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Is the Civil Service changing? The answer is undoubtedly: yes. The Civil Service has always been changing. 100 years ago it was different from today. Departments enjoyed considerable autonomy. Nearly thirty per cent of permanent secretaries appointed between 1900 and 1919 had begun life in another profession. Their average age was under 40. It was not unknown for former MPs and junior ministers to become permanent secretaries.

The Civil Service which I joined in 1966 was essentially the Civil Service created by the Treasury under Sir Warren Fisher in the inter-war years, united in one centralised structure with three main classes - administrative, executive and clerical. It was the mandarin model. We have been steadily moving away from the mandarin model for forty years. The Civil Service I left was not the one I joined. It may be that a new kind of mandarin is being invented. But in any event the Civil Service is changing.

Let us turn to this concept of the mandarins. What is or was this myth of the mandarin? I know of no definition of 'mandarin' beyond the definition in the OED which says: 'a grotesque toy figure in Chinese costume that goes on nodding after it is shaken'. I do not want to pursue that line of thought!

Taking a pot shot, I would say that mandarins – people such as Hankey, Fisher, Bridges, Normanbrook, Evelyn Sharp, Burke Trend and all their generation - were public figures of intelligence, character and ability, who worked behind the scenes managing the processes of government excellently and without political involvement. They were dedicated public servants schooled in the values of Northcote Trevelyan. Their skills lay in the effective use of the written word, in the deployment of argument and in the giving of advice. They were not afraid of speaking truth unto power and they made available to Ministers the corporate memory and wisdom of the Service built up over many years.

Their heyday was in the post-war years when the performance of the Service was strong. Like Sir Humphrey, they were figures of fun along with Wigan pier and mothers-in-law, as Lord Bridges (1950) said in his famous lecture, *Portrait of a Profession*. But they were members of the best Civil Service in the world and with their Rolls Royce brains and subtlety they could be relied upon – so the myth runs - to make sure that governments were well run, and if necessary kept in check, and that the constitutional conventions were observed. I suspect that somewhere in the public subconscious people were reassured by their presence and by the belief that the constitution and good government were safeguarded by them.

Some of this was, and is still, true. The British Civil Service is still excellent. It comprises outstanding people who are committed to public service. It still follows the great Victorian principle of appointment and promotion on merit, and holds to longstanding values of integrity, honesty, objectivity and political impartiality, as Gus O'Donnell's new

It would be wrong to glorify the mandarin period. Senior civil servants of that time were

have to face the critical scrutiny of the media which in the case of a personal attack may feel like being mugged in the street. I sometimes wonder whether the media understand their own power or the impact they can have on the inner workings of government. They have to nurse their constituencies, usually in their free time at the weekend, and ensure their own re-election.

If they are ambitious – and most of them are: otherwise what is the point of it? -they have to keep an eye on the next reshuffle, a weapon which Number 10 are not afraid to use to encourage loyalty. Above all they are under pressure to produce results on timetables which in management terms are often unrealistic. It is a mistake to think that the needs of politics and the needs of management always coincide. Politicians and managers often see the world through a diffe



It has to be won by the civil servant across the gulf which separates the temporary politician from the permanent official, without becoming politically partial. Once established it often produces excellent working partnerships. And it explains much about the sense of loyalty and duty which is strong in the Service. It explains the outcry for instance which followed Christopher Meyer's book and indeed my own reluctance tonight to talk to you about current events.

Unfortunately the sense of trust which individuals may win does not always extend beyond them to the Civil Service as a whole. There is often a lingering feeling that beyond the individuals whom the Minister deals with and trusts, there are lurking hordes of civil servants who are not so supportive. I can remember too many occasions over the years when Ministers in different governments have said: 'I know what you, and the other officials whom I see, do and I am grateful; but what are the other thousands of the people in this department doing?'. The only answer then is to persuade the Minister to go out and see for him or herself

It is this inner tension between Ministers and Civil Servants which is the mainspring of change in the character of the Service. Ministers need to change things. Civil Servants need to win trust. There is a deal to be done. It may be that the presence of a number of special advisers changes the terms of trading, but that is not my point today. My focus is on the inner drives for change.

Wave upon wave of politicians, of whatever political party, have borne down on the Civil Service over the years, like an ocean beating against the shoreline, and urged it to transform its performance. Generation after generation of newly appointed politicians have come into office and demanded that while they are in power the Civil Service should comply with their needs, their priorities, and their vision of the role of Government, as if no other Minister, no other government, were ever likely to take over from them. And generation after generation of civil servant have accepted their



The media add to the pressure. There has been a growing willingness, even eagerness, to

trait. Part of that tradition must remain: it is and always will be crucial to ensure that Ministers have a private space in which to discuss options, in which to argue among themselves, before reaching a collective view. The relationship of confidence between Ministers and Ministers and between Ministers and their officials should always be protected, as I explained earlier. So too must certain intelligence and security matters.

But the writing is on the wall. Freedom of Information and greater openness with the media, something which Gus O'Donnell himself admirably personifies, will in time create a more open culture in government than





It is interesting that the new Code published in June 2006 has another shot at developing a subtler position. It drops the reference to loyalty to the government of the day and develops an approach based on support for the government and accountability to Ministers combined with 'a commitment *to the Civil Service and its core values*' (my italics). It is a neat approach and it will be interesting to see how it fairs in rough weather. I think it is right to anticipate pressure in this area. As assemblies and parliaments assume their own personality in Scotland, Wales an Northern Ireland and as localism gains a hold on communities, as I believe it will, we may find the Civil Service's loyalties come under pressure to fragment. They may not but my point is that the potential for change is there.

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