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NOTE OF A MEETING HELD AT THE HOME OFFICE ON 14TH DECEMBER 1976

FOOTBALL HOOLIGANISM

Present:

Home Secretary	
Secretary of State for Transport	
Minister for Sport	
Mr. Frank McElhone, M.P.	(Parliamentary Under Secretary of State Scottish Office)
Sir Arthur Peterson	
Mr. R. T. Armstrong	
Mr. D. Grant	
Mr. J. F. Halliday	
Sir James Haughton	(H.M.C.I.)
Mr. P. Matthews	(Chief Constable, Surrey)
Mr. A. Goodson	(Chief Constable, Leicestershire)
Mr. P. D. Knights	(Chief Constable, West Midlands)
Mr. K. G. Oxford	(Chief Constable, Merseyside Police)
Mr. W. H. Gibson	(Deputy Assistant Commissioner, Metropolitan Police)
Mr. D. Milefanti	(Department of Transport)
Mr. D. Sharp	(Department of Environment)
Mr. S. Hook	Scottish Office
Sir Harold Thompson	(Football Association)
Mr. E. A. Croker	(Football Association)
Mr. V. Stokes	(Football Association)
Lord Westwood	(Football League)
Mr. A. Hardaker	(Football League)
Mr. W. Winterbottom	(Sports Council)
Mr. T. Morris	(Football Association of Wales)
Mr. R. Greenwood	(Football Club Managers Association)
Mr. E. Plumley	(Football Club Secretaries Association)
Mr. D. V. Ellison	(Chief Passenger Marketing Manager, British Railways Board)
Mr. R. M. Morris	
Mr. C. Farrington	

The Home Secretary said that he was very pleased that all the organisations represented had responded so promptly to his invitation to a meeting. He had become aware of the considerable public feeling about the continuing problem of football hooliganism. He was sure that an exchange of information was a useful step forward in seeing what could be done. He hoped that those present would use the occasion to exchange ideas frankly.

2. The Home Secretary outlined the provisions in the Criminal Law Bill which he had now put before Parliament. This increased the maximum fines for criminal damage and unlawful wounding and assaulting a police constable etc. to

£1.000 for an adult, £200 for a young person, and £50 for a child. It increased the amounts payable by offenders in compensation and provided better sanctions for the enforcement of fines payable by juveniles. It would become easier for an attendance centre order to be made against a juvenile convicted by a court in an area away from his home.

3. The Home Secretary invited his ministerial colleagues to describe their responsibilities in tackling the problem of football hooliganism.

4. The Minister for Sport said that his responsibility was primarily for control and safety inside football grounds. He was sure that in the long term the best answer to these problems was the provision of more seating accommodation. He was pleased to note that the Football Ground Improvement Trust was now established and that over £1m was available to assist clubs. Although it could only help in a very long term sense, it was a welcome development. Attention had equally to be directed to what could be done outside grounds and in refusing the right of admission. There remained problems, too, about drink being carried into grounds and being consumed in excessive quantities.

5. The Secretary of State for Transport and his responsibilities related to the carriage of people to and from the grounds. He had consulted British Rail and the Traffic Commissioners about how they could help to deal more effectively with rowdyism and the consumption of alcohol: he had been impressed by their responsibility and willingness to co-operate. For example, British Rail's termination of "football specials" had led to a substantial loss of revenue. As to coaches, the powers of the Traffic Commissioners to control their operation was extremely limited and did not, as had at one time been thought, extend in England and Wales to imposing conditions relating to the carriage of alcohol. Nor did they have powers to control hired coaches. Since there was no chance of early legislation, an attempt had to be made to see what could be done within existing statutory limits.

6. Mr. Matthews said that Chief Constables shared the view that the consumption of drink was an important factor. Generally, the problem was basically one of controlling irresponsible youngsters; and what was needed was the closest voluntary co-operation between the football clubs, the police and the carriers. From the

enquiries he had made of Chief Constables throughout the country the greatest success seemed to be achieved where liaison schemes with officials and supporters' clubs etc. were in operation and where the police had established procedures for assessing likely difficulties in advance. One particular proposal which had been made but which Chief Constables opposed was that hooligans should be required to report at their local police station during match hours. While the police were in favour of extending community service orders and greater use of attendance centres, they could not favour an additional reporting scheme which would be easily ignored and difficult as well as expensive to run. In addition, the police did not want to be seen to be inflicting punishment in addition to undertaking their other roles.

7. Responding to the Home Secretary's invitation to representatives of the football organisations to comment, Sir Harold Thompson said he and his colleagues greatly appreciated the Home Secretary's initiative in calling the meeting. Public opinion fully supported the authorities, and provided that there was a continuing and wide degree of public involvement the tide might turn against the disruptive minority who had brought the game into disrepute. The proposed new penalties were impressive but it remained dispiriting that magistrates imposed sentences much lower than the maximum. Small fines meant nothing to groups of young hooligans who could share the cost between themselves. There were many in the football world who favoured the reintroduction of corporal punishment, although it was realised this was not politically possible. The possibility of detention seemed the most effective deterrent. There were all sorts of ways of arranging detention: his home team at Oxford for example kept young hooligans penned in until their parents came to collect them. A preliminary approach to the Magistrates' Association had met with a polite response and the offer of a meeting.

8. Sir Harold agreed that alcohol was a very important problem but he was not convinced the railways were doing all they could to stop excessive consumption on their trains and there was some evidence to suggest that British Rail were still running extra trains at reduced charges. He agreed also with Mr. Howell that improvements within the grounds were essential but they would need immense sums of money. The Trust Fund could not be used solely for the purposes of seating and in any case it would be far from sufficient.

9. Lord Wood, who had himself been a magistrate for 27 years, agreed generally with Sir [redacted]'s comments. The magistracy were not imposing sufficient penalties within the limits available to them. The League clubs were caught in an impossible position. [redacted] were already paying considerable sums to the police (although even then rarely the full cost, Mr. Matthews explained) for patrolling etc. during matches and if they improved facilities, they would inevitably increase their rates bill: that everything pointed to increased charges for customers. But many football supporters could not afford to pay high charges, especially in working class areas such as his own. In those areas fathers were not taking their sons to football matches as they used to and the future of the professional game was not as glamorous as the media tended to suggest.

10. Mr. [redacted] Baker enlarged on the problems of the Improvement Trust. The Trustees could not spend their money until local authorities had made orders under the Safety of Sports Grounds Act. Some reports led him to believe that one or two local authorities were imposing unnecessary conditions. He hoped that reasonable safety would be a hardstick.

11. Mr. [redacted] [redacted] said that, as carriers, British Rail were in business to transport people efficiently and at minimum cost. They would be widely criticised if in order to eliminate the transport of troublesome football supporters they made life uncomfortable and inconvenient for the vast majority of sensible passengers. On the other hand they were not in business to carry hooligans at rock bottom fares and he was disturbed by the comments made by Sir Harold Thompson that some low priced trains were being run without proper stewarding. It was not now the practice to hire out special trains over long distances without it. If there was any evidence that this was being done locally, he would investigate it. He doubted whether anything could be done to deal with local journeys where trouble arose only on scheduled services. He stressed that the main problem was with the 12-16 year old age group. Some of them terrorised passengers, robbed buffets and pulled communication records. Local managers could close buffets and off-licences on stations and on trains whenever trouble was predicted, but he still held to the view that the only way to deal with the problem was to discourage them from travelling in the first place i.e. to show that unruly elements would not be admitted to the ground.

12. Mr. Croker said that in his experience it was visiting supporters who were the prime cause of conflict. He felt that every train and coach coming to the ground should be escorted by club representatives. Unstewarded coaches, especially those that came from pockets of supporters in different parts of the country from the home team, were a major source of trouble. Mr. Howell concurred that the spread of branches of supporters clubs throughout the country could benefit from examination in his Working Party.

13. In further discussion, the following points were made.

Sir James Haughton and Mr. Knights felt that there was considerable scope for greater resort to community service orders and attendance centres. Mr. Howell commented magistrates should have specific powers to send offenders to attendance centres on particular days when they knew that a football match was being held. He had been impressed by the profound impact made on young people by community service and hoped that it might be made available for teenage offenders as well as those between 17 and 21. Mr. Trevor Morris agreed that community service schemes could achieve a lot and that closer liaison between the police and the clubs was important. This was a view shared by Mr. Plumley who thought the fines imposed by magistrates to be astonishingly low and that responsible football supporters and their organisations were often blamed when the real source of trouble was "pirate" operators bringing in groups of rowdies from far afield. Mr. Greenwood stressed the need for a reassertion of parental control over youngsters: no amount of action by the authorities could detract from parents' responsibility for the behaviour of 12-16 year olds. Mr. Stokes concurred and said that the clubs could not really be held responsible for the activities of spectators, many of which were not real supporters. Mr. Winterbottom drew attention to the European dimension: in France and Germany there were also small malevolent fringe groups involved, whose sole interest appeared to be disruption and who were not closely tied to the official club organisations. The Germans had apparently had some success in concentrating their efforts on "needle" matches, and improving their intelligence about the fringe groups.

14. Mr. Gibson said that the meeting had reaffirmed the need for maximum co-operation between the police, the clubs and the transport carriers, especially when Manchester United and similar clubs could attract to an away fixture more than 800

coaches from all over the country. He wondered whether something more could be done by imposing conditions on the issue of PSV licences. Coach operators would then be required to inform the police when they thought that their vehicle was being used to transport football supporters. In response Mr. Rodgers pointed out that independent coach operators could not properly be described as "pirates". Fresh legislation was not necessarily the answer: powers to impose new kinds of conditions could not be taken unless they were enforceable, and there seemed as much to be said for the police co-operating to improve intelligence about coach operators as for imposing new requirements upon them.

15. Mr. McElhone described the situation in Scotland. He had long been worried about the way in which decent fans were being driven from the game. They would desert it in greater numbers if the grounds became fortresses where the emphasis was all on security, and the physical conditions remained appalling. He had to differ therefore from the approach of some of the football representatives who appeared not to accept any responsibility for the problems of hooliganism. On the contrary, this rested in fair measure squarely on their shoulders. While they had every right to expect co-operation from the police the transport organisations and the general public, they had to take a clear lead in combatting hooliganism. He described some of the measures being taken in Scotland.

16. The Home Secretary concluded by saying that the discussion had been most useful. He hoped that all the points raised would be closely examined and appropriate action taken. He had been left in no doubt of the determination of all those involved to seek the end of disruptive behaviour associated with football matches. He would arrange a further discussion if it would seem helpful.

C. FARRINGTON
Private Secretary

Private Office

December 1976

P.S. to S. of S. for Transport	Mr. W. N. Hyde	Mr. Grant
P.S. to Minister of Sport	Mr. Halliday	Mr. Darlington
P.S. to Mr. McElhone	Mr. Cairncross	Mr. Milefanti (Transport)
c.c. Miss Edwards	Mr. Moriarty	Mr. Sharp (D.O.E.)
Mr. Taylor	Mr. Hindley	Mr. Hook (Scottish Office)
Ms. Hyde	Mr. Shuffrey	
Mr. Armstrong	Mr. Bohan	
Sir J. Haughton	Mr. Rudd	
	Mr. Penman S.H.H.D.	