

PRIME MINISTERRAVENSCRAIG

Michael Forsyth rang me to report on the latest position. Malcolm Rifkind is receiving heavy and sustained criticism in the Scottish press. He is seen as staking his credibility on his call for BSC to reconsider and will be badly damaged if this fails. There is already speculation about his future and he is reported as isolated in the Government, Labour will obviously use Monday's debate to attack him personally in a bid to achieve a kill. I understand from Barry that we again had to revise the terms of the Government's amendment to the opposition motion to delete the word "While it is a commercial decision...".

The Scottish Party is in disarray. All six of our backbenchers, on Malcolm Rifkind's instructions, signed the Labour Party's EDM which you saw. Bill Walker and Allan Stewart, against Michael's advice, have now tabled their own motion which I attach. Bill Walker also went on the Today programme this morning and said that he had no problems in supporting the position that it is a commercial matter for BSC but that BSC should have handled it better. This seems in direct contradiction with his two EDMs.

We are now faced with a year-long "Save Ravenscraig" campaign running in Scotland, which can only hurt us further. Mark suggests, and I agree with him, that Malcolm would certainly appreciate it if you were able to telephone him over the weekend.

JFW
7

JOHN WHITTINGDALE

18 May 1990