

32/03

90

MT

CONFIDENTIAL FILING

Speeches by the Head of the Civil Service,
Sir Robert Armstrong

CIVIL SERVICE

June 1985

Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date
17/6/85							
18/6/85							
27/9/85							
4/2/86							
1.10.90							

Material used by
officials in
DO NOT DESTROY

PREM 19/2926

File

RETURNBULL.



CABINET OFFICE

70 Whitehall London SW1A 2AS Telephone 071-270 0101

~~PRIN PS~~
PS ~~FCO~~
PS ~~TSY~~
PS ~~PARLY~~
PS ~~HOME~~
PS ~~DIARY~~

From the Secretary of the Cabinet and Head of the Home Civil Service
Sir Robin Butler KCB CVO

Return to AT

Ref. A090/2267

MINISTER OF STATE, PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE

Redcliffe-Maud Memorial Lecture: Tuesday 10 October

--- I attach the text of a lecture which I am proposing to give on Tuesday 10 October. The lecture is sponsored annually by the Royal Institute of Public Administration and PA Management Consultants.

2. The title under which I was asked to speak is "New Challenges or Familiar Prescriptions: Managing the Public Services in the 1990s". I have taken the opportunity to review the directions which management in the Civil Service is taking, in effect bringing up to date a lecture which I gave to the Institute of Personnel Management two years ago. So it will be the second public statement which I have given on Civil Service Management since I became Head of the Home Civil Service.

3. The lecture refers first to the major changes currently affecting Civil Service Management - Next Steps, the more flexible and market related Civil Service pay agreements, competition and untying, more flexible recruitment and relocation; and says why these developments have been welcome to me and, I believe, to the Civil Service.

4. It then sets the development of agencies in the Civil Service in a longer term context, going back to the Fulton report. It suggests reasons why the process faltered during the 1970s and why it has proceeded now with much greater momentum.

5. The lecture then goes on to say that, despite the excellent progress with Next Steps, people cannot regard it as being "in the bag". It lists some of the ways in which Next Steps might founder if we are not alert - eg setting up purely cosmetic agencies involving no real change; acquiescing in trade union constraints in order to avoid opposition in establishing the agencies; allowing Parliament to get the impression that their powers of control are being confined or that the new structure would make the Civil Service somehow less able to serve a different Government; allowing the new structures to become as ossified as the previous ones. I describe how we are seeking to set the system up in ways which will make it secure against these traps.

6. The lecture then goes on to say that the traditional values of the Civil Service - good policy advice, integrity, political impartiality and appointment and promotion on merit - also remain of fundamental importance; and the record of the Civil Service, as well as the wishes of individual civil servants, should give nobody any reason to doubt that the Civil Service will retain those qualities.

7. Finally, the lecture refers to specific challenges which face the Civil Service in the 1990s - recruiting talent in a tight labour market, being effective in the European Community and exploiting the opportunities provided by information technology and the communications revolution.

8. I hope and believe that the lecture is politically uncontroversial and that it will provide a useful up to date statement of the directions which management of the Civil Service is taking and the reasons why we are taking it.

9. I am copying this minute to Mr Turnbull and Mr Ingham (No 10), to Mr Kemp and to Mr Lawson in the OMCS Press Office.

F.R.B.

1 October 1990

FOURTH DRAFT "NEW CHALLENGES OR FAMILIAR PRESCRIPTIONS"

REDCLIFFE-MAUD MEMORIAL LECTURE

I am delighted and honoured to be asked to give this lecture which bears the name of John Redcliffe-Maud; and I am very grateful to the Royal Institute of Public Administration and to PA Management Consultants - both of whom do so much in their separate ways to contribute to the study of public administration - for their support of this occasion.

I cannot say that I joined the Civil Service because of John Redcliffe-Maud, for he became Master of my College at Oxford shortly after I came down. But within a few years I became the liaison officer between the Civil Service Commission and the College. The scheme, which still exists, is that young civil servants who have recently graduated return to their universities and give current undergraduates who may be interested an idea of what a job in the Civil Service is like. Those sent forth in this way are certainly unguided missiles and what they may say might cause consternation in their departments or the Civil Service Commission who are fortunately not there to hear it. But the testimony is all the more valuable because it comes from those who were themselves recently undergraduates.

John Redcliffe-Maud, apart from making sure that I sat next to him at high table and gave him my impressions of what was going on in the Civil Service as if he didn't know, was helpful in two other ways. One was that he always made sure that I had an

audience of undergraduates. The second was that he himself never attended the talk.

Now I come to think of it, there was a third way in which he showed his sensitivity and generosity. Under his guidance, my College produced a number of recruits to the Civil Service who have subsequently become senior in it; and when I returned the following year, he always solemnly congratulated me on their recruitment, as if I rather than he had been responsible for it.

So I remember John Redcliffe-Maud with affection and admiration; and I am particularly glad that Jean Redcliffe-Maud is here this evening.

It is now two and three quarter years since I took up my present post and became Head of the Home Civil Service.

It is two and a half years since the Prime Minister announced the Next Steps initiative, of which the key proposal was that as many as possible of the executive functions of Government should be established as free-standing agencies within the Civil Service.

That initiative coincided with a number of other developments of policy which were already affecting the management of the Civil Service. New pay agreements had been reached with the Civil Service Unions which both established a framework for negotiating pay in the light of the Civil Service's ability to recruit and retain staff and movements in the labour market generally. Those agreements also embraced more flexible and varied patterns of

Civil Service pay related to geographical locations, the market for individual skills and merit.

At the same time the Civil Service had become used to the idea that the object of a very large part of our activities is service to the public; and that we have no inherent right to provide those services if others could do it better or more efficiently.

Finally, the Civil Service like other employers, had recognised the effect on the labour market of the baby boom working its way out of the school leaver population. The penny had dropped that we would have to be not only sharp but creative in reviewing established ways of recruiting and managing staff and locating work if we were to maintain the quality of our work in the 1990s.

There was no connection between these events and my taking up post except a coincidence of timing. But I consider myself very fortunate that I happened to take up post at the time I did.

During my career in the Civil Service, a lot of which has been spent in ministerial private offices or close to Ministers, I have seen a proliferation of the detail referred to Ministers to decide. Not only has this meant overnight boxes loaded with large amounts of complex and wearisome paper, which divert Ministers (unless they have superhuman energy and of course some do) from the task of setting the strategic directions which should properly be theirs. But it has discouraged civil servants further down the line from proposing initiatives simply because it meant adding yet more paper to the box which anyway took a long time to clear as it went up the hierarchy.

This is a process deadening to energy and creativeness. I had long felt that there was a need to push responsibility down the line, and I accepted the corollary that if responsibility were to be devolved from Ministers individual civil servants had to accept it. Of course, such defined and delegated responsibility is consistent with ultimate accountability remaining at the political level, which is essential. I shall have more to say about this later.

Conversely, I believed that able people in the Civil Service were looking for greater responsibility, by which I mean that they were fully prepared to take responsibility for making decisions within a line of policy established by Ministers. Certainly I was aware that one of the main questions which young people ask when considering a career is whether it will give them a real opportunity at an early stage of making their own mark.

Thirdly, because the Next Steps initiative was intended in this way to improve both the quality of services which the government provides to the public and the satisfaction which civil servants can find in their work, I saw it as an opportunity for uniting the approach of politicians on both sides of the political fence with the professional aspiration which civil servants have to do a first-rate job, after a period in which - it is no secret - the relationship between civil servants and Ministers had passed through some choppy waters.

Finally, as I looked around outside organisations, I saw the general trend of management going in the same direction. We

could all name major companies with household names which have headquarters from which those running the companies set general strategies while the managers of subsidiaries and operating units have substantial freedom in running their operations within firm overall budgetary controls and are held responsible for the results.

The significance of the Next Steps initiative and its initial effect are now generally acknowledged. It was recently described by the all-party Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee as perhaps the most important reform of the Civil Service this century. Even among those who were at first sceptical of it as another high-sounding and well-meaning manifesto, most now acknowledge its initial impact in terms of identifiable improvements in service, greater freedom for local managers, greater openness about both aims and responsibilities and greater willingness to make posts available to talent whether from within or outside the Civil Service - there is too much concrete evidence of all these things to be ignored.

So this is perhaps the moment to remind ourselves that progress and enlightenment did not begin with Next Steps and will certainly not end with it. Hence my title - "New Challenges or Familiar Prescriptions?"

Let us deal first with familiar prescriptions.

Let me read some words, of which I think that you will easily guess the provenance:-

"It is not easy in the Civil Service clearly and distinctly to allocate to individuals or units the authority to take decisions. This has led well-informed observers, including some who have given evidence to us, to conclude that large-scale executive operations cannot be effectively run by government departments, and that they should be "hived-off" wherever possible to independent boards We believe, however, that the work of departments can be so organised as to enable responsibility and authority to be defined and allocated more clearly than they often are at present. Individuals and units could then be called to account for performance which is measured as objectively as possible We consider this principle of organisation to be a necessary condition for achieving maximum departmental efficiency and for enabling men and women to get greater satisfaction from their work."

Those words come from the Fulton Report of 1968. The Next Steps approach could hardly be better described.

There were aspects of Fulton of which I was and remain critical. Into that category I put the criticism of the Civil Service as being based on "the philosophy of the amateur". For inserting a nail in the coffin of that line of attack, and indeed for other things including a lot of fun, we have to thank the authors of "Yes Minister": whatever else Sir Humphrey Appleby is, he cannot be described as "an amateur". To me one of the pleasures of working in the Civil Service has always been its professionalism. By that I mean not just that we work for pay - if pay were the overriding criterion, people would not look to the Civil Service

first - but that we care about doing our jobs well; we distil our experience into skills and expertise; we work to clearly stated values of service, which are sustained by example and by peer pressures within the profession; and we nurture these skills, expertise and values in those coming along after us.

But over the devolution of responsibility, and accountable and efficient management, the Fulton Report has much to say that reads as convincingly now as it did when it was written. Moreover, great progress was made in both the 1970s and the 1980s which it would be wrong to ignore. A number of trading funds were set up, and many Civil Service organisations spectacularly improved their service and performance. For example, the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Centre did not have to become a Next Steps agency before it converted its reputation for notorious delay into that of an organisation so much more efficient that every Member of Parliament will tell you about the reduction of this source of complaints in their postbags.

So the road to better management in the Civil Service did not begin with Next Steps, just as it will not end with it. Nonetheless, it has to be acknowledged that in the 1970s the recommendations in the Fulton Report for greater definition and devolution of responsibility faltered and it is not difficult to see some of the reasons why they did.

In the first place, the attention of both politicians and the most senior civil servant was diverted by the country's economic problems in the early and mid-1970s. One response to those economic problems was the overriding need to get and keep public

expenditure under control; and that pointed towards a much firmer grip from the centre of government. The need for such a grip was reinforced by difficult relations with staff associations, and subsequently trade unions, which as Fulton recognised, were inclined to hold onto agreements imposing rigid and uniform management methods and to exploit any discrepancies for the purpose of evening up terms and conditions of employment. In addition, the managerial centralism on which Fulton was based, though it may have been useful as an initial booster, was the wrong prescription for management itself in the long run.

By the late 1980, the conditions were more favourable again to greater delegation of responsibility.

First, although the requirement for firm public expenditure control still existed, and continues to exist, there is in place a system of cash limits and controls on running costs which provide a system through which managers can be given considerable freedom within firm budgetary controls.

Secondly, the Financial Management Initiative, supported by an infrastructure of cost and management accounting, has developed to the point where the measurement of results, whether in the form of the traditional bottom line (when that is applicable to Civil Service activities) or in terms of measurement of outputs or other indicators, provides a basis for setting specific and measurable aims for Civil Service operations. It has become accepted that individual managers should have identified objectives to achieve and should be responsible for the resources they use in doing so.

Thirdly, there is greater belief that small is beautiful. Again this did not exist in the late 1960s and the early 1970s when the fashion was for industrial amalgamations and jumbo departments. The spread of information technology and of instant communication has provided both the opportunity and the impetus for operations to be more widely dispersed and for managers to be expected to take decisions on the spot. It is no use having information available in micro-seconds and taking three weeks to get authority from head office to act on it.

Fourthly, a new generation of Civil Service trade union leaders is, I believe, forward-looking, responsive to the interests of its members and therefore less dogmatic about retaining traditional and uniform patterns of management. Where change can be clearly shown to be in the interests both of their members and of the public they serve, the trade union leaders have shown a very constructive attitude to change.

Fifthly, the Civil Service has become much more open, not only in terms of movement into it and out of it at all stages of people's careers, but also in terms of individuals being more publicly identified with areas of responsibility. This too was anticipated in the Fulton Report which said of the traditional anonymity of civil servants: - "It is already being eroded by Parliament and to a more limited extent by the pressures of the press, radio and television; the process will continue and we see no reason to reverse it".

So I would argue that, while the Next Steps initiative and the other recent changes did not contain entirely new prescriptions - indeed many of them including very important ones on training, have strong affinities with what was recommended in the Fulton Report and in other earlier documents - in the 1980s the groundwork had been laid for pushing them forward; and, as I remarked earlier the initial success of the Next Steps initiative over the last two and a half years reflects that. The tide was already strongly flowing in this direction.

There are those who fear that the formation of the executive operations of government into self-contained agencies represents a division between "policy" and "execution" which would be a backward step, almost a throwback to the old rigid distinction between the administrative and executive classes of the Civil Service.

I take this opportunity of saying that I do not see it like that at all - any more than the division between a subsidiary of ICI and the main board is a strict division between policy and execution. Of course, the main strategic issues have to be reserved to Ministers as they do to the board of a company - and Chief Executives of agencies as of corporate subsidiaries have to know what they may decide for themselves and what they must refer upwards. But to say that the Chief Executive for the Royal Mint or of a Forensic Science Laboratory has no policy to decide is obvious nonsense. Problems have to be solved and initiatives have to be taken every day if the operation is to be a success; and those go well beyond mechanistic execution of policy set by others. And, more deeply, policy and execution must in any case

inform one another. No activity for which Ministers retain responsibility to Parliament can be carried out without sensitivity to that responsibility. And no policy at Ministerial level can sensibly be considered without taking account of the experience of those working in that particular field. It is for this reason that we must be particularly concerned throughout the Civil Service not only with literacy and numeracy but with what has been called in a new buzz-word "operacy" - the practical sense of what works and what doesn't in any particular situation.

I have just referred to the "initial" success of Next Steps. I did this deliberately. We have a number of Agencies set up and we have a lot more to come. We have improved financial and non-financial performance targets in place, and they are starting to be delivered. And there is a good deal of Parliamentary and public perception that the project is moving forward well. All this is good. But it would be wrong not to recognise that we are still relatively near the beginning of a continuing process. It would be premature to claim that the durable success of the Next Steps Initiative is yet assured.

Bringing about change in any institution or organisation is notoriously difficult. Machiavelli said in a famous remark "There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, more uncertain in its success than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things" - and of course he only had to deal with a whole lot of ambitious, scheming and murderous Italian princelings. When I survey the range of

possibilities of things which could go wrong with Next Steps they are clearly many and various.

The first possibility is that in the effort to demonstrate that the Next Steps policy is being achieved, Agencies are set up simply for the sake of the scorecard, and to make it look as though something is happening, without involving any real changes of management. For instance, and this is a real risk, Departments though apparently delegating control may not do so in practice or - more insidiously -, in the name of monitoring an Agency's performance, may supervise and constrain the Agency's freedom of action at every turn. The most recent report from the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee commented on this risk.

Another case of this danger is that in the interests of getting Agencies up and running with the least possible opposition from Trades Unions or staff interests, Departments and Agencies shirk tackling at the outset those Trade Union agreements which impose quite as much constraint on their freedom of management as any outside control.

Yet another aspect of this risk at the setting up stage is that Agencies are set up on some kind of production line or "look alike" basis, without properly studying the real business they are in and the real needs and requirements each Agency has if it is to deliver what the responsible Minister wants. We are taking great care to avoid such an approach, and we must carry on doing so; it is fundamental, of course, that all activities are

different and so to go for a production line would simply be to risk substituting one monolith for another.

A different sort of danger is that Parliament instead of feeling that Next Steps enhances their ability to scrutinise the executive and call it to account as I think is the case, feels that its powers are being inhibited. I have no doubt that in these circumstances Parliament would cease to welcome and cheer on the Initiative, as it has so far done, and would quickly find ways of stopping it or even putting it into reverse, perhaps even by requiring Ministers to answer in yet more detail than they do already.

In this context I would like to say how much I welcome the recent Select Committee observation that the non-partisan nature of the reform must be maintained. They specifically commended the proposition "Agencies are set up to do what the Government of the day wants; they are a means to an end, to do what Ministers want effectively and efficiently". And perhaps it is timely for me to add, during a difficult public expenditure round, that the Agency system and the targets set for them must be capable of being adjusted to whatever level of public expenditure resources Ministers decide that the Government can afford for each Agency. The Select Committee went on to say that the "machinery of the public service should be as effective and efficient as possible in delivering what is required of it and any reform which achieves this aim should be supported by all Parties."

But even then the greatest obstacles may not come at the outset. After the effort of establishing an Agency and negotiating a framework, there will be a temptation for Departments and Agencies, when the time comes to review the framework and reappoint, or indeed maybe disappoint, the Chief Executive, to fight hard simply to protect the new ground they have gained and allow the new order to become as ossified as the old. The temptation to "routinise" - indeed to swerve back into the old ways - is an inevitable characteristic of any large organisation. It will be interesting to see how the new breed of civil servant that we are creating - the Chief Executive - responds to this challenge of restlessness which must be successfully met if Next Steps is to stay relevant.

And of course there is always the opposite danger that the disciplines imposed on the Agencies prove too lax and are not enforced, so that Ministers and the Treasury lose confidence in the Initiative and feel it necessary to reassert central controls.

This may not be a comprehensive list, but any of these possibilities could happen. Against each of them, if the direction of progress is to be maintained and the fleet is to be kept to its course, look-outs have to be put in place and arrangements made for warning bells to be rung if there are signs of losing direction. And this is what we shall do.

As regards Parliament, it has been made clear that far from losing the ability to question a Minister about any aspect of an agency's operations, Members of Parliament not only retain that

ultimate recourse but are also gaining the additional information about who precisely is responsible for what and the opportunity of going in the first instance to the Chief Executive where he has the specific and published responsibility. There is little doubt in my mind that this enhances rather than diminishes Parliament's ability to enquire into and control the Executive.

And the main protection against the arthritic tendency is that frameworks do have to be reviewed and re-negotiated. Chief Executives do have to be re-appointed or dis-appointed, and above all this process, and the objectives set and achieved, are public and open to the comment and encouragement of Parliament and the media.

It is noteworthy and reassuring that other countries - Canada, Australia, the United States, our continental partners - have programmes of reform which embrace the greater delegation, objective setting and flexibility of terms and conditions which are features of the changes we are making in this country. As I look round at the Civil Service of other countries, our approach seems to embrace a set of ideas whose time has come.

But it would be misleading to give the impression that the ideas and approach which underlie these reforms are all that are important to the development of British government administration in the next decade. It is not just the Next Steps initiative which has caused the Russians or the Chinese Government to turn to us for advice, or the countries of Eastern Europe to look to this country's Civil Service as a guide to them on the path towards democracy. What those countries are looking to is very

much more the traditional and established qualities of our Civil Service tradition, qualities which Next Steps can build on but which it would be disastrous to neglect.

Good government is about well-considered, well-designed policies as well as the efficient delivery of services which these policies allocate to central government. Here too we are seeking to apply the basic principles of good management of work: clarifying individual responsibilities for achieving specified objectives, thinking through the right regime for the purpose, mobilising the right resources. And there are other ideas which are equally relevant to policy-making - the importance of direct management of people in the line, of engaging individuals in their own career development, of freeing ideas, energies and initiative by cutting out accumulated layers of supervision and second-guessing.

When these countries come to talk to us it is also about the safeguards in our Civil Service against corruption, the impartiality between political parties, appointment and promotion on merit by fair and open competition rather than by patronage - these are the matters in which they are interested.

These are qualities which civil servants here at all levels value and seek to protect, not least those who have just joined the profession, attracted to it by precisely those qualities as I was myself.

It is because these qualities are so valuable that I welcome the jealous eye which individual civil servants and observers on the Civil Service keep for any sign of what is called politicisation.

In this respect it is reassuring that those who have made a close study of these matters - the all-party House of Commons Select Committee on Treasury and Civil Service matters and an independent study under the auspices of the Royal Institute of Public Administration - have found no evidence of politicisation.

It is, I think, one of the respects in which politicians and civil servants find it difficult to understand each other that politicians, so partisan themselves, cannot believe that civil servants are a different breed of people whose political beliefs are not strongly partisan.

Against any such suspicions the best protection for the Civil Service is its record. In 1964 after a long period of Conservative rule, the Civil Service applied itself as loyally to implementing the policies of the incoming Labour Government, as it did in 1979 for the radical policies of an incoming Conservative Government.

Today I have no doubt that the same fierce determination to serve loyally and with commitment whatever government the electorate put in place remains as much the badge of the profession as the obligation not to confuse private gain with public duty.

Integrity, impartiality, selection on merit and a real concern to serve democratically elected governments and get results - these

come under the heading of familiar prescriptions, as valuable today, I suggest, as they have ever been in the past. But what other new challenges does the Civil Service of the 1990s have to face?

Above all it has to face the challenge of recruiting and retaining people of the necessary calibre to undertake the vital task of advising governments and managing the public services. This has to be done not only in a very competitive market as the supply of young people becoming available in the 1990s become more constricted but also it has to be done in a market in which a much wider range of professions is vying for the attention of the highly-qualified graduate and school leaver.

This requires the Civil Service to present a career of challenge and opportunity, in which the way is more open than it was in the past for people with talent to make their own way to the top - here we are back to Next Steps again. But also we need to re-establish in a modern and attractive form the view of public service as something to take a pride in - that is a high priority for the 1990s.

We face other challenges which were not even thought about by the authors of the Fulton report only 20 years ago. Let me mention just two.

First, our growing involvement with Europe will need a generation of civil servants prepared not to operate in the administrative modes so familiar to us in this country but to adapt to, and be effective under, continental methods of administration very

different from our own. Some, a growing number but as yet too few, of our civil servants have learned to make that transition: many more will have to do so if we are to be effective in representing and promoting the interest of the people in this corner of the European Community.

Secondly, the opportunities provided by information technology and the revolution in communications have gone much further and faster than anyone imagined even a few years ago in providing opportunities not only to provide the traditional public services differently and better but to provide new types of services altogether. Those opportunities will only be exploited if we are prepared to give chances to specialists with the necessary skills and managers with the necessary drive to take us through the gates which information technology and communications open.

So familiar prescriptions for the 1990s - yes, much of what we are doing to produce a Civil Service fit for the 1990s was prescribed as long ago as Fulton and perhaps longer. Much of what we are seeking to safeguard goes back much further than that. New challenges - yes, there are plenty of those too.

But I do profoundly believe that as we face those challenges the Civil Service is breaking down the restrictions of the past and making itself more open - open to recruitment of all manner of people at all stages of career, open to those who leave it and wish to return, open to the exercise of initiative and responsibility, open to competition with outside providers of similar services, open to public scrutiny and Parliamentary

accountability, open to the ideas, initiative, enthusiasm to be found in its own ranks at all levels and throughout the country.

In those senses, not in the sense of betraying the confidence of our employers, I am in favour of a more open Civil Service. My memory of John Redcliffe Maud, who was the least stuffy of men, open-minded to new solutions, encouraging to youth and energy, and devoted to the public service, gives me confidence that these are directions of which he would have approved.

FILE

cc MR INGHAM

CJ.



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

I have shown the Prime Minister your minute of 3 February about the invitation from the BBC to appear on a World Service programme, "Recording of the Week".

The Prime Minister has no objection to your appearing on this programme. She agrees that you should postpone the putting out of the programme until the Westland difficulty has died down.

N.L. WICKS

4 February 1986

Prime Minister
Content for
RTA to
appear?

Ref. A086/361

MR WICKS

N.L.W.

Yes not

3.2

c Mr Ingham

31-1-86

I attach a copy of a letter which I have received from the BBC inviting me to be a guest on a World Service programme "Recording of the Week".

2. If the Prime Minister sees no objection, I should rather like to accept this invitation, though I would hope to postpone the putting out of the programme until the Westland difficulty has died down somewhat.

REA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

3 February 1986

**BBC**

BRITISH BROADCASTING CORPORATION
PO BOX 76 BUSH HOUSE STRAND LONDON WC2B 4PH

TELEPHONE 01-240 3456 TELEX: 265781

TELEGRAMS AND CABLES: BROADBRIT LONDON TELEX

Tel: Direct Dial: 257 2146

31st January 1986

Sir Robert Armstrong, GCB, CVO,
Secretary of the Cabinet,
Cabinet Office,
Whitehall,
LONDON SW1



Dear Sir Robert,

I produce a programme for the World Service called "Recording of the Week" in which a guest chooses and talks about a recent record of music he/she has enjoyed. It's informal and certainly not technical - it's not a forum for professional critics.

A (nominally) fifteen minute programme, it involves choosing three or four music extracts totalling some eight minutes interspersed with chat adding up to about five minutes altogether.

I would very much like you to be one of my guests; if so, you would grace a list that has already included, for example, Denis Healey, Lord Carrington, Sir Claus Moser and Sir David Attenborough.

I appreciate that you may not be au fait with the new releases and I would be only too pleased to help you make your choice. We usually pre-record the programme on Friday mornings but this is adjustable.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Dan Zerdin,
Producer,
"Recording of the Week",
BBC World Service.

DZ/JA



fen

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

I have shown the Prime Minister the draft of your notes, attached to your minute of 26 September, for your contribution to the International Press Institute Seminar today on the subject of terrorism and the media.

The Prime Minister is content that you should speak on the lines indicated in the draft notes.

I am copying this minute to the Private Secretary to the Home Secretary.

N.L.W.

27 September 1985

Ref. A085/2450

MR WICKS

Agreed with

*Prime Minister
Bill Bernard
and I think this
sensible and reasonable.
N.L.W.*

The Prime Minister and the Home Secretary agreed that I should take part in an International Press Institute Seminar tomorrow on the subject of terrorism and the media. I should be speaking specifically on "Problems for the Authorities that Media Activities create".

26.9

2. I attach for information and clearance by the Prime Minister and Home Secretary as appropriate, a copy of the notes from which I propose to speak.

3. I am sending a copy of this minute and of the draft to the Private Secretary to the Home Secretary.

me

for

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

26 September 1985

Problems for the Authorities that Media
Activities Create

This is a tempting title. I have to remind myself that this discussion is within the framework of the general subject of today's seminar: terrorism and the media.

I start, as no doubt we all start, from three basic premises;

(1) that in a democratic society the media are and should be free to report and comment upon facts and events of public interest, and that inconvenience or embarrassment to the authorities is not of itself an acceptable reason for curtailing that freedom;

(2) that the media have a responsibility to society, which is, if you like, the counterpart of that

/freedom,

SPEAAA

freedom, that their reporting should be accurate and objective and that comment should be fair and responsible;

(3) that the authorities owe a duty to the electorate to explain and account for the policies and activities which they undertake, not only to elected representatives but also more widely.

In an imperfect world the day-to-day application of these principles generates a certain tension - often a constructive tension - between the authorities and the media with which we are all familiar. Nonetheless the principles themselves are fine and positive in a society in which there is general consent to the proposition that differences of view and of policy are pursued in discussion and debate within a framework of public law and accepted convention, and not by means of violence or intimidation.

/There are,

SPBAAA

There are, however, times when society faces the problem of dealing with people or movements who are not prepared to express their views and aspirations through the democratic process - often because they know that their views and aspirations have no chance of attracting support through that process - and seek to publicise their aspirations and impose their views by resorting to violence or intimidation.

Those people present a threat to the society which both the authorities and the media are there to serve. It makes sense that representatives of the authorities and the media should from time to time sit down together, as we are doing today, to examine the special problems that terrorists create for both of them, and the extent to which and the ways in which the normal framework of relationships between authorities and the media, and between both and the public, is affected and may perhaps need to be modified.

/Such a process

SPEAAA

Such a process may not lead to the codification of detailed guidelines capable of covering every situation. Apart from anything else, the situations that may arise are likely to be too diverse for that to be possible. But this kind of discussion should and, in my experience can, lead to greater mutual understanding and to the avoidance or mitigation of some of the problems, and particularly of the problems that the media and the authorities can create for each other.

One set of problems is created, as much I suggest for the media as for the authorities, by the fact that the major objective of most acts of terrorism is to secure public attention. The terrorist hopes by the use or threat of violence to gain publicity for his cause or his group. He hopes - indeed he can be reasonably confident - that when he hijacks an aircraft

/full of innocent

SPEAAA

full of innocent passengers he is also hijacking the television screens, the radio waves and the headlines.

Thus there is a sense in which, in reporting terrorist events and activities, the media are playing into the hands of the terrorist, gratifying the demand for publicity when it would be arguably better to frustrate, and encouraging the abuse of freedom which these activities represent.

And yet a terrorist outrage is no less arguably an event of legitimate public interest which the public are entitled to expect that the media will report. There is no way in which such events are not going to be reported. The problem lies in the how. It is here that we begin to encounter the problems that the media create for the authorities in their treatment of such episodes.

/I am not thinking

SPEAAA

I am not thinking so much of the problem of denying the terrorist the publicity his crimes are intended to bring for his activities or his cause. That is a problem primarily for the media to face. It has been suggested, for instance, that the media should get together to see if they can agree among themselves upon some voluntary code of conduct which they can all observe.

I am thinking of the problems that can arise for the authorities in the course of handling a terrorist incident. Many incidents take the form of hijacking or hostage-taking: deliberately so, because an incident which takes that form gives the terrorist both what he sees as a bargaining hand and opportunity for protracted public attention.

In handling such an incident the objectives of the authorities are:

/(1)

SPEAAA

(1) to bring the incident to a peaceful conclusion as quickly as possible without loss of life, and with minimum use of force;

(2) terrorism being a crime, to apprehend and bring to justice the perpetrator;

(3) to demonstrate that terrorism does not pay.

These are all objectives to which, I suggest, the media can subscribe. Should it not be possible for the media to agree that they should be willing in principle to accept constraints on their freedom to report on at least some aspects of such incidents, while they are in progress, if they are convinced that the constraints asked of them are likely to serve those objectives, and particularly the first of them - the preservation of lives?

/During such

SPEAAA

An awful sentence construction!

Could be put more simply.

~~Should they not~~
Agree not to report activities outside the incident which give useful information to terrorists - who use it for the needs.

During such an incident, the terrorists concerned are likely to be acutely conscious of their impact on public opinion; and they are very likely to have access at least to radios, if not to television and newspapers. They are also likely to attend closely to media reporting for any clues as to the actions and reactions of the authorities with whom they are dealing.

Those actions are likely, for their part, to depend for their effectiveness to some extent on concealment and surprise. It can be practically and psychologically important to keep the terrorist in ignorance and suspense about what may be happening or in preparation, and about the tactics of those with whom he is negotiating.

Thus it seems to me that it is likely very often to be reasonable that, in the interest of reducing danger to life and of increasing the prospect of bringing an incident to a peaceful and successful

/conclusion,

SPEAAA

conclusion, the authorities should be able to ask the media, and the media should be able to agree, that they should (for instance):

- not publish details of the movement, organisation and disposition of the police or military forces that may be involved in dealing with the incident; ✓
- not publish information or to speculate about negotiating tactics; ✓
- not speculate about or refer to the use of technical aids; ✓
- not describe the layout of buildings or other physical surroundings at the scene of the incident. ✓

There may indeed be some information, for instance about tactics of handling or of operations, that are better not published

/even after

SPEAAA

even after an incident is over, because of their possible relevance to the handling of subsequent incidents. ✓

For obvious reasons it may be insufficient to rely on a general request to the media to observe self-restraint on this; in a particular incident it may well be helpful for both sides if the authorities make specific requests to the media not to publish this or that type or piece of information. ✓

This can be done by setting up arrangements for regular and frequent briefing of the media by spokesmen for the police, at which the media can be given up-to-date information about the progress of the incident, and the police can both make specific requests that certain matters should not be disclosed or discussed in the ✓

/published media

SPRAAA

published media and explain to the media representatives why those requests are justified in relation to the objectives for handling the incident.


Such a system can be the basis of an arrangement which meets the legitimate interests of both sides. On the one hand the media can be given as much and as full information as possible, while understanding and accepting the need for constraints upon the amount of that information which can be published - or at least upon the timing of its publication. On the other hand the authorities can maximise their chances of achieving their objectives in handling the incident - and above all the objective of a peaceful and successful conclusion without loss of life.

I can understand all the hesitations which many journalists would feel about entering into arrangements of this kind with those with whom they would normally prefer
/to deal

SPEAAA

to deal at arm's length. But I suggest that the circumstances of terrorist incidents, and the shared interest of the authorities, the media and the public in the prevention and defeat of terrorism, provide a sufficient justification, and indeed impose an obligation upon, the media to put those hesitations on one side and give these ideas the most serious consideration.

SPEAAA



NBPM

Ref. A085/1661

MR BUTLER

cc Miss Mueller
Mr Stubbs

--- I attach a copy of my opening address to
the Centenary Conference of the Chartered
Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy,
as delivered.

RTA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

18 June 1985

CHARTERED INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC
FINANCE AND ACCOUNTANCY

Centenary Conference 1985

Address by Sir Robert Armstrong GCB CVO

18 June 1985

Mr President, I should like first to express my appreciation of the honour you do me, and the service of which I have the honour to be the Head, in inviting me to give the opening address at this your centenary conference.

You have waited a hundred years for it. It had better be vintage stuff.

The main subjects for your discussions at this conference are no doubt, as befits the title of your institute, weighty issues of

/public finance

public finance and accountancy. Let me reassure you at once. I am content to leave those matters to other hands and minds. You, Mr President, know me too well to imagine that I should have anything to say which would be likely to illumine your deliberations on those issues, important though they are.

Nor do I propose to weary you with a discourse on the marvels and mysteries of Cabinet Government and the machinery for co-ordination at the centre of Government, which is the stuff of my life as Secretary of the Cabinet.

No, I propose to speak to you today as Head of the Home Civil Service, and to touch on matters of some interest not only for the Civil Service - those who serve the Crown with the pen rather than with the sword - but also perhaps for others of you who have the honour to serve the public in local government.

/I sometimes

I sometimes wonder whether the title "The Head of the Home Civil Service" would satisfy the requirements of the Trade Descriptions Act or the Advertising Standards Authority. The holder of that title advises the Prime Minister on senior appointments, and on questions of organisation and machinery of government; and he is the official head of the office which supports the Prime Minister, as Minister for the Civil Service, on questions of personnel management, recruitment, training, conduct and discipline in the Civil Service.

You would suppose that he is expected also to be in some sense the leader of the Civil Service, and as such to represent the Civil Service publicly in matters affecting the Service as a whole. But this is something that he cannot easily do, since such matters will generally be matters of policy for the Government which he serves, and his profession requires him not to take public positions on

/matters of

matters of Government policy. It is of course his privilege to have regular and constant access to members of the Government, and in particular to the Prime Minister. He must for the most part be content to say what he thinks needs to be said privately, in the course of that privileged access, rather than publicly, in speeches or interviews.

It follows from that, that it is a rare event for the Head of the Home Civil Service to be heard in public; and that, when he is so heard, what he has to say must conform to the conventions which his position and profession impose upon him.

Despite all that, I should like to share with you this afternoon some reflections on the public service. Those reflections are derived from my experience in the Civil Service and my present position as the Head of it; but I think that a good deal of what I have to say will

/sound

sound resonances for those of you who have made their careers in the service of local government.

I was reading an article by a Member of Parliament in a newspaper the other day which began as follows:

"I don't think I'd like to be a public servant in Britain today."

He went on to say that the Civil Service were accused of bureaucracy, of incompetence, of being "out of touch with real life (whatever that means)", and of providing a "soft home" for people to while away their days until retirement. He allowed that we were uncorrupt, but feared that our traditional political neutrality was under attack.

I do not suppose that the Civil Service - or the public services generally - have ever

/been one

been one of the country's best loved institutions. My predecessor of thirty-five years ago, Sir Edward Bridges, talking about the Civil Service and how it was regarded, said that the Civil Service was resigned to being regarded as a bit of a music-hall joke - like mothers-in-law or Wigan Pier.

But the lecture in which he said that was redolent of self-confidence. It was written by a man who knew that the Service of which he was speaking enjoyed a very high degree of public respect, if not exactly affection, and could be confident of the value placed upon its contribution to public life.

That that should have been so was not, I think, just a reflection of the success of the Northcote-Trevelyan reforms of the mid-nineteenth century in establishing a career Civil Service of acknowledged integrity, selected and appointed solely on merit and without patronage. It was also a reflection of the fact that Sir Edward Bridges was

/speaking

speaking only a few years after the end of a war during which the whole machinery of government had been directed to one primary purpose: that of winning the war. There was no argument about that objective, and general willingness to accept an unprecedented degree of Government intervention in pursuit of it.

Moreover the wartime administration was composed of Ministers in a national Government drawn from all the main political parties. Thus, when the war ended, and a Labour Government took office, the senior Ministers in that Government were entirely used to working with the Civil Service. There was a high degree of confidence and familiarity, indeed of comradeship. By and large Ministers knew the civil servants who were working with them, and knew that they could be trusted to give honest and dispassionate advice and to carry out the policies of the Government.

And I think that this state of affairs remained broadly true for the first post-war

SPEAAE

/Conservative

Conservative Government, the senior members of which had all served in the wartime administration.

More recently, however, newly appointed Ministers, on first taking office, have not perhaps always started with that degree of confidence in the Civil Service. Some of them, before taking office, have tended to see the permanent civil servants as liable to be unsupportive, if not positively hostile to, the policies they are committed to pursuing when they take office. In fact, of course, as they have soon found after coming into office, civil servants accept and carry out their professional responsibility to serve the Government of the day with equal skill, energy and loyalty, whatever its political complexion.

Moreover, the country emerged from the Second World War battered and impoverished indeed, but less badly battered and impoverished than the main powers of

/continental

SPEAAE

continental Europe, and victorious: second only, as it then seemed, in strength and standing in the free world, to the United States itself.

The years that followed saw other European countries regaining their strength. We gradually recovered our economic prosperity but, starting as it were from a higher base, our recovery was less spectacular; we divested ourselves of our Empire; and our standing and influence in the world declined. Britain seemed, to her own people, to have lost her way in the world. And, looking for explanations, people sought to blame not just circumstances nor just the policies pursued but also the institutions and instruments by which policies were devised and put into effect - and notably the Civil Service.

That has been one element in recent discussion about the public services in this country. It relates to the accusations of

/bureaucracy

bureaucracy, of incompetence, of being "out of touch with real life (whatever that means)".

There have been other elements, which are, I think, in part, the product of the tendency to greater polarisation in political life. This has produced a strange mixture of seemingly inconsistent arguments and points of view about the public service.

There is, first, the suggestion that, in a situation where the main political parties in public life are perceived as having been moving apart from each other, the public services can and should act like a governor in a vehicle, preventing political excesses in either direction, at once an expression and a guardian of consensus. On this thesis, the public services become almost like a fourth estate, with a constitutional standing and responsibility of their own independent of those of the Governments they serve.

/I believe

I believe this to be a false and dangerous thesis, at least as applied to the Civil Service in this country. It is, as I have said, the duty of a non-political civil service to serve the Government of the day with skill, energy and loyalty, whatever its complexion. We could hardly expect to deserve the confidence of Ministers, which is the first requisite for a good relationship with them, if they believed that we thought that we might in certain circumstances have the right and the duty to thwart their purposes.

Then there is the argument that, because of political polarisation, the changes of policy and direction as Governments alternate - whether at national or at local level - are so extensive and so sharp that it is no longer possible to maintain the tradition of a professional, neutral, non-political public service, and that we must perforce move some way towards an American-style system in which

SPEAAE

/the

the higher levels of the public service change when the whirligig of democracy brings in changes of the political complexion of the Government.

There are even some who suggest that that is already quietly and insidiously happening. As I shall hope to show, I do not believe that it is happening in the Civil Service. From what I hear, I fear that it may be happening in some areas of local government.

Another related strand in this texture of public discussion is the debate about the ethics of public service, and in particular whether a civil servant, if he thinks that something done or to be done by the Government in whose service he is employed is or would be contrary in some sense to the public interest, has an obligation to that public interest which transcends his obligation to the Government which he is serving. As some of you will know, I recently had occasion to issue a note of

guidance on the duties and responsibilities of civil servants in relation to Ministers which had a bearing on this subject.

So there are many aspects of the public service in this country which are currently under public discussion and scrutiny. There are also great changes afoot. In the Civil Service we have embarked on a programme of reform of management practices and style. For those of you in local government, another round of structural change is proceeding, and the conventions that have governed the relationship between central and local government have come under strain.

Change, and the process of discussion and scrutiny that precedes and accompanies it, always makes for uncertainty; and uncertainty can lead on to self-doubt. If there is one theme which I should like to leave you with today, it is to recall that the British public services have a long and
/British

honourable record of service to the country;
have inherited great strengths and virtues; and
have much to give and much to be proud of.

Of course the public services need to have the flexibility and the readiness to adapt to change. But it is important not to let the whims of fashion or the passing preoccupations of the media stampede us into beliefs or measures that cause us to lose sight of, or even to put at risk, the abiding strengths and virtues. Nor must we allow change and uncertainty to undermine our self-confidence, our pride in the service we give, and our determination to continue to provide services of the kind and standard which the country needs and expects of us.

The management of a complex and civilised society, the development of its success and prosperity, and the furtherance of the wellbeing of its members, do not depend solely on the creation of wealth by its industries.

/There is

There is inescapably some role for the state to play. People can and do differ about how large that role should be, and what it should consist of. But, wherever the boundary is to be drawn between the state and private enterprise, there remain some services - perhaps many services - which society requires to be provided and which can only be or are best provided as public services.

Thus the public and private sectors have each their part to play, and are inextricably dependent on one another. And the provision of a public service remains not just a necessary but also an honourable calling, deserving of pride from those engaged in it and respect from those dependent on it.

But, if the public services are to earn that respect, they must meet the needs and expectations of those whose contributions finance them.

/They expect

They expect, and are entitled to expect, that it should be incorruptible and incorrupt. As to that, I say no more than that even the severest critics of the British Civil Service allow that it is generally speaking free from the taint of corruption. The standards are high; departures from them are rare, and are strictly punished when they occur.

Parliament and the public also want and expect the public service to be competent and effective.

The economic recession of the late seventies and very early eighties forced industrial and commercial concerns, for the sake of sheer survival, to make themselves as efficient and as productive as they could. The public service is not exposed to the disciplines of the market place. Nonetheless, it is spending the taxpayers' money, and there is no less need for it than for the private

/sector to

sector to be as efficient and as productive as possible, and for the introduction of disciplines and systems that will bring that about.

I believe that the Civil Service, over the years, has given, and has generally been recognised as giving, a high standard - I might even say a Rolls Royce standard - in its service of advice to Ministers of successive Governments on the formulation and execution of policies, and a high standard of service to the public in the equitable distribution of public benefits and collection of public revenues. But you only buy a Rolls Royce if you don't need to count the cost of it; and I think that we have not always or not sufficiently counted the cost to the taxpayer of the service we were providing. Whether in response to political needs and pressures or for some other reason, such as professional satisfaction, we have sometimes built in refinements without establishing that the benefits they would yield would be worth the costs they would incur.

SPEAAE

/The system

The system has served to reinforce those tendencies, because financial responsibility has been highly centralised in the Treasury and in finance branches of Departments.

We are in the process of changing that. In every Department we have introduced systems to provide managers at all levels with the management information, and particularly the financial management information, which they need in order to exercise financial responsibility for the functions which they are managing. We are decentralising and extending financial management responsibility as widely as possible to line managers. And in parallel we are making wide-ranging changes in systems of personnel management.

All this adds up to a huge change in the culture of the Civil Service, and requires a profound change in the attitude of civil servants to their work and their responsibilities. I believe that they will increasingly find that the change makes their

SPEAAB

/work more

work more satisfying, as well as more effective. Undoubtedly, however, the first feeling is that it makes the work more exacting and more worrying. That is one of the reasons - the sheer size and diversity of the organisation is another - why the change on which we have embarked takes a long time to work through and to become established.

This process of change is taking place against the background of an unprecedentedly large reduction in the size of the Civil Service. In the five years from April 1979 to April 1984 the number of civil servants was reduced by 110,000, from 730,000 to 620,000. By April 1988 the figure is expected to be below 600,000, lower than at any time since 1945.

That is a reduction of as much as 20 per cent in as little as a quarter of the working life of a generation of civil servants.

/When a

When a Government is determined to reduce the role of the state and the burdens which the state places on its citizens and on industry, it is wholly understandable and reasonable that it should seek to reduce the numbers of people employed in the service of the state.

And, of course, such a reduction acts, in the public service as it would anywhere else, as a powerful spur to the constant search for ways of making government more efficient, of getting better value for money. Indeed since the demands placed upon the Civil Service do not seem to have come down by anything like as much as the numbers, productivity has risen - and with it a strong sense among civil servants of the unrelenting pressures of an increasing workload. So much for the myth of a "soft home".

But reductions on that scale and at that pace create problems and pains in any organisation. We have so far been able to achieve the reductions almost entirely by

SPEAAE

/wastage

wastage in the non-industrial Civil Service, without significant numbers of compulsory redundancies (though there have had to be such redundancies in the industrial Civil Service). But the reduction in numbers - which has been if anything sharper in the higher reaches of the Civil Service - followed a period of high recruitment in the second half of the 1970s. The inevitable result is a marked deterioration of promotion prospects for those now in the Civil Service. We are acutely conscious of the potentially depressing effects of this upon motivation and performance, and we are thinking hard about a variety of measures to alleviate the problem, including early retirements, changes in working arrangements to increase responsibility and job satisfaction, and possible changes in pay structures and arrangements.

Let me now turn to the various arguments about politicisation. Here again I shall

/speak about

speaking about central government, though some lessons from central government can perhaps be read across to local government.

The tradition in this country has been, and still is, to draw a clear distinction between the elected members of Government and the career civil servants who serve them.

In central government, Ministers are by convention members of one or other of the Houses of Parliament, most of them as a result of a process of democratic election, who exercise the executive powers of the Crown, and are answerable to Parliament. It is they who take political decisions: that is what they are elected for, and they bear the responsibility for them.

The Civil Service as such has no constitutional personality or responsibility separate from the Government of the day. It is a professional career service, non-political at all levels. It is there to provide the

Government of the day with advice on the formulation of the policies of the Government, to assist in carrying out the decisions of the Government, and to provide delivery of the services for which the Government is responsible.

This arrangement provides Ministers with a body of official advisers and coadjutors which has all the advantages of accumulated knowledge, skill and experience which are conferred by continuity in the service of Government. It is the professional duty of those advisers to serve the constitutionally appointed Government of the day, without fear or favour, with the same honesty, integrity, energy and goodwill, whatever its political complexion.

It is not that civil servants are required not to have political views; it is that they must not let those views colour or obtrude upon their advice and conduct as officials. It is part of the professional equipment of the civil

servant that he should be able to do this; and someone who thinks that it will not be possible for him or her to do so had better not join the Civil Service.

That is a restraint upon the freedom of civil servants, if you like; but it is one which successive generations of able, intelligent and dedicated men and women have been able to accept, as the condition of enjoying the privilege of being able to spend a satisfying and reasonably rewarding career in this particular form of service to the country.

In recent years Ministers in both Conservative and Labour Administrations have felt the need to have about them some advisers who are not career civil servants, either because they feel the need of a particular qualification or expertise which the Civil Service cannot provide, or - more usually - because they feel the need to supplement the professional and expert, but non-political,

SPEAAE

/advice

advice of the Civil Service on the business of government with advice from people from outside the Civil Service who specifically and explicitly share their political commitment and affiliation. Hence the institution of what has come to be called the special adviser.

That seems to me to be a wholly understandable need, and one that the system should be able - as it has been able - to meet.

The point about special advisers, for my present purposes, is that they do not replace or supplant the career Civil Service. They provide a separate source of advice to the Minister, who is thus helped to address his mind to the specifically political aspects of the decisions he is intending or is required to make.

As I indicated earlier, it is now being suggested by some that the time has come to go further, and to change the system so that an incoming Minister of a different political
/complexion

complexion from his predecessor can replace the senior civil servants in his Department by other people - either civil servants or non-civil servants - on whom he can count as open and acknowledged supporters of his political aims and objectives.

This - or something very like it - is of course the basis of practice in the United States, and that experience shows that it is perfectly workable - in that system, which is conditioned to working it, and to making possible for non-elected people the alternation between being in Government and being out of it which the system implies.

But a change to such a system would be a profound change in the British context, and one (I suggest) that would carry with it significant drawbacks.

The first drawback would be a significant loss of continuity in administration when the Government changes. American experience shows
/that for

SPEAAE

that for a period of many months after a change of Government, a new Government, lacking continuity at the senior levels of administration, can be at a considerable disadvantage in formulating policies over the whole range of public affairs.

A second drawback would, I fear, be a deterioration in the quality of the career public service. Many of the able and intelligent men and women, who now come into the public service because it offers them the possibility of rising to the highest levels of responsibility and service to the state, would not be attracted to a service which would by definition set limits to the level of achievement to which they could hope to attain.

And that could, over time, adversely affect the standards of administration of the public service.

/It

It has been suggested by some commentators that there is already a process of crypto-politicisation at work in senior appointments to the public service here.

There have been, and will no doubt continue to be, a few cases where appointments have been made to senior positions in the public service of people from outside the Civil Service. Two recent cases have been the new Head of the Government Accountancy Service and the new Chief of Defence Procurement. In each case there was felt to be a need for a particular combination of qualifications and experience which it was felt could not at the time be found within the Service.

As a general rule, however, appointments at the highest levels in the Civil Service, as at lower levels, continue to be made, as they have been made for over a century, from within

SPEAAE

/the Civil

the Civil Service and on merit. There is no question of political considerations entering into the choice. The Prime Minister is ultimately responsible for the appointments of Permanent and Deputy Secretaries, and she takes a keen interest in them. She attaches much importance, as I do in making recommendations to her, to skill and effectiveness in management as well as in the traditional role of policy advice. She is not concerned with, and I can vouch for the fact that she does not seek to ascertain, the political views or sympathies (if any) of those who are recommended. Nor do I. She wants, as I want, to have the best person for the job.

When Mrs Thatcher became Prime Minister, in 1979, she and her colleagues were content, as her predecessors had been, to work with the senior civil servants in post at the time, though they brought in some special advisers. I was interested to hear Mr Kinnock say in an interview on television the other day that, as Prime Minister, though he would obviously not

SPEAAE

/retain

retain Mrs Thatcher's special advisers and would appoint some of his own, provided that he was satisfied that civil servants would serve his Government with loyalty, he would be "prepared to work on the conventional basis, which has stood us in good stead in Britain, about the way in which civil servants are prepared to work". I welcome his statement. He can be sure that, in that event, the Civil Service would serve the Government of which he was the head with no less loyalty, energy and goodwill than they have served the present Government and its predecessors.

I do not wish to spend much time this afternoon on the ethics of public service, or on the duties and responsibilities of civil servants in relation to Ministers. I said what I had to say publicly on this in the note of guidance which was published on 26 February. I will add only two things:

/(1) It is

(1) It is clearly possible for ingenious people to dream up a hypothetical situation in which a civil servant's duty as a human being or as a citizen could reasonably be held to override his duty to the Government which he serves. But in real life, as things actually are, such situations will be very rare indeed and will by their nature be impossible to prescribe for in advance. The general rule must be that a civil servant owes a primary duty of loyalty and best endeavour to the constitutionally appointed Government of the day.

(2) If such a situation were actually to arise, or if an individual civil servant were to think that he was about to face such a situation, he does not need and should not try to carry the burden on his own. He is a member of a Service, under discipline, and the burden can and should be shared with his seniors in the Service, up to and including the head of his

Department or even in the final analysis the Head of the Home Civil Service, who of course has access to the Prime Minister. I believe that in almost every case such a process would be likely to result in a reasonable and satisfactory resolution of any dilemma of conscience.

The conventions of government and of public service which I have been discussing this afternoon are, of course, part of a larger framework of constitutional and administrative conventions, which in some sense depend on one another. There is an overall pattern and logic about the system as a whole; and it would be difficult to change particular conventions without putting the stability of other parts of the framework at risk. Equally, it has to be said, the conventions which I have been discussing could themselves be put at risk if there were profound changes in other parts of that framework.

/That was

That was why I was particularly glad when the Prime Minister, in presenting to the House of Commons the note of guidance which I issued on 26 February, went out of her way to emphasise that civil servants who carry out their duties and responsibilities in the manner described in my note are entitled to the trust, respect and support of Ministers, and went on to pay tribute to the quality of the advice that Ministers receive from the Civil Service..

That has long been the traditional convention in this country. The reasons for it are as valid, and the need for it is as great, as ever; it was good to have it so authoritatively reaffirmed.

In conclusion, Mr Chairman, let me return to the theme on which I touched earlier.

Those of us who are public servants, whether in central or local government, are of course in the service of our immediate

SPEAAE

/employers,

employers, and in the case of the Civil Service of the Crown; but we are also, in a very real sense, in the service of the country and of our fellow men and women whom we call the public. The provision of service to the public is not only a necessary but an honourable calling: a calling of which we are entitled to be proud, and which deserves the respect of those for whom the service is provided. It is a privilege, as well as an honour, that those of us who devote our working lives to the service of the public enjoy.

That privilege, like most privileges, carries with it obligations. Today is the 170th anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo. Do you remember what the Duke of Wellington said?

/"I am

"I am nimmukwallah, as we say in the East; that is, I have eaten of the King's salt, and, therefore, I conceive it to be my duty to serve with unhesitating zeal and cheerfulness, when and wherever the King or his Government may think proper to employ me."

And do you remember above all what Queen Elizabeth I said to Sir William Cecil - whom I like to think of as one of my predecessors - when she appointed him her Secretary of State in 1558:

This judgment I have of you:

that you will not be corrupted with any manner of gift;

and that you will be faithful to the state;

/and that

and that without respect of my
private will you will give me that
counsel that you think best".

I assure you that I do not forget those
things for a single day. I do not believe that
there will be too much amiss with a public
service, or perhaps a country, whose members do
their best to live up to those standards.



Ac VC

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

Thank you for your minute of 15 June (A085/1628) covering a draft of your address to the Annual Conference of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy in Brighton on Tuesday 18 June.

I showed the draft to the Prime Minister over the weekend. She commented that in her view some of the lecture would cause quite a stir, but added that you should feel free to say whatever you think it right to say as Head of the Civil Service.

The Prime Minister did not herself identify the passages which she thought might be controversial, but you and I have subsequently had a word about those which struck me as possibly falling into that category.

FRB

17 June 1985

Mr. Ingham 4

*Robert says
whatever he wishes
to say.*

Prime Minister

I do not think that

Ref. A085/1628 *I believe that*

*you need read the whole of this
(although it is well and amusingly*

MR BUTLER

*some of the volume
will cause "anti"
a stir. not.*

*written). But if have time only to
read a little I suggest you concentrate
on pages 28-30 (reference tag)*

As you know, I am due to address the Annual Conference of
the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy in
Brighton on Tuesday 18 June.

*FERB
14.6.*

2. I am proposing to discuss a number of issues relating to the public service, including "politicisation".
3. I attach the latest draft of what I propose to say. As you will see, towards the end of it (from page 28) I deal with the allegation that recent appointments of Permanent Secretaries have been more "political", and in so doing, I refer to the Prime Minister's role. If she is content, I should like to say what is there stated; but you may wish to ask her.
4. I also refer back in the last pages of the draft, to relations between Ministers and civil servants and to what the Prime Minister said in her Answer in the House of Commons on 26 February.

R

Approved by
ROBERT ARMSTRONG
and signed in his absence.

14 June 1985

CIPFA

18 June 1985

I suppose that the main subjects for your discussions at this conference are, as befits the title of your institute, issues of public finance and accountancy. Your President knows me too well to imagine that I should have anything to say which would be likely to illumine your deliberations on those issues, important though they are.

Nor do I propose to weary you with a discourse on the marvels and mysteries of Cabinet Government and the machinery for co-ordination at the centre of Government. These are the stuff of my life as Secretary of the Cabinet, and I recently attended an interesting seminar in Paris, marking the fiftieth anniversary of the French secretariat général du Gouvernement, where I had the

/opportunity

SPEAAE

1

opportunity of hearing at first hand about the comparative methods employed for these purposes not only in France - it is of course an article of faith that they order these things better in France - but also in such orderly and well-regulated countries as Lebanon, Mali and Vietnam.

No, I propose to speak to you today as Head of the Home Civil Service, and to touch on matters of some interest not only for the Civil Service - those who serve the Crown with the pen rather than with the sword - but also perhaps for others of you who have the honour to serve the public in local government.

I sometimes wonder whether the title "The Head of the Home Civil Service" would satisfy the requirements of the Trade Descriptions Act or the Advertising Standards Authority. He advises the Prime Minister on senior appointments, and on questions of organisation

/and

and machinery of government; and he is the official head of the office which supports the Prime Minister as Minister for the Civil Service on questions of personnel management, recruitment, training, conduct and discipline in the Civil Service.

You would suppose that he is expected also to be in some sense the leader of the Civil Service, and as such to represent the Civil Service publicly in matters affecting the Service as a whole. But this is something that he cannot easily do, since such matters will generally be matters of policy for the Government which he serves, and his profession requires him not to take public positions on matters of Government policy. It is of course his privilege to have regular and constant access to members of the Government, and in particular to the Prime Minister. He must for the most part be content to say what he thinks

/needs

needs to be said privately, in the course of that privileged access, rather than publicly, in speeches or interviews.

It follows from that, that it is a rare event for the Head of the Home Civil Service to be heard in public; and that, when he is so heard, what he has to say must conform to the conventions which his position and profession impose upon him.

Despite all that, I should like to share with you this afternoon some reflections on the public service. Those reflections are derived from my experience in the Civil Service and my present position as the Head of it; but I think that a good deal of what I have to say will sound resonances for those of you who have made their careers in the service of local government.

/I was

I was reading an article by a Member of Parliament in a newspaper the other day which began as follows:

"I don't think I'd like to be a public servant in Britain today."

He went on to say that the Civil Service were accused of bureaucracy, of incompetence, of being out of touch with "real life (whatever that means)", and of providing a "soft home" for people to while away their days until retirement. He allowed that we were uncorrupt, but feared that our traditional political neutrality was under attack.

I do not suppose that the Civil Service - or the public services generally - have ever been one of the country's best loved institutions. My predecessor of thirty-five years ago, Sir Edward Bridges, talking about the Civil Service and how it was regarded, said

/that

that the Civil Service was resigned to being regarded as a bit of a music-hall joke - like mothers-in-law or Wigan Pier.

But the lecture in which he said that was redolent of self-confidence. It was written by a man who knew that the Service of which he was speaking enjoyed a very high degree of public respect, if not exactly affection, and could be confident of the value placed upon its contribution to public life.

That that should have been so was in part, I think, a reflection of the fact that it was still only five years after the end of the war. During the war the whole machinery of government was directed to one primary purpose: that of winning the war. There was no argument about that objective, and general willingness to accept an unprecedented degree of Government intervention in pursuit of it. Moreover the

/wartime

wartime administration was composed of Ministers in a national Government drawn from all the main political parties.

Thus, when the war ended, and a Labour Government took office, the senior Ministers in that Government were entirely used to working with the Civil Service. There was a high degree of familiarity, indeed of comradeship. By and large Ministers knew the civil servants who were working with them, and knew that they could be trusted to give honest and dispassionate advice and to carry out the policies of the Government.

And I think that this state of affairs remained broadly true for the first post-war Conservative Government, the senior members of which had all served in the wartime administration.

/More

More recently Governments, on first taking office, have not always started with that degree of confidence. Out of office, they have tended to see the permanent civil servants as liable to be unsupportive, if not positively hostile to, the policies they are committed to pursuing. They have had to relearn each time the lesson that civil servants accept and carry out their professional responsibility to serve the Government of the day with equal skill, energy and loyalty, whatever its political complexion.

Moreover, the country emerged from the Second World War battered and impoverished indeed, but less badly battered and impoverished than the main powers of continental Europe, and victorious: second only, as it then seemed, in strength and standing in the free world, to the United States itself.

/The

The years that followed saw other European countries regaining their strength. We gradually recovered our economic prosperity but, starting as it were from a higher base, our recovery was less spectacular; we divested ourselves of our Empire; and our standing and influence in the world declined. Britain seemed, to her own people, to have lost her way in the world. And, looking for explanations, people sought to blame not just circumstances nor just the policies pursued but also the institutions and instruments by which policies were devised and put into effect - and notably the Civil Service.

That has been one element in recent discussion about the public services in this country. It relates to the accusations of bureaucracy, of incompetence, of being out of touch with "real life (whatever that means)".

/There

There have been other elements, which are, I think, in part, the product of the greater polarisation in political life which has been a feature of the last decade or two. This has produced a strange mixture of seemingly inconsistent arguments and points of view about the public service.

There is, first, the suggestion that, in a situation where the two main political parties in public life are perceived as having been moving away from the centre, the public services can act like a governor in a vehicle, preventing political excesses in either direction, at once an expression and a guardian of consensus. On this thesis, the public services become almost like a fourth estate, with a constitutional standing and responsibility of their own independent of those of the Governments they serve.

/I believe

I believe this to be a false and dangerous thesis, at least as applied to the Civil Service in this Country. It is, as I have said, the duty of a non-political civil service to serve the Government of the day with skill, energy and loyalty, whatever its complexion. We could hardly expect to deserve the confidence of Ministers which is the first requisite for a good relationship with them, if they believed that we thought that we might in certain circumstances have the right and the duty to thwart their purposes.

Then there is the argument that, because of political polarisation, the changes of policy and direction as Governments alternate - whether at national or at local level - are so wide-ranging and so sharp that it is no longer possible to maintain the tradition of a professional, neutral, non-political public service, and that we must perforce some way towards an American-style system in which the

/higher

higher levels of the public service change when the whirligig of democracy brings in changes of the political complexion of the Government.

There are even some who suggest that that is already quietly and insidiously happening. As I shall hope to show, I do not believe that it is happening in the Civil Service. From what I hear, I fear that it may be happening in some areas of local government.

Another related strand in this texture of public discussion is the debate about the ethics of public service, and in particular whether a public servant, if he thinks that something done or to be done by the Government in whose service he is employed is or would be contrary in some sense to the public interest, has an obligation to that public interest which transcends his obligation to the Government which he is serving. As some of you will know, I recently had occasion to issue a note of

/guidance

guidance on the duties and responsibilities of civil servants in relation to Ministers which had a bearing on this subject.

All this makes it sound as if I am trying to present the public service in the guise (as P G Wodehouse once said) of St Sebastian on receipt of the fifteenth arrow.

The last arrow I should like to deal with is an old arrow with new features. This is the notion that wealth creation is an exclusive function of the private sector and that the public services are no more than a burden or parasite on the process of wealth creation, and therefore on the private sector.

Or, as George Orwell might have put it, wealth creation good, private sector good, public service bad.

/Put

Put like that, the notion is, of course, a prejudicial and pernicious distortion which few people could acknowledge or accept. But it represents, I suggest, a recognisable and not uncommon, if normally unspoken, prejudice.

The truth is surely different.

In a complex and developed society, the state has some role to play. People can and do differ about how large that role should be, and what it should consist of. Many people would agree that the state should not encroach into, or should where possible withdraw from, areas and activities best undertaken by private enterprise - though that of course presupposes political value judgments into which it is not for me to venture. But there remain some services - perhaps many services - which society requires to be provided and which can only be or are best provided as a public service.

/Thus

Thus in a developed economy the public and private sectors have each their part to play, and are inextricably dependent on one another. And the provision of a public service remains not just a necessary but also an honourable calling, deserving of pride from those engaged in it and respect from those dependent on it.

But, if the public service is to earn that respect, it must meet the needs and expectations of the taxpayers whose contributions finance it.

They expect, and are entitled to expect, that it should be incorruptible and incorrupt. As to that, I say no more than that even the severest critics of the British Civil Service allow that it is generally speaking free from the taint of corruption. The standards are high; departures from them are rare, and are strictly punished when they occur.

/Parliament

Parliament and the public also want and expect the public service to be competent and effective.

The economic recession of the late seventies and very early eighties forced industrial and commercial concerns, for the sake of sheer survival, to make themselves as efficient and as productive as they could. The public service is not exposed to the disciplines of the market place. Nonetheless, it is spending the taxpayers' money, and there is no less need for it than for the private sector to be as efficient and as productive as possible, and for the introduction of disciplines and systems that will bring that about.

I believe that the Civil Service, over the years, has given - and has generally been recognised as giving - what might be called a Rolls Royce service of advice to Ministers of

/successive

successive Governments on the formulation and execution of policies, and a Rolls Royce service to the public in the equitable distribution of public benefits and collection of public reserves. But you only buy a Rolls Royce if you don't need to count the cost of it; and I think that we have not always or not sufficiently counted the cost to the taxpayer of the service we were providing. Whether in response to political needs and pressures or for some other reason, such as professional satisfaction, we have built in refinements without establishing that the benefits they would yield would be worth the costs they would incur.

The system has served to reinforce those tendencies, because financial responsibility has been highly centralised in the Treasury and in finance branches of Departments.

/We

We are in the process of changing that. In every Department we have introduced systems to provide managers at all levels with the management information, and particularly the financial management information, which they need in order to exercise financial responsibility for the functions which they are managing. We are decentralising and extending financial management responsibility as widely as possible to line managers. And in parallel we are making wide-ranging changes in systems of personal management.

All this adds up to a huge change in the culture of the Civil Service, and requires a profound change in the attitude of civil servants to their work and their responsibilities. I believe that they will increasingly find that the change makes their work more satisfying, as well as more effective. Undoubtedly, however, the first feeling is that it makes the work more exacting

/and

and more worrying. That is one of the reasons - the sheer size and diversity of the organisation is another - why the change on which we have embarked takes a long time to work through and to become established.

All this has been taking place against the background of an unprecedentedly large reduction in the size of the Civil Service. In the five years from April 1979 to April 1984 the number of civil servants was reduced by 100,000, from 730,000 to 630,000. By April 1988 the figure is expected to be below 600,000, lower than at any time since 1945. That is a reduction of the order of 20 per cent in a quarter of the working life of a generation of civil servants.

And, since the demands placed upon the Civil Service have not come down by anything like as much as that, productivity has risen - and with it a strong sense among civil servants

/of

of the unrelenting pressures of an increasing workload. So much for the myth of a "soft home".

The reduction in numbers - which has been if anything sharper in the higher reaches of the Civil Service - followed a period of high recruitment in the second half of the 1970s. The inevitable result is a marked deterioration of promotion prospects for those now in the Civil Service. We are acutely conscious of the depressing effects of this upon motivation and performance, and we are thinking hard about a variety of measures to alleviate the problem, including early retirements, changes in working arrangements to increase responsibility and job satisfaction, and possible changes in pay structures and arrangements.

/Let

Let me now turn to the various arguments about politicisation. Here again I shall speak about central government, though some lessons from central government can perhaps be read across to local government.

The tradition in this country has been, and still is, to draw a clear distinction between the elected members of Government and the career civil servants who serve them.

In central government Ministers are by convention members of one or other of the Houses of Parliament, most of them as a result of a process of democratic election, who exercise the executive powers of the Crown, and are answerable to Parliament. It is they who take political decisions: that is what they are elected for, and they bear the responsibility for them.

/The

The Civil Service as such has no constitutional personality or responsibility separate from the Government of the day. It is a professional career service, non-political at all levels. It is there to provide the Government of the day with advice on the formulation of the policies of the Government, to assist in carrying out the decisions of the Government, and to provide delivery of the services for which the Government is responsible.

This arrangement provides Ministers with a body of official advisers and coadjutors which has all the advantages of accumulated knowledge, skill and experience which are conferred by continuity in the service of Government. It is the professional duty of those advisers to serve the constitutionally appointed Government of the day, without fear

/or

or favour, with the same honesty, integrity, energy and goodwill, whatever its political complexion.

It is not that civil servants are required not to have political views; it is that they must not let those views colour or obtrude upon their advice and conduct as officials. It is part of the professional equipment of the civil servant that he should be able to do this; and someone who thinks that it will not be possible for him to do so had better not join the Civil Service.

That is a restraint upon civil servants, if you like; but it is one which successive generations of able, intelligent and dedicated men and women have been able to accept, as the condition of enjoying the privilege of being able to spend a satisfying and reasonably rewarding career in this particular form of service to the country.

/In

In recent years Ministers in both Conservative and Labour Administrations have felt the need to have about them some advisers who are not career civil servants, either because they feel the need of a particular qualification or expertise which the Civil Service cannot provide, or - more usually - because they feel the need to supplement the professional and expert, but non-political, advice of the Civil Service on the business of government with advice from people from outside the Civil Service who specifically and explicitly share their political commitment and affiliation. Hence the institution of what has come to be called the special adviser.

That seems to me to be a wholly understandable need, and one that the system should be able - as it has been able - to meet.

/The

The point about special advisers, for my present purposes, is that they do not replace or supplant the career Civil Service. They provide a separate source of advice to the Minister, who is thus helped to address his mind to the specifically political aspects of the decisions he is intending or is required to make.

As I suggested earlier, it is now being suggested by some that the time has come to go further, and to change the system so that an incoming Minister of a different political complexion from his predecessor can replace the senior civil servants in his Department by other people - either civil servants or non-civil servants - on whom he can count as open and acknowledged supporters of his political aims and objectives.

/This

This - or something very like it - is of course the basis of practice in the United States, and that experience shows that it is perfectly workable - in that system, which is conditioned to working it, and to making possible the alteration between being in Government and being out of it which the system implies.

But a change to such a system would be a profound change in the British context, and one (I suggest) that would carry with it significant drawbacks.

The first drawback would be a significant loss of continuity in administration when the Government changes. American experience shows that for a period of months, if not years, after a change of Government, a new Government, lacking continuity at the senior levels of

/administration

administration, can be at a considerable disadvantage in formulating policies over the whole range of public affairs.

A second drawback would, I fear, be a deterioration in the quality of the career public service. Many of the able and intelligent men and women, who now come into the public service because it offers them the possibility of rising to the highest levels of responsibility and service to the state, would not be attracted to a service which would by definition set limits to the level of achievement to which they could hope to attain.

And that could, over time, adversely affect the standards of administration of the public service.

/It

It has been suggested by some commentators that there is already a process of crypto-politicisation at work in senior appointments to the public service here: that there is an increasing tendency to appoint someone who is (as the phrase goes) "one of us", even if there is someone else who has on merits equal or better claims to the appointment.

There have been, and will no doubt continue to be, a few cases where appointments have been made to senior positions in the public service of people from outside the Civil Service. Two recent cases have been the new Head of the Government Accountancy Service and the new Chief of Defence Procurement. In each case there was felt to be a need for a particular combination of qualifications and experience which could not at the time be found within the Service.

/As

As a general rule, however, Permanent Secretaries and Deputy Secretaries continue to be appointed, as they always have been, from within the Civil Service and on merit, and there is no question of political considerations entering into the choice. The Prime Minister is ultimately responsible for the appointments, and she takes a keen personal interest in them. She attaches much importance, as I do in making recommendations to her, to skill and effectiveness in management as well as in the traditional role of policy advice. She is not concerned with and does not seek to know the political views or sympathies (if any) of those who are recommended, and I do not know, or seek to know, the political views of those whose names I recommend to her. She wants as I want, to have the best person for the job.

/When

When Mrs Thatcher became Prime Minister, in 1979, she and her colleagues were content, as her predecessors had been, to work with the senior civil servants in post at the time, though they have brought in some special advisers. I was interested to hear Mr Kinnock say in an interview on television the other day that, as Prime Minister, though he would obviously not retain Mrs Thatcher's special advisers and would appoint some of his own, he would work within the existing conventions of the public service, provided that he was satisfied that civil servants would serve his Government with loyalty. I welcome his statement, and can assure him here and now that, in that event, the Civil Service would serve the Government of the day with no less loyalty, energy and goodwill than they have served the present Government and its predecessors.

Check]

/I do

I do not wish to spend much time this afternoon on the ethics of public service, or on the duties and responsibilities of civil servants in relation to Ministers. I said what I had to say publicly on this in the note of guidance which was published on 26 February. I will add only two things:

- (1) It is clearly possible for ingenious people to dream up a hypothetical situations in which a civil servant's duty as a human being or as a citizen could reasonably be held to override his duty to the Government which he serves. But in real life, as things actually are, such situations will be very rare indeed and will by their nature be impossible to prescribe for in advance. The general rule must be that a civil servant owes a primary duty of loyalty and best endeavour to the constitutionally appointed Government of the day.

/(2)

(2) If such a situation were actually to arise, or if an individual civil servant were to think that he was about to face such a situation, he does not need and should not try to carry the burden on his own. He is a member of a Service, under discipline, and the burden can and should be shared with his seniors in the Service, up to and including the head of his Department or even in the final analysis the Head of the Home Civil Service, who of course has access to the Prime Minister. I believe that in almost every case such a process would be likely to result in a reasonable and satisfactory resolution of the dilemma of conscience.

The conventions of government and of public service which I have been discussing this afternoon are, of course, part of a larger framework of constitutional and administrative conventions, which in some sense depend on one

/another

another. There is an overall pattern and logic about the system as a whole; and it would be difficult to change particular conventions without putting the stability of other parts of the framework at risk. Equally, it has to be said, the conventions which I have been discussing could themselves be put at risk if there were profound changes in other parts of that framework.

That was why I was particularly glad when the Prime Minister, in presenting to the House of Commons the note of guidance which I issued on 26 February, went out of her way to emphasise that civil servants who carry out their duties and responsibilities in the manner described in my note are entitled to the trust, respect and support of Ministers.

I do not wish to imply that there is or should be some sort of bargain between Ministers and civil servants, such that civil

/servants

servants are in some sense absolved for breaching their duties if Ministers fail to keep their side of the bargain. I am saying that the conventions hang together; that it is more likely that the conventions binding public servants can be sustained if other groups of people involved observe the conventions that apply to them; and that there is no better way of guaranteeing the loyal observance by civil servants of their duties to Ministers than that Ministers should be ready to give their civil servants their trust, respect and support, and publicly to acknowledge, as the Prime Minister did on that occasion, the quality of the advice and service that Ministers receive from the Civil Service.

In conclusion, Mr Chairman, let me return to a theme on which I touched earlier.

/Those

Those of us who work in the public service, whether in central or local government, are in a very real sense the servants not just of our immediate employers or (in the case of the Civil Service) the Crown but of the country and of our fellow men and women whom we call the public. The provision of service to the public is not only a necessary but an honourable calling: a calling of which we are entitled to be proud, and which deserves the respect of those for whom the service is provided. It is a privilege as well as an honour that those of us who devote our working lives to the service of the public enjoy. But that privilege, like most privileges, carries with it obligations. Today is the 170th anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo. Do you remember what the Duke of Wellington said?

"I am

"I am nimmukwallah, as we say in the East; that is, I have eaten of the King's salt, and, therefore, I conceive it to be my duty to serve with unhesitating zeal and cheerfulness, when and wherever the King or his Government may think proper to employ me."

And do you remember above all what Queen Elizabeth I said to Sir William Cecil - whom I like to think of as one of my predecessors - when she appointed him her Secretary of State in 1558:

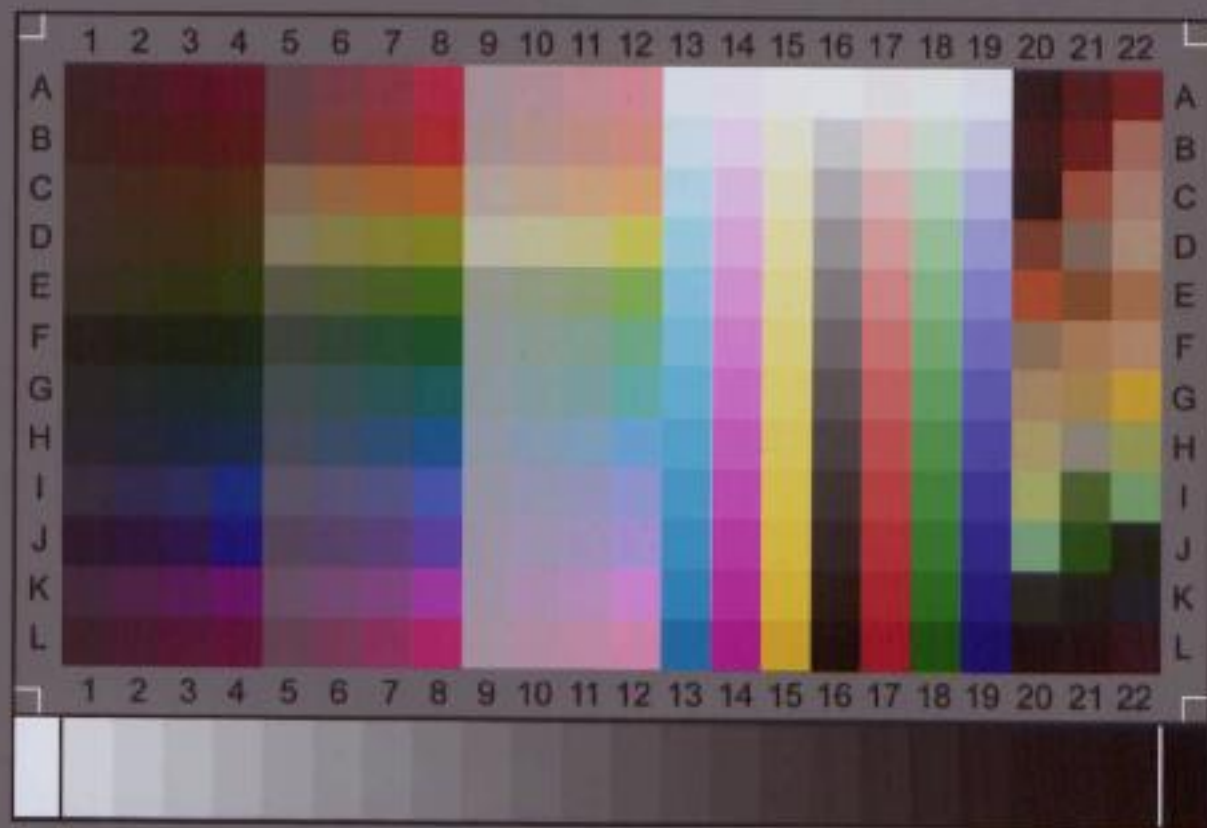
This judgment I have of you:

that you will not be corrupted with any manner of gift; and that you will be faithful to the state;

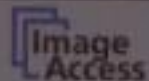
/and

and that without respect of any private will you will give me that counsel that you think best".

I assure you that I do not forget those things for a single day. I do not believe that there will be too much amiss with a public service, or perhaps a country, whose members do their best to live up to those standards.



IT8.7/2-1993
2009-02



IT-8 Target

Printed on Kodak Professional Paper
Charge: R090212