



Prime Minister²

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MR WICKS

ms

cc Mr Ingham
Mr J B Wright

The Cabinet Office 1916-86

I amended the proposed article as suggested by the Prime Minister, and I also made one or two other minor changes, before offering it to The Times.

2. The Times have decided that they do not want to take it. I have therefore offered it to the Daily Telegraph who, with a fine sense of topicality, have accepted it with alacrity.

3. I enclose a copy of the article as it has gone forward to the Daily Telegraph.

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ROBERT ARMSTRONG

5 December 1986

THE CABINET OFFICE 1916 TO 1986

Seventy years ago, on 9 December 1916, Sir Maurice Hankey took his place at the Cabinet table beside the Prime Minister, the Rt Hon David Lloyd George, as the first holder of the newly created post of Secretary of the Cabinet. Hankey served for 22 years, until 1938; he was followed by Edward Bridges (1938-46), Norman Brook (1947-62), Burke Trend (1963-73) and John Hunt (1973-79).

2. Until 1916 the Cabinet had met without a formal agenda, without minutes and without a Secretary. The only written record of the discussion was a letter sent by the Prime Minister to the Sovereign after each meeting and Ministers took executive action on the basis of their recollection or understanding of what had been decided. Lloyd George, on his appointment as Prime Minister in December 1916,

decided that the War Cabinet needed a Secretariat to prepare business for consideration and to record and notify decisions.

3. The Secretariat which supported Hankey was formed from the Secretariat of the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID), set up in 1904, of which Hankey was the Secretary. After the War, in 1919, it was organised into a branch for home affairs and a branch for imperial, external and defence affairs. When the CID was revived in 1922, the branch for imperial, external and defence affairs became the staff of the CID; this arrangement persisted until the functions of the CID were taken over by the War Cabinet in 1939. Hankey was the Secretary of the CID during this period; he was also Clerk of the Privy Council from 1923 to 1938.

4. The need for continuing with a separate Cabinet Office was queried after the First World War. Despite this, and an attempt by the Treasury (led by Sir Warren Fisher) to take over the function of providing the Cabinet Secretariat, the Cabinet Office retained its

independence, thanks to Hankey's determination and personal standing, and developed as a permanent part of the machinery of government at the centre.

5. The Secretariat has grown in range, to cope with the increased use of standing and ad hoc Cabinet Committees. There are branches for home affairs, economic affairs and defence and foreign affairs, to which have been added more recently a European Secretariat and a Science and Technology Secretariat. The size of the Secretariat has fluctuated, growing larger particularly in time of war; but it remains relatively small with some 55 staff (under 20 in 1916), excluding secretarial and clerical support staff. This makes for effectiveness and flexibility in adapting to varying requirements and responding to changes in pressures. All the members of the Secretariat save the Secretary himself are seconded in from other Departments for periods of two to three years: this ensures the maintenance of good contacts and exchanges of information with Departments, and provides valuable career development opportunities at the centre of

government for promising civil servants from other Departments.

6. The Cabinet Office has provided (or contributed to) the Secretariat for the United Kingdom delegation for important international meetings. It provided the Secretariat for meetings of Commonwealth Prime Ministers until the Commonwealth Secretariat was instituted. In 1970 a team of officials was brought together in the Cabinet Office to support the Minister responsible for conducting the negotiations for British entry into the European Community; after the negotiations were completed the team was continued as a European Secretariat to co-ordinate the British Government's business with and in the Community.

7. The Cabinet Office has taken on other additional functions over the years. The Central Economic Information Service, created in 1939, was divided in 1941 into an Economic Section (which was transferred to the Treasury in 1953) and a Central Statistical Office which continues as part of the Cabinet Office to this

day. From 1970 to 1983 there was a Central Policy Review Staff to provide Ministers with a central service of policy analysis and advice. When the CPRS was disbanded, its Chief Scientist remained as Chief Scientific Adviser, Cabinet Office, thus reviving (with a slight difference of nomenclature) a post which had existed in the 1960s and early 1970s. He now heads a Science and Technology Secretariat and a Science and Technology Assessment Office which together constitute a significant strengthening in the central co-ordination of the Government's domestic and international policies on science and technology.

8. The work of all the Secretariats is supported and indeed depends upon the skilful, efficient and devoted services of all those who organise meetings and manage the production and flow of the large number of documents which the office generates.

9. Edward Bridges held the post of Cabinet Secretary concurrently with that of Permanent Secretary to the Treasury and Head of the Home Civil Service from February 1945 to the end of 1946; and his successor, Norman Brook, did likewise from 1956 until his retirement in 1962. In 1981 the Secretary of the Cabinet once again became Head of the Home Civil Service (until April 1983 jointly with the Permanent Secretary to the Treasury), and the personnel and management efficiency functions of the Civil Service Department went to a Management and Personnel Office under the Cabinet Secretary which became part of the Cabinet Office in June 1983. This arrangement was queried by the Treasury and Civil Service Committee in its Seventh Report; they suggested the reconstitution of a Department for the Civil Service whose Permanent Secretary would be the Head of the Civil Service. In its response to the Committee's report, however, the Government said that it saw no reason to change the existing organisation at the present time.

10. The Cabinet Office has evolved, and will no doubt continue to evolve, in response to the requirements of the time and the priorities of particular Governments. Throughout its history, however, there has been a clear thread: the Cabinet Office has seen itself and has been seen as the servant of the Cabinet and of the Government collectively, its purpose being to promote and assist the discussion and resolution of issues that transcend departmental boundaries and the reaching and disseminating of conclusions and decisions commanding the collective assent of Ministers. It is not a "Prime Minister's Department". But the Prime Minister is of course primus inter pares among those whom it serves, and the Minister responsible for it.

11. The Cabinet Office was based in 1-4 Whitehall Gardens from 1916 to 1938, when Whitehall Gardens was demolished to make room for what is now the Ministry of Defence; in Richmond Terrace from July 1938 to December 1940; and in the Storey's Gate section of the "New Public Offices" in Great George Street from 1940 to 1964. In 1964 the Cabinet Office

moved to the old Treasury building, newly restored, in Whitehall, which communicates directly with 10 Downing Street (a propinquity which has a more than geographical significance), and it resides there to this day, as J M Keynes once said of the Treasury, "midway between Heaven and the Scottish Education Department".

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