

A DIFFERENT SONG

Jim Rainey



When the Troubles began, a Northern Ireland football match was seen as an opportunity for fans to show their Britishness, and that they wouldn't be defeated by this new regime and the new Troubles that were coming along. As a result it was mainly British emblems that were in the kop (spectator stand). The colour of the kop was red, white and blue even though the team on the pitch was playing in green and white. So in the 70s and 80s the football song we sang at Northern Ireland matches was "Hello, Hello, we are the Billy Boys," and there was a line in it which read "we're up to our neck in Fenian blood." You didn't really think about it at the time; you were just singing it; that's what you sang at football matches even though the guy beside you was a Catholic.

I began to think about it - what about the guys on the pitch, the players there, half of them are representing Northern Ireland and half of them are Catholics and how do they feel when we're singing songs like that? I said to myself- that can't be right let's try and change it.

We had been building up the "Football for All" project and it was going really well. We were trying to encourage other groups to come in, people who wouldn't traditionally support Northern Ireland, just to show them that the atmosphere was changing. Everything was going quite well until the night that Neil Lennon, who had previously signed for

Celtic, was booed each time he caught the ball. There is nothing much that you can do when a crowd of 50 start chanting - it's not a case of where you can challenge people and say don't be doing that, or knock that on the head.



I felt let down by the Northern Ireland fans. I had been trying to encourage others to come along and support football; putting out this message that things were changing ; that the craic's great; that you'll have a good time going to watch N.Ireland; the atmosphere will be great.

By this time the Northern Ireland supporter clubs had started to amalgamate and we had enough people by then to decide -right we'll do something about this. We reckoned that football fans tend to just sing what others start so we made an agreement with the IFA, to get 800 people into the kop stand and I would bring the megaphone and we would start chants. I went down into Belfast and bought a megaphone and during games started to chant "Green and White Army," along with the two drums, the base drums... BOOM BOOM, GREEN AND WHITE ARMY, BOOM BOOM... and it gradually spread throughout the ground. Had it not worked or had people told me that this was ridiculous, we'd have stopped it.

So these type of songs and chants have now become the norm and as a result there are no sectarian chants at matches. I don't even have to try and drown out sectarian songs because they don't happen as everybody has bought into these new chants and new songs.

Some people would suggest that I was a bit of a hero but I'm saying that it's not me- it's the Northern Ireland fans who have done this. One person couldn't do that; you need all the Northern Ireland fans backing it. If there was only one person it wouldn't happen.

