

Prime Minister

Civil Service Efficiency and Manpower: C(80)43

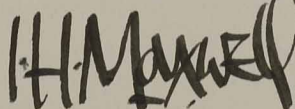
Cabinet is tomorrow discussing the Lord President's proposals for achieving our target of reducing the size of the civil service to 630,000 by April 1984. While I fully support the target itself, I regret I cannot agree to the means whereby the Lord President proposes it be achieved. His proposal that all Departments with very few exceptions, should reduce their staff numbers by 10% by April 1984 seems, if I may say so, to amount to an attempt to re-open the decision which we took on 1st May, that there should be flexibility in the way cuts are applied to different Departments.

My own departments represent only about 2% of the civil service, but they exist to fulfil statutory duties and to provide statutory services. I have no means of controlling the amount of work which comes to the courts, and it is certainly no part of our policies to lengthen delays in bringing cases to trial, or to provide the public with an inferior service. This would be the inescapable consequence of cuts on the scale which the Lord President is advocating. The savings which I have already offered to find represent the very most I can hope to secure from increased efficiency in the courts service. To go further would entail court closures and increased delays.

The same goes for the Land Registry and the Public Record Office. They cannot control the amount of work which comes to them. To find their share of the savings would mean, in the case of the Land Registry, the stopping of new registrations, and in the case of the PRO an amendment to the Keeper's statutory duties. The present exercise is designed to make the civil service more efficient, not to lead to the abandonment of worthwhile functions which Parliament has seen fit to provide for.

I would most strongly urge therefore that small departments like mine should not be subjected to arbitrary percentage cuts, but that the Lord President should discuss with individual Ministers how much it is sensible and realistic to expect particular departments to contribute, having regard to the extent to which Ministers are able to control the volume of work which their departments are required to undertake.

I am sending copies of this minute to other members of the Cabinet, the Minister of Transport and Sir Robert Armstrong.



Approved by the Lord Chancellor and signed in his absence.

23rd July, 1980