



CABINET OFFICE

Central Policy Review Staff

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From: John Sparrow

Dear Mr. Thatcher,

You were clearly unhappy at our meeting this morning, and that makes me unhappy too. I see and agree with the need for you to be better served, and it is not out of any wish to obstruct that I differ from you in my view of the way in which the C.P.R.S. can best improve its service to you in support of goals which I totally support.

As I see it, the tasks of the C.P.R.S. are as follows:

First, to be the guardian of the strategy. This involves a complete awareness of the Government's goals and objectives, and the scrutiny of every proposal emanating from within or from outside Government, to test its compatibility with the strategy and to draw attention to discrepancies. It also involves creative thinking about aspects of policy that might otherwise be missed, and

- the proposal of alternative and compatible solutions to those problems the originally proposed solutions to which would offend against the strategy.

Secondly, to be sufficiently involved with and aware of incipient problems and proposals, and departmental thinking generally, to be able both to influence the nature of propositions before they come to Committee, so that they appear in acceptable form, and to be able to alert you at an early stage to anything which has the appearance of intractability. I believe that we are getting better at this, but we are still a long way short of perfection, as the Shotton Paper II demonstrates. But it is my intention that we should achieve the position outlined.

Thirdly, to undertake specific studies, under your aegis, on significant broad-ranging problems normally (but not necessarily) of an inter-departmental nature.

To succeed in these tasks, we need more than our own commitment to you and to the strategy - both of which are unquestionably there. We need your belief and support, and we need contact with you

● from time to time, to exchange views and to recharge the batteries. We also need the confidence and openness of your colleagues and of departmental officials - confidence in the sense of trusting our capabilities, and confidence also in the sense of letting us know right at the outset of the problems, ideas and solutions which are at any time in their minds.

I believe that we are gaining ground on all these matters, and in particular on the last one - although your colleagues would give you a more dispassionate view. I also believe that, because we have the confidence of ministers and of officials, we are increasingly able to influence the early stages of thinking on specific issues, and thereby to reduce significantly the number of matters which come to you in unacceptable form. Of course problems will still come to you: some will always have to come to you, others will only have to do so so long as we are less than complete in our coverage, but I think that we have made considerable progress, from a substantial base, in the four months that I have been here.

● My concern is that, in seeking to change the role of the C.P.R.S., you will ultimately find that the losses outweigh the gains. This is not to say that you should not have your own staff, I accept that entirely, and see the need particularly on foreign and defence matters. Indeed, the C.P.R.S. is your own staff, and the question is really one of how best it should serve your ends.

The danger I foresee in what you have in mind is that we would lose some of the confidence that is so necessary to our working successfully for you. Since I have been here I have devoted a fair amount of time and energy to the building-up of that confidence, in ministers and in officials, and I think that we are beginning to see the fruits of that effort. When we have completed the process, as I hope and intend to do, we should be very well placed to serve you to the ends you have in mind, more so in my view than if we were to start all over again in a new disguise.

This is not to say that everything is line-far from it. Even the goals I have described have still to be attained, and will have to be constantly pursued. You need a staff of your

own, and you should have it, but the C.P.R.S., also your staff, should operate in tandem with your "own" staff and ~~be~~ in contact with you, if the best results are to be obtained. We already do this, in varying degrees, with the Policy Unit, with your private office and with the Cabinet office, and we should do it (and do it better) with any new staff you have.

This is too long a letter, but the subject is important. We are entirely at one on objectives; it is only on means to an agreed end that we differ and, if you would like to discuss matters further, I would be very happy to do so. It is not in my nature to be obstructive or obscurantist, but it is my job to give you the best advice that I can, and that I am trying to do.

You may need to be reminded that I remain your loyal and obedient servant.— but I do!

Yours sincerely,  
 John Sparrow.

P.S. I have some hopefully constructive ideas which will be fed into the exercise which Clive and Robert are co-ordinating.  
 JK.