



Treasury Chambers, Parliament Street, SW1P 3AG
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PRIME MINISTER

PUBLIC OPINION: EXPENDITURE CUTS

I do not know whether you saw the results of the recent opinion poll conducted by Central Office among a sample drawn from the population generally about the balance of opinion in favour of reducing particular public expenditure programmes as opposed to maintaining them. I think that you may be interested to see the attached note by George Cardona.

2. One must not attach too much weight to an exercise of this sort, but the general order of priorities is similar to that which emerged from a similar poll in the autumn when the balance shown was between those who wanted programmes increased and those who wanted them cut. The desire to protect social services and to cut transfers, both unemployment benefit and support for industry, is interesting, as is the strong desire to cut overseas aid: these preferences were also reflected in the earlier poll. There is also an interesting contrast between the attitude to defence, where the poll shows a slight majority in favour of cutting, and law and order where there is a strong disposition against cutting. In the earlier poll there was a very large majority in favour of increasing defence, roads and aid to industry whereas now the majority is slightly the other way: the majority in favour of housing is also much lower in this poll than in the previous one.

G.H.

(G.H.)
29 February, 1980

PUBLIC OPINION ON EXPENDITURE CUTS

The results below come from an ORC survey of public opinion carried out on behalf of Central Office between 29 November and 3 December. The sample consisted of 1,044 people, representative of the electorate in Great Britain.

2. The table below shows, for each category of expenditure, the percentage of respondents who most wanted it cut, less the percentage who most wanted it safeguarded from cuts:

	<u>% difference</u>
1. Contribution to EEC	+ 68
2. Aid to overseas countries	+ 60
3. Civil Service	+ 36
4. Local Government	+ 16
5. Industry/help for companies in trouble	+ 12
6. Social security/unemployment benefits	+ 10
7. Rail and public transport	+ 7
8. Roads	+ 4
9. Defence	+ 3
10. Agriculture	- 7
11. Housing/Council Housing	- 11
12. Social Services/Home helps	- 17
13. Law and order/police	- 34
14. Education and overseas students	- 41
15. Pensions	- 43
16. NHS/Hospitals	- 70

3. The proportion of respondents who believed we were cutting each category of expenditure programme was as follows:

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	<u>%</u>
1. Education and overseas students	64
2. NHS/Hospitals	53
3. Local Government	27
4. Social Services/Home helps	26
(Housing/Council Housing	} 14
5. { Roads	
(Civil Service	
6. Contribution to EEC	13
7. Industry/help for companies in trouble	10
8. Social security and unemployment benefits	8
9. Rail and public transport	7
10. Aid to overseas countries	5
11. Defence	4
12. { Pensions	} 2
(Agriculture	
13. Law and order/Police	1

Only Defence and Law and Order/Police were mentioned as items on which expenditure was being increased.

4. The most worrying feature of this table is the high proportion of people who believe we are cutting health, which is the area people are most anxious to protect from cuts, and also an area in which we can claim that we are not planning to spend significantly less than the previous Government had planned.

5. One interesting feature of the breakdown of the results by party supporters is that our supporters are more likely than Labour's to believe we are cutting expenditure, particularly on the social services and social security. Conversely, few of our supporters think we are increasing expenditure on social services and social security, but more Labour supporters think we are doing so.

6. We are not allowed to quote this poll in public.

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