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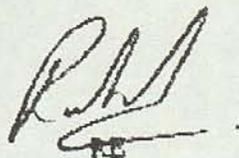
JIM MOLYNEAUX'S VISIT TO THE BACKBENCH COMMITTEE

Jim Molyneaux visited the Backbench Committee last night, his second visit within a month. Attendance at the meeting was very sparse. Two of the officers, Michael Brown and Bill Benyon were not there, nor were many of the Agreement's most vocal opponents. Ian Gow, Julian Amery and Michael McNair Wilson, for instance, were notable by their absence. It was therefore a much lower key occasion than his previous visit. It was notable though that Cranley Onslow did attend. The main points made by Molyneaux were:

- Suspension of the Agreement is the unionists minimum condition for talks with the Government. He described this as their sticking point, and said that without it the deadlock must continue. He was told by several of our backbenchers that he was unlikely to get this, and replied that informal suspension would suffice.
- He said that at the meeting with the Prime Minister on 25 February he had urged her to approach the Irish about some form of suspension. The unionists have now received signals from Dublin that this has happened, and that the Irish would be happy about it. Hume had also told Paisley, at their lunch in Strasbourg, that he might approach Dublin about it - provided his party did not object.
- Paisley apparently favours a round table conference, but Molyneaux thinks the Prime Minister will be wary of this.

Molyneaux agrees with her, he would prefer bilateral talks between the unionists and the Government concurrently with similar talks between the SDLP and the Government.

- He thinks any talks should be about devolution, but he does not think devolution is possible at the moment. He would expect them to last about three months, and then end in failure. He did not say what might happen then, nor what else the unionists might hope to get out of them.
- He repeated that the secrecy surrounding the Conference was a tremendous problem for the unionists.
- He said that the OUP would not support another strike, and its executive had unanimously backed him on this. He thought that without the OUP's support, another strike would not be effective.
- He said that the Workers' Council '86, which organised the last strike, was being infiltrated by Marxists. He said there were three Marxists in Ballylumford power station, who were causing particular trouble.
- He said that, contrary to the Daily Telegraph's report, the Government had not rebuffed the unionists' latest approach for talks. Paisley and he had been promised a considered reply to their latest letter, in the near future. In the meantime he admitted to maintaining "polite communication with the Government".



14th March 1986