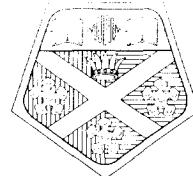


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APPOINTMENTS IN THE HIGHER CIVIL SERVICE:

Assessing a 'Thatcher Effect'

by

David Richards

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Introduction

There exists a vast literature on Margaret Thatcher and her administration analysing and discussing what has become known as the Thatcher revolution or phenomenon. One constantly recurring debate in both academic and media circles centres on the degree of interference by Mrs Thatcher in the promotion and appointment of top civil servants. Ridley (1983), Fry (1985a, 1985b), Theakston (1990) and Drewry and Butcher (1991) have all discussed a possible 'Thatcher effect' on the appointment of top officials in Whitehall. The debate has also been stimulated by media accounts of experienced journalists (Hennessy 1989a, Harris 1989, Young 1989). At one stage the Royal Institute of Public Administration (RIPA) set-up a 'working party' to examine possible interference by the Prime Minister concerning 'top appointments', concluding that Mrs Thatcher had indeed taken an increased interest in the appointment of senior mandarins, but that this had had no overall effect. The structure and work of the Civil Service remained unchanged (RIPA 1987).

This paper surveys the areas left unexplored by the commentators above; that is, it tests for any change in the composition of the new generation of mandarins who secured their position during the Thatcher Administration, and compares their demographic characteristics with those who served during the previous administration.

One of the powers of the British Prime Minister is the right to scrutinise and determine the appointment of top mandarins at the levels of Permanent Secretary, Deputy Permanent Secretary and Deputy Secretary. Up until 1979 a strong convention existed whereby Prime Ministers did not actually interfere in senior appointments or promotions – this was the responsibility of the Service with appointments merely ratified by the Prime Minister. This was an important component of the notion of the political neutrality of civil servants – they were non-political experts, avoiding public involvement in politics, who suppressed private political convictions. Political neutrality was an essential corollary of anonymity, a concept anchored in the constitutional convention of ministerial responsibility. The general consensus among political commentators was that there had been relatively few attempts to intervene in the day-to-day management of Whitehall, in particular by appointing politically sympathetic officials to key posts.

Mrs Thatcher came to power in June 1979 and as Hennessy (1989a:635) noted:

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with a few exceptions, disliked the Permanent Secretaries she inherited and was keen to use her chance to replace them with a different breed as the post-war generation for whom, in (Lord) Bancroft's words, 'everything was achievable', retired in the early eighties in the same concentrated manner with which they had entered in the late forties.

Mrs Thatcher involved herself more directly in senior appointments in the service and, in so doing, her relationship with the bureaucracy came under greater scrutiny. Commentators, both media and academic, claimed that the highest ranks in the Civil Service were becoming increasingly politicised. Their views were substantiated by suggestions of accelerated promotion for certain individuals and the introduction of outside appointees.

The aim of this paper is to test for a 'Thatcher effect' on appointments to the highest grades in the Civil Service. Throughout the 1980s, arguments concerning possible interference by Mrs Thatcher in top appointments fell into two broad categories. Some maintained that 'overt' politicisation had occurred with Mrs Thatcher appointing individuals sympathetic to her policies. Others saw her interference as motivated by a desire to introduce a 'management-efficiency' ethos at the highest level by appointing 'can-do' officials. This second argument is closely associated with the literature on 'New Public Management' that surfaced towards the end of the Thatcher Administration (see Hood 1991, Dunsire et al 1991, Carter 1991).

Most of the following analysis is quantitative in form, examining career paths of the highest graded civil servants, in order to ascertain whether certain individuals climbed the hierarchical ladder at an extraordinary rate. Where such cases arise, a qualitative analysis has been applied, using references and biographical notes to determine why accelerated promotion, or an outside appointment, occurred. The research also has a vital comparative perspective, comparing accelerated promotion or increased outside appointments in the Thatcher era with the previous Labour Administration. This comparison will allow us to identify if any increased interference in top appointments by Mrs Thatcher, was merely the continuation of previously established practice.

The paper does not attempt to examine the Civil Service as a single, corporate institution, or to test for change in its functions and organisation. The analysis is confined to the micro-level only and concentrates on top appointments. This concentration on individual appointments in part reflects the widely held view that Mrs Thatcher was not interested in changing institutions. Instead her preoccupation

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was with people. In this view Hugo Young (1989:162) argued that in the 'first few months ... the ground began to be laid for the colonising of Whitehall with departmental leaders whom the prime minister approved of.' Similarly, Ridley (1983:40) commented that 'a new type of official is required. Perhaps the energetic pursuit of such policies even requires commitment - "conviction civil servants" as well as "conviction politicians".'

Survey Of The Literature

The literature on the interference in the appointment's procedure during the 1980s suggested two putative hypotheses, which were not mutually exclusive. Initially, most political commentator's attention centred on what they regarded as the 'politicisation' of the higher Civil Service by the Conservative Government, and more particularly by Mrs Thatcher herself. Here the emphasis was upon the appointment or promotion of individuals sympathetic to the Party's policies. For example Guy Peters (1986:91) remarked of Mrs Thatcher's approach:

Some actions have been taken which can be seen as politicising the Civil Service ... Mrs Thatcher has been seen to intervene in the appointment of senior Civil Servants ... This has resulted in the appointment of several very young Permanent Secretaries in key positions ... The appearance of partisan intervention may be as important as the reality.

Subsequently, from the mid-80s onwards, commentators adopted a new approach, in which they presented a subtler argument. In this view, intervention in promotion/appointments to the higher Civil Service occurred 'to push those she [Mrs Thatcher] believes to be dynamic, cost conscious and managerially inclined to top posts' (Peters 1986:41). The essence of the argument was that there had been an attempt to introduce a 'management/can-do culture' into Whitehall. This change was associated with the development of a 'new public management ethos'.

a) Mrs Thatcher's Political Appointments

During the first half of the decade political commentators argued that the higher Civil Service was politicised via the selection/promotion procedure of the Senior Appointments Selection Committee (SASC),

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whereby Mrs Thatcher intervened at Grades 1, 1a and 2. The view was that she promoted or appointed individuals who, if not members of the Conservative Party (legally they could not be), were at least sympathetic to the party's policies and, in particular, to the neo-liberal, monetarist policies of the early 1980s.

There were a number of prominent proponents of this position. Ridley and Doig (1985) suggested that the political polarisation of the early 1980s called into question whether officials could collaborate in policy-making without a degree of commitment to the Conservative Government's radical political views and values.

Similarly, Garrett (1980) argued that Mrs Thatcher had a gut-feeling that Whitehall was essentially obstructive to radical policies (during her time in Parliament the Fulton Committee had been established and thus she was able to witness at first hand the manner in which top mandarins were able to dilute the radical thrust of that Report). This prompted widespread political change at the highest level in appointments and promotions, when the opportunity presented itself, with the post war generation retiring in significant numbers during the early eighties. Lord Bancroft, after effectively being dismissed in 1981, claimed there were 'clear indicators of the Thatcher Government's determination to assert political control over the service.' (quoted in Fry 1984:327). Kavanagh (1989:209) in the same vein, noted that Mrs Thatcher appeared to intervene more directly than previous Prime Minister's in the promotion of Permanent Secretaries: 'preferring less senior and "obvious" candidates, apparently on the grounds that they were impatient with the status quo and defeatist.' Madgwick (1991:207) also supported this view:

She came to like some sharp bright officials; indeed, a handful became quite close to her, and she depended on them. In this sense she 'politicised' some of her 10 Downing Street officials. Some of these favoured officials went on to rapid high promotion; others stayed, becoming almost too close for further movement within the service.

John Silkin, Shadow Leader of the House of Commons 1980-83, suggested that: 'Mrs Thatcher had tampered with the traditional political neutrality of the Civil Service and pledged that a Labour Government would subject top officials to a 'test of impartiality' (quoted *The Times* 4 November 1982). A number of civil servants also supported the thesis that officials were appointed to senior positions as a direct result of their 'sympathetic' political views. Clive Ponting (1986:222), one of the most controversial officials to have emerged out of Whitehall during the

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1980s, believed: 'She has not been content like many of her predecessors to accept the recommendations of the mandarins, but has instead looked for candidates she believes are sympathetic to her general aims.' Not to be outdone the journalist, Hugo Young (1989:162, 332), in his biography of Mrs Thatcher argued: 'Within these first few months ... the ground began to be laid for the colonising of Whitehall with departmental leaders whom the Prime Minister approved of ... The Whitehall culture was beginning to change ... and was now in the hands of some senior people each of whom could justly be described as "one of us"'. Even today this view is still advanced. Bernard Crick, writing in May 1992, argued that:

Mrs Thatcher's early populist assault on the higher Civil Service..Far from depoliticizing it ... politicised it to an appalling degree. Far from trimming the power of the mandarins, rather she put 'our sort of people' into key posts. (*Guardian* 7 May 1992)

b) The Emphasis On A 'Management-Efficiency Ethos'

By the mid-1980s the analysis had shifted away from 'politicisation' to focus on the view that the Prime Minister interfered in order to create what is termed in this paper a 'management and efficiency ethos' or 'can-do culture' at the highest levels within Whitehall.

Much of the literature in this area was inspired by John Hoskyn's (1983) views (in the aftermath of his departure from Thatcher's 'Policy Unit' having become disillusioned by the machinery of government) that essential changes were necessary in the framework of Whitehall. Commentators noticed the importance Thatcher placed on relationships with individual businessmen and academics from the 'monetarist' school, and upon the operation of the Policy Unit. On this basis, they surmised that new appointments and promotions in the Service were being determined by a desire to promote a 'management-efficiency ethos'.

Fry (1984:330) detected this approach, citing the dismissal of Lord Soames, the abolition of the Civil Service Department, the introduction of the Management Information System for Ministers and the Financial Management Initiative of 1982, as necessary steps to: 'make the Civil Service as much like a business organisation as possible, and the dictates of sound money indicated the desirability of ending the division at the centre and formally restoring Treasury predominance.' Fry later developed his own version of 'capture theory', a theory previously used

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in the United States by economists and politicians to highlight the 'take-over' of independent regulatory commissions by the economic interests they are supposed to regulate. Fry argued that the Civil Service had formed an institutional view, based on working with successive administrations, that 'governments were ill-equipped to govern'. Hence, the Civil Service view was that the task of government had to be performed by 'permanent politicians'. They therefore reacted when Mrs Thatcher appeared to upset the previous equilibrium:

The career civil service having 'captured', if in part by default, higher ground than constitutional theory allowed, did not seem to be always gracious about conceding it to a Thatcher Government which, like its more co-operative predecessors was equipped mainly with slogans. (Fry 1985a:347)

In this view, by altering the ethos of the Civil Service and effecting a culture change at the highest levels in Whitehall, Mrs Thatcher aimed to ensure that such 'capture' became a redundant practise of a previous era. The First Division Association (1987:44), the representative body for the highest grades in Whitehall, commented: 'it is style rather than political belief which tends to be considered important. The style which appears to appeal to the Prime Minister is the "can-do" approach.'

Peter Hennessy in (1989:116) also emphasized Thatcher's preference for 'can-do' officials, noting that: 'the ethos of the senior Civil Service would be changed from a policy-making to a managerial culture when it became plain that the route to the top would be open to those who got most out of people and cash.' More recently Hennessy (*Guardian* 18 January 1993) has observed that:

There are relics like the concept of the 'good chap' when it comes to appointments, but a different type of person has arisen: the post-war generation of civil servants retired and there is an element of the entrepreneurial servant.

By the end of the Thatcher administration, then, it was argued there had been a 'Thatcher effect' on the upper echelons of Whitehall. It was believed that she had introduced a 'management-efficiency ethos' at the highest levels in Whitehall, via the promotion and appointment of a certain 'type' of individual. Thus Kavanagh (1990:252) felt that by 1990: 'Mrs Thatcher has been more concerned to reward senior civil servants who are "doers" – good at implementing policy, concerned with good management and value for money – rather than appoint more policy advisers.' Theakston (1990:47) argued that she: 'does not appear

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to have applied a partisan litmus test when making top appointments, but to have preferred a decisive and energetic "can-do" style.' Similarly, Drewry and Butcher (1991:216) declared that:

There is little overt evidence that the Thatcher government ... is trying consciously to subvert the traditional neutrality of the civil service ... At the same time we also accept that absolute neutrality has probably become an unrealistic aspiration in an age of increasingly polarised party politics.

They conclude that civil servants had to be committed and display enthusiasm for the government's programme, implying a 'hands-on, can-do' approach. The 1987 RIPA Report, investigating the appointments' procedure under Mrs Thatcher, rejected outright any notion of 'overt' politicisation, but concluded that the: 'appointment process has become more personalised in the sense that at the top level 'catching the eye' of the Prime Minister (in a favourable or unfavourable manner) may now be more important than in the past.' (RIPA 1987:43) As recently as May 1992, William Plowden (in Hennessy and Coates 1992:9), a former career Civil Servant and member of the 'Think-Tank', the Central Policy Review Staff, suggested: 'the greatest single culture change is the whole emphasis on efficiency and management and thinking about the bottom line and so on, which has been very much part of the Thatcherite revolution of the eighties.' It is clear that both hypotheses examined here have been presented regularly throughout the 1980s and there have been a number of attempts to examine how far the changes instigated under Mrs Thatcher, in terms of the management of the Service, have had an impact (see *Public Administration* 1990). This present paper is unique, however, because it combines a systematic quantitative and qualitative analysis in order to test these two hypotheses.

Measuring A Thatcher Effect

Since the introduction in 1968 of SASC procedures for top appointments/ promotions in Whitehall, the process has remained largely cloaked in secrecy. However, what is known is that appointments at Grade 1 (Permanent Secretary), Grade 1a (Deputy Permanent Secretary) and Grade 2 (Deputy Secretary), together with any transfers among the above three grades, all require the approval of the Prime Minister. Despite the abundant literature concerning Mrs Thatcher's

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approach to the selection procedure, there is no systematic evidence examining her role, or that of any other Prime Minister, in its operation during the post-war period. There are obvious difficulties in measurement and that is clearly one of the reasons why most observers have contented themselves with anecdotes.

An analysis of the selection process must involve at least three stages. In examining any change during the Thatcher Administration, the first and obvious step is to undertake a demographic comparison of officials appointed at the levels of Permanent Secretary or Deputy Permanent Secretary during the Labour Governments of 1974-79 and the Thatcher Governments of 1979-90. This will provide evidence to indicate whether disparity exists in the demographic background of officials appointed at both grades during the two separate periods of Government. In particular it will indicate whether the new generation of Permanent Secretaries appointed during the 1980s was markedly different from its predecessors. If the comparison reveals a close similarity in the demographic complexion of the two groups it would suggest that the tradition of appointing neutral, impartial officials has been maintained. However, if variation arises in the demographic profile, these findings can be utilised as a foundation to explore the possibility of a 'Thatcher effect' on the higher Civil Service.

Secondly, it is necessary to identify putative cases of interference, that is cases where there was accelerated promotion. As such, the analysis concentrates upon those cases where the appointment of an individual to Grade 1 or Grade 1a involved a rise of two or more grades. However, all outside appointments to the Civil Service are also identified, in order to ascertain whether such appointments, although rare, might have been made for political or management/efficiency reasons.

While it is easy to identify those who obtained accelerated promotion or who were recruited at the highest level from outside the service, it is much more difficult to establish why such appointments were made. The paper concentrates, therefore, on two variables which reflect different aspects of the alleged interference with senior Civil Service appointments: first, the views of appointees; and secondly their business, industrial or financial credentials. Of course, the first variable is almost impossible to measure. No official source gives any idea of the political views of individual senior civil servants. Hence, it was necessary to rely on the memoirs of politicians and the commentaries of journalists and contemporary historians. The second variable is more easily established as reference books provide the biographical backgrounds of civil servants. However, this approach entails an important assumption, which some may dispute – that if Mrs Thatcher was searching for more management expertise such a background could explain why some

appointees were advanced.

The Research Method

The method employed here is a combination of quantitative analysis supplemented by qualitative detail. The initial stage involved compiling a list of all the Ministries in Whitehall and of any structural changes which occurred to those Ministries after 1974. Subsequently, the Permanent Secretaries and Deputy Permanent Secretaries who held posts in all Departments between 1974 and 1990 were listed using the *Civil Service Year Book*. A comparison of the social backgrounds of the individuals appointed to Permanent Secretary or Deputy Permanent Secretary during the Labour and Conservative Governments was undertaken, considering age, gender, schooling and higher education records. Each individual appointment/promotion at Grade 1 and Grade 1a was subsequently examined; it was noted where there was accelerated promotion, that is, promotion by two or more grades, and where an outside appointment occurred. At this stage of the analysis some caution was necessary as a few departments did not have a Deputy Permanent Secretary. Where this was the case an official was only credited with accelerated promotion if he/she rose from Grade 3, Under Secretary, straight to Grade 1, Permanent Secretary. *Who's Who* was then used to construct a biography of each official identified. Finally, biographical sources, and any further references obtained from memoirs/diaries etc, were examined to see if there was any indication of why rapid promotion, or an individual outside appointment, had occurred. In particular, the aim was to establish whether or not there was any indication that the promotion/appointment had been made because an individual was politically sympathetic to Thatcherite policy, or had previous experience of management/efficiency techniques.

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Results and Analysis

Table 1: Numbers in Cabinet, Ministries and Permanent Secretaries 1974-1990.

| | 1974 | 1976 | 1979 | 1990 |
|--|------|------|------|------|
| Departments with Permanent Secretary | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 |
| Cabinet Ministers | 23 | 24 | 24 | 22 |
| Cabinet Ministries with Perm. Sec. | 18 | 19 | 20 | 19 |
| Non-Cabinet Ministries with Perm. Sec. | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Non-Ministerial Depts. with Perm. Sec | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 |

Table 2a: The number of appointments and promotions 1974-79

| | 1974 | 1975 | 1976 | 1977 | 1978 | 1979 | Av. | Total |
|---------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-----|-------|
| Total at Grades 1/1a | 15 | 8 | 12 | 2 | 15 | 2 | 9 | 54 |
| First Time at Grades 1/1a | 15 | 9 | 9 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 7.2 | 43 |

Table 2b: The number of appointments and promotions to Grade 1/1a 1979-November 1990

| | 1980 | 81 | 82 | 83 | 84 | 85 | 86 | 87 | 88 | 89 | 90 | Av. | Total |
|---------------------------|------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|-----|-------|
| Total at Grades 1/1a | 9 | 8 | 6 | 16 | 7 | 9 | 5 | 5 | 15 | 4 | 8 | 8.4 | 92 |
| First Time at Grades 1/1a | 9 | 4 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 5 | 6 | 8 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 6.3 | 69 |

Table 3: The Average Number of Promotions/Appointments By Each Government 1974-90

| | <i>N Posts at Grades 1 & 1a</i> | <i>N Appointments Promotions</i> | <i>Av.% Per Year</i> |
|---------|---|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1974-76 | 42 | 23 | 27.4 |
| 1976-79 | 40 | 31 | 19.4 |
| 1979-90 | 36 | 92 | 25.5 |

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Table 2(a) indicates that between 1974-79, 54 promotions occurred, an average of exactly 9 per year. In contrast, Table 2(b) indicated that 92 appointments were made over the 11 year period of the Thatcher Government, an average of 8 per year. The lower figure for the Thatcher era is interesting, especially in view of the high number of post Second World War entrants retiring in the early eighties. The figure suggests that if Mrs Thatcher was interfering in the promotion/appointment procedure, her approach was not to introduce immediate, widesweeping change throughout all the highest grades of Whitehall, but slow, piecemeal alteration.

The most important figures in testing for demographic divergence or the accelerated promotion of a particular breed of mandarin are the numbers appointed or promoted to the levels of Grades 1/1a. Hence, there was no examination of those previously appointed officials who experienced a horizontal shift at this level, instead the focus was only on those individuals actually elevated to Permanent or Deputy Permanent Secretary between 1979-90.

Table 2(a) indicates that between 1974-79 there were 43 first time promotions to Grades 1/1a, a yearly average of 7. Table 2(b) indicates that between 1979-90 there were 69 first time appointments to these two grades, an average of 6 per year. These statistics demonstrated that in both overall promotion and appointments to the grades of Permanent and Deputy Permanent Secretary, and new promotions and appointments to the same level, there was no increase in the Thatcher years, but in fact there was a slight decrease. This implies that if, as alleged, Mrs Thatcher wished to alter the traditional structure and make-up at the top most levels in Whitehall, her approach was certainly not to implement immediate and sweeping change.

A demographic comparison between the two cohorts was carried out to establish whether, during the Thatcher era, the individuals appointed or promoted were of a different socio-economic backgrounds to that of their direct predecessors.

Demographic Results

Table 4: The Social Composition Of Whitehall

| | <i>Labour 1974-79</i> | <i>Cons 1979-1990</i> |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Total N. at Grades 1 & 1a. | 76 | 105 |
| Total N. women at Grades 1 & 1a. | 0 | 1 |
| Total N. Oxbridge at Grades 1 & 1a. | 59 | 77 |

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The demographic analysis compared the 43 individuals promoted for the first time to Permanent Secretary or Deputy Permanent Secretary in the 1974-79 with the 69 individuals promoted for the first time to these positions during the 1979-90 period.

Table 5: The Demographic Profile Of Officials

| | 1974-1979 | | 1979-1990 | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|-------|-----------|----|-------|------|
| | n. | total | % | n. | total | |
| N. State Educated | 4 | (40) | 10.0 | 5 | (66) | 7.6 |
| N. Eton/Harrow | 5 | (40) | 12.5 | 2 | (66) | 3.0 |
| N. Private School | 36 | (40) | 90.0 | 61 | (66) | 92.4 |
| N. University | 39 | (43) | 90.7 | 63 | (68) | 92.4 |
| N. Oxbridge | 33 | (43) | 76.7 | 42 | (68) | 61.8 |
| N. Without Further Education | 4 | (43) | 9.3 | 5 | (68) | 7.4 |
| N. Women | 0 | (43) | 0.0 | 1 | (69) | 1.4 |
| Av. Age of Newly Appointed Official | | | 53.8 | | | 53.5 |

The demographic results indicated that there was only a slight divergence in the social composition of the two cohorts of mandarins. The average age of appointment was almost identical. The officials appointed after 1979 were marginally more likely to have had private education and gone to university. However, it is important to note that there was a drop of nearly 15 per cent in those officials entering the Service with experience of Oxbridge. There was also a substantial move away from the Eton/Harrow tradition. Overall however, the top officialdom still came from a very narrow social class and little headway had been made in establishing women at the top of the hierarchy.

The demographic analysis, though not revealing any significant divergence in the social composition of the two different sets of officials, does however provide interesting data to be used in further developing the notion of interference in the appointment and promotion of senior civil servants. Listed below are the individuals who experienced promotion by two or more grades and the two sets of individuals identified as having received accelerated promotion.

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Individuals whose promotion had been by two or more grades:

- 1] **Robin Butler**; promoted to Head of the Home Civil Service from 2nd. Permanent Secretary in the Treasury - a rise of 2 grades.
- 2] **Clive Whitmore**; promoted to Permanent Secretary of State in the M.o.D. from Principal Private Secretary to the Prime Minister's Office - a rise of 3 grades.
- 3] **David Hancock**; promoted to Permanent Secretary in the Department of Education and Science from Deputy Secretary in the Cabinet Office - rise of 2 grades.
- 4] **John Caines**; promoted to Permanent Secretary of the Overseas Development Administration from Deputy Secretary in the Department of Trade & Industry - a rise of 2 grades.
- 5] **Michael Franklin**; promoted Permanent Secretary in the [then] Department of Trade from Deputy Secretary in the Cabinet Office - a rise of 2 grades.
- 6] **Peter Middleton**; promoted to Joint Head of the Home Civil Service from Deputy Secretary in the Treasury - a rise of 2 grades.
- 7] **Jack Hibbert**; promoted to Head of the Government Statistical Service [Grade 1] from the level of Statistical Division 2, Grade 3, in the Department of Trade & Industry - a rise of 4 grades.
- 8] **Tim Lankester**; promoted to Permanent Secretary in the Overseas Development Administration from Deputy Secretary Grade 2 in the Treasury - a rise of 2 grades.
- 9] **Angus Fraser**; promoted to Permanent Secretary in Customs & Excise from Deputy Secretary in the Civil Service Department - rise of 2 grades.
- 10] **Michael Quinlain**; promoted to Permanent Secretary in The Department of Employment from Deputy Secretary in the Treasury - a rise of 2 grades.
- 11] **Crispin Tickell**; promoted to Permanent Secretary in the Overseas Development Administration from Under-Secretary in the F.C.O. - a rise of 3 grades.

Appointments of individuals to Grades 1 and 1a from positions outside of Whitehall:

- 1] **Arnold Alfred**; appointed Second Permanent Secretary in the Property Services Agency (Department of the Environment) from Caxton Publishing Holdings Ltd.
- 2] **Patrick Wright**; appointed Head of the Diplomatic Service from Ambassador to Saudi Arabia.
- 3] **John Fretwell**; appointed Deputy to Permanent Under-Secretary in the F.C.O. from Ambassador to France.
- 4] **Duncan Nichol**; appointed to Chief Executive grade 1 in the Department of Health from Regional General Manager of the Manchester District Health Service.
- 5] **Terence Burns**; appointed Head of the Government Economic Service in the Treasury, Grade 1, from Professor of Economics at the London Business School.
- 6] **Peter Levene**; appointed Chief of Defence Procurement, Ministry of Defence, Grade 1a, from Joined United Scientific Holdings.

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In order to identify clues as to why these appointments occurred, the biographical details of individuals in this list were scrutinised along with comments in memoirs/diaries of politicians.

1] Arnold Alfred: appointed Chief Executive [2nd Permanent Secretary] Property Services Agency in the Department of Environment from Caxton publishing Holdings Ltd. in 1982.

Considering the extensive nature of the rhetoric concerning outside appointments in the Civil Service, there are actually very few Permanent or Deputy Permanent Secretaries who have been recruited from outside Whitehall. Of the 79 appointments between 1979 and 1990, there were only 6 cases of outside appointments. Yet in examining Alfred's career his working life centred on financial management and administration. After attending the LSE, he became (at the age of 28) Head of the Economics Department at Courtaulds Ltd. Between 1964-69 he was Director of BPC Publishing Ltd. and between 1971-81 was Chairman of Caxton Publishing Holdings Ltd. His publications in the field of economics (Alfred 1965; 1968) proved he had the attributes of a sound financial mind while his directorship of publishing firms indicated his managerial skills. With such credentials his appointment to Grade 1a appears to reflect his private sector financial and business experience.

2] Terence Burns: Burns was appointed from outside of Whitehall to the post of Chief Economic Adviser to the Treasury and Head of the Government Economic Service, Grade 1a.

Burns was a northern grammar school boy, who graduated from Manchester University with an economics degree to become, fifteen years later at the age of 36, the youngest appointed Permanent Secretary of the 1980s. He was brought in by the Thatcher/Lawson/Howe team from the London Business School in 1980, where he had become dissatisfied with the then still popular 'Keynesian orthodoxy'. A leading proponent of the monetarist school of economics, he firmly believed in the maintenance of a high exchange rate for economic recovery, in the 1970s. His appointment as the Government's 'Chief Economic Adviser', over the heads of many better qualified, but less monetarist-oriented economists, was considered by many as an overtly political act. This initial reaction to Burn's appointment was perhaps misguided. William Keegan's assessment of the Burn's appointment holds the real key: 'Burn's was never imbued with the pure dogma of monetarism; he is a

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pragmatist who saw it as his job to try to make the best he could of the policy.' (*Observer* 21 April 1990)

3] Sir Robin Butler: In 1987 Butler was appointed as Secretary to the Cabinet, Permanent Secretary to the Management Personnel Office, and Joint Head of the Home Civil Service, from 2nd Permanent Secretary, Public Expenditure, H.M.Treasury.

His appointment to the Head of the Home Civil Service from 2nd Permanent Secretary indicated a rise of two grades. As early as 1975, when Butler was only 37 years old, he was tipped for one of the top three 'super' Permanent Secretaryships. By 1975 Harold Wilson had established a close working relationship with Butler; he posted him back to the Treasury in 1976 to help Leo Pliatzky bring public spending under tighter control. As Marcia Falkender (1983:152) notes: 'While there he developed a financial information system, known as fizz, to monitor spending surges department by department, month by month.' Hennessy has labelled Butler a 'Renaissance Prince', noting how even as a Permanent Secretary he would cycle to work on a rusty old bike favoured by Oxbridge students. Butler has also been credited with physical bravery - he was in the Grand Hotel, Brighton, on the night it was bombed during the 1984 Conservative Party Conference: 'His appetite for hard work is said to have saved her [Mrs Thatcher] life when at ten to three in the morning he asked her to read just one extra brief which meant she was still in her sitting room when the bomb went off.' (*Glasgow Herald* 14 July 1987). Though it would be fanciful to suggest this had any direct effect on his subsequent promotion, it none the less indicates his capacity for work and dedication to the job.

In gaining promotion to the Head of the Civil Service, he was in essence competing against Sir Clive Whitmore. Butler could never be, to use Hugo Young's term, 'One Of Us'. He was certainly not a 'Thatcherite'. Neither is he a great philosopher, nor a great original thinker. What then is the key to Butler's success? Burke Trend perhaps holds the answer when he said of the man: '[he got on with] the bread and butter of the job - ensuring that the flow of government business up through committees to the Cabinet itself goes forward as quickly and smoothly as it possibly can.' (*BBC Radio 3* 12 March 1976)

Butler fits the Northcote-Trevelyan specifications perfectly, but what placed him ahead in Thatcher's eyes was his administrative management capabilities and ability to do the job in hand:

If a Minister says 'I want this done', he is brilliant at calling a meeting, making it clear how he thinks business should proceed,

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consulting all the concerned departments represented round the table and parcelling out the work. He prides himself on it enormously. (Hennessy 1989:641)

His experience in the Treasury 1961-65, in the Cabinet Office 1965-69, as a member of the Central Policy Review Staff 1971-72 and as Principal Private Secretary to the P.M. in 1982-85, gave him the experience in management and administration that Thatcher sought. In addition he struck up a close relationship and understanding of her own approach to work whilst he was her Private Secretary. Butler's appointment appears to be a result largely of his managerial ability, not his political beliefs.

4] John Caines: appointed Permanent Secretary of the Overseas Development Administration from Grade 2 Consumer Affairs, the Department of Trade and Industry.

Caines' promotion was rapid in Whitehall terms: rising from Grade 2 straight to Permanent Secretary. However, the posts he held in the 1980s, prior to his promotion, betray why he experienced a speedy rise through the ranks of the service. In 1982-83 he was appointed Deputy Secretary in the Central Policy Review Staff in the Cabinet Office. This is a post that entails working closely with the Prime Minister in the development and implementation of policy and, as such, the two struck up a close working relationship. Couple this with his one year sabbatical in business and commerce at the Manchester Business School in 1967 and one finds the combination of experience in Cabinet Office and experience of finance and business management that seems to have resulted in swift promotion.

5] Michael Franklin: appointed Permanent Secretary in the Department of Trade from Deputy Secretary in the Cabinet Office in 1982.

Franklin was another civil servant who experienced life in the Cabinet Office for 4 years, 1977-81 and in so doing established a close working relationship with Mrs Thatcher. Franklin has experience in the world of commerce. He has since 1988 been a Director of Barclays Bank, whilst in 1987 he was made Director of the Agriculture Mortgate Corporation. In the Cabinet Office, he was Head of the European Secretariat, which placed him in good standing for the top post in the Department of Trade. It seems clear that his business experience and time spent in the

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Cabinet Office aided his progress.

6] Angus Fraser: appointed Permanent Secretary in H.M. Customs and Excise from Deputy Secretary of Personnel Management Recruitment & Training Group in the Management & Personnel Office.

The promotion from Grade 2 to Permanent Secretary indicates a rapid vertical rise in the hierarchy of the Service, though his move has to be seen in the light of the closure of the Civil Service Department where he was previously located. President of the Electronic Data Interchange Association since 1988 and Vice-President of the Royal Institute of Public Administration from 1985 it is not surprising that in 1988 he was appointed adviser to the Prime Minister on 'Efficiency and Effectiveness in Government'. Fraser displays all the traits of an able business administrator, which indicated the likelihood of rapid promotion.

7] John Fretwell: appointed Deputy to the Permanent Under-Secretary in the F.C.O. from Ambassador to France in 1987.

Apart from many postings as Ambassador abroad, Fretwell's only experience serving domestically in the FCO occurred between 1976-80, when he was Assistant Under-Secretary. Being appointed as Permanent Under-Secretary from Ambassador to France is an unusual appointment within the FCO. Though it has proved hard to uncover evidence explaining exactly why Fretwell was appointed, undoubtedly one factor was his vast overseas experience in Hong Kong, Peking, Washington, Warsaw and France.

8] David Hancock: appointed Permanent Secretary in the Department of Education and Science, from Deputy Secretary, the Secretariat, in the Cabinet Office 1984.

Hancock's appointment is an unusual case. If the SASC had had its way in 1983, then it is widely held that he would have replaced Douglas Wass as Joint Head of The Home Civil Service. However, Peter Middleton was preferred to Hancock. The key point here is that it was not Hancock's failings that led to Middleton's promotion. In fact, Hancock entered the Department of Education & Science having spent 4 years in the Cabinet Office, two years as Deputy Secretary. Therefore, he had an intimate knowledge of the workings and programme of the Government, as well as a close, office relationship with Thatcher. Hancock was also closely associated with the financial world; as

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Director of the European Investment Bank 1980-82. He was also a Member of the British Committee Of Harkness Fellowship, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts 1986 and a Companion of the British Institute of Management in 1987 and had clear business skills. Once again it appears experience in the Cabinet Office, with a sound knowledge of the financial world, provided the right combination for rapid promotion.

9] Jack Hibbert: appointed Director and Head of Government Statistical Service in the Cabinet Office from Statistical Division 2 Grade 3 in the Department of Trade and Industry.

Hibbert's appointment is a clear case of an able man receiving swift promotion. No one would question the fact that a rise from Grade 3 to Grade 1, Head Of Government Statistical Service, is unusually rapid. A degree from the LSE was followed by service first in the Exchequer Department and then the Central Statistical Office. His subsequent spell as Chief Statistician in the CSO, provided the solid base from which promotion followed. His publications concerning the effects of inflation, income and savings indicate his sympathies with a monetarist approach to policy-making, which may have endeared him to Mrs Thatcher.

10] Tim Lankester: rose from Deputy Secretary Grade 2 in the Treasury to Permanent Secretary Overseas Development Administration in the FCO.

Lankester's promotion by two grades straight to Permanent Secretary indicated a desire by Thatcher to ensure this official wielded influence in Whitehall. He gained his first experience of overseas work as a teacher on the VSO in 1960. He worked as an economist with the World Bank from 1966-69, before joining the Cabinet Office, where in 1979-81 he was Mrs Thatcher's own Private Secretary. In 1981 he was seconded to S.G. Warburg & Co., returning to the Treasury in 1983. Lankester's sound financial mind resulted, in 1985, in his elevation to Executive Director of both the IMF and the World Bank. Simply tracing Lankester's career and acknowledging the respect he has gained in the financial world might explain in itself why he enjoyed such rapid promotion.

11] Peter Levene: in 1985 Levene was appointed from outside of Whitehall to Chief of Defence Procurement.

Levene's appointment was widely regarded at the time, by the majority

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of the 'informed media', as an overt move to politicise Whitehall. Controversy surrounded Levene. He had been appointed on a five year contract, taking him beyond the next general election but breaking the tradition of what was meant to be a 'career Civil Service'. He also had interests in firms which had MoD contracts. Special arrangements had to be made therefore to ensure he was not privy to the files dealing with these contracts, despite the fact that he was now the Chief Accounting Officer for the Ministry. The arrangement caused problems and widespread criticism.

Michael Heseltine had demanded Levene's appointment as he regarded him as a very able individual, capable of introducing cost-cutting schemes, economies of scale and increasing overall efficiency in the operating procedures within the Department. However his appointment prompted the question - how exactly was Levene to carry out an efficiency drive, when he had only limited access to the files in the Department? The Public Accounts Committee was most concerned:

The effect of the Government's decision is precisely to reduce the responsibility of the Accounting Officer to one of form without substance ... we regard the arrangement as a serious breach of the principle of personal financial accountability to Parliament. (Ponting 1986:223)

Once again media critics were misguided in their initial charge that Levene marked an obvious case of politicisation. His background was that of a successful businessman; a graduate in economics from Manchester University, he progressed to become first Managing Director and then Chairman of Joined United Scientific Holdings. He was also appointed Deputy Chairman of the merchant bank Wasserstein Perella & Company. The key to Levene's appointment was his relationship with Heseltine. As Minister of Defence, Heseltine had experienced close dealings with Levene; Joined United Scientific Holdings had a large contract with the MOD and Heseltine had witnessed and come to respect, at first hand, Levene's working practices, whilst he was their chairman. He wished to see Levene's approach transferred to the Ministry. The opportunity presented itself when the post of Chief of Defence Procurement was vacated in 1985. Levene was enticed to Whitehall in part by an income of £107,000, twice the amount received by his fellow Permanent Secretaries. The circumstances surrounding the appointment prompted Labour's Gordon Brown (*Guardian* 10 September 1992) to declare this to be 'a further reinforcement of the incestuous relationship between the ministry and the arms world.' Although Brown's comment may contain an element of truth, the prime

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reason for Levene's appointment appears to be his proven track record in running a company in the field of defence along extremely efficient lines and, in so doing, attracting the attention of a Minister, himself renowned for economy and efficiency drives.

12] Peter Middleton: in 1983 Middleton was appointed Permanent Secretary and Joint Head of the Home Civil Service in the Treasury, from Deputy Secretary, Counter Inflation And Public Finance, in HM. Treasury.

Middleton's appointment was extremely contentious. The late Tony Rawlinson had been 2nd Permanent Secretary in the Treasury since 1977 and, though he was not regarded as a credible candidate for the post vacated by the retiring Douglas Wass (see Hennessy 1989:629), it was relatively insulting to promote Middleton directly above Rawlinson, leaving him as 2nd Permanent Secretary until his own promotion a year later.

Middleton clearly received rapid promotion – Deputy Secretary in the Treasury to Joint Head of the Home Civil Service was a great leap. If the SASC had had their own way, most observers believe that either Brian Hayes or David Hancock would have received the top post. As it was, Middleton, an avowed monetarist, responsible for implementing the Government's medium term financial strategy, was preferred. At the time of his appointment Middleton was accused by many of being one of Thatcher's political pawns, a man who welcomed policy directives from the 'New Right'. This was a distortion however. Although an open monetarist, his dedication to whichever party was in power could not be questioned as Denis Healey (1989:442) testified: 'I had an exceptionally able Head of Public Relations in Peter Middleton ... he fully deserved his later promotion to Permanent Secretary over the heads of older men'. Similarly Hennessy (1989:630) commented: 'Middleton ... has a sparky style and a 'can-do' approach which appealed hugely to Labour Ministers in the Wilson and Callaghan years. It is possible ... that he would have become No. 1 under a Labour Chancellor.' Middleton would have been just as satisfied to operate under a 'left of centre' government as he was to work under the Thatcher Administration. It appears that he was very much a 'hands-on, can-do type of official of the kind that appeals to Mrs Thatcher whatever their views ... He does believe in getting from Ministers what the policy is and getting on with it.' (Hennessy 1989:630)

Middleton's appointment was clearly not purely political, his ability to manage and administer and his undoubted financial experience,

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accumulated from years in the Treasury, helped explain his promotion. It also suggests why, in 1984, he was asked to become a Member of the Council of the Manchester Business School.

13] D. Nichol: appointed to Chief Executive, N.H.S. Management Board Grade 1 in the Department of Health from Regional General Manager of the Manchester District.

Though a government employee, as a Regional General Manager of the Manchester District, Nichol was brought straight into the service at Grade 1 having never previously worked in Whitehall. The appointment itself would appear to confirm some degree of intervention and, though there is little biographical information available on Nichol's early career, it is known that he was closely involved in managing the Manchester District Health Authority. He had published a number of articles on management in health care, and in 1984-5 he was appointed President of the National Council of the Institute of Health Services Management. These attributes appear to have contributed to what was effectively an outside appointment in Whitehall at a very high grade. It is also worth noting that, prior to the 1992 election, Robin Cook, Labour's Health spokesman, was quoted as saying he would not work with Nichol because of his earlier comments criticising the Labour Party's health programme.

14] Michael Quinlain: appointed Permanent Secretary in the Department of Employment from Deputy Secretary of Industry in the Treasury in 1983.

Quinlain's appointment, a rise of two grades, is believed to have been at the expense of Donald Derr. It is suggested that Quinlain left his mark on Thatcher when he served at the MoD:

Thatcher was particularly impressed with his work on strategic nuclear weapons and was said to have been especially taken by his [anonymous] disquisition on deterrence theory and the British strategic nuclear force in the 1981 Defence White Paper. (Hennessy 1989:63)

Quinlain is undoubtedly an apolitical figure, it would appear his virtue as far as Thatcher was concerned was his strength in implementation.

15] Crispin Tickell: appointed Permanent Secretary in the Overseas Development Administration from Under-Secretary of State in the FCO.

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Tickell's promotion was certainly rapid; during the Thatcher years he progressed from Deputy Under-Secretary to Permanent Secretary - an impressive leap up the administrative ladder. Like the other two civil servants whose promotion in the FCO had been rapid, it appears not to have been based primarily on managerial, financial or administrative capabilities. In these cases it seems to be overseas experience which really counts. Tickell certainly had experience in this area serving in the Hague, Mexico and Paris, but in his case he was also involved in the negotiations for British entry into the European Community in 1970-72. He had also written a number of respected publications on international affairs. This wealth of experience seems to account for his rapid promotion.

16] Clive Whitmore: appointed to Permanent Secretary of State [Member of the Defence Council] in the MOD from Principal Private Secretary to the Prime Minister's Office in 1982.

During his time as Principal Private Secretary to the Prime Minister from 1979-82 Whitmore gained considerable experience of the working of the Conservative Government, and in particular Mrs Thatcher's approach. The move from Principal Private Secretary to the Prime Minister to Permanent Secretary in Defence, though not unheard of, represents an impressive upward shift. Prior to becoming Private Secretary, Whitmore was Under-Secretary in the Cabinet Office from 1977-79 and so held a position two grades below that of Permanent Secretary.

Whitmore was appointed at the age of 47, early by Whitehall standards, and some commentators have argued his appointment had a definite political slant to it. This is difficult to accept. As Hennessy (1989a:672) observes, 'Whitmore was clearly going to make it at some stage'. Mrs Thatcher's involvement in his accelerated promotion more probably reveals two factors: first, her desire to lower the age of Permanent Secretaries; and second an acknowledgement of the working relationship she and Whitmore struck while he served as her Private Secretary. Hennessy (1989:672) adds that 'one prescient senior man at the time of the 1983 election saw Whitmore as at heart a big manager' and, as such, it is no surprise he rose to Permanent Secretary so rapidly.

Analysts of Whitehall offer a number of reasons why Whitmore lost out to Robin Butler for the appointment of Head of the Home Civil Service in 1987. First, there was no obvious successor in the Ministry of Defence to Whitmore. Michael Quinlain was regarded as too close to retirement, though in 1988-89 he did take-over at the MoD. Second,

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'there were suggestions that Mrs Thatcher was not pleased at Whitmore's failure to calm-down Heseltine when the pressure was rising over Westland - which is most unfair, as a Permanent Secretary's loyalty must be to his secretary of state's cause.' (Hennessy 1989:673) Third it was suggested that it is most unlikely a 'Defence man' would attain the position of Head of the Civil Service, as the MoD is always regarded as a controversial department.

17] Patrick Wright: appointed to Permanent Secretary of State and Head of the Diplomatic Service from Ambassador to Saudi Arabia in 1986

Wright's appointment caused a certain degree of controversy within the Foreign Office. Derek Thomas had been Deputy to the Permanent Under Secretary of State in the FCO since 1984 and when Tony Acland left, the Permanent Secretary until 1986, Thomas had a right to believe that he was the number one candidate for promotion. Yet when the appointments were announced Thomas, unusually, remained as Deputy and Wright was brought in over his head to fill the post of Permanent Secretary. Wright had certainly gained considerable experience in the FCO, having served in Beirut, Washington, Cairo, Bahrain, the Middle East, Luxembourg, Syria and Saudi Arabia. Rather perversely, Wright had not held any post within the FCO in this country, normally regarded as a necessary credential for the post of Head of the Diplomatic Service. The key to his appointment can probably be found in an interview he gave in March 1988, in which he was quoted as saying: 'Our job is to promote the development of British interests in an era in which Britain has a new political and economic strength and respect in the world. This opens up new opportunities.' (*Independent* 18 January 1988) This positive attitude, clearly in harmony with views shared by Mrs Thatcher, endeared him to her. He wished to improve Britain's world standing and, as such, was prepared to be an 'action-man'. Dynamism in the FCO is what Mrs Thatcher sought and to her Wright showed the potential to warrant rapid promotion to the most senior post in that department.

Notions of a Politically Sympathetic Service Dispelled

The examination of the background of individual officials who received accelerated promotion or were appointed from outside of Whitehall, suggested that there were no appointments made on the grounds that individuals were 'politically sympathetic'. It would appear that, to the

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extent that interference occurred in the appointment or promotion of top officials, it did not introduce into the higher Civil Service a cohort of mandarins closely identifiable with the politics of the Thatcher Administration. This conclusion is partly based on the biographical material on each top mandarin and strengthened by academic and journalistic analyses.

The biographical analysis also revealed one other crucial pattern – of the eleven individuals identified as having received rapid promotion, seven (64 per cent) at some stage served in the Cabinet Office while Mrs Thatcher was Prime Minister. This suggests a need to reassess the understanding of the concept of a 'Thatcher effect'. In particular, more attention needs to be paid to the role of the Cabinet Office in relation to the perceived accelerated promotion of certain officials. Indeed, if we broaden the analysis to consider the 1974-9 Labour governments a similar effect emerges as only 2 of the 54 of individuals (3.7 per cent) who gained promotion or were appointed to Permanent or Deputy Permanent Secretary had previously served in the Cabinet Office (see appendix). In contrast, during the Thatcher years 17 of the 92 individuals (18.4 per cent) who gained promotion to, or were appointed at this level, at some stage were associated with the Cabinet Office serving under Mrs Thatcher (see appendix).

Explaining The Cabinet Office Effect

These results suggest a further hypothesis: individuals who had been in the Cabinet Office and so had a close understanding of how the Prime Minister and her inner core of ministers and advisers operated, were more likely to receive accelerated promotion. Of course, this interpretation assumes that an individual working in the Cabinet Office became very familiar with the work of that government, knew what the government's goals were and established a close working professional relationship with the Prime Minister. In such circumstances, individuals who were fully supportive in their role might be 'earmarked' for rapid promotion. In fact, there are two possible explanations of this pattern:

- a) Mrs Thatcher was more likely to favour individuals who had been socialised into her way of thinking. The emphasis was not necessarily, or even mainly, on the individual's political views but upon his/her willingness to accept a new path, not simply adopt the traditional consensus option. As Ridley (1983:40) puts it: 'While the

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mandarins may be loyal ... that is not enough if radically new policies are to be implemented.'

b) The Cabinet Office could be regarded as a 'testing ground' for officials lower down the hierarchy who gained the reputation of 'can-do' individuals. What is suggested here is that Mrs Thatcher was keen to see at first hand whether officials who had gained an efficient, able, 'getting on with the job' reputation, were in fact worthy of accelerated promotion. In transferring these individuals to the Cabinet Office she was able to gain a close working knowledge of how effectively they operated. Anthony Seldon (1990) analysed co-ordination in the Cabinet Office and observed a trend of seconding young, 'high-flyers' into the Cabinet Office. Individuals, who had already been marked out for future rapid promotion, became part of what Seldon calls a 'loan system', whereby they would leave their own department to serve in the Cabinet Office for a two to three year period. This ensured 'a steady supply of appointees with fresh experience of the workings, personalities and problems of the departments from when they came, which helped keep the Cabinet Office fully in touch with, and in the confidence of, the rest of Whitehall' (Seldon 1990:110). Those who impressed gained accelerated promotion to the highest ranks, the others were either held back or continued at the normal rate of Whitehall promotion.

Conclusion: A Business Ethos or Depoliticization?

Senior Civil Servants may no longer be entirely anonymous appendages of ministers, but their greater 'visibility' has not compromised their ability to serve governments of different complexions. Party polarisation has by no means reached the stage where the role of the career civil servant is impossible to perform. Robert Armstrong (1985), a member of the SASC for four years, declared of Mrs Thatcher: 'She is not concerned with, and I can vouch for the fact that she does not seek to ascertain, the political views or sympathies [if any] of those who were recommended ... She wants as I want, to have the best person for the job.'

Neither of the main opposition parties believed Mrs Thatcher had in some insidious manner attempted overtly to politicise the Civil Service. During a television interview in 1985, Neil Kinnock stated he would willingly accept the Civil Service inherited from the Conservatives. He also indicated that an incoming Labour Government would not retain Mrs Thatcher's special advisers, but as regards Permanent Secretaries:

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We obviously have to examine the degree of enthusiasm and loyalty that they are prepared to demonstrate in support of a Labour Government and in the implementation of the policy of that Government. I'm prepared to work on that basis, the conventional basis, which has stood us in good stead in Britain. (Neil Kinnock, *A Week In Politics*, 29 May 1985)

There is however a subtler concern emphasised recently by John Smith, now the Labour leader:

It certainly occurs to us from time to time that there might be a Conservative mind-set that has settled against public sector solutions, for example and that does worry me that there could be an intellectual tradition, tilted so far away from the policies of the Government that it might create problems. (Hennessy and Coates 1992:10)

Overall, mainstream opinion in all the opposition parties is sceptical about claims that since 1979 the Service has been politicised and all oppose any moves towards openly party political appointments. The Labour Party's acceptance of the higher Civil Service was welcomed by Robert Armstrong (1985) when he declared: 'He [Kinnock] can be sure that ... the Civil Service would serve the Government of which he was the head with no less energy or loyalty, and goodwill than they had served the present government and its predecessors.'

The analysis presented here confirms this view. There has been little or no overt party politicisation of the senior Civil Service. Mrs Thatcher was able to influence the appointment of more Permanent Secretaries than any other past Prime Minister. Despite the secrecy which surrounded the SASC it is clear that during the 1980s she regularly intervened in the appointments/promotion procedure.

The view that Mrs Thatcher appointed individuals sympathetic to the Party's policies was always too simplistic a notion. In contrast, a far more credible assessment of the Thatcher approach to top appointments was that she appointed people with management experience or a 'can-do' reputation. In addition however, the analysis here has revealed that, during the Thatcher years, a number of individuals spent time serving in the Cabinet Office, prior to promotion to the highest grades. This pattern was particularly noticeable in comparison with Labour Governments between 1974-79.

The number of individuals who actually worked with Mrs Thatcher in

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the Cabinet Office appeared to suggest that what emerged was a less critical Civil Service. In effect, these individuals may have been 'socialised', with the higher Civil Service and transformed into a breed of 'can-do' officials who readily passed the 'one-of-us' test. The former civil servant William Plowden (Hennessy and Coates 1992:11) offers some support for this notion:

I think we believe, wrongly, that it is possible, for civil servants to convince all the politicians for whom they'll work, and indeed to convince the electorate at large, that they can be totally neutral and totally impartial servants of any party of any persuasion. I just don't, and I've never believed that to be psychologically plausible. And I think we should acknowledge it and I think we are the extreme case at one end of the spectrum of systems of government in believing that civil servants can be totally transferable between different administrations.

This has a profound implication for the service as a whole: it may involve the erosion of a core principal of the Civil Service, the willingness of senior civil servants to offer informed criticism of party policy. In relation to the selection of new appointments, Mrs Thatcher displayed a close personal interest and influence and, at the same time, the Head of the Home Civil Service took account of her preferences in preparing short lists. The Donald Derx case was a classic example, clearly described by James Prior who witnessed it when he was Secretary of State for Employment. On a visit to the Department Mrs Thatcher became involved in an argument with a very 'dedicated civil servant' – Donald Derx. The argument was about industrial relations, or more particularly secondary industrial action. Prior noted she knew neither the facts nor the legal position on this detail of policy. Derx ended the argument by bluntly inquiring: 'Prime Minister – do you really want to know the facts?'. Prior (1986:136) has pointedly observed that afterwards Derx was continually passed over for promotion: 'It was a pity that she was not able to accept that by standing up to her, he was displaying qualities which a civil servant must have if he is to serve his Minister properly, and which she of all people used generally to accept.' This does not mean that individuals who had already obtained the highest posts, the 'chosen few', were simply 'yes' men. Thatcher respected individuals prepared to stand up for what they believed in. As one of her Permanent Secretaries, Anthony Parsons, observed:

I've disagreed with her, stood up to her, on many many occasions,

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over many many different subjects. I've never found her either pompous or hierarchical or resentful about it. Obviously she may violently disagree, but in my experience she has always welcomed really strong expression of view, even if it's totally contrary to her own. (Young & Sloman 1986:51)

What is apparent is the speed at which Mrs Thatcher judged people. Another of her Permanent Secretaries, William Pile (who served under her in 1973 in the Department of Education), noted:

She made up her mind about people very quickly and didn't change it. She once said 'I made up my mind about people in the first ten seconds and I very rarely change it' ... When she made up her mind you were consigned either to a very short list of saints or a very long list of sinners and that was the difficulty, you couldn't work your passage from one side of the list to the other except in very exceptional circumstances. (quoted in Young and Sloman 1986:48)

These comments are revealing in highlighting the approach of Mrs Thatcher to assessing the personnel with whom she would have to deal. However, perhaps James Prior's observation highlighted the most understated phenomena concerning the higher Civil Service throughout the 1980s: the 'Thatcher effect' may have actually 'depoliticized' the upper echelons and with it accelerated the growth of a less critical Civil Service. Certainly Hennessy (1989:638) has argued this point:

The dangers are of the younger people, seeing that advice which Ministers want to hear falls with a joyous note on their ears, and advice which they need to hear falls on their ear with a rather dismal note, will tend to make officials trim, make their advice what Ministers want to hear rather than what they need to know.

Of course this argument can be linked to the view that the Cabinet Office is used as a testing ground for young officials with 'can-do' reputations. It would appear Mrs Thatcher did not oppose individual civil servants standing-up to her, as long as they had already received her seal of approval, normally through a close working knowledge derived from time spent working in the Cabinet Office. In contrast Derx was a very able individual prepared to stand-up to Mrs Thatcher, who then failed to gain any further endorsement. Such 'disloyalty' may have resulted in a block on his chances of further promotion.

Alternatively, it could be argued that the neutralisation of independent

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criticism represented further evidence of a 'Thatcher effect': the selection of senior Civil Servants with certain qualities, skills and attitudes who supported that government's policies, or at least its approach towards problems. Thus, rather than 'de-politicising' the highest mandarins, rather they have actively been politicised. The evidence here indicates that a degree of interference in the appointments procedure did occur during the Conservative Administration. This was particularly highlighted by the analysis comparing the appointments procedure under the Thatcher Government, with that of the previous Labour Government. Thus, as Ridley (1983:43) noted: 'Intervention by politicians in promotion, even if it does not have a straight party-political character, tends to politicise the Civil Service and thus calls into question the constitutional convention that senior officials are the neutral servants of successive governments.'

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APPENDIX

1. The individuals who gained promotion to Grades 1/1a and who served in the Cabinet Office at some stage during the 1974-79 Labour Government were:

Brian Cubbon, Deputy Secretary in the Cabinet Office 1971-75, who was promoted to Permanent Under Secretary of State in the Northern Ireland Office 1976-79.

James Hamilton, Deputy Secretary in the Cabinet Office 1973-76, who was promoted to Permanent Under Secretary of State in the Department of Education and Science 1976-83.

2. The individuals promoted or appointed to Permanent Secretary under Mrs Thatcher and who at some stage had also served in the Cabinet Office were:

J. B. Unwin, 1985-87 Deputy Secretary in the Cabinet Office.

C. A. Whitmore, 1979-82 Principal Private Secretary to the Prime Minister.

D. S. Hancock, 1982-83 Deputy Secretary, the Secretariat.

P. Harrop, 1979-80 Deputy Secretary, the Secretariat.

M. Franklin, 1977-81 Deputy Secretary, the Secretariat

A. Bailey, 1981-82 Deputy Secretary in the Central Policy Review Staff

R. Butler, 1982-85 Second Permanent Secretary, in the Cabinet Office.

J. Cassels, 1983-84 Second Permanent Secretary the Cabinet Office

P. Le Cheminant, 1983-84 Second Permanent Secretary the Cabinet Office.

A. E. Mueller, 1985-87 Permanent Secretary the Cabinet Office

J. Hibbert, 1985-90 Director and Head of Government Statistical Services, Cabinet Office.

E. Kemp, 1988-90 Second Permanent Secretary, the Cabinet Office

J. Caines, 1983 Deputy Secretary, the Cabinet Office

J. Chilcot, 1984-86 Under Secretary, the Cabinet Office

T. Lankester, 1979-81 Private Secretary to the Prime Minister

P. Weston, 1988-89 Deputy Secretary, the Cabinet Office

N. Wicks, 1985-88 Principal Private Secretary to the Prime Minister.

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