

**MINUTES OF MEETING BETWEEN MINISTER, SPORTS COUNCIL FOR  
NORTHERN IRELAND (SCNI) AND THE IRISH FOOTBALL  
ASSOCIATION (IFA) RE SECTARIANISM IN SOCCER, 7 MARCH 2001**

**Present:**

**DCAL**

Minister  
Nigel Carson  
Jack Palmer  
Brian Kirk  
Ciaran Mee

**SCNI**

Eamonn McCartan

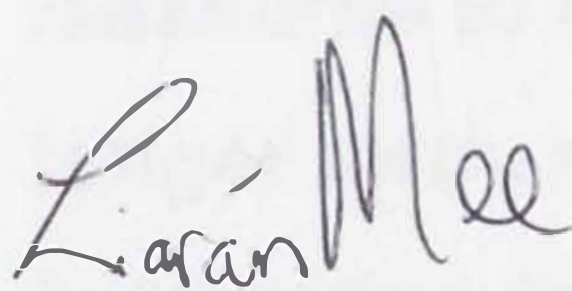
**IFA**

Jim Boyce  
David Bowen  
David Currie

1. The Minister stated that he had called this meeting in response to events at the friendly international between Northern Ireland and Norway at Windsor Park on 28 February. The Minister thanked the IFA for responding so promptly to his request for a meeting.
2. The Minister explained that his purpose in calling the meeting was to explore with the IFA what action could be taken in the short term to address the problem of sectarianism. He stressed the urgency of the situation given that a World Cup qualifying match is due to take place between Northern Ireland and the Czech Republic at Windsor Park on 24 March.
3. Mr Boyce, on behalf of the IFA, thanked the Minister for his recent public statements condemning the conduct of certain spectators during the recent friendly international. Mr Boyce stated that the IFA remained extremely concerned that a small sectarian group, some with possible paramilitary connections, was continuing to cause disruption and intimidation at international fixtures at Windsor Park.
4. Mr Currie went on to present the Minister with a list of proposals, drawn up by the IFA in response to events at the recent match, aimed at counter-acting those elements engaged in unruly and sectarian behaviour.
5. There was some discussion about the necessity, nature and practicalities of introducing further legislation to Northern Ireland to combat hooliganism and sectarianism at soccer fixtures. It was agreed that an appropriate legislative package could not be reached in isolation from the rest of the current exercise to draw up a strategy for the future of soccer in Northern Ireland.
6. It was decided that there was a need to obtain clarification from the RUC, at local level by the IFA, and at senior level by DCAL, as to the police's existing public order powers and how they might choose to exercise them at soccer events. **[Action: Mr Palmer and Mr Mee]**



7. It was agreed that, in the interim, the IFA would consider introducing the following measures at Windsor Park:
- a) the adoption of a written code of conduct for spectators attending international fixtures at Windsor Park;
  - b) the introduction of an IFA Supporters' Register under which the sale of tickets would be controlled;
  - c) the up-grading of existing CCTV systems to facilitate the gathering of clear visual and auditory evidence against offenders;
  - d) the use of CCTV at turnstile entrances to permit identification of past offenders intent on entering the stadium; and
  - e) the deployment of a private security firm, equipped to handle hooliganism at sports events, to serve in support of IFA stewards and backed up by the police as required.
8. The Minister stated that DCAL through SCNI would, if necessary, assist the IFA in the funding of any new measures, such as upgrading CCTV, which are aimed at counter-acting the behaviour of sectarian elements attending soccer fixtures.
9. The Minister stressed that the final judgement on appropriate measures to adopt rested with the IFA. However, he cautioned against attempting to remove culprits from the stands during matches unless absolutely necessary. The Minister suggested instead that the primary intent of any action should be to remove the cloak of anonymity from offenders, prevent their future entry to the grounds and, if possible, pursue action against them in the aftermath of games.
10. The difficulties facing the IFA, and its stewards, in confronting and controlling offenders were fully acknowledged at the meeting. Mr McCartan wished to record his congratulations to the IFA for being the only governing body in sport to have developed anti-sectarian policies and to have introduced a range of initiatives aimed at combating sectarianism.
12. In view of the media interest in the Neil Lennon case, it was agreed that the Minister would issue, through the DCAL press office, a statement, on his own and the IFA's behalf, summarising the outcome of today's discussions. **[Action: Mr Kirk]**



**Ciaran Mee**

**19 March 2001**

cc: P/S Minister  
Secretary  
Mr Carson  
Mr Palmer  
Mr Kirk



# Executive Information Service

Department of Culture, Arts & Leisure

7 March 2001

## **MICHAEL MCGIMPSEY MEETS IRISH FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION**

Sports Minister, Michael McGimpsey MLA, today met representatives of the Irish Football Association and the Sports Council for Northern Ireland to discuss what further steps need to be taken to combat sectarianism at soccer matches.

Following the meeting, the Minister said: **“After the disgraceful treatment meted out to Neil Lennon last week, I arranged an urgent meeting with the IFA to discuss what more must be done to rid our grounds of the scourge of sectarianism in both local and international football.**

**“I am grateful to the IFA for responding quickly to my request as sectarianism is an issue which has already been identified by my Soccer Advisory Panel as one of the greatest problems facing our football.**

**“We had a very constructive discussion about feasible short-term measures to counter this menace and there was unanimity that in the longer term, any appropriate legislative package, could not be reached in isolation from the rest of the current exercise to draw up a strategy for the future of soccer in Northern Ireland.**



**“We agreed that that the problem would not be resolved overnight but we are all committed to working closely together to cut out this cancer from the game. If football is to have any future in Northern Ireland, we must succeed.”**