



CABINET OFFICE

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From the Secretary of the Cabinet: Sir John Hunt GCB

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5th April, 1979

Dear Mrs Thatcher.

I am looking forward to seeing you this afternoon. I thought it might be helpful to let you have in advance a short note on the Cabinet Office. I understand that Ken Stowe will be sending you one on No. 10 shortly.

You may remember that when I succeeded Burke Trend in the autumn of 1973 I began two things - a drive against unnecessary Committee work and an attempt to make the Cabinet Office itself less compartmentalised and more cohesive. These have been maintained, though resistance to unnecessary Committee work needs regular renewing.

At the same time the use of the Cabinet Office to provide information, comments and briefing to No. 10 has increased - not just on Cabinet and Cabinet Committee papers but on other minutes and correspondence that comes to the Prime Minister. The Cabinet Office also chairs many of the more important interdepartmental Official Committees. I should however like to put our role in perspective. The Cabinet Office does not seek to push policies of its own. We aim to be - and I hope are - the best informed Department in Whitehall with "fliers" seconded to us from a wide range of Departments, and are thus in a position to give a good deal of help to the Prime Minister. At the same time we seek to be trusted not only by No. 10 but also by Departments. And we are of course in a position to see that the right levers are pulled (and to monitor the pulling of them) to ensure that what a Prime Minister wants to be done actually gets done. In all this we work very closely indeed with the No. 10 Private Office. Ken Stowe and I usually see each other several times a day: and he always attends my Forward Business meetings.

We have achieved this with fewer people than we had during the last Conservative Administration. The strength of the Cabinet Office, excluding the Central Statistical Office, is 361 now compared with 418 on 1st January 1974: and in the process of streamlining and integrating we have given up two Permanent Secretary posts. The Central Statistical Office is however carried on the Cabinet Office vote and their strength has increased from 182 on 1st January 1974 to 261 now.

/Taking

The Rt. Hon. Margaret Thatcher, MP

Taking our constituent parts separately -

The Secretariat

Reporting to me are five Deputy Secretaries:-

Peter Le Cheminant, responsible for economic, industrial and scientific affairs. He comes from the Department of Energy (and was formerly in No. 10) and is supported by an Under Secretary from the Treasury. In addition to their normal work they keep in very close touch with the Treasury over macro-economic policy, the forecasts, etc. This is the part of the Secretariat which is also heavily involved in the whole public expenditure process. It maintains close contact with Ken Berrill and the CPRS economists and often draws on CPRS views when preparing draft briefs for me to send to the Prime Minister.

Peter Harrop, responsible for home and social affairs and for the legislative programme. He comes from the Department of the Environment and is supported by an Under Secretary from the Home Office. He covers all domestic affairs other than economic. He also has under him the rump of the Constitution Unit which handled the devolution exercise.

Sir Clive Rose (due to be succeeded in the summer by Robert Wade-Gery), responsible for defence and overseas affairs. Comes from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and is supported by an Under Secretary from the Ministry of Defence. He has a fairly light load of Ministerial Committee work (mainly the Defence Committee and Southern African affairs): but a Prime Minister is necessarily involved in a lot of international work at Head of Government level and we have to maintain a capability to support this. Clive Rose also has considerable staff responsibility in relation to such matters as the nuclear deterrent, terrorism, War Book planning and civil contingencies (i. e. ensuring essential supplies in the face of strikes).

Michael Franklin, responsible for European affairs. The experiment of having a Minister for European affairs in the Cabinet Office (John Davies) was not very successful and I believe that it is right that the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary should play the main role at Ministerial level in co-ordinating our European policies. He needs however to be supported by a unit in the Cabinet Office (to knock Whitehall heads together at official level) which has access both to him and to the Prime Minister. This arrangement has worked well and is very similar to what the French do. Michael Franklin, who handles this, is a Deputy Secretary from the Ministry of Agriculture and he is supported by an Under Secretary from the Department of Industry.

Sir Brooks Richards. The Intelligence Co-ordinator. As you probably know, I am responsible to the Prime Minister for the Intelligence Community as a whole. I am also the Accounting Officer for the Secret Vote and we have the Assessments Staff, the JIC machinery, etc., within the Cabinet Office.

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The CPRS

The CPRS is accommodated in the Cabinet Office and has very close relations with the Secretariat. Each can help the other, but the CPRS is independent in what it says. Its role is of course capable of very considerable adaption to meet the requirements of the Prime Minister of the day. You know Ken Berrill. His Deputy is Gordon Downey from the Treasury and he has a first-rate young Chief Scientist in John Ashworth. The present strength of the CPRS is 19 and I do not think that any of those from outside the Civil Service have a party political connection which would make them unsuitable to serve a Conservative Administration.

The Central Statistical Office

The present Head of this is John Boreham. The CSO is of course responsible for managing the Government Statistical Service as a whole as well as for the statistics produced by the CSO itself.

Briefing for an Incoming Administration

If you are the next Prime Minister, you will not want to find a flood of paper waiting for you. I will however have briefs ready for you on what seem to be the immediate key issues and in preparing these I will of course have had access to the material which the Treasury will be preparing for an incoming Conservative Chancellor.

Yours sincerely,

John H. H.
