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PRIME MINISTER

BAN ON CIVIL SERVICE RECRUITMENT

I have seen a copy of the Lord President's minute to you dated 17th July about the continuation of the ban on Civil Service recruitment.

2. I endorse what he says about the indiscriminate effects of the ban which are producing serious consequences for some areas of defence operations. I have been able thus far to avoid essential support to operational tasks deteriorating to an unacceptable level by authorising limited exceptions to the ban in specially difficult cases, but these are short-term expedients and there is increasing concern about the longer-term effects. We have already missed the best part of the peak recruiting season for staff we need urgently and we are experiencing high rates of wastage in some areas - particularly with skilled people.

3. The total ban has, undoubtedly, been of value in setting the tone. But it is, inevitably, a crude instrument, not well adapted to policies and needs. My own preference would be to lift the general ban but to continue with a period of restraint within which there would be departmental flexibility to recruit the groups of staff which are most urgently needed. As far as the Ministry of Defence is concerned, I do not think this would prejudice either our 3% cut in staff costs this year or our ability to achieve whatever long-term reduction target we decide upon in September.

4. I have copied this as the Lord President's minute.

23rd July 1979

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