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*From the Secretary of State*

The Rt Hon Paul Channon MP  
Minister of State  
Civil Service Department  
Whitehall  
London, SW1A 2AZ

26 September 1980

Dear Paul,

CONTROL OF MANPOWER

*will require if required*

I have seen your letter of 8 September to Willie Whitelaw inviting reflections on the role of the Minister as manager of the Department.

I must say unhesitatingly that I see myself as a politician not as a staff-manager.

The constitutional relationship between the Secretary of State and the Permanent Secretary is unique, but my own experience is that it is effective. The inevitable preoccupation of Ministers with policy issues and with Cabinet decisions means that they do not normally have the time - or the experience - to ensure that their Departments are correctly staffed to carry out their tasks. We must certainly ensure that Government does not continue with functions which should be abandoned or handed over to the private sector. But the Permanent Secretary carries the responsibility for carrying through those changes, acting under the political direction of his Minister.

In the staff cutting exercises which we have instituted since coming to office I have found that the top management of the Department has put forward constructive proposals to meet the targets we have fixed. These will result in a 17 per cent reduction in staff by 1984 and



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and 21 per cent by a year later. The Permanent Secretary is in a far better position than I to judge the validity of the staffing arguments which are advanced. This leaves me free to attend to those matters which only a Minister can handle, including the mobilisation of the necessary political support, both at Westminster and in the country, for the policies that lie behind the cuts.

I believe that this is the only way the system can work. If I did not have this confidence in my Permanent Secretary I would of course look to the Prime Minister, as Minister for the Civil Service, to move him somewhere else.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, to all Ministers in charge of Departments and to Sir Derek Rayner.

Yours ever  
John.

JOHN NOTT