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PRIME MINISTER

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ORGANISATION OF THE CENTRAL DEPARTMENTS: WHITE PAPER

... I attach a redraft of the White Paper replying to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee's Report on the Future of the Civil Service Department. Sir Ian Bancroft and I have taken account of your comments on the earlier version (outlined in Mr Whitmore's minute of 20 January). The redraft also reflects views expressed by Sir Derek Rayner, Sir Douglas Wass and Sir Robert Armstrong, as well as a general tightening up of the text. Paragraph 20 in the original draft, on which you commented, was provided by the Treasury: they have revised it. It now stands as paragraph 16.

*See the Chancellor's minute at May 'A'*

In general, the redraft is a clearer statement of our priorities and goes as far as I think it can whilst still observing the courtesy of replying to the Select Committee's specific recommendations. The concluding section of the draft foreshadows the proposed White Paper on Efficiency and the Elimination of Waste, in which we shall take the opportunity in more detail to point to what has been done so far and our priorities and plans for the future. This is but a reply to the Select Committee and is drafted as such. But it also, I hope, provides a springboard for the later, more expansive and vigorous, account of our policies on Civil Service efficiency.

I think the draft should be firmer in rejecting the Committee's implicit criticism of officials. We state now, quite clearly, that the attack on inefficiency and waste depends primarily on the commitment of the Government of the day to the promotion and pursuit of efficiency and economy. The Civil Service has responded well since we came to office in seeking and implementing new ways of improving efficiency under our direction, and I think we should take this opportunity to say so publicly. I therefore propose that we should add to paragraph 12:

"Within this framework, and under the direction of Ministers, the Civil Service as a whole has responded quickly and well to the present Government's drive for increased efficiency."

Subject to your views, and to those of copy recipients, the next step might well be to circulate an agreed draft to Cabinet colleagues for information. Whether or not copy recipients of this minute need meet before that stage is a matter for consideration. But we should, I think, press on with publication as soon as possible: the longer we leave it before publishing a reply to the Report the greater the expectation that we shall be publishing a major Paper.

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The earliest we can publish the White Paper is a week after circulation to the Cabinet, and we should avoid, if possible, slipping too far into February.

Copies of this minute go to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Minister of State, CSD, Sir Ian Bancroft, Sir Douglas Wass, Sir Robert Armstrong and Sir Derek Rayner.

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SOAMES

27 January 1981

Prime Minister.

We have provisionally arranged a meeting to discuss this revised draft of the White Paper for Friday morning of this week when all those concerned can be present except the Chancellor (Sir Douglas Wass can take care of the Treasury's interests).

I am showing this to you tonight because tomorrow evening you will have Questions briefing and you should see OD papers on Thursday evening you have the 'Pillbox' Document.

Agree to go ahead with the meeting on Friday? Yes.

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