



file 16
adv. D. Kaye
Civil Service

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

13 May 1980

STATEMENT ON THE CIVIL SERVICE

The Prime Minister has now decided to make her statement on the Civil Service this afternoon. I enclose for information a copy of the text which she has now agreed.

I am sending copies of this letter together with the statement to the Private Secretaries to members of the Cabinet, including the Minister for Transport, and to Geoffrey Green and David Laughrin (Civil Service Department), Murdo Maclean (Chief Whip's Office), Bill Beckett (Law Officers' Department), Mary Howat (Lord Advocate's Department) and to David Wright (Cabinet Office).

C. A. WHITMORE

Jim Buckley, Esq.,
Lord President's Office.

FINAL

With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the efficiency and size of the Civil Service.

The Government have been reviewing the efficiency of the Civil Service in the light of experience gained in our first year in office. The work of the Civil Service divides broadly into two areas. The first is the formulation of policy and the direct support for Ministers in Parliament. The second, on which the great majority of civil servants are engaged, is carrying out the executive tasks which flow from the Government's policies in the manner and to the extent decided by Ministers.

In the past, Governments have progressively increased the number of tasks the Civil Service is asked to do without paying sufficient attention to the need for economy and efficiency. Consequently staff numbers have grown over the years. This Government is committed both to a reduction in tasks and to better management. We believe that we should now concentrate on simplifying the work and doing it more efficiently. The studies which Departments have already carried out, including those in conjunction with Sir Derek Rayner, have demonstrated clearly the scope for this.

All Ministers in charge of Departments will now work out detailed plans for concentrating on essential functions, and making operations simpler and more efficient in their Departments. The preparation of these plans will be co-ordinated by my noble friend, the Lord President of the Council.

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When the Government took office the size of the Civil Service was 732,000. As a result of the steps we have already taken it is now 705,000. We intend now to bring the number down to about 630,000 over the next four years.

I recognise that contracting the size of Government always causes staff both fears of insecurity and genuine anxiety lest important work should suffer. The Government are allowing time to produce the best possible plans, to take account of the legitimate interests of the staff and to encourage them to involve themselves in drawing up proposals for reform. I stress that each year some 80,000 people leave the Civil Service on retirement or resignation. It should therefore be possible to accommodate a reduction of 75,000 spread over four years without significant compulsory redundancy. We shall of course be consulting the Civil Service Unions about implementing our plans.

My experience from visiting departments and that of Ministers and Sir Derek Rayner is that the staff want to work in and for an efficient organisation. I have been particularly impressed by the quality and enthusiasm of the young people I have met. They want more personal responsibility for providing the country with good value for money.

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It is the Government's job to ensure that the structure of the Civil Service, its working methods and the rewards it offers for success bring on the right kinds of talent; give it scope for personal initiative; and offer conditions which promote loyalty and commitment.

I believe that the great majority of civil servants will welcome the changes which I have described.