

C(80) 20

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CABINET

DISPERSAL OF CIVIL SERVICE POSTS TO SCOTLAND

Memorandum by the Minister of State, Civil Service Department

1. Under the revised dispersal programme agreed by Cabinet last July (CC(79) 12th Conclusions, Minute 4) and announced in Parliament, it was decided that at least 2,000 Civil Service posts were to be dispersed to Scotland in the next few years. There is great political pressure in Scotland to send at least this number, and assurances have frequently been given by Ministers in public, and also in private to our Scottish backbenchers.

2. The 2,000 or so posts were to be made up of 1,400 posts from the Ministry of Defence (MOD) to Glasgow and 650 from the Overseas Development Administration (ODA) to East Kilbride. The MOD posts are not due to go to Glasgow until the mid-1980s, so there is even more importance to be attached to the East Kilbride posts which are due to be dispersed in 1980-81. In effect, the East Kilbride posts are the only Civil Service posts due to be transferred to Scotland during the lifetime of this Parliament. The Secretary of State for Scotland tells me that as a result it is politically essential for him both for the numbers to be 650 and that we should keep as closely as possible to the announced timetable.

3. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary has now minuted the Prime Minister, on 22 February, that it is no longer possible for the ODA to send more than between 400 and 450 posts owing to cuts in numbers and organisational changes. The Prime Minister has asked me to put forward some options to my colleagues as to how we should deal with this problem.

OPTIONS

4. a. We could reduce the number of posts to be dispersed to the Glasgow area including East Kilbride. If we decide on that course, that is the end of the matter. But for political reasons in Scotland and in the House of Commons, I strongly advise against this.

If this option is unrealistic, as I believe, then we must either:-

- b. Find further posts from ODA and/or the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to take up the shortfall; or
- c. Make up the shortfall with numbers from other Departments.

FURTHER DISPERSAL FROM ODA OR FCO

5. The ODA's staff complement is some 2, 500 posts including 1, 400 Headquarters posts (of which 70 are located overseas). It has five specialist units including the Directorate of Overseas Surveys (DOS). The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary has circulated a paper about the DOS (C(80) 19). It was intended originally to disperse the DOS to the Glasgow area. But last year we did not include it in the revised dispersal programme because of the cost of special accommodation, the prospect of wholesale resignations and the expected decline in demand for its services. It was said that the unit had already lost 20 per cent of its output due to resignations of specialist staff attributed to the prospect of dispersal. The cost of the special accommodation would now be some £3.4 million for which, as I understand it, the Property Services Agency (PSA) has made no provision.

6. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office and ODA are now to merge. 1, 600 FCO posts are in fact filled by Home Civil Servants. Our predecessors had planned to send 300 FCO posts to Merseyside. Last year the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary agreed that this would be unreasonable, among other reasons because there was no self-contained element that could be hived off; a high proportion of posts was filled by members of the Diplomatic Service; and it was unreasonable to further disperse a Department already spread over 120 countries.

7. The Overseas Development Administration's other specialist units are Centre for Overseas Pest Research (170 posts); Land Resources Development Centre (110); Tropical Products Institute (390), and Population Bureau (6). I am told that none of these is suitable for dispersal. Some would require the provision of costly laboratories and all have close links with institutions in the South. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary could give more information as to what effect a move to Scotland would have, in particular, on the Tropical Products Institute.

OTHER DEPARTMENTS

8. We have had endless trouble in attempting to find a dispersal package for Merseyside from other Departments. The MOD is already sending 1, 400 posts to Glasgow from London. I am told that, to find larger numbers, MOD would have to look for posts from outside London. If that is really so, then it would be undesirable.

9. It is conceivably possible that other Departments who were at one stage proposing to disperse to Merseyside or elsewhere could now send a contingent to Scotland. These included Inland Revenue, PSA, Home Office and Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. My colleagues responsible for those Departments will know whether this is a possible course. But I suspect that this would cause them just as much trouble as present plans will cause the ODA. I doubt too if such a move could be achieved as quickly as the present programme.

CONCLUSION

10. I advise my colleagues to reject Option a. If that is agreed, then, unless colleagues are prepared to provide posts for dispersal to make good the ODA's shortfall as in Option c., I see no alternative to Option b. - i.e. to ask the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to make good the shortfall from the merged Departments of the FCO/ODA.

P C

Civil Service Department

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