
TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

The attached paper provides a background as the basis for discussion on item four of the agenda - Political Activities of the Civil Servants - at the Leader's Consultative Committee on Wednesday 5th November.

Conservative Research Department,
24 Old Queen Street, London, S.W.1.

ANR/SMA

4.11.75

THE POLITICAL ACTIVITIES OF CIVIL SERVANTS

(Paper by the Research Department)

Recent developments make it necessary for us to consider our attitude towards the political activities of civil servants.

For some time now officials have been divided into three categories:

- (a) Those "politically free" - who are subject to almost no restrictions. This group comprises roughly speaking all industrial and non-office grades.
- (b) An "intermediate" group subject to limited restrictions and comprising typists, the lower clerical grades etc.
- (c) The "politically restricted" who are debarred from almost all forms of political activity. The executive and administrative classes form the core of this group.

For some time the National Staff Side have been unhappy about the rules and have pressed for certain changes. At the beginning of this year officials proposed to Ministers some important relaxations:

- (a) The executive officer grade (who are principally represented by the Society of Civil Servants) would be moved from the restricted to the intermediate category.
- (b) Clerical and analogous groups within the intermediate group would be treated as politically free unless they worked in certain defined areas of restriction.

The Prime Minister wrote to the Leader on October 22nd saying that the Government were considering whether the rules governing the political activities of civil servants should be liberalised and, as a matter of courtesy, reported the Government's intention when giving evidence to the Simon Commission on standards of conduct in public life, to confirm the offer outlined in the previous paragraph.

It now appears that the Royal Commission have stated that the question put to them by the Government does not fall within their terms of reference. Colleagues are invited to consider on what basis the Leader should respond to the Prime Minister's letter.

It is important to note that most of the pressure for greater political freedom is being generated by the Society of Civil Servants whose leadership is becoming increasingly militant and left-wing. It is not likely that senior officials or the First Division Association which represents them would be in favour of any change in the present rules. Nor do we know the position adopted by other civil service unions.

There seems to be no general case for any further relaxation in the rules enforced today. A possible line of argument in replying to the Prime Minister might be on the following lines:

(i) To ask what has happened to the Government's evidence to the Royal Commission and what the Government now intends to do.

(ii) To ask what are the attitudes of other civil service unions to the Government's proposal.

(iii) To stress a point made in the Prime Minister's own letter that it is of the greatest importance not to weaken the reputation of the civil service for political impartiality.

It is less clear what general posture to adopt in conclusion. There appear to be several possibilities - to ask to be kept in touch with any further developments, to ask the Government not to take any action until the Salmon Commission has reported on the wider issues of standards of conduct in public life, or to express downright opposition to any change straightaway.

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