

COMMENTS IN THE NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Recipients will have seen PAB(86)2 which reported proposals put forward by Messrs Taylor, McCusker and Robinson for political progress in Northern Ireland all which indicated the withdrawal of the Anglo-Irish Agreement as a prerequisite for movement.

In his speech in the Northern Ireland Assembly debate on the Grand Committee's report on 5 February Dr Paisley elaborated on the existing proposals, and suggested a slightly different shift of emphasis. Making it clear that he had cleared his comments in advance with Mr Molyneaux, Dr Paisley indicated that if at her meeting with the unionist leaders next week the Prime Minister gave an undertaking that there would be no further implementation of the Agreement then the unionist parties would be prepared to attend a conference to which representatives of all the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland would be invited to discuss political development in the Province. The implication appeared to be that the Intergovernmental Conference did not have to be dismantled before the other conference could take place. This view was reinforced when, in answer to a question from Ulster Unionist Assemblyman Billy Bleakes who thought the unionist objective was the scrapping of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in its totality Dr Paisley repeated what Mr Robinson had said the previous day, that everyone believed in consultation and not confrontation. He went on to emphasise that negotiations would not take place until there was no further implementation of the Agreement. "Mrs Thatcher must know that this round table conference is completely and totally outside the Agreement."

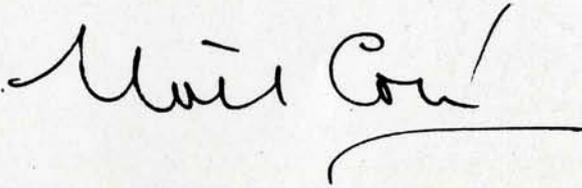
This seems to be another attempt by the unionists, as a body, to be seen, despite their boycott of Ministers and withdrawal from Council Chambers, as more flexible and constructive than the Government. They are clearly preparing the ground for a statement of that sort when they get the response they anticipate from the Prime Minister next week.

It is worth recording that not all members of Dr Paisley's party, even within the Assembly, seem to share his view, which may suggest that it is an artificial one. Mr Gregory Campbell, DUP Member for Londonderry (who had led an anti-Agreement protest outside a building in Belfast

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where Dr Rhodes Boyson was lunching) said that "We should not waste our time or our breath in needlessly going over the same ground". It was now, he said, time to get organised. The Catholic Belfast morning paper on 6 February interprets this as a veiled threat.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Noel Cornick", with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

NOEL CORNICK
Political Affairs Division
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