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Confidential filing

lecture by Sir Douglas Hays to the
RIPA on 'The Public Service in
Modern Society'.

CIVIL SERVICE

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November 1982

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29.11.82							
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Civil Service

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

29 November 1982

PERSONAL

Dear Douglas,

I attach a letter describing the Prime Minister's reaction to the text of your lecture. I said that I would also let you have a note of one or two points raised by Bernard Ingham, whom I asked to look at it with a journalist's eye.

Bernard Ingham commented that journalists would be quick to try to apply the epithets "apologist, complacent, self-satisfied". He thinks that you have adequately protected yourself against this, but he suggests that the general line in dealing with the press should be that the lecture does not portray a complacent Service, but rather one which is lacking in self-assurance: the lecture is aimed at securing not merely more informed criticism but also a more balanced approach to some more serious current questions about the civil service.

On the passage on efficiency, Bernard wondered whether it would be helpful to insert a sentence before the last sentence on page 6 as follows:-

"It is not my experience that civil servants as a race are Luddite or obstructive of change whatever the popular or cultivated view of them may be".

The effect of this addition would be to play down a little the rather positive statement at the end of the previous sentence. Bernard also wondered whether the draft does not make too much of a dichotomy between efficiency and accuracy, commenting that surely we should now be pursuing the quest for efficiency (as well as accuracy) with the same dedication with which our forebears pursued accuracy (as well as efficiency).

In the passage on accountability, Bernard suggested that it would be helpful if at the end of this section on page 10 you could insert a sentence or so about how the service does now pursue the most rigorous standards of accountability.

Bernard commented that the last sentence of the second paragraph on page 12 may be read as a rather exaggerated panegyric; it could be played down a bit by rephrasing it: "If there is a prototype, it is a person who is continually seeking to further the interest of his Minister and who sees his job as being to initiate and develop ideas within a contextual framework the Government has set".

I mention to you my concern about the last paragraph on page 19 and the first paragraph on page 20. Bernard Ingham also picked out the passage on page 20 and suggested that the paragraph might be ended at the words "research and development department". My own feeling was that some of the dangers could be avoided by removing the most quotable sentence starting off "The distinction of activities in society".

I hope that these comments are helpful. In general, Bernard Ingham and I found this a most interesting talk and one which, if I may say so, we as civil servants were glad to think that the head of our service should give.

Yours ever,

Robin.

Sir Douglas Wass GCB



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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

29 November 1982

Dear Douglas,

RIPA LECTURE

Thank you for your letter of 25 November, covering the text of your proposed lecture to the Royal Institute of Public Administration.

I have shown this to the Prime Minister and she has commented that she would not dream of trying to prevent you from delivering this lecture.

Yours ever,

Robin

Sir Douglas Wass GCB

AH



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25 November 1982

Jean Robin.

RIPA LECTURE

As I mentioned to you the other day I have been invited to give a public lecture to the RIPA on 2 December and I have chosen as my title "The Public Service in Modern Society". I enclose a copy of the text from which I propose to speak and I thought that you would wish to show it to the Prime Minister.

Yours sincerely,
Douglas

DOUGLAS WASS

PRIME MINISTERSir Douglas Wass Lecture to RIPA

I suggest that, if you have time, you read in full the attached lecture which Sir Douglas Wass is planning to give to the RIPA. ^{next Thursday, 2 December} It is designed as, and will be seen as, a major statement on the current issues facing the Civil Service. It is also, in a sense, Douglas Wass' valedictory.

He told me that he has tried very hard to be balanced and to say some hard things to the Service, as well as defending it on some issues. To my eye, he succeeds in coming across as a thoughtful, dignified, open-minded and thoroughly nice man.

However, the press will undoubtedly make trouble if they can, and Bernard Ingham and I have been through the piece, asking what we would pick on if we were journalists trying to make trouble by writing a story that Douglas Wass is criticising you and the Government. I have highlighted the passages which present the greatest risk:-

- Page 5 - Cost-cutting does not always lead to greater efficiency
- Page 11 - The passage about politicisation of the Civil Service will be seen as an answer to John Hoskyns, although he is not mentioned.
- Page 14 - The passage about pay and comparability
- Page 16 - Index-linked pensions, ^{though he does not say anything substantial}
- Page 19 - "There has been a flood of criticism in recent years that the service is a burden on society rather than an asset, and parasitic in nature ... Frankly no institution which is subjected to sustained criticism of this nature can be expected to maintain its self-esteem and morale."

Page 20 - "The distinction of activities in society between those which 'create wealth' and those which are ancillary to that creation is I think a dubious and dangerous one".

I doubt whether any of this is very important except perhaps the passages I have quoted from pages 19 and 20, which - however unfairly - could be written up as 'Civil Service Chief hits back at Maggie'.
cancel the lecture to

I know that Sir Douglas hopes very much that you will agree that he should make the speech in toto. My feeling is that you could, subject perhaps to his softening the paragraph on page 19 and removing the sentence on page 20.

Sir Douglas Wass has told me that if you had more fundamental worries about the lecture he would like the chance to discuss it with you.

F.R.B.

Sir Douglas is free to say
whatever he wishes. I shouldn't
dream of trying to stop him

26 November, 1982.

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DOUGLAS WASS'S RIPA LECTURE

I find this an interesting talk of the kind I look for in the head of the Civil Service of which I am a member.

But this raises the question whether it will merit the epithets - a apologist, complacent, self-satisfied, etc. That seems to be the main charge against which Sir Douglas should guard himself, for the label could damage the overall message. I think he does this adequately on page 2 in which he says the service lacks complacency and self-assurance. But I think it would help if, in selling the speech to the media and in any off-the-cuff remarks Sir Douglas makes, we and he say something to this affect:

"The paper portrays a Service which far from being complacent is lacking in self-assurance, no doubt because of the many criticisms and attacks upon it. Sir Douglas/I am far from complacent. But what Sir Douglas/I think we/I must do is to try to secure not merely more informed criticism but also a more balanced approach to some very serious questions about the Civil Service which do in fact affect all our citizens."

I find the arguments well made, and I have only the following comments on some of the main issues:

Efficiency

If the need - as I believe it is - is to guard against over positive statements, I wonder whether the insertion of the following penultimate sentence on page 6 might to be helpful:

"It is not my experience that Civil Servants as a race are Luddite or obstructive of change whatever the popular or cultivated view of them may be."

In the second paragraph on page 6 I found myself shaken by quests for efficiency and accuracy; surely we should now pursue the quest for efficiency (as well as accuracy) with the same dedication that our forebears pursued the quest for accuracy (as well as efficiency). There are some of my clients who would say the present words put efficiency before accuracy.

Accountability

I think it would be helpful if in one sentence or so Sir Douglas could rehearse at the end of this section on page 10 precisely how the Service does now pursue the most rigorous standards of accountability.

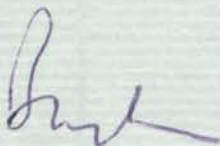
The two new points are politicisation and index linked pensions. Sir Douglas does not add anything on the latter. Consequently I believe the main story will be his passage on politicisation. This passage persuasively puts the case for a politically uncommitted Civil Service but I think paragraph 2 on page 12 really does overdo it a bit. The last sentence could usefully be edited to read:

"If person who is continually seeking to further the interests of his Minister and who sees his job as being to initiate and develop ideas within set".

I have no comments on the Industrial Relations and Privelege sections. But I have one major concern over Some Anxieties. The passage in the middle of page 20 on public v private goods can - and most probably will - be seen as a parting riposte to the Prime Minister. It is indeed conceivable that this passage could take the headlines - eg. 'Treasury wet drenches Maggie'. The sentence, "It is no part of the Civil Service's duty to resist or oppose that preference" will be brushed aside by mischief-makers, assuming they have the stamina to reach page 20.

The choice is to play safe and end the argument at line 10 - "..... research and development department." Or complete the argument with eyes open.

I hope this is helpful.



B. INGHAM

26 November 1982

