located in single identity areas, and which, therefore, attract single identity support. Equally, existing Northern Ireland legislation does not make specific provision for dealing with persons attending football matches who engage in disorderly conduct and sectarian abuse. (In GB, for example, disorderly conduct, such as throwing of missiles, indecent or racist chanting and pitch invasion, are specifically prescribed under the **Football (Offences) Act 1991**.)

SR/SECTARIANISM/2597

Working Group recommendations
Not introduced.
Mins at time agreed in
principle to
recommendations
in that report (never made)
but considered it
would be
approp for NI
Assembly
to take forward!

The IFA has responded to the Sports Council for Northern Ireland calls for action on sectarianism in the following ways:

- the development of policy and practice, which has seen the appointment of a Community Relations Officer
- the decision to join FARE (Football Against Racism in Europe), a Vienna based organisation which aims to provide soccer clubs and bodies with information, documentation and ideas on how to combat racism in the sport
- the development of an IFA community relations programme targeting club staff and supporters
- the development of resources to foster quality community relations in local contexts
- the development and promotion of a 'fair play' programme, which will incorporate a "Code of Conduct" drawn up by the IFA
- the establishment of anti-sectarianism demonstration projects which can be duplicated elsewhere
- the implementation of a broad ranging community relations programme

In addition, during last month's three day conference/workshop at Newcastle on the future of football in Northern Ireland organised by DCAL, community relations, anti-sectarianism and inclusion were identified by stakeholders as key problems to be confronted. The Department is currently preparing terms of reference for addressing

these particular issues which will be considered at this month's meeting of the Soccer Strategy Advisory Panel. The possibility of introducing legislation to deal with sectarianism within soccer is expected to feature prominently in the Panel's deliberations.

The problems that sectarianism brings to the game is societal rather than specific to the sport of football. Nevertheless, soccer remains the most popular sport in Northern Ireland and has done a huge amount to foster good community relations and encourage others into good practice. Global trends suggest that there remains considerable potential for growth in Northern Ireland and Association Football, therefore, has huge potential to continue to contribute to the Community Relations agenda in Northern Ireland.

It is likely that the IFA will press the Minister to introduce legislation immediately to combat sectarianism. In this way the IFA will be seeking to transfer responsibility for the problem to the Minister. In reality, there is much more that the IFA could be doing to improve the management of international fixtures. Details of these will be available for the pre-brief. It would therefore be appropriate for the Minister to remind the IFA of their obligations and to ask them for details of further steps which they could take to bring about improvement.

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AGENDA

One item - Sectarianism in Soccer in Northern Ireland

1. He should tell the IFA that he has called today's meeting in order to determine what steps can be taken as of now to tackle this type of behaviour.
2. On the question of legislation, the Minister could say that it will inevitably take some time to bring forward legislation. He could state that he feels it is essential that any legislative programme which emerges looks at sectarianism in the wider context of the game and takes due account of policing, public order and broader health and safety concerns.
3. The Minister may want to remind the IFA that action to address sectarianism is already a requirement of the Safe Sports Grounds Scheme. He could point out that the issue is also being examined by DCAL at the moment as part of the School Strategy exercise.
4. In the meantime, the Minister will want to hear how the IFA see the problem and to explore with them further actions which they, as the Governing Body, could take to combat this type of behaviour amongst soccer spectators.
5. The Minister could, if pressed, remind the IFA of their obligations as the Governing Body for soccer to do all in its power to deal with sectarianism occurring within the sport.

LINE TO TAKE

1. The Minister should remind the Irish Football Association (IFA) that he has already expressed, through the media, his deep disgust at the treatment meted out to Neil Lennon at last week's international game by a minority of spectators.
2. He should tell the IFA that he has called today's meeting in order to determine what steps can be taken as of now to tackle this type of behaviour.
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LEGISLATION AVAILABLE IN NI TO DEAL WITH PUBLIC ORDER OFFENCES

1. The police has general powers to act against sectarian behaviour under the Public Order (NI) Order 1987. This Order establishes a range of public order offences relating to 'stirring up hatred and arousing fear on religious and racial grounds'.
2. The Public Order (NI) Order 1987 is the Northern Ireland equivalent of the GB Public Order Act 1986 mentioned in the recent Sunday World article. The GB Act relates to incitement to racial hatred. The Northern Ireland Order, however, goes further than the GB legislation by including a concept of 'arousing fear' and in its reference to 'religious belief'. The Northern Ireland Order is also specifically aimed at the 'protection of a person or groups of persons defined by reference to their religious belief, colour, race, nationality (including citizenship) or ethnic or national origins.'
3. As with all legislation, it remains for the RUC to determine how to respond to any given public order offence that may occur.
4. The responsibility for introduction public order offences in Northern Ireland continues to rest with the Secretary of State.
5. The GB Crime and Disorder Act 1998 is not currently applicable to Northern Ireland, although the NIO are presently considering how this legislation could be introduced here. At present there are technical difficulties in relation both to the drafting of appropriate legislation and on whether racially-motivated and sectarian-motivated offences should be categorised separately.

Conclusions

- a) There is existing public order legislation which could be applied in Northern Ireland to deal with incidents such as occurred at Windsor Park last week. However, is general in nature and not specifically applicable to sports events.
- b) If legislation were to be introduced in Northern Ireland to deal specifically with sectarian behaviour at football matches it may need to tie in with existing public order and proposed crime and disorder legislation.
- c) Regardless of what legislation might be introduced, its enforcement is a matter for the police. It must also be borne in mind that public order legislation remains a reserved matter and responsibility for its introduction continues to rest with the Secretary of State.