

DOUGLAS WASS'S RIPA LECTURE

I find this an interesting talk of the kind I look for in the head of the Civil Service of which I am a member.

But this raises the question whether it will merit the epithets - a apologist, complacent, self-satisfied, etc. That seems to be the main charge against which Sir Douglas should guard himself, for the label could damage the overall message. I think he does this adequately on page 2 in which he says the service lacks complacency and self-assurance. But I think it would help if, in selling the speech to the media and in any off-the-cuff remarks Sir Douglas makes, we and he say something to this affect:

"The paper portrays a Service which far from being complacent is lacking in self-assurance, no doubt because of the many criticisms and attacks upon it. Sir Douglas/I am far from complacent. But what Sir Douglas/I think we/I must do is to try to secure not merely more informed criticism but also a more balanced approach to some very serious questions about the Civil Service which do in fact affect all our citizens."

I find the arguments well made, and I have only the following comments on some of the main issues:

Efficiency

If the need - as I believe it is - is to guard against over positive statements, I wonder whether the insertion of the following penultimate sentence on page 6 might to be helpful:

"It is not my experience that Civil Servants as a race are Luddite or obstructive of change whatever the popular or cultivated view of them may be."

In the second paragraph on page 6 I found myself shaken by quests for efficiency and accuracy; surely we should now pursue the quest for efficiency (as well as accuracy) with the same dedication that our forebears pursued the quest for accuracy (as well as efficiency). There are some of my clients who would say the present words put efficiency before accuracy.

Accountability

I think it would be helpful if in one sentence or so Sir Douglas could rehearse at the end of this section on page 10 precisely how the Service does now pursue the most rigorous standards of accountability.

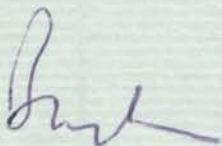
The two new points are politicisation and index linked pensions. Sir Douglas does not add anything on the latter. Consequently I believe the main story will be his passage on politicisation. This passage persuasively puts the case for a politically uncommitted Civil Service but I think paragraph 2 on page 12 really does overdo it a bit. The last sentence could usefully be edited to read:

"If person who is continually seeking to further the interests of his Minister and who sees his job as being to initiate and develop ideas within set".

I have no comments on the Industrial Relations and Privelege sections. But I have one major concern over Some Anxieties. The passage in the middle of page 20 on public v private goods can - and most probably will - be seen as a parting riposte to the Prime Minister. It is indeed conceivable that this passage could take the headlines - eg. 'Treasury wet drenches Maggie'. The sentence, "It is no part of the Civil Service's duty to resist or oppose that preference" will be brushed aside by mischief-makers, assuming they have the stamina to reach page 20.

The choice is to play safe and end the argument at line 10 - "..... research and development department." Or complete the argument with eyes open.

I hope this is helpful.



B. INGHAM

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