



File 16

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

24 November 1982

Michael  
You may like to  
read this, though  
I would not give it  
much priority.

Thank you for your letters of 17 November. Your paper you gave to the Manchester Statistical Society will, as the bureaucratic phrase goes, be read with interest here. As for your other letter, I will show this to the Prime Minister, and I know she will want to give Keith Joseph a chance to comment on it, before replying herself.

W  
24/11

I doubt if anybody will be doing much moving here before the Election, whenever that turns out to be, but thank you for your kind words. I would say the same to you, but I am not sure there is much higher you can go.

F 100.F.S

Professor J. M. Ashworth.



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From the  
Vice-Chancellor

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JMA/HP.

17th November, 1982.

Mr. W. Rickett,  
Private Secretary to  
the Prime Minister,  
10 Downing Street,  
LONDON.

*replied via 28/11*  
Dee Willie,

In view of this morning's item in 'The Times Diary', I thought you might like to have a copy of the enclosed. Whether you wish to show it to anyone else I leave to your good sense and judgement. . . . .

I have been meaning to write for some time along the lines of the attached letter which I would be grateful if you could forward. It is not every day that Salford finds itself in the exclusive company of Oxford and Cambridge (although it is a sign of the times to see them join us in the "Top Ten" of The Financial Times's University employment league table). I hope the Prime Minister is pleased by the increase in the 'A' level scores of our entrants - presumably this was one of the objectives of the present policies. I am rather ambivalent about it all - it is unlikely that anyone else can do as well as we used to do for those poorly prepared by the schools (see the last column of the FT table) and it is by no means obvious to me that we will be able to cope with those better prepared by the schools in ways that are significantly better than say the universities of Leicester, Liverpool etc., where they have traditionally gone.

I hope everything goes well with you. Isn't it time you moved on to other (higher?) things?

*Yours truly*  
*John*

ON THE GIVING AND RECEIVING OF ADVICE (IN WHITEHALL AND SALFORD).

PAPER FOR THE MANCHESTER STATISTICAL SOCIETY, 16TH NOVEMBER, 1982.

J.M. ASHWORTH.

In the past 14 months I have had the unusual experience of being translated from the post of Chief Scientist in the Central Policy Review Staff (CPRS) in the Cabinet Office - where I was responsible for seeing that the Cabinet obtained, when appropriate, suitable scientific and technological advice - to the post of Vice-Chancellor of Salford University - where I have had to shoulder the responsibility for managing an Institution in the crisis that resulted from the decision of the University Grants Committee to cut its recurrent grant by 44% two months before I became Vice-Chancellor. I have thus experienced a sudden transformation from being an adviser to those (Cabinet Ministers) who have to manage crises to being, myself, a recipient of advice on how to manage a major crisis. I do not think there can be many who have had such a rapid translation from a position of power without responsibility to what, as any Vice-Chancellor will tell you these days, often seems like a very visible position of great responsibility without some very necessary powers! When I was invited by your Secretary to talk to you tonight it occurred to me that this was the perfect excuse and stimulus to reflect on the problems of giving and receiving advice in crisis situations and - if they will forgive the presumption - for offering a series of "do's and dont's" to those who find themselves either at the giving or the receiving end. But first, let me begin by briefly describing the job of Chief Scientist, CPRS, since I imagine that whereas most of you have at least some idea of what a Vice-Chancellor is and does, you have only the haziest of notions of what the CPRS is and does.

Many of the misunderstandings about the CPRS stem from the unfortunate way in which it has become known as the "Government's Think Tank". Think Tanks are an

American invention. The first was the RAND Corporation which was brought into being to help the United States Military (particularly the Air Force Staff) work out the strategic doctrines appropriate for the design and deployment of nuclear weapons. Subsequently, the remits given to the RAND Corporation widened and others - such as the Brookings Institution in Washington - were set up to address specifically civilian tasks. The characteristics of a classical Think Tank of the RAND/Brookings Institute kind are:-

- 1) a commitment to objective, interdisciplinary analysis of policy and policy making
- 2) a critical mass (say 15-20) of full-time professional staff working in teams with full access to all or nearly all of the existing information on the issues under examination
- 3) considerable, if not quite complete, freedom to carry out research focused on the evaluation of basic policies rather than the more efficient implementation of current policies and to publish the results and
- 4) dependence on a variety of funding agencies for research contracts with Government(s) as only one (if often the major) client.

The Central Policy Review Staff (CPRS) satisfies the first two of these criteria but not the last two. It is, I think, best considered as a hybrid organisation mid-way, as it were, between a Think Tank sensu stricto and the kind of "Brains Trust" or informal ad hoc group of "wise persons" that rulers have traditionally gathered about them. Professor Yehezkel Dror (to whom I am indebted for this analysis) has called attention to the proliferation of such units (which he terms "policy analysis units") amongst governments in the past twenty years.

The distinction between:

Think Tanks  
Policy Analysis Units  
Brains Trusts

is a useful one and has been somewhat confused by referring to the CPRS as the "Government's Think Tank". It is interesting to see, by the way, how in recent weeks the Prime Minister has been seen by a number of commentators to be complementing the CPRS by a traditional "Brains Trust" comprising so far, a trusted economist (Professor Alan Walters), diplomat (Sir Anthony Parsons), management expert (Sir Derek Rayner) and defence expert (Sir Frank Cooper). But I am being carried a little away from my main theme for tonight; let me return to the CPRS - what it is, what it does, and how it does it.

Giving Advice - the Central Policy Review Staff (CPRS).

The CPRS was created by Mr. Heath who had been struck by the contrast between his harrassed existence in office as a Minister, when he found himself "bogged down" in administrative detail, and his comparatively tranquil existence when out of office in Opposition and was able to think widely and strategically. His notion of the CPRS was very much that of a body whose role was to remind a Prime Minister and Cabinet harried by day-to-day problems of Government that they had a collective, strategic view formed whilst they had been in opposition and to which they should cleave whilst in Government. The White Paper "The Reorganisation of Central Government" (Cmd.4506) published in October, 1970, said of the CPRS that:

"Under the supervision of the Prime-Minister, it will work for Ministers collectively; and its task will be to enable them to take better policy decisions by assisting them to work out the implications of their basic strategy in terms of policies in specific areas, to establish the relative priorities to be given to the different sectors of their programme as a whole, to identify those areas of policy in which new choices can be exercised and to ensure that the underlying implications of alternative courses of action are analysed and considered.

The new staff will not duplicate or replace the analytical work done by departments in their own areas of responsibility. But it will seek to enlist their co-operation in its task of relating individual departmental policies to the Government's strategy as a whole. It will, therefore, play an important part in the extended public expenditure survey process described below, and it will also be available to promote studies in depth of inter-departmental issues which are of particular importance in relation to the control and development of the Government's strategic objectives."

It is interesting to reflect that of all the organisational innovations described in Cmnd.4506 only the CPRS is still in existence. The reason for this is partly that the remit described above is, in fact, extremely general and has thus allowed the CPRS to adapt as circumstances, and Prime Ministers, have changed but mainly, I believe, because the first Head of the CPRS, Lord Rothschild, established certain conventions and working practices which have meant that that potential for flexibility has been seized on and exploited by his successors.

#### Size and Composition.

The first of these conventions is size. The CPRS usually has between 15 and 20 members (a number which can be fitted conveniently around the large table which dominates the Head of the CPRS's office and which provides the focus for much of its activities as well as for the regular Monday morning staff meeting). About half of these are career civil servants on secondment from their departments and the other half are recruited from outside the Civil Service - from universities (as I was), industry, the City, local government and international organisations. This results naturally in a number of disciplines (scientists, social scientists, accountants, economists) being represented and also in a non-hierarchical structure. The normal length of stay in the CPRS is between two and three years and, most important, at the end of this time members return to their parent organisations (or departments in the case of Civil Servants). For practical, career reasons this means that the average age of the CPRS will be in the mid-thirties to early forties.

The staff members of the CPRS are thus not in competition with one another for promotion; the CPRS is not, of itself, a promotional posting (although the subsequent careers of members of the CPRS suggest that few careers have been harmed by the experience!) and thus a mutually supportive and collaborative work style has evolved naturally. Further, since it has not proved possible

to develop any rational means of calculating what a member of the CPRS should be paid the decision was taken to adopt the rule that whilst in the CPRS its members should "neither win nor lose" financially. Since a 35 year-old whizz-kid banker or accountant is usually paid far more than a 35 year-old University lecturer (or even Professor) this has resulted in some curious anomalies but another potential source of friction, rivalry and tension has been thereby removed.

Traditionally and, on occasions notoriously, the CPRS has also tried to ensure that between a quarter and a third of its staff are female. In part this reflects the way in which the Civil Service has been a career of choice for clever women graduates in the past decade but, in part, it is a recognition that such a policy provides a useful counterbalance to a bureaucracy which at its highest levels is virtually exclusively male.

I would strongly advise any ruler or top executive/decision-taker who wanted to establish near him/<sup>her</sup> a policy advice unit of the CPRS kind to think seriously of emulating what I believe to have been the key features of the composition of the CPRS namely:

- (1) small size, i.e. 15 - 25
- (2) average age in the mid thirties
- (3) average residence time short (2-4 years)
- (4) a non-hierarchical and non-competitive work environment
- and (5) at least a quarter of the staff members should be female.

#### Work Programme.

Let me turn now from the size and composition of the CPRS to the work it does. I find it much more difficult to make useful generalisations on this topic. In part this is because in the five years that I was a member of the CPRS I served under two Prime Ministers (Mr.Callaghan and Mrs.Thatcher), two



Heads of the CPRS (Sir Kenneth Berrill and Mr. (now Sir) Robin Ibbs and two Secretaries of the Cabinet (i.e. Civil Service Heads of the Cabinet Office; Sir (now Lord) John Hunt and Sir Robert Armstrong). The day-to-day life of a member of the CPRS is determined by the relationship between the Prime Minister, the Secretary of the Cabinet and the Head of the CPRS; how they see their roles; what sort of help they want or need (by no means the same thing) and how they interact together. In addition, of course, events take their course; there is a natural rhythm to a year's work (building up to a major "panics" before budgets, or recesses or Summits or Fridays or whatever) as well as to an administration's life cycle (elections cast long shadows, in all directions and relationships, between the Prime Minister and his/her Cabinet colleagues or between the colleagues themselves are always changing as reputations are mysteriously made or lost). All this makes generalisation difficult or trite. But let me try.

A Unit like the CPRS should be given a wide range of tasks and it should always be kept very busy. The broad remit of Cmnd.4506 enjoined the CPRS to "work for Ministers collectively" - not for the Prime Minister notice, or any sub-set of Ministers, but for the Cabinet as a whole. All other civil servants work within a departmental framework and work ultimately to and for an individual Minister and within his/her policy framework. The CPRS is thus uniquely privileged in being able to transcend this limitation but it nevertheless has, in offering advice, to be seen to be helping individual Ministers to relate their policies and decisions to the Government's strategy as a whole. This task can be carried out in a variety of ways with the balance, or mix, varying from time to time and from administration to administration.

#### Strategy reviews.

At regular intervals the CPRS attempts to take stock, across the board, of

the problems facing the Government both in the shorter and longer term. The results of this exercise can be presented to Ministers in a variety of ways depending on taste and circumstances. Alternatively these reviews can be used merely to keep track of the CPRS's own work programme and to highlight gaps, tensions or omissions in the policy making process. Often such reviews suggest subjects which may require study in depth; or they can give early warning of decisions which are likely to be coming before Ministers and on which the CPRS should be prepared to offer specific advice.

#### Major studies.

Normally the CPRS is involved in two or three major studies at any one time. The subjects and results are usually kept confidential but examples of exceptions to this general rule are Energy Conservation (1974); the Future of the UK Power Plant Manufacturing Industry (1976); Population and the Social Services (1977) and Education Training and Industrial Performance (1980). These reports are similar to the output of a Think Tank of the classical RAND/Brookings Institute type and their production helps build up, amongst the members of the CPRS, a specialist competence in certain policy areas. This is necessary both for other activities and for the maintenance of a degree of professionalism in certain kinds of policy analysis. The initiative for these in-depth studies may come directly from Ministers (often a Cabinet committee) or from the CPRS itself.

#### Programme analysis and review.

Cmd. 4506 initiated a formal system of stock taking (the PAR system) whereby major policy areas, often defined in budgetary terms, were to be reviewed by the relevant department(s) in conjunction with Treasury, the Civil Service Department and the CPRS according to a regular cycle. Enthusiasm in Government for a formal PAR system has waxed and waned with the years but the need for

some sort of regular review process is generally accepted. The difficulty has been to find a device (or set of devices) whereby enthusiasm for the review process can be kept alive and periodically rekindled. The trouble is that such reviews are often technically very difficult to do, take up an immense amount of time and frequently produce results which are of no great Ministerial interest. At present there seems to be a distrust for the formalities of the PAR system and a greater reliance on ad hoc reviews and individual entrepreneurship as encouraged by Sir Derek Rayner's efficiency audits - with their "Rayner's Raiders" overtones. It is sad, but I suspect inevitable, that these two styles should be seen as mutually exclusive.

Preparation of collective briefs.

The CPRS sees the papers prepared for discussion in Cabinet and in Cabinet committees and it decides whether or not to prepare a brief for Ministers on any issue raised in these papers. Much of the excitement and a lot of the tension of being in the CPRS stems from the work involved in the preparation of these briefs. The aim of collective briefs is to ensure that discussions in Cabinet and Cabinet committee meetings do not degenerate into arguments between the two or three Ministers with a departmental axe to grind whilst a silent majority - insufficiently briefed by their own departments to realise what the fuss is all about or to appreciate the consequences a decision one way or the other may have for the Government's general strategy - looks on. An important part of the CPRS's task is to generate amongst Ministers a demand for briefing of this kind - and no more presumptuous (or potentially dangerous) task can be imagined. For on any one issue there will be at least one Minister who will not regard the CPRS brief as a help to good Government and, in time, all Ministers (including the Prime Minister) can be expected to harbour the thought that the CPRS has outlived its usefulness. The fact that the CPRS has survived demonstrates, I suppose, better than anything else that the

algebraic sum of these positive and negative Ministerial reactions has been positive. It all makes for a certain (creative) tension, however!

#### Other activities.

The CPRS is physically and constitutionally part of the Cabinet Office and depends on the Cabinet Office secretariat for much routine information. In return the Cabinet Office secretariat sometimes will look for help from the CPRS in areas where there might be particular expertise - this was especially, but by no means exclusively, true of scientific and technological matters. In addition members of the CPRS are in constant contact with the civil servants in other departments; obtaining information; following up Ministerial decisions; keeping in touch with policy developments and so on. All this takes time, and valuable time, away from "Think Tank" activity but without it much of the CPRS work would appear even more peripheral and remote from the day-to-day hurly-burly of departmental administration than it does at present to the hard-pressed Minister or civil servant.

#### Special role of the CPRS in Science and Technology.

I was unique amongst members of the CPRS in having a special title: Chief Scientist. It is, I suppose, a tribute to the perceived importance of science and technology and the strength of the science lobby, that I should have been singled out and that we did not also have a Chief Economist, Chief Sociologist etc. - although it would often have been possible to identify amongst colleagues in the CPRS those who could have been so described. It was true, of course, that the special title carried with it some special responsibilities. I had a specific responsibility for some aspects of our scientific relationships with foreign countries, for example, and also had a particular responsibility for overseeing the work programme of the Advisory Council for Applied Research and Development (ACARD). I was also ex officio a member of a number of

committees responsible for various aspects of our national scientific and technological policy such as the Advisory Board for the Research Councils (ABRC) and the co-ordinating Committee of Chief Scientists and Permanent Secretaries designed to fill that "gap at the centre" which has been identified as a fundamental weakness of the highly decentralised policy making system established as a consequence of the Rothschild Report in 1972.

In acquiring a Chief Scientist the CPRS thus got much more than another scientifically qualified member with a fancy title. It now had formal access to a standing Council (ACARD) of extremely distinguished (and, as it proved, hard working) industrial technologists and representation on ABRC as well as the co-ordinating Committee of Chief Scientists and Permanent Secretaries and a diversity of international bodies. In bureaucratic terms this carried with it the opportunity for a different kind of influence as well as the implication of a changed style of work - at least as far as scientific/technological issues were concerned. In 1976 the members of the CPRS were rather apprehensive about what this would mean for the Unit as a whole but, as things turned out, I believe that this added dimension to the CPRS's activities strengthened the organisation considerably. The ACARD reports:

The Applications of Semiconductor Technology (1978)

Industrial Innovation (1979)

Joining and Assembly : the Impact of Robots and Automation (1979)

Technological Change : Threats and Opportunities for the United Kingdom (1980)

Computer Aided Design and Manufacture (1980)

R & D for Public Purchasing (1980)

Information Technology (1980)

Biotechnology (1980) - a joint report with the Royal Society and ABRC.

Facing International Competition (1982)

The Food Industry and Technology (1982).

are a tribute to the industry of those concerned and a good indication of the sorts of issues which were occupying the CPRS in the field of science/technology policy at the time. The knowledge built up during the work leading up to those publications was of great value to the CPRS in its other work as, in my view every bit as useful, was the public response to ACARD reports. It is often forgotten that Ministers read newspapers as well as official papers and the message of the latter can often be usefully complemented by the opinions of the former (especially when amplified by TV as happened in 1978 with the brilliant BBC Horizon programme "When the Chips are Down" on the possible applications of semi-conductor technology to our social, economic and industrial infrastructure). This influence was reciprocated. I was scrupulously careful to avoid being seen to set up a sub-unit within the CPRS and so the scientific/technological work of the Chief Scientist and ACARD often strained a strict definition of "applied R&D". This led to some tensions within the bureaucratic machine but, fortunately, those who argued for a strict and narrow interpretation of ACARD's remit lost the argument. At this level of policy making there is, in my opinion, no point in pretending that it is possible to draw a clear distinction between 'fundamental' or 'applied R&D' and between the latter and great chunks of 'industrial/energy/environmental policy'.

#### Work style.

The above makes a forbidding list of activities and different Cabinets (and Prime Ministers) or the same ones at different times only required a selection. Individual members of the CPRS always tried to keep a balance between their work on short, medium and long term policy issues - even if Cabinets did not. A number of rules for conducting studies were also discovered (sometimes painfully) which I would recommend to anyone trying to emulate the CPRS.

These were:

- (i) never have a one person team;
- (ii) never let a study take longer than three months (at the very most);
- (iii) never forget the opportunity costs of having a third or more of the CPRS involved in any one study and avoid such studies if you can (or get someone else - like ACARD - in to help);
- (iv) always ensure that an individual has a mix of types of work;
- (v) ensure that someone who is a "senior" in one team is simultaneously a "junior" in another;
- (vi) nourish the contacts individuals have with genuine "Think Tanks" outside the bureaucracy - especially where they are looking at policies or areas which go against the declared policy interests or prejudices of Ministers i.e. be a little "counter cultural" but do not invest much CPRS staff effort or time in this;
- (vii) be resigned to the fact that for a body like the CPRS there can be no rules and that all of the above will be broken at one time or another.

It is difficult for a player to see much of the game or to judge how effective his team is really being. Certainly I would not presume to judge how effective the CPRS has been over the five years I belonged to it. It was extremely hard work, tremendous fun and a marvellous education - I wouldn't have missed it for worlds but that is hardly an evaluation. I think the best I can do is quote Sir Kenneth Berrill's words at the conclusion to his article on the CPRS in 1977: "CRPS believes that in various ways whether by long-term strategy papers, major studies, collective briefs, participation in PAR's or interdepartmental committees it has, at a relatively, small cost, both helped to improve the machinery for decision-taking at the centre and helped departments to relate their individual policies to the Government's strategy as a whole."

Receiving advice.

So much for the CPRS and the problems associated with giving advice. What about the problems of someone receiving advice? The people I have in mind are those who are visibly and publicly accountable and responsible for a discrete organisation - the Rulers of countries, the Bosses of commercial firms, Vice-Chancellors of universities, Headmasters or Headmistresses of schools and so on.

The first, and in some ways by far the most important point to make is that such people have to be answerable for an enormous range of different activities - investment decisions, personnel management, customer/client complaints, marketing/PR policies and so on and on and on. They will, of course, be helped to cope with managing most, if not all, of these activities but if something goes wrong (or right) they are the ones who will carry the blame (or receive the congratulations). A number of things flow immediately from this. Such people - let me call them "rulers" for the sake of brevity - receive or are told an immense amount, disparate facts, opinions, rumours, gossip, etc., which they must keep or discard and then shape or fit into some sort of manageable form. They will be offered and will need help with this but only they can know all the information that comes in and, in the last resort, only they can integrate it. Much of it will be confidential (personal records of employees, secret service reports, marketing information of competitors' products etc.) and a frighteningly high proportion will be uncertain, of doubtful or unknown veracity or just plain wrong. This means that rulers are inescapably lonely and thus are usually given kinds of support other than the purely intellectual. Thus the Prime Minister, Vice-Chancellors, Directors of Marks & Spencers, etc. have houses and chauffeur driven cars provided for them. They embody or personify the organisation they "rule" and thus have to participate in representational or ceremonial functions for which they are often given special clothes, (e.g. academic or ceremonial dress), a special life style and are effectively



prevented from certain kinds of acts or ways of living. The apocryphal "perfect" newspaper headline "Bishop in Sex Change drama dashes to Palace" expresses what I mean perfectly. I do not think that such people need our sympathy - after all presumably they chose their jobs knowing what was in store - but they do need to recognise that because of their position they will be offered (and need) support of a variety of different kinds - intellectual, administrative/managerial, physical, emotional, political (with a 'p' or a 'P') - and nothing is more fatal than for them to muddle these up. Thus the CPRS was set up to give intellectual and administrative support to the Cabinet. It is ill-equipped to give political advice. Yet Cabinet Ministers have to deal with problems which always have a political dimension and are frequently tempted to expect that from the CPRS - especially if they have come to rely on and appreciate the intellectual advice they have been getting. There is one further, very significant aspect, of this symbolic role and the loneliness and responsibility that goes with it. All need some sort of emotional comfort and support and the spoils of office have traditionally always included the possibility of personal indulgences - power, as Henry Kissinger has recently pointed out, is the greatest aphrodisiac known - and President Kennedy was neither the first nor the last to capitalise on this. The temptation to look to wives, lovers, husbands, chauffeurs, hairdressers, old school chums and especially family relatives for advice and support in fields other than the emotional/personal is ever present and often disastrous. The temptation for a 'ruler' to trust his intuition or instinctive 'gut'feelings is always strong because of the uncertainty inherent in the data on which he or she has to base his or her judgements. Those who offer emotional/personal support and advice, whether they do it consciously or not, pander to that temptation because what they are interested in is the 'ruler' as a person not as the centre of a decision taking and making process.

There is a surprising lack of academic study of and advice directed at

political rulers, although rulers of companies and similar organisations are somewhat better served by business schools and other organisations. Let me, therefore, try and draw up a list of "do's ; and dont's". The most important I have already discussed -

- 1) distinguish and differentiate between the various kinds of support your organisation will provide (intellectual, emotional/physical, political, administrative/managerial) and never muddle them up
- 2) don't trust your intuitive judgements or gut reactions blindly - always check them with those whose job it is to give you intellectual support

It follows from the above that you should establish near yourself a group designed to give you this intellectual support and analysis. The CPRS was set up to help do just this and most large organisations now have some kind of corporate planning staff within their ruler's office. Smaller organisations can adopt less formal devices but woe-betide the ruler who does not follow this advice - unless he is unusually far sighted or lucky he is condemned to be permanently surprised by events.

- 3) interact closely with your staff, trust them and invest a significant part of your time in them. They must know your strengths and weaknesses, be sensitive to your worries, feelings and preferences and be privy to as much of your thinking as the conventions (or rules) of confidentiality allow.

This is easy to say and very difficult to do because all rulers like to give the impression of omniscience. Yet you have to admit to your staff that you

have made mistakes and errors (even if by hard work and opportunism you have turned them to ultimate advantage) because you and they must learn from them. There is also another danger in this process. Rulers, by definition, are confident (usually over-confident) people and thus will tend to constrain and restrain their staff to work within their own intellectual boundaries. These are always too narrow for the solution of the problems that will arise and, hard though it is, a ruler must insist on his staff doing at least a modicum of unconventional even apparently crazy thinking - a "Think Tank" that does not think the unthinkable from time to time is useless.

4) do not despise formalised methodologies

Just as the eye needs a telescope or microscope the better to see the distant or the small so the brain needs intellectual tools and instruments to handle complexity, face uncertainty and impose some sort of structure on "reality". Rulers distrust such things - it is a rare politician, corporate chairman or even Vice-Chancellor who is happy to expose his strategic thinking to sensitivity analysis, econometric modelling, simulation and gaming, decision tree analysis, alternative scenarios, issue mapping, breaking point or critical path analysis and so on. Often rulers are right to be distrustful yet such techniques can be powerful aids to policy analysis and to identifying the strength and weaknesses of proposed policies and actions. Like any tools they should be used with care and are neglected at the ruler's peril. Politicians who profess to despise the social sciences are either liars or fools. This is not to say that they should be expert or even familiar with any of these techniques but they should expect their staff to know of them and to use them when and where appropriate.

- 5) beware of "facts"; graphs that start at "now"; numbers without error estimates and simple solutions

Rulers have to deal with those problems and issues that others cannot or have not been able to deal with. This is a wearisome and often depressing business and the temptation to clutch at the simple sword with which to cut the Gordian knot is often overwhelming. Your staff must always remind you of the complexities, the ambiguities, the uncertainties and - even if they provide you with simplistic solutions for PR or other purposes - should always remind you of the different "realities" that lie behind the "facts" and "numbers" that you use.

- 6) weigh up the costs and benefits of ambiguity with especial care

Faced with the perils of an oversimplistic solution and the complexities of "reality" the temptation to do nothing is often considerable. There is always great merit in "masterly inactivity" and "do nothing" is an option which you and your staff should always explore. I was told, the no doubt apocryphal, story when in the Civil Service of the devout Permanent Secretary in the Treasury who thanked his God every night that his and the Chancellor's powers were so limited. Mrs. Williams, when talking of the successes and failures of the 1964 Labour government rounded on those baiting her with, "what you must remember is that any reform which does not achieve the opposite of its stated intention must be considered a success". The Civil Service, like any bureaucracy, is full of weary and battle scarred veterans of the battles waged by eager reformers. Of course, they have a point but I doubt whether Rulers should take too much notice of them. The attractions of doing nothing are usually so obvious and well presented by those who offer administrative or managerial support that they are unlikely to be overlooked and

if the Ruler is not to champion the innovative who will? In practice the attractions of doing nothing are usually evident in the short term whilst the benefits of change (if there are any) can only be enjoyed in the long term. Rulers are always having to make very difficult and painful choices between the short term and the long term; between the pleasures of doing nothing with the effort of successfully achieving change and the ever present attractions of ambiguity against the perils of precision. Given the inherent stability of the bureaucracy that surrounds a Ruler I would always advise that a Ruler should

- 7) be creative and innovative and always favour the long term over the short term

in the confident expectation that for much of the time those who press for the converse of this will (and probably should) prevail.

Finally, there are two maxims which are almost as important as my first - and as often go unobserved.

- 8) always plan for failure; hope for the best but have a plan for the worst. No position is more visible and exposed than the one at the top and
- 9) accept final responsibility.

Nothing is more demoralising for those who support a Ruler if they find themselves blamed for every failure and denied the recognition that comes from success. Since a Ruler is going to receive the public rewards of success

(however, ill deserved his or her staff might feel these to be) it is only just that he should receive the blame for failure. Indeed one of the purposes of having Vice-Chancellors, Prime Ministers, Chairmen of Boards of Directors, Headmasters and Headmistresses and so on is that they can indeed carry away with them the burdens of failure and allow their institutions fresh starts and, hopefully, better futures. If Rulers should be committed to change it is perhaps only fitting that those ruled should be able to change their Rulers.

JMA/HP.  
1.11.82.