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M A Pattison
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Private Secretary
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My ref:

Your ref:

27 May 1982

Dear Sir

MA

We spoke about this evening's Adjournment Debate - "Government Policy on Sporting Contacts with Argentina as it Affects Participation in the World Cup". I enclose, as promised, a copy of Mr Macfarlane's speech.

I am copying this to Adam Wood (Lord Belstead's office), Jeremy Cresswell (Mr Cranley Onslow's office) and Simon Fuller (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever

W L Smith

W L SMITH
Private Secretary

SPEECH FOR

NEIL MACFARLANE MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE

TO THE

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

ON

JOHN CARLISLE MP (LUTON WEST)

GOVERNMENT POLICY ON SPORTING CONTACTS WITH ARGENTINA

AS IT AFFECTS PARTICIPATION IN THE WORLD CUP

ON

27 MAY 1982

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Mr Speaker. I am grateful to my hon Friend the Member for Luton West for giving me the opportunity to end recent Press speculation and to state clearly on the record, once again, the Government's views on our participation in the World Cup.

I remind the House that, on 21 April, in answer to a Question from the hon Member for Stirlingshire West I said "There is no question of a boycott". In answer to further Questions I added that "As matters now stand, we (the Government) have no objection to British teams taking part in international competitions where Argentina may also be represented." I added that the position would be kept under constant review in the light of changing circumstances.

On 19 May, in answer to a Question from the hon Member for West Lothian, I repeated the Government's view that no objection was seen to participation in the World Cup Finals. I also made it clear on that occasion to my hon Friend the Member for Luton West that I had put no pressure on the three British Football Associations to withdraw.

It is the Government's policy to discourage all sporting contact with Argentina either here or in that country at representative, club or individual level.

Outside these two countries we see no objection to British teams or individuals competing in any international events where Argentina may be represented. This policy applies to all sporting events.

There are a number of reasons for this stance. It is the Argentines who are the aggressors and who stand condemned in the eyes of the world through United Nations Resolution 502. We in the United Kingdom are the innocent party and, as I have said on previous occasions, I feel that it would be grossly unfair to penalise our sportsmen and women by denying them the right to participate in international competition abroad simply because the guilty party, Argentina, does not withdraw from such competition. Certainly they have given no indication that their football team will not be going to Spain.

In addition, as I have said before, there must be many millions of people in this country who would think it strange if our teams withdrew from the World Cup because of the actions of Argentina, who are solely responsible for the battle in the Falklands.

As several hon Members have indicated before, there would be no problem if the Argentinian team had been, or were to be, banned from participation. This is a decision which only the Federation Internationale de Football Associations could take. Their Brazilian President, Dr Havalange, has already stated that no such ban on the World Cup holders will be made.

My hon Friend, the member for Luton West has criticised UEFA for taking no action with FIFA. That is entirely a matter for our own home Football Associations who are members of that organisation. What debate might have gone on inside UEFA - or indeed within FIFA itself if the matter had been raised by Mr Harry Cavan, Chairman of the Northern Ireland Football Association, but also a senior Vice-President of FIFA - I cannot say as I have not been privy to any such discussions. All I can say is that this is a matter in which Government has no locus whatsoever.

I must emphasise that, however the Government views this situation, the final decision on whether or not to participate in the World Cup Finals is one for the football authorities, and their players. Certainly the authorities have made clear their wish to participate.

It has been reported in some papers that a few individual footballers - and perhaps one or two administrators - have queried the morality of participation. Again, should any player feel that strongly on the issue, the decision whether or not to go must rest entirely with him.

Public opinion on this issue, like so many others, is difficult to gauge. Certainly there are indicators such as the recent poll by a Scottish newspaper which showed that 90% of those asked favoured their teams' participation in the World Cup. I have had - as one would expect - much correspondence on the matter. Virtually everyone who has written to me has favoured our teams going. Some have made the very valid point that, bearing in mind the love of football by the average Argentine citizen, any withdrawal by the UK teams would be greeted with great joy in Argentina and be regarded by them as a moral victory over us and presented by the Argentine Government as an indication of world opinion against Great Britain.

Some of the letters I have had come from people with husbands or sons in our Task Force now engaged so heroically and perilously in action in and around the Falklands. I would like to quote from one letter from a lady whose husband is on one of our warships. She mentioned how many of her husband's colleagues enjoy their football and support our international teams and who would be saddened by any withdrawal from the World Cup.

She said "Argentina must be gloating over the fact that with the possibility of England withdrawing, they may possibly retain the World Cup (though not the Falkland Islands). As the wife of a sailor serving his country, I ask you please to consider these facts". Another letter says "What a boost to the spirits of our armed forces if they won, and if not, they would have had a go." A third comments that a boycott "May even be misconstrued as guilt or misreported as action taken by FIFA against the aggressor."

Returning to Press speculation. There have been some inferences that, despite my public statements, I have been quietly pressing our football authorities behind the scenes to withdraw from the World Cup. This I emphatically deny. I am in constant touch with the football authorities over the World Cup and a whole range of other footballing matters and have been since last September. In answer to their questions, I have told them simply that the Government sees no objection to their going to Spain. Indeed, only three days ago, a leaflet of guidance for people travelling to the World Cup was published and distributed under cover of a Press statement from me, demonstrating that my Department has gone to some lengths to tackle the potential problem of hooliganism in Spain. My officials have visited the centres where first round matches are to be played and advised local officials of the preventative measures taken in Britain. I have visited Madrid for talks with my opposite number.

I have mentioned public opinion in this country. There is also the matter of Spanish public opinion in relation to its effect upon those British supporters who will be going to Spain in support of their teams -- and in relation to some of the 4 million British people who travel to Spain every year for their holidays.

It has been reported that, because of Spain's cultural and historical links with Latin America, and for other reasons, public opinion in Spain is running high in connection with the Falklands issue in sympathy with Argentina. For this reason there must be some increased risk of incidents resulting from contacts between a variety of visiting football fans. We have, however, received assurances from the Spanish Minister for Culture and her Secretary of State for Sport, from the Royal Organising Committee for the World Cup, from regional Civil Governors, Chiefs of Police, stadia authorities and so on, that the British teams and their fans are most welcome and that they will enjoy the traditional hospitality which Spain offers our people.

Government business permitting, I am intending to be in Spain for a few days of the first phase of the World Cup and will keep in close contact with our three Football Associations.

To conclude - I repeat that the final decision on whether or not our three teams participate in the World Cup Finals lies solely with the football authorities, and their players. The Government sees no objection to their taking part. I hope that this statement will end all future speculation and I am sure that the House will join me in wishing our 3 teams success.