

CONFIDENTIAL

Prime Minister

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*My main worry about
devolved government is the
effect it would have on
Sukhney. Further I see little
prospect of sufficient agreement to
secure an effective
devolution. not.*

Prime Minister

I thought you would like to know of a meeting I had at the beginning of the week with Jim Molyneux, Harold McCusker and a number of their official unionist colleagues.

As you know, there has been some debate in official unionist circles over whether the Party should seek the establishment of a devolved government or the integration of the Province into Great Britain. Enoch Powell and Jim Molyneux have been amongst those to hold the view that integration was the right course. Enoch Powell is firmly of that opinion; Jim Molyneux has recently argued it on the basis that devolution in a form acceptable was not apparently on offer and that integration was the only alternative.

There has been a good deal of dissatisfaction in unionist circles with Jim Molyneux's leadership, and a growing body of opinion that the Party should press for devolved government. The two questions have become bound up. Harold McCusker - previously an integrationist - is one of those who has made public his support for devolution. At its conference in October the Party rejected an attempt by Jim Molyneux to commit itself to seeking integration on the ground that an acceptable form of devolution was unobtainable.

In these circumstances it is significant that at my recent meeting Jim Molyneux unequivocally, though not fully, committed himself to supporting devolved government and did so on behalf of his Party. This leaves Enoch Powell in a very isolated position. It also means that those of our backbenchers, amongst them John Biggs-Davison, who have supported integration can no longer claim to be in line with the official unionist leadership. I have never felt that integration was a practicable policy, and have said so. Some of our colleagues have been unhappy about this, and it is relevant that their views are not now supported by any important political group in Northern Ireland.

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I am sending copies of this minute to Willie Whitelaw, Francis Pym and Michael Jopling.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be the initials "JP".

JP

21 December 1981

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