



HOUSE OF LORDS,
SW1A 0PW

Prime Minister

*This may be the first
of several pieces of special
reading. Lord Soames is
sending a robust reply.*

22nd December 1980

Lord President

MA 23/80

Civil Service Manpower: Estimates for
1981/82

I was unfortunately unable to be present in Cabinet on 18th December, because I had to be in the Lords to move the second reading of the Supreme ^{Court} Bill. I therefore missed your report on the Civil Service Manpower Estimates figures, but I understand that you proposed that all Departments' bids should be reduced by 0.5% and 1.25% as at 1st April 1981 and 1st April 1982 respectively.

Had I been able to be present at the meeting I would have reiterated my view that it is not acceptable to seek to apply manpower reductions of this kind on a pro rata basis across all Departments. The two of my Departments most affected by all this are the Lord Chancellor's Department (LCD) and the Land Registry. The effect of your proposal would be to reduce the staff in LCD by 125 below my manpower estimate figure for 1st April 1982, and by 70 in the case of the Land Registry.

I am sorry to be unhelpful to you over this but I have to say that cuts on this scale are simply not acceptable. So far as the LCD goes we are playing our part in the strengthening of law and order services by bringing 10 new Crown Courts into use during 1981/82. If my 1982 manpower figure is cut in the way suggested there will be a real risk of the new courtrooms coming available with no one to staff them, which would be unacceptable. I would also be unable to find the additional resources for the work on ADP which will eventually be the means of securing much more worthwhile staff savings. So far as the Land Registry goes, we have already been forced to suspend the extension of compulsory registration - against my better judgement - and any further cuts

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would risk bringing the machine to a standstill. They would also jeopardise the prospects for a significant increase in council house sales, another important part of our programme.

The numbers I am talking about are small in relation to the total figures against which you are working but they are critical to the efficient functioning of my Departments. I trust therefore that you will be prepared to agree that my manpower estimate bids should not be reduced in the new proposals which you are preparing.

I am sending a copy of this minute to the Prime Minister and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

H. of S. M.

I must add a personal point of my own. There are certain categories of public service, — the Land Reg^y is one, wh: actually make a profit. What is the sense of divorcing manpower in such cases from profitability?