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WHERE DO WE GO NEXT

Following the 'Day of Action' it does seem to me that for the first time the likelihood of a split in the Unionist ranks is becoming more of a probability than a possibility.

2. The mercurial McCusker having looked over the brink clearly did not relish the abyss and this seems to be the view of a number of his colleagues in the OUP.

3. The main difficulty confronting us is to find enough moderate Unionists to form the core of a 'Nottinghamshire miners group'. Up to now there have been too few in number and without any geographical cohesion so they have been easy targets for intimidation.

4. In considering the Permanent Secretary's note the option I favour is the one which is most likely to hasten and solidify the split within the Unionist ranks.

/My own....

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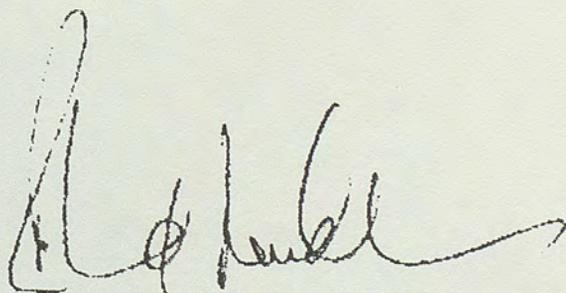
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5. My own preference is therefore for seeking an early movement towards devolution. I take Sir Robert's point about the difficulty of getting a resolution within a month. But if following today's meeting the Intergovernmental Conference did not take place till early May we would have between 6/8 weeks to play with rather than 4.

6. Secondly, and more importantly, we may not get agreement from all the Unionists but could we get the agreement of some? Would our proposals be sufficiently attractive to increase and encourage our equivalent of the Nottinghamshire miners? (Our policy towards Sinn Fein will be of some importance in this).

7. I believe that whatever we do has its problems but Sir Robert's devolution option has a better chance of success because it does involve talks while the other two offer no obvious way of avoiding confrontation.

8. Finally I am increasingly of the opinion that the behaviour of the Assembly gives us little alternative than to prorogue it before the marching season begins.



RICHARD NEEDHAM

11 March 1986

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