

cc Mr Gaffin

2 pps

Yes - I agree with his decision. I hope no-one is going to say how the cabinet office works

Prime Minister

Agree with the way Sir Robert Armstrong is preparing to proceed?

30

Ref. A04580

MR. WHITMORE

I understand that the Prime Minister has given her agreement to Ministers and serving civil servants taking part in a series of programmes on the Civil Service on BBC Radio 4.

2. The producer of the series, Mrs. Anne Sloman, has asked to come and see me. She will, I understand, ask me to give an interview in the series; and, if I say no, she will ask whether I would object to her asking Lord Hunt of Tanworth and would encourage him to agree to do so.

3. Unless the Prime Minister wants me to give an interview, I propose to decline to do so. I have not accepted any invitations to give radio or television or press interviews since I became Secretary of the Cabinet, and the longer I spend in the job the less inclined am I to do so. In some ways I regret this, because I think that those at the top of the Service ought to be ready to respond to opportunities to improve public understanding of the Civil Service and what it does; and how the centre of Government works is a subject of considerable public interest. But I think that, if I or any other Secretary of the Cabinet were to give such interviews, it would be bound to risk forfeiting some of the confidence and trust of the Prime Minister and of other members of the Cabinet on which one's ability to do the job properly substantially depends.

4. As to my predecessor, I shall say that it is up to him, and I do not object to his being asked. But I shall go on to say that, if I were the former Secretary of the Cabinet, I should be very conscious of the possible implications of any interview I might give for my successor in post, and should probably decline to give interviews, as I know both Lord Hunt of Tanworth and Lord Trend have so far consistently declined to do. I shall have to tell Mrs. Sloman that, if Lord Hunt consulted me, that is what I should be bound to say.

5. I believe that one of those whom Mrs. Sloman is to interview is Sir Patrick Nairne. He did a spell in the Cabinet Office, in charge of the European Secretariat, and I will suggest to her that she puts to him any points she has to ask about the centre.

6. I am sending a copy of this minute to Mr. Buckley, Civil Service Department.

RA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

30th March, 1981