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cc. Market etc.

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

29 April 1980

BF 25-80

Meeting with Permanent Secretaries

When the Prime Minister saw you this morning she told you that she was becoming increasingly aware that the task of improving management in the Civil Service was far bigger than she had earlier thought. The bureaucracy had a life of its own and exercised almost as many constraints on Permanent Secretaries as it did on Ministers. Moreover, because the attitude of the unions was often one of resistance and sometimes even of confrontation, getting better management in the Civil Service was much more difficult today than it had been a few years ago. The scale of problem was therefore very large. Sir Derek Rayner was doing a very good job in this area, but this was only a start. The Prime Minister was seeking ideas about how to set about the task, and she wondered whether she should see Permanent Secretaries about it. If so, there was the question of how best to meet them. Should she, for example, see them without their Ministers present?

You said that the Civil Service was there to serve the Government of the day. The present Government had policies and an approach to management which were very different from those of its predecessor, and this required a change of attitudes on the part of the Civil Service. You believed that such a change was already happening. Permanent Secretaries were already trying very hard to move their Departments in the new direction, and it would greatly encourage them if the Prime Minister were to see them. The meeting might best be confined to the 24 or so Permanent Secretaries who were Heads of Departments, and it would be better if the Prime Minister saw them all together rather than in two or more groups. One possibility was for her to arrange a simple dinner, preceded by a lengthy pre-dinner period during which she would be able to mingle with the Permanent Secretaries. There would also be an opportunity to talk to them further after dinner. You did not think that Ministers would mind if they were not present.

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The Prime Minister said that she welcomed your suggestion, and would arrange a dinner accordingly. She would, however, mention it during the forthcoming Cabinet discussion on Civil Service manpower and management to make sure that no Ministers objected.

C. A. WHITMORE

Sir Ian Bancroft, G.C.B.

MANAGEMENT IN CONFIDENCE: PERSONAL