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Man copy filed on Home Affairs: Policy towards Prison Service Pt 2.



*Thinking on... we should... advise the Home Office... to release... on*

QUEEN ANNE'S GATE LONDON SW 1 1AT

March 1983

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*Dear Sir... in the Prison... in the Prison... with*

PRISONS MANPOWER AND LONG TERM EXPENDITURE

Within the Home Office the detailed review of Civil Service manpower after 1984 requested in your letter of 7 January is now nearing completion. I shall be taking stock of the results myself within the next few weeks, and shall write to you before the end of the month, as you have asked. But there is one major issue on the horizon, of which I feel I ought to give you the earliest possible notice. And this letter also gives me the opportunity to consult you about my response to the Prime Minister's minute of 4 February about long term expenditure.

PRISONS MANPOWER

In last year's Public Expenditure Survey, although you were able to accept an increase in prisons manpower in 1983-84, for a number of years thereafter, we agreed to state wherever the need arose in the public expenditure in later years. I have recently reviewed the situation in the light of our political acceptance that no significant change could be expected in sentencing practice. We now have to plan in the light of the fact that the prison population will remain at present levels, 65,000-67,000, for a number of years.

I am convinced that substantial increases in prisons manpower will be necessary. There is a minimum essential requirement for the staffing of new prisons due to become available in the latter part of the decade. There is also, as you know, a deep seated problem arising from the service's dependence on undesirably high levels of overtime. I noted the existence of these requirements in my "forward look" for the Prime Minister before Christmas.

I realise that, since prison officers count as civil servants, this will go against the drift of our policy on Civil Service numbers. But I believe that the combination of continuing pressure and known additional commitments leaves me with no choice. I propose that, if you agree, our officials should meet urgently to discuss how best to take the matter forward, on the basis of a note which Sir Brian Culbert will be sending to Sir Anthony Rawlinson within the next few days. I would hope that we could carry the results of these discussions into both your manpower review and, in due course, this year's Public Expenditure Survey.

LONG TERM PUBLIC EXPENDITURE

The existence of this important prisons requirement, and the general priority which I believe we must continue to attach to law and order, are

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bound to condition my response to the Prime Minister's minute. Over 80% of the expenditure for which the Home Office carries PES responsibility is on law and order. I see no prospect of major strategic changes which would enable me to contribute to the substantial reduction in public expenditure which was discussed in Cabinet on 9 September.

In my "forward look" I identified two areas - police and prisons - where some further growth seemed necessary. There may be others. But, even with the major prisons requirement which I have signalled in this letter, I do not see the Home Office programme growing in real terms by more than a few percentage points between now and the end of the decade. If that could be achieved, it would represent considerably less rapid growth than was postulated by the report by officials which we considered on 9 September. But I can see no prospect of being able to contribute to a substantial reduction in public expenditure from present levels.

That does not mean that my mind is closed to the possibility of reductions at the margins in areas other than law and order, although these by their nature would not make any significant contribution to the Prime Minister's exercise. And even here one finds that the money is supporting policies (such as civil defence, immigration control and support for the victims of crime) to which we attach high priority. I shall, however, be looking critically at these areas in the context of this year's Public Expenditure Survey.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister and to George Younger.

*Agnes*

*Walker*

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