



DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY
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SIR JACK RAMPTON KCB
PERMANENT UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE

2nd May 1980

Prime Minister [Has seen]

Clive Whitmore, Esq.
No. 10, Downing Street
London SW1

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2/80*

Dear Clive

Most disappointingly I shall be abroad next Tuesday supporting the UK's Offshore Supplies efforts at a major exhibition at Houston. This means that I shall not be able to come to the Prime Minister's dinner that evening.

Being deprived of an opportunity to say something in person, I have set out in the attached note a few points which strike me as of critical importance. Obviously I would feel very pleased if the Prime Minister were able to see it, since I shall have no opportunity to make them in person. But equally obviously I leave it to you.

Yours

Paul



An Efficient Civil Service

There is a great deal of goodwill among Civil Service management for determined efforts to get a more efficient Civil Service - we believe that there is a great deal that can be done and it is immensely refreshing to have a Government that is seriously addressing its mind to the problems.

2. While the shorter term pressures for saving money and manpower are understood, the fundamental changes needed can only be achieved as part of our long term programme which has to be pursued with unremitting effort over many years.

3. As part of this, there has to be an equally continuous process of encouragement and support for management and for the Service as a whole. It is no use Ministers giving a pat on the back from time to time when something unpleasant has to be done. No one is impressed by "flannelling" and it is only by positive and continuing support that one can get the 110% of effort which is needed.

4. In spite of the overwhelming need for economy and financial constraint, as continuing policy one cannot hope for an efficient Civil Service if the working conditions are poor and deteriorating. Compared with almost any other Western civil service (and I have seen a great many of them round the world), office accommodation, modern facilities, mechanical aids, etc. are inadequate or downright bad.

5. Again as a continuing policy management can only ensure the efficiency that everyone wants by having adequate tools to do the job. As of now the system is so inflexible that the best of intentions are frustrated. The ability to cope with staff who, while not inefficient in an absolute sense, cease to fit or to be moveable is severely limited. The inducements to retire early are in most cases inadequate. The agreed procedures are often elephantine in length and complexity.



Departmental management has no ability to be flexible in terms of incentives for exceptional merits and performance. No power even to add (or to defer except in extreme circumstances) increments, etc. A special plea for small Departments who have a limited ability to switch staff round to get round pegs into round holes and square into square. There needs to be a much more determined effort Service-wide to get adequate movement and interchange so that manpower resources can be used to full effect. Small Departments themselves cannot do it. Force has to be used from the Centre.

6. The involvement and interest of Ministers in management is necessary and welcome. But responsibilities and accountability has always to be clear. To take a private sector analogy, perhaps the Secretary of State and his ministerial team can be regarded as "the Chairman" and the Permanent Secretary and top official management as "the Chief Executive". The latter must operate in an agreed framework and with approved guidelines and be answerable for implementation. The former settle the guidelines and have every right and need of oversight. And they must judge by results. It is a partnership which only works with full trust and confidence.

Jack Ramsden

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