

STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE

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Most liberal democracies, especially countries in the commonwealth with British traditions, are proud of their high standards in public life. Their systems of government have been developed with considerable care. Citizens in general have high expectations of their politicians and officials, and their expectations have usually been met. The occasional *cause celebre* has had a salutary educational affect in terms of drawing attention to dangers to be avoided, often in leading to the introduction of new procedures or safeguards, and also a contributory factor in the education of citizens about their systems of government, through focusing attention on what standards to expect and what to condemn.

Leading politicians, officials and writers have contributed to this reputation by emphasising the high standards achieved and expected. For example, in his 1993 evidence to the United Kingdom's Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, Lord Callaghan said of the British civil service the 'It really is a bulwark of the constitution. One only has to go to any other country and to see what happens when the Civil Service is not a bulwark, when it does not have the traditions of our Civil Service';¹ and Laby Thatcher in her book *The Downing Street Years*, sa 'The sheer professionalism of the British Civil Service, which allows governments to come and go with a minimum of dislocation and a maximum of efficiency, is something other countries with different systems have every cause to envy'.²

These high standards were advanced by a number of conventions, processes and procedures that were developed over long periods of time and that became particularly important in the context of the so-called unwritten features of a constitution. Also carefully designing the machinery of government, by statements made of the purposes of our insitutions and, in more recent times, by codes of practice. But perhaps most important of all, they have arisen from a complex amalgam which social scientists often refer to as socialisation. In this context this refers to the impact of a variable combination of education, unstructured learning, observation, and experience of life. People know what they ought to do, and what should be expected of others, from this important combination, and from their own reflections about it. A good example of this in practice, using terminology which reflected his own classical education, is the statement made by Sir William Armstrong in 1969, when, as Head of the Civil Service, he was being questioned on television about his personal attitude

to exercising the considerable power he had. He explained that for him, being accountable to oneself was the greatest taskmaster. He added: I am accountable to my own ideal of a civil servant'.³

The position from which this lecture begins is therefore that high standards have been expected in public life, and to a considerable degree those standards have been achieved - or, at least, there is a widespread belief that they were being achieved. Politicians and civil servants, as individuals or as groups, may not have been noticeably popular, and they may have been good subjects for caricature; but they have been largely trusted, thought to have been decent, and motivated in the direction of the public interest rather than satisfying their personal or private interests. When compared with other countries, our own experience of standards in public life has usually been reflected in feelings of relief, gratitude for our apparent good fortune, and a belief that, on balance, we are not really being badly served.

In recent years, however, the position has changed. There is less reason for contentment and no reason for complacency. People look back on the events of nearly thirty-five years ago, recall that, in the United Kingdom, John Profumo resigned from the Government and Parliament because he was found to have lied to Parliament, and they reflect that his action in resigning would not be easily found in similar circumstances today. MPs have been exposed for accepting money to ask questions in the House of Commons, but they have not resigned their seats. There appears to have been an increase in the number of cases of officials found guilty of corruption. There have been numerous examples of standards being lowered in the provision of services, and in the ways of assessing and measuring services. The idea of upholding public service above private or sectional interests is no longer a revered feature of public life. Indeed, as Fergus Allen, formerly a First Civil Service Commissioner, recently put it: 'Impartial public service is a concept to be praised from the platform but laughed at in the cocktail bar'.⁴ It is, perhaps, an important sign of the times. As a result there have been two significant institutional developments confirming that all is not well. A standing Commission, under Lord Nolan, has been created to consider and make recommendations about standards in public life,⁵ and there has been an unprecedented major public inquiry by Sir Richard Scott into the export of defence equipment and dual use goods to Iraq.⁶ This inquiry, in particular, revealed contemporary details of the way government works so that any responsible citizen is now likely to be very anxious about current and future standards in public life.

For the purposes of this lecture it should be emphasised that the Scott Report has made available more detail about the working of government than any previous public inquiry. Other inquiries, even those set up in accordance with the provisions of the 1921 Tribunals of Inquiry (Evidence) Act, have not been so revealing, nor have they presented so many judgments and considered comments on administrative practice.⁷ However, the starting point as far as the Scott Report is concerned, will not be the purpose of the Scott Inquiry but its unprecedented revelations about

standards in public life, including aspects of ministerial responsibility and the abuse of power. This will be followed by comments on the machinery of government, and ethics in the practice of government. The lecture will end with some personal comments and reflections.

In the final paragraph of volume one of his Report, Scott, summarising the Government's attitude to policy on defence exports to Iraq, says that statements made in 1989 and 1990 'consistently ... failed to discharge the obligations imposed by the constitutional principle of ministerial accountability'⁸. His Report is peppered throughout with observations about ministers and civil servants failing to comply with these obligations, and although at first sight the Scott Report appears to have drawn attention to weaknesses in the practice of the key doctrine of ministerial responsibility, there is a sense in which the report in fact re-emphasises its importance. Throughout the report there are numerous examples of the ways the behaviour of officials is conditioned by this doctrine. The evidence makes it absolutely clear that the doctrine - which requires ministers to be responsible for all actions carried in their name by their officials - is still of fundamental importance in the British system of government. Of course, any student of public policy knows that it is a doctrine of much more significance than the more sensational press reports suggest: popular newspapers sometimes find it easy to state its lack of practical relevance, citing the apparent absence of ministerial resignations as evidence. Students of public policy, and discerning citizens, know that there is much more to the doctrine than the press and other media commentators might have us believe. In practice, this doctrine, or constitutional convention, permeates the daily decision making processes in all government departments. This is always evident where officials have to be aware of the politically sensitive implications of any decision they may make, even where it is an apparently routine nature.

In recent years the doctrine of ministerial responsibility has been undermined by politicians. There have been occasions when ministers have not been prepared to accept public responsibility for the consequences of decisions they approved or that were made in their name. An outstanding example of this - in my opinion a watershed in the history of ministerial accountability - was in 1972 when Mr John Davies, as Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, told civil servants who had been criticised by the Vehicle and General Inquiry, that they could speak publicly in defence of their position if, as he put it, 'they considered that it was in their best interest to do so'.⁹ This was contrary to any reasonable expectation of ministerial responsibility and, indeed, could have led to his officials becoming public figures and the redundancy of ministers, but Davies's statement was not even challenged by the Opposition in the House of Commons. A second example occurred in 1985. In oral evidence to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, Mr Alistair Graham, then General Secretary of the Civil and Public Services Association,

was being questioned about the duties and responsibilities of civil servants and ministers. When he was being pressed strongly by Mr Ralph Howell MP, Graham replied by asking Howell what he thought a civil servant should do if he was being asked to play a role in misleading, or publicly lying to, Parliament. Howell replied: 'Since that has been happening ever since Parliament has been, I cannot see what you are getting fussed about'.¹⁰ It seemed extraordinary that an MP should make such a statement in public, but it was even more extraordinary that the statement did not receive a rebuke or comment from the Committee Chairman or any other MP present. The serious implication was that they accepted the statement as accurate in reference to the conduct of ministers.

The Scott Report reveals more examples, both about the willingness of ministers to circumvent the requirements of ministerial responsibility and more widely about the decline in constitutional propriety of the relationships between ministers and civil servants. They reveal that civil servants are equally culpable as their political masters for this decline. Three examples illustrate this.

One of the Ministers of Defence in 1985 was Mr (now Sir) Adam Butler, and he made it clear to his civil servants, on more than one occasion, that he wanted to be kept informed about decisions of Interdepartmental Committee on licensing experts to Iran and Iraq, so that he could pursue matters himself if he wished. In particular he wanted to see details of license approvals before the information was passed to the Department of Trade and Industry or to the companies concerned. His civil servants, however, effectively prevented this by presenting the information so late that, as Scott put it, 'The Minister was being presented with a *fait accompli*'.¹¹ Scott later added: 'I do not understand how Mr Dawson (a civil servant) could have thought it right to dispense with Mr Butler's approval of the proposed procedures.'¹² The Minister, it seemed to Scott, was not aware until some time later that he had been effectively denied the opportunity of challenging the Interdepartmental Committee's decisions, and as soon as he became aware, he had the position remedied. The fact remains, however, that civil servants were expressly ignoring the Minister's instructions and gave him no time to intervene in decisions before they were announced. The reason for this surprising disregard of the authority of, and accountability to ministers, was that civil servants were placing greater emphasis on increasing defence sales than they were on carrying out the minister's instructions and getting ministerial approval of licensing decisions. Civil servants also seemed to be adopting a cavalier attitude to the requirement for consultation. There is, in practice, so much difference between consulting, on the one hand, and presenting information, on the other, that failure to actually consult the minister resulted in an unauthorised change in the power base for decision making from ministers to officials.¹³

A second revelation in the Scott Reports concerns the abuse of power by successive governments from the end of the Second World war until December 1990, in the using of emergency powers, intended only for the duration of the emergency, contained in the Import, Export and Customs Powers (Defence) Act, 1939. This resulted in controls over exports for reasons of administrative convenience and political expediency by the 'convenient fiction' that the wartime emergency was continuing. Officials and politicians, Scott discovered, were aware that this was a misuse of power but nevertheless continued to make decisions on that basis. Scott made his reaction perfectly clear by saying that this was 'a continuing abuse of power'.¹⁴

Sadly, it is appropriate to recall that at least one other example could be given of using powers intended by Parliament for one purpose, for a quite different purpose. When the Civil Service Department was created in 1968 it was established not by an Act of Parliament but by an Order in Council.¹⁵ 'The Minister for the Civil Service Order' (No 1656), was promulgated in pursuance of the Ministers of the Crown (Transfers of Functions) Act 1946. However, that Act was intended to rationalise functions between departments in post-war conditions, and Parliament was specifically told at the time that it could not be used to set up a new ministry.¹⁶ Of course, ministers and officials could have argued that it was in accordance with ancient precedent to regulate the Civil Service of the Crown by Orders in Council, and the effect was the same whatever the ultimate basis of authority was. However, the fact remains that a new ministry was set up by a procedure of very debious propriety.

These examples should be enough to indicate that, in terms of constitutional conventions and formal organisation theory alone, standards have been by no means as high as is popularly thought. Any examples of setting aside ministerial responsibility, and the abuse of power for administrative convenience or political expediency, are extremely worrying in a system of government which is popularly thought to be above such tactics. Indeed, the examples seem more likely to have come from a developing country with little experience of constitutional government or liberal democracy than from the United Kingdom, with its long respected traditions of high standards in the practice of government. Nevertheless, the details presented here are soundly based on incontrovertible evidence. Anxieties are even more serious when the present British Government's plans for future of its recruitment agency; recruitment and Assessment services, are considered as an example of changes in the machinery of government.

Recruitment and Assessment services (RAS) was created as an executive agency of government in 1991. Its primary aim was 'to be the most cost-effective centre of excellence in the recruitment and selection services working in the public sector'.¹⁷ As an executive agency, it was an example of implementing the proposals in the Next Steps Report of 1988.¹⁸ That report made

recommendations for delivering government services more efficiently and effectively within available resources, for the benefit of taxpayers, customers and staff. In particular, it said that government activities were too big to be managed as one unit, and freestanding agencies should be created to carry out specific activities. In 1991 the Government therefore abolished the Civil Service Commission, replacing it with RAS and a small office, known as the Office of the Civil Service Commissioners. The Commissioners continued, but with reduced responsibilities, and much of the continuing operational work of advertising vacancies, and running the selection competitions for recruiting staff became functions of the new RAS agency.

This work had a long and distinguished history. In the nineteenth century there was considerable public concern about the inefficiency of government departments and the problems caused by patronage as a survival of aristocratic privilege. This led to a number of inquiries into the work of individual government departments and, later, to what amounted to a concluding report by Sir Stafford Northcote and Sir Charles Trevelyn. In their famous report, published in 1854, two of the most important proposals were that open competitive examinations should replace patronage, and that the examinations should be conducted by an independent body of examiners.¹⁹ These duties became the responsibility of the Civil Service Commission, first set up in 1855 on an experimental basis, but confirmed on a more effective and permanent basis, from 1870. It became a requirement that anyone appointed to a permanent position in the civil service should have a certificate of qualification from the Commissioners.

The system of selection by open competition proved to be very effective, was highly regarded and copied by other countries. After the Second World War the Commission developed the selection of graduate entrants through a specially created and subsequently world famous Civil Service Selection Board.²⁰ All of this was done by the Commissioners and their staff to high standards and with great distinction. The result was that the Civil Service Commission and its Civil Service Selection Board became, in the recent words of Lord Bancroft, a former Head of the Civil Service, 'the envy of the world', and 'open competition supervised by an independent body itself protected against interference from any quarter, has been the bedrock of Civil Service standards for more than a century'.²¹

Since 1991 RAS, as an agency of government, has had to compete with commercial organisation for contracts from departments to select their staff. This was because devolution of recruitment to departments meant that over 3,000 recruitment units had been created, and for many categories of jobs RAS had no protected right to run the recruitment schemes. Some departments did their own, others contracted out the work, or parts of it, to firms of consultants. The Commissioners were still responsible for monitoring recruitment according

to the principles laid down by the minister for fair and open competition, and they have been doing this in what has been referred to as 'light-handed, economical and systems-based manner'.²² RAS meanwhile developed a consultancy service to advise departments on their devolved responsibilities, using the considerable expertise and experience it had of public service recruitment.

On 23 November 1995, by an arranged question in the House of Commons - and in terms of channels for the announcement of a public policy you can't get much lower than that - to which the Government responded with a written answer, it was revealed that the Government intended to sell RAS. Later, on 25 January 1996, Earl Howe explained in the House of Lords that the Government's policy on this issue began 'from the premise that the administration of a recruitment service ... is not a task which needs to be undertaken by government'.²³ It was also announced that till the service was privatized staff would, in principle, be able to apply for other posts advertised within the civil service, subject to the agreement of line management that they could be released. However, a news release from the Office of Public Service has recognised that, in practice, staff might find it difficult to secure this agreement, because in order to maintain the viability, and presumably achieve the saleability of RAS, staff will have to be sold as one of its main assets. It therefore seems that most RAS staff will have no alternative to ending their public service careers. It remains to be seen what happens to this sale in the next two or three months, but whatever happens to RAS, the arrangements for recruiting civil servants have been made changed fundamentally in the last few years. Some attempts have been made to preserve the standards for which, in the past, the Civil Service Commission achieved such widespread recognition. In particular, the Commissioners issued a Recruitment Code in 1995;²⁴ but whether this will be sufficient to maintain the high reputation of civil service recruitment will only be evident after many more years (i.e. when new recruits have had the chance to achieve the most senior positions in departments).

The reason for focusing on the recent history and the proposed sale of RAS is that it indicates the importance of machinery of government arrangements for ensuring high standards in public service. Already there is no central office with overall responsibility for advertising, processing applications, selecting candidates and allocating them to departments. Most of this work is now done by departments themselves. However well drafted the recruitment Code may have been, it is unlikely to ensure that the previous standards are applied in so many devolved units, and there is already a considerable amount of anecdotal evidence suggesting that the efficiency of recruitment procedures is no longer as good as it was, and good graduates are being discouraged from applying for some of the most important competitions. Moreover, it is very difficult to explain to friends and colleagues, especially in other countries, why the Civil Service Commission, previously so widely admired, has now been abolished and RAS is being sold.

The issues associated with the Civil Service Commission and RAS are more important than other topics in the machinery of government. This is because the recruitment processes, for which they were responsible, played such a major role in eliminating patronage and improving the overall efficiency of government departments. Their greatly admired achievements were, in fact, to recruit people both of merit and who were motivated to public service. There can be no guarantees that a commercial organisation, recruiting civil servants on a contract basis, and as only part of its activities, will be able to perform a comparable service—however good the Recruitment Code is that guides the work and however effective the light-handed monitoring procedure may be.

Many other examples could also be given of the importance of high standards when designing or re-structuring government departments and their associated procedures. For example, at the present time questions are being asked in the United Kingdom about the possible conflicts of interest in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, when dealing with the problems associated with bovine spongiform encephalopathy (i.e. mad cow disease). Can such a ministry be properly effective when looking after both food hygiene interests and farming interests? What structures are best suited to resolving conflicts between government departments in matters like the exporting of defence equipment and dual use goods, especially where, as in the case of Iraq, three government departments were involved with interests that were by no means the same? In relation to these and similar questions it is important to have clear understandings of what the purposes of particular organisations are, how their purposes may be best achieved. These are as much matters for the attention of students of public policy and for responsible citizens as any more salacious aspects of the behaviour of particular individuals in public life, though those elements also have important parts to play in the widest approach to this topic.

The third area of the subject to be briefly considered in this lecture is ethics in the practice of governments; but as time is limited, two examples only will be introduced. Ethics in governments is such a very broad topic that these examples can do no more than indicate the sorts of themes worth pursuing further. The two examples are first, lying, including being economical with the truth; and secondly, openness and embarrassment.

First, as far as the acceptability of lying is concerned, much depends on such factors as the values of society, including some of the most important principles of the systems of government, and the interests being held in the balance when a decision has to be made about the over-riding interest or goal to be pursued, and other interests to be subordinated. There is a significant literature on this subject, including the major works on lying and secrets by Sissela Bok,²⁵ but there is no time even to mention the many themes that should be explored. However, one of the matters examined so well by Bok is

the relationship between lying and the duty felt by individuals to protect their secrets, and it is this link which will be considered here because the two themes come together so well and so provocatively in the evidence to the Scott inquiry.

Lying was significant in the controversy over exporting arms to Iraq because of its political perspectives. Again and again in the Scott report politicians and officials were making decisions for reasons other than the reasons they were stating. In the 1980s the United Kingdom Government was trying to maximise its sales of arms but at the same time presenting itself not only as not assisting Iran or Iraq in their hostilities, it was also claiming to adopt an even-handed and impartial approach to the two countries. This led to the development of guidelines for deciding export licence applications. The guidelines were carefully drafted, and the key criterion, on which licence applications were considered, was whether new orders for any defence equipment would 'significantly enhance'²⁶ the capacity of either side to prolong or exacerbate the conflict. These guidelines, and in particular the key criterion that is, significant enhancement, as the former minister Mr Alan Clark explained, an ideal Whitehall formula. He said the guidelines were:

'imprecise, open to argument in almost every instance, guaranteed to generate debate, if not dispute between different Departments (thus generating much paper, sub-committees and general bureaucratic self-justification). They were high-sounding, combining it seemed both moral and practical considerations, and yet imprecise enough to allow real policy an override in exceptional circumstances.'²⁷

These policy guidelines had the quite extraordinary result of allowing policy to change, though interpretation and flexible implementation, while ministers claimed that it had not changed. From the perspective of this present discussion it is not the guidelines or their interpretation that will be considered but the complex reasoning and attitude of politicians and officials to the democratic environment. It may be argued by people expecting integrity in public life that if we are prepared to sell arms to anyone who wants to buy them, including tyrants, we should be prepared to say so and defend the policy. The alternative, involving an elaborate pretence, seems intended to convince, or keep in the dark, gullible or ill-informed citizens, though it may never convince people with insider experience, or who have studied public policy.

What is so serious about this is that it is contrary to parliamentary expectations and offensive to citizens. As Scott has reported, the obligation to be forthcoming with information in answer to Parliamentary Questions lies at the heart of the constitutional principle of ministerial responsibility.²⁸ Instead, what was revealed to the inquiry was that the Government's policy was being concealed, as Scott put it, 'from Parliament and the public, while at the same time repeatedly professing a defence sales policy that was impartial and even-handed'.²⁹

This conveniently leads on to comments about openness and secrecy. The Scott Report sheds new and unattractive light on this. As with other topics touched on all too briefly in this lecture, there is a large and well established literature on openness and secrecy.³⁰ Much of it is highly responsible - for example, in drawing attention in a democracy to the need for openness in order to hold a government fully accountable for its actions, and to assess the validity of actions taken; but at the same time recognising that there are occasions when confidentiality and secrecy have to be respected in the public interest or in the private interest of individual citizens. No where, as far as I know, is there a proper defence of secrecy on two of the grounds found by Scott to have been applied in practice. One of these was embarrassment: the evidence indicated that Public Interest Immunity certificates were being signed by ministers to suppress and keep from disclosure documents which, if disclosed, would be an embarrassment to the Government.³¹ The other is the attitude to publicity revealed in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The Assistant Head of the FCO Middle East Department wrote that '... if it becomes public knowledge that the tools are to be used to make munitions, deliveries will have to stop at once', and that the companies 'must renounce publicity and lobbying for their own good'. Scott interpreted this as accepting 'that public pressure may cause the reversal of an administrative decision (presumably a decision believed to be a correct one) and implicitly, that possibility is a good reason for knowledge being withheld from the public'.³² The implications of this were made even clearer, when Mr Barrett, a Ministry of Defence official, said 'the public would not understand',³³ and when Lord Howe agreed at the Scott inquiry that it was a 'Government knows best approach'.³⁴

This sheds new light on a phenomenon widely mentioned in studies of public policy making. One of the most sensitive constraints on civil servants in a liberal democracy is 'embarrassment' - which it is thought necessary to avoid at all costs. Anthony Sampson explains embarrassment as a word which signals the dreaded intrusion of the outside world.³⁵ In most cases this may, in the past, have been thought of as no more than inconvenience and additional expense when the administrator's carefully considered policy, conscientiously made in the public interest, is interrupted for reasons that official minds believe to be ill-informed or misguided. In other cases this may, in the past, have related to policy matters becoming sensitive in the context of partism controversy; and to officials loyal to whatever government they are currently serving, this, too, is inconvenient. Nowhere, as far as I know, has it ever before been related to concealing a policy from Parliament and the public because actual policy was contrary to the publicly professed policy of defence sales on a basis of impartiality and even-handedness.³⁶ Information about this was in fact legitimately requested through the normal parliamentary procedures but Scott found that it was being denied for the spurious reason of commercial

confidentiality, when it could easily have been provided without breaching any such confidentiality.³⁷ This was a serious denial of what Scott corrently referred to as 'the right of Parliament and the public to be informed of and to require Ministers to account publicly for the manner in which public money is being utilised'.³⁸

After this survey of some of the key issues raised, by the Scott Report and elsewhere, about standards in public life, it is now time for some personal comments and reflections.

For most of my life I have been a student of politics and, in particular, of public policy making with special reference to the United Kingdom. After some initial scepticism, I acquired a considerable respect for the politicians and civil servants I studied. Some of this respect was inspired by my teacher and friend Professor Bruce Miller, whose inaugural lecture was in praise of studying politicians. Miller noted that there was

'an incurable human tendency to blame somebody for the unpleasent things in life; and since politicians always claim credit for any good which occurs, it is reasonable that they should take the blame for the bad. It is also true that they sometimes tell lies and mislead the public ...(but, he said) I think we should take more account than we do of the indispensable functions which the politician performs in a free political culture. If we want a free political system, we cannot do without him'.³⁹

Comparable comments may be offered about civil servents. They, too, are necessary in a liberal democracy; and, though they can sometimes be infuriating and dilatory, and may also have other defects of bureaucrats, studies of past officials, especially in the United Kingdom, have generally shown them to be able, well-motivated, decent men and women, whose primary concern was to serve the public interest, through the administration of the policies of, or approved by, elected representatives. As individuals and as a group many of them have contributed to a tradition and ethos of public service; they have chosen an honourable profession of public service and done their best. Many civil servants and politicians are still like that, but there have been major changes in recent years. The private interests of officials have been stimulated by personnel policies that encourage performance related pay, with performance indicators that assess merit and reward achievement according to varieties of, often inadequately considered, measurable criteria. It is considered a virtue to be productive in these conditions, and people who are thought to be business-like and appear to get things done are rewarded with rapid advancement and the sort of salaries thought to be appropriate in a business-admired world. Sometimes, it seems, this undermines their traditional professional standards because, in order to advance their interests, it becomes expedient to give advice according to what they think ministers want to hear.

In the past there were safeguards, thought generally to be effective (though who knows how effective they were without a Scott Inquiry to investigate them?), and believed to be crucial in a country without the advantages of a written constitution. These safeguards were built up piecemeal and over many years. They included formal and hierarchical accountability within formal organisation structures, together with ultimate accountability to ministers, and ministerial accountability to Parliament; institutional provisions for fair and open recruitment of officials according to known standards by a respected independent body; legal safeguards to ensure that powers were exercised in accordance with the law by legitimate officials on behalf of ministers; and expectations that public policies should be fairly administered with as much openness as possible in the interests of democratic government.

Some of these safeguards are being abolished or are now considered to be redundant in the context of new approaches to public sector management. Therefore new safeguards are being introduced - in the United Kingdom there are now numerous customer service charters and codes of conduct for ministers and public servants. New commissioners have been created for administration, and for Parliament. There is the hope that, without a written constitution and a bill of rights, the gaps will be filled and everything will be all right.

This, however, is never likely to be completely satisfactory. It is not possible to legislate for trust; and laws and codes to protect the rights of individual do not always operate satisfactorily - as the evidence in totalitarian regimes proves. Indeed, as Ellen Wilkinson, the MP for Jarrow, wrote many years ago, 'Nothing is so dangerous in a democracy as a safeguard which appears to be adequate but is really a facade'.⁴⁰

The best safeguard for high standards in public life must be conscientious and responsible citizenship. It is only through a combination of active participation in citizenship, and education, including education about government and politics, as well as through good institutions, responsible procedures, and the widespread expectation of and agitation for high standards, that those high standards will be achieved and maintained in public life. It is not a responsibility of others, but of us all.

Notes

1. Treasury and Civil Service Committee, *The Role of the Civil Service: Interim Report*, Sixth Report, Session 1992-£93, HC 390-II, HMSO, 1993, Q. 622.
2. Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, Harper Collins, Quoted in *The Civil Service: Continuity and Change*, Cm 2627, HMSO, 1994, p. 6.
3. Quoted in Richard A. Chapma, *The Higher Civil Service in Britain*, Constable, 1970, p. 141.
4. *The Independent*, 4 March 1996.