

The Complete Yes Minister

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THE COMPLETE
YES
MINISTER



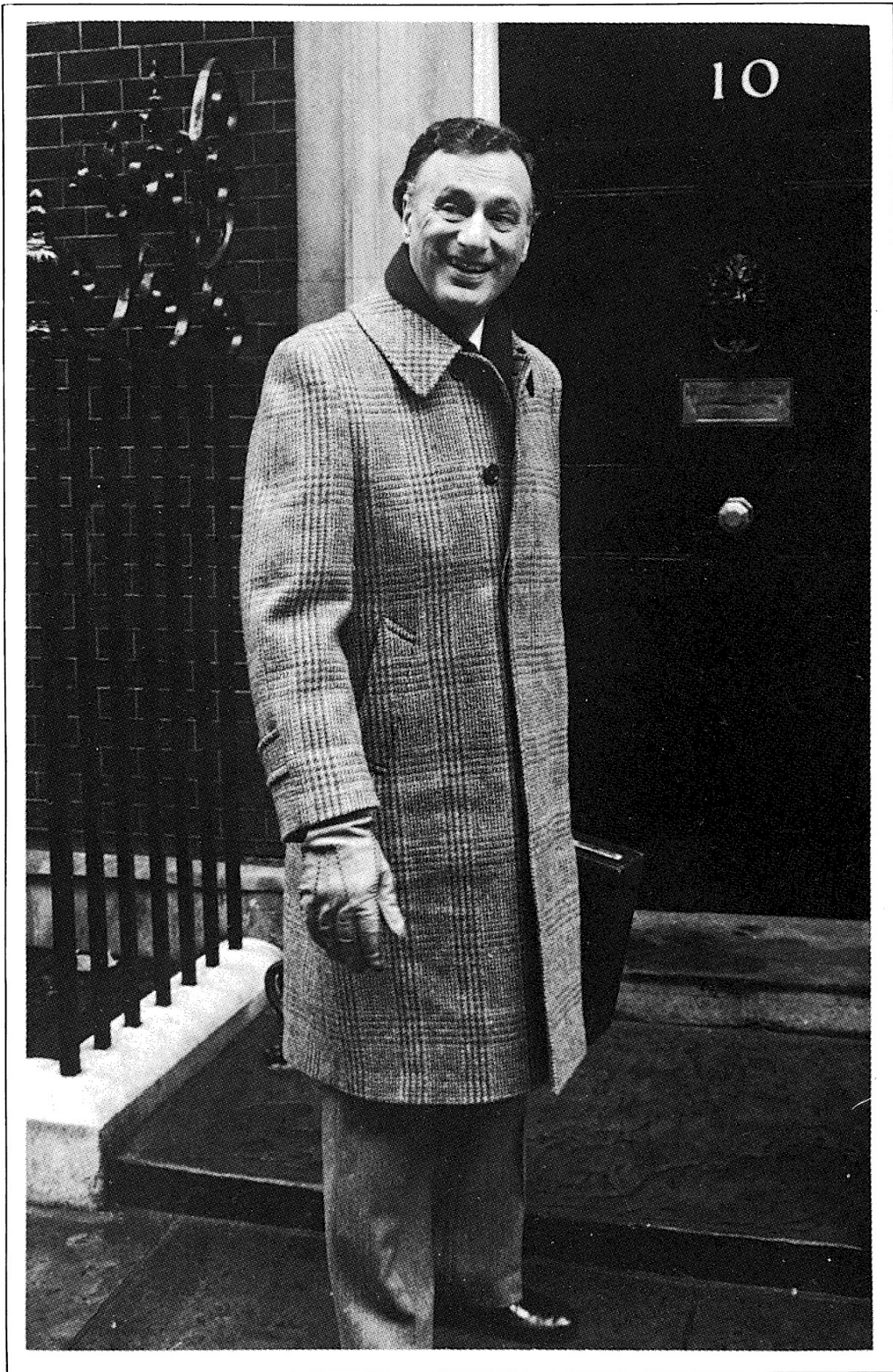
The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister

by

the Right Hon. James Hacker MP

Edited by Jonathan Lynn and Antony Jay

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The BBC TV series *Yes Minister* were written by Jonathan Lynn and Antony Jay and produced by Sydney Lotterby and Peter Whitmore. The part of *James Hacker* was played by Paul Eddington, *Sir Humphrey Appleby* by Nigel Hawthorne and *Bernard Woolley* by Derek Fowlds.

Editors' Note

Some note of explanation is needed on the methods and guidelines that we have used in reducing these collected diaries of many millions of words to one relatively short volume.

James Hacker kept his diaries from the day on which he first entered the Cabinet. He dictated them into his cassette recorder, sometimes on a daily basis, more often at weekends when he was at his constituency home. His original plan had been simply to make notes for his memory, but he soon realised that there would be intrinsic interest in a diary which gave a daily picture of the struggles of a Cabinet Minister.

Before going into politics full time, Hacker had been first a polytechnic lecturer and, later, Editor of *Reform*. When the diaries were first transcribed they were hardly readable, having been dictated very much *ad lib*, rather like his polytechnic lectures. Furthermore, there were a number of discrepancies in his account of events, both within the book itself and when objectively compared with outside events. Being a journalist, Hacker had no particular talent for reporting facts.

Apart from the discrepancies, there was also a certain amount of boring repetition, inevitable in the diaries of a politician. Years of political training and experience had taught Hacker to use twenty words where one would do, to dictate millions of words where mere thousands would suffice, and to use language to blur and fudge issues and events so that they became incomprehensible to others. Incomprehensibility can be a haven for some politicians, for therein lies temporary safety.

But his natural gift for the misuse of language, though invaluable to an active politician, was not an asset to a would-be author. He had apparently intended to rewrite the diaries with a view to improving the clarity, accuracy and relevance of his publication. Towards the end of his life, however, he abandoned that plan because – according to his widow, Lady Hacker (as she now is) – he saw no reason why he should be the only politician publishing memoirs which adhered to those criteria.

The editors have therefore had to undertake that task, and in doing so found one further obstacle to clear understanding of the Hacker tapes. The early chapters of this volume had been transcribed from the cassette recordings during the great statesman's own lifetime, and he had glanced at them himself and made a few preliminary suggestions of his own as to selection and arrangement. But later chapters had yet to be transcribed when the bell rang for the Last Division and – curiously – it seemed that Hacker's speech became more and more indistinct, slurred and emotional as each recording session progressed. This may have been due to a fault in the recording machine, but it did not make our task any easier.

Nevertheless, these diaries constitute a unique contribution to our understanding of the way that Britain was governed in the 1980s and because Hacker wrote them in the hope that the public would understand more rather than less of the political process, we have edited the diaries ruthlessly. We encountered three principal problem areas in the editing process: chronological, technical, and interpretation.

First, chronology. Broadly, we tried to preserve the narrative element of the original diary, and thus we have tended to pursue particular stories and trains of events to their conclusion. At all times we have striven to maintain a chronological day-by-day account, even though the original tapes are much more confused. There is a slight risk of

historical inaccuracy in this approach, because Hacker himself was deeply confused for most of his time in office and it could be argued that the diaries ought to reflect this confusion. But if we had allowed the diaries to reflect his confusion in full, the events that they relate would have become as incomprehensible to the reader as they were to him.

Technically, we have completed and punctuated sentences, unmixed the metaphors and corrected the grammar, unless by leaving the original we were able to give an insight into Hacker's state of mind.

Finally, interpretation. Where the book is ambiguous we have assumed that this is a deliberate exercise of his political skills. Although it is true that he was often unclear about the meaning of events, it is also the case that sometimes he was deliberately vague.

We believe that these diaries accurately reflect the mind of one of our outstanding national leaders; if the reflection seems clouded it may not be the fault of the mirror. Hacker himself processed events in a variety of ways, and the readers will have to make their own judgement as to whether any given statement represents

- (a) what happened
- (b) what he believed happened
- (c) what he would like to have happened
- (d) what he wanted others to believe happened
- (e) what he wanted others to believe that he believed happened.

As a general rule, politicians' memories are less reliable about failures than successes, and about distant events than recent ones. Since Hacker's career, like all politicians', inevitably consisted mostly of failures, these diaries ran the risk of having only small historical value. But the fact that the great man had no time to make any alterations or excisions in the light of subsequent events has enabled us

to select from the morass a document of unique value to students of that period of British history.

This book covers Hacker's entire career as the Minister for Administrative Affairs. This was his first experience in government. The Ministry had been created some years earlier as an umbrella ministry, along the lines of George Brown's Department of Economic Affairs in the Wilson government of the 1960s, to co-ordinate government administration. Theoretically it gave Hacker a roving brief, to investigate and control administrative inefficiency and overspending throughout the system, wherever it was to be found. Unfortunately the Department of Administrative Affairs was not only created to control the Civil Service, it also had to be staffed by the Civil Service. Readers will therefore be well aware of the inevitable result of Hacker's labours.

Nonetheless, it remains a slight puzzle to the editors of this volume that Hacker, who was such a master of blurring and obfuscation in his own political dealings, should have found such difficulty in dealing with a group of civil servants whose techniques were essentially similar. Hacker's innocence, as revealed in these diaries, is quite touching.

Later volumes under the title *Yes Prime Minister* will deal with Hacker's career as he failed upwards to Number Ten Downing Street, and thence to his final demise on his elevation to the House of Lords (as it then was).

We have, of course, had the benefit of other sources. Hacker was, inevitably, in ignorance of certain conversations and events which, had he known of them, would doubtless have altered his perceptions and his views. We are fortunate that under the Thirty-Year Rule all of Sir Humphrey Appleby's memos and minutes have become available to us. We are also fortunate that because Appleby was a first-class civil servant he had a total belief in the value of committing everything to paper. Thus we have also had the benefit of Sir Humphrey's own private diaries, and we would like to

record our debt of gratitude to the Public Record Office and the Trustees of the voluminous Appleby Papers.

A final word of thanks. We were most grateful to have had a few conversations with Sir Humphrey himself before the advancing years, without in any way impairing his verbal fluency, disengaged the operation of his mind from the content of his speech. And we should like to express our thanks to the staff of St Dymphna's Hospital for the Elderly Deranged, where he resided for his last days.

Above all, we are grateful to Sir Bernard Woolley, GCB, former Head of the Civil Service, who was Hacker's private secretary for the period covered by this volume. He has given generously of his time and checked our selection against his own memory and records. Nevertheless, any responsibility for errors and omissions is, of course, entirely our own.

Jonathan Lynn
Antony Jay

*Hacker College, Oxford
September 2019 AD*

1

Open Government

October 22nd

Well, perhaps it's the early hours of Friday, the 23rd now. I am most excited. I have just been returned to Parliament by Birmingham East. And after years in opposition, the party has finally won a general election and we're back in office.

After the result was announced I went to the celebration do at Alderman Spotteswoode's^{[fn1](#)} and saw Robert McKenzie on the telly say: 'And so Jim Hacker's back, with an increased majority in his marginal constituency. After many years as a Shadow Minister he seems almost certain to get a Cabinet post in the new government.'

Robin Day seemed doubtful, though. I do hope Bob McKenzie's right.

October 23rd

I'm still hoping but I wonder if Robin Day knows something that I don't.

I've been sitting by the telephone ever since breakfast. No potential Cabinet Minister ever moves more than twenty feet from the telephone in the twenty-four hours following the appointment of a new Prime Minister. If you haven't heard within twenty-four hours, you're not going to be in the Cabinet.

Annie kept me supplied with constant cups of coffee all morning, and when I returned to the armchair next to the phone after lunch she asked me to help do the Brussels sprouts for dinner if I didn't have anything else to do. I

explained to her that I couldn't because I was waiting for the call.

'Who from?' Sometimes Annie really is a bit dense.

The phone rang. I grabbed it. It was Frank Weisel, my special political adviser, saying that he was on his way over. I told Annie, who wasn't pleased.

'Why doesn't he just move in?' she asked bitterly.

Sometimes I just don't understand her. I patiently explained to her that, as my political adviser, I depend on Frank more than anyone. 'Then why don't you marry *him*?' she asked. 'I now pronounce you man and political adviser. Whom politics has joined let no wife put asunder.'

It is awfully difficult for Annie, I know. Being an MP's wife is a pretty thankless task. But now that I may be a Minister, she'll at last reap the rewards!

The phone rang all day. Alderman Spotteswoode, the Gas Board, Frank, all sorts of useless people ringing up to congratulate me. 'On what?' I said to Annie: 'Don't they realise I'm waiting for the call?'

She said, 'You sound as if you're about to enter the ministry.'

'Yes,' I said, 'but which ministry, that's the whole point.'

Suddenly Annie screamed. I couldn't believe my ears. 'It was a *joke*!' she shouted, and started to pull her hair out. I decided that she must be a bit tense.

'Are you a bit tense?' I asked. She screamed again, and threw herself onto the floor. I thought of calling an ambulance, but was worried about the adverse publicity affecting my career at this crucial juncture – NEW MINISTER'S WIFE TAKEN AWAY IN STRAIT-JACKET.

'Are you a bit tense?' I asked again. Carefully.

'No,' she shouted – 'No, no, no, I'm not tense. I'm just a politician's wife. I'm not allowed to have feelings. I'm just a happy carefree politician's wife.'

So I asked her why she was lying face downwards on the floor. 'I'm looking for a cigarette. I can't find any.'

'Try the cigarette box,' I advised, trying to keep calm.

'It's empty.'

'Take a Valium.'

'I can't find the Valium, that's why I'm looking for a cigarette. Jim, pop out and get me some.'

I explained to Annie that I simply didn't dare leave the phone. Annie betrayed her usual total lack of understanding. 'Look, if the PM wants you to be in the bloody Cabinet, the PM will phone back if you're out. Or you can phone back.'

Annie will never understand the finer points of politics.

[Hacker was very insecure about his cabinet prospects because he had previously run Martin Walker's campaign against the new PM for the leadership of the party. The question was whether the PM would be strong enough to ignore Jim Hacker or whether, in the interests of party unity, the PM would be obliged to give him a good job - Ed.]

By the end of today I've heard on the grapevine that Bill's got Europe. Poor old Europe. Bill can't speak French or German. He hardly even speaks English, as a matter of fact. Martin's got the Foreign Office, as expected, Jack's got Health and Fred's got Energy.

I told Annie of these appointments, and she asked me if anyone had got Brains. I suppose she means Education.

October 24th

At last I'm a Cabinet Minister.

And today I had my first encounter with the Civil Service, and I must say I am very impressed.

I got the call from Number Ten at about 9 a.m., after a sleepless night, and immediately Frank Weisel and I caught the London train. I got a taxi to Number Ten, where I was asked by the PM to take over the Department of Administrative Affairs.

This is an important post. In the Cabinet ranking, about eighth or ninth I should think. On the other hand, Martin

reminded me (when he phoned to congratulate me) that the DAA is a political graveyard, a bit like the Home Office, and the PM may have over-promoted me – a vengeful move. I am determined to get a grip on the DAA and prove to the PM that I'm not so easily taken care of.

I was expecting to be Minister of Agriculture, as I've shadowed Agriculture for seven years, and have many good ideas about it, but for some inexplicable reason the PM decided against this.

[We found a memo from Sir Andrew Donnelly, Permanent Secretary of Agriculture, to Sir Arnold Robinson, Secretary to the Cabinet, imploring Sir Arnold to make sure that Hacker did not get Agriculture as he was too 'genned up' on it. Cabinet Papers show that Sir Arnold managed to convey to the PM that it would be better for Hacker not to go to Agriculture because 'he's been thinking about it rather too long and is perhaps in a bit of a rut' – Ed.]

An official car met me as I came out of Number Ten, and I was driven straight to the DAA. I was met on the front steps by Bernard Woolley, who is to be my Private Secretary, and his assistant. He seems a likeable enough chap.

To my surprise he instantly knew who Frank Weisel was, as we got out of the car, though he pronounced his name 'Weasel', which always infuriates Frank.

We walked down miles of corridors. When we got to my office Frank had disappeared with the Assistant Private Secretary. Bernard assured me that Frank was being taken care of. They really are awfully nice and helpful.

My office is large, with a big desk, a conference table with lots of chairs around it, and a few armchairs arranged around a coffee table to form a conversation area. Otherwise, rather characterless. Bernard immediately went to the drinks cupboard.

'A drink, Minister?'

I nodded. 'Jim,' I said, as I want us to be on first-name terms.

'Gin?' he said, mishearing me.

'No,' I said, 'Jim. Call me Jim.'

Bernard said: 'If it's all the same to you, I'd rather call you Minister, Minister.'

'Minister, Minister?' It reminded me of Major Major in *Catch-22*. Then I realised what he meant. I asked him, 'Does that mean I have to call you Private Secretary, Private Secretary?'

Bernard said I was to call him Bernard. I'm sure that in the course of time I'll persuade him to call me Jim.

A moment later Sir Humphrey Appleby arrived. He is the Permanent Secretary of the DAA, the Civil Service Head of the Department. He is in his early fifties I should think, but – somehow – ageless. He is charming and intelligent, a typical mandarin. He welcomed me to the Department.

'I believe you've met before,' Bernard remarked. I was struck for the second time how well-informed this young man is.

Sir Humphrey said, 'Yes, we did cross swords when the Minister gave me a grilling over the Estimates in the Public Accounts Committee last year. He asked me all the questions I hoped nobody would ask.'

This is splendid. Sir Humphrey clearly admires me. I tried to brush it off. 'Well,' I said, 'Opposition's about asking awkward questions.'

'Yes,' said Sir Humphrey, 'and government is about not answering them.'

I was surprised. 'But you answered all my questions, didn't you,' I commented.

'I'm glad you thought so, Minister,' said Sir Humphrey. I didn't quite know what he meant by that. I decided to ask him who else was in the Department.

'Briefly, sir, I am the Permanent Under-Secretary of State, known as the Permanent Secretary. Woolley here is your Principal Private Secretary. I, too, have a Principal Private Secretary, and he is the Principal Private Secretary to the

Permanent Secretary. Directly responsible to me are ten Deputy Secretaries, eighty-seven Under-Secretaries and two hundred and nineteen Assistant Secretaries. Directly responsible to the Principal Private Secretaries are plain Private Secretaries. The Prime Minister will be appointing two Parliamentary Under-Secretaries and you will be appointing your own Parliamentary Private Secretary.'

'Can they all type?' I joked.

'None of us can type, Minister,' replied Sir Humphrey smoothly. 'Mrs McKay types - she is your secretary.'

I couldn't tell whether or not he was joking. 'What a pity,' I said. 'We could have opened an agency.'

Sir Humphrey and Bernard laughed. 'Very droll, sir,' said Sir Humphrey. 'Most amusing, sir,' said Bernard. Were they genuinely amused at my wit, or just being rather patronising? 'I suppose they all say that, do they?' I ventured.

Sir Humphrey reassured me on that. 'Certainly not, Minister,' he replied. 'Not quite all.'

I decided to take charge at once. I sat behind my desk and to my dismay I found it had a swivel chair. I don't like swivel chairs. But Bernard immediately assured me that everything in the office can be changed at my command - furniture, decor, paintings, office routine. I am unquestionably the boss!

Bernard then told me that they have two types of chair in stock, to go with two kinds of Minister - 'One sort folds up instantly and the other sort goes round and round in circles.' On second thoughts, perhaps that was another of Bernard's little jokes.

I decided that the time had come to be blunt and to tell them what's what. 'Frankly,' I said, 'this Department has got to cut a great swathe through the whole of the stuffy Whitehall bureaucracy. We need a new broom. We are going to throw open the windows and let in a bit of fresh air. We are going to cut through the red tape and streamline this

creaking old bureaucratic machine. We are going to have a clean sweep. There are far too many useless people just sitting behind desks.'

I became aware that I was actually sitting behind a desk, but I'm sure that they realised that I was not referring to myself.

I explained that we had to start by getting rid of people who just make work for each other. Sir Humphrey was very helpful, and suggested that I mean redeploy them – which, I suppose, is what I *do* mean. I certainly want to reduce overmanning, but I don't actually want to be responsible for putting people out of work.

But, by the clean sweep and the new broom, I mean that we must have more Open Government. We made election pledges about this, and I intend to keep them. We must take the nation into our confidence. I said all this to Humphrey and Bernard who, to my surprise, were wholeheartedly in favour of these ideas.

Humphrey referred to my speeches on this subject in the House last year. And he referred to my *Observer* article, *Daily Mail* interview, and the manifesto.

I am most impressed that he knows so much about me.

Humphrey then produced draft proposals, to implement my policy in a White Paper. I was flabbergasted. The efficiency of the Civil Service is quite astounding. They even plan, Sir Humphrey tells me, to call the White Paper 'Open Government'.

All of these draft proposals are available to me within thirty-six hours of the new government being elected and within minutes of my arrival at my office. And on a weekend! Remarkable chaps. I asked Humphrey who had done all this.

'The creaking old bureaucratic machine,' he replied with a smile. 'No seriously, Minister, we are fully seized of the need for reform and we have taken it on board.'

I told him I was slightly surprised.

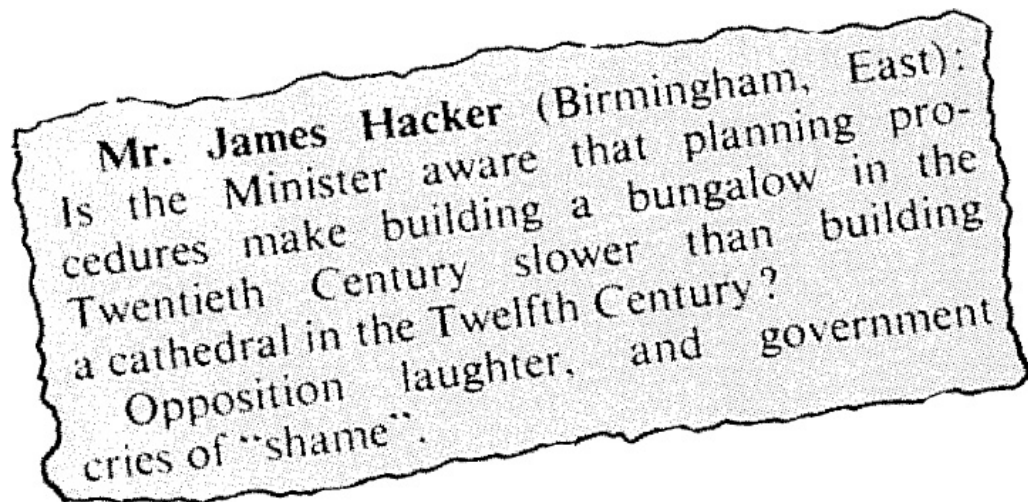
'I thought I'd have to fight you all the way,' I said.

Sir Humphrey remarked that people have funny ideas about the Civil Service.

'We are just here to help you formulate and implement your policies,' he explained.

He seems most sincere.

The draft proposals, which I have brought home tonight to my London flat in a red box, include 'Proposals for Shortening Approval Procedures in Planning Appeals'. Excellent. Sir Humphrey was able to quote from Hansard the rather amusing question which I'd asked earlier this year in the House:



Mr. James Hacker (Birmingham, East):
Is the Minister aware that planning procedures make building a bungalow in the Twentieth Century slower than building a cathedral in the Twelfth Century?
Opposition laughter, and government cries of "shame".

[Actually they cried 'Bollocks' - Ed.]

As it's Saturday, we have arranged to start things properly on Monday morning. But they've given me six red boxes for the weekend, four to be completed by tonight and two more tomorrow. Bernard tells me that the previous Minister got a bit slack about the paperwork, especially during the election campaign.

I'm certainly not going to be slack! I shall be a good Minister. I shall read everything they give me to read.

October 26th

I read all my boxes over the weekend. It took about nine hours. I caught the 7.15 a.m. train to Euston, the official car met me, and I was in the office by 9.20.

All the draft proposals for Open Government are superficially pretty impressive, but I happen to know that the Civil Service is pretty good at delaying tactics. I mentioned this to Humphrey at a meeting today. I think he's getting to know who's boss around here.

But first things first. The day started with the diary. I found to my surprise that there were numerous appointments in it already. I asked how this was possible, since they didn't even know who would win the election.

Bernard said: 'We knew there'd be a Minister, Minister.' I told him not to start *that* again.

Sir Humphrey explained, 'Her Majesty likes the business of government to continue, even when there are no politicians around.'

'Isn't that very difficult?' I asked.

'Yes ... and no,' said Humphrey. I must say, I can't see how it's possible to govern without the politicians. I'm afraid that Humphrey might have delusions of grandeur ...

My diary was pretty frightening. Cabinet at 10 on Thursday. Nine Cabinet committees this week. A speech to the Law Institute tomorrow night, a deputation from the British Computer Association at 10.30 tomorrow morning, University Vice-Chancellors lunch on Wednesday (another speech), opening the National Conference of Public Employers on Thursday morning (another speech), and so on.

I noticed that everything in the diary is in pencil, so presumably much of it can be and will be changed. I pointed out to Bernard that I have various other commitments.

Bernard looked puzzled. 'Such as?' he asked.

'Well ... I'm on four policy committees of the party, for a start.'

‘I’m sure you won’t be wanting to put party before country,’ said Sir Humphrey. I had never looked at it in that light. Of course, he’s absolutely right.

They were going to give me three more red boxes for tonight, by the way. When I jibbed at this a bit, Sir Humphrey explained that there are a lot of decisions to take and announcements to approve. He then tried something on, by saying: ‘But we could, in fact, minimise the work so that you need only take the major policy decisions.’

I saw through that ploy at once. I insisted that I would take *all* the decisions and read *all* the relevant documents.

They’ve given me five boxes for tonight.

October 27th

Today I found that we have a problem with Frank Weisel. It’s Tuesday today, and I realised that I hadn’t seen him since I arrived at the DAA last Saturday morning.

To be quite truthful, I didn’t actually realise it till he barged into my office, shouting and carrying on, demanding to be let in.

It appears that he’s been in the waiting room since Saturday. (I presume he went home on Sunday.) Bernard tried to tell him that he, Humphrey and I were in private conference, but I quickly sorted that out. I demanded that Frank, as my adviser, be given an office in the Department.

Sir Humphrey attempted to fudge the issue, saying that I had a whole Department to advise me now. Nonetheless I insisted.

‘Well,’ said Sir Humphrey, ‘I believe we have some spare office space in Walthamstow, don’t we Bernard?’

Frank was appalled. ‘Walthamstow?’

‘Yes, it’s surprising isn’t it?’ said Sir Humphrey agreeably. ‘The government owns property all over London.’

‘But I don’t want to be in Walthamstow,’ explained Frank at the top of his voice.

‘It’s in a very nice part of Walthamstow,’ put in Bernard.

‘And Walthamstow’s a very nice place. So I gather,’ added Sir Humphrey.

Frank and I looked at each other. If they were not so charming and, well, gentlemanly, you might have thought they were trying to squeeze Frank right out.

‘I need an office *here*, in this building,’ said Frank, firmly and extremely loudly.

I added my agreement. Sir Humphrey capitulated at once, and told Bernard to find a suitable office right away. I then said, to make assurance doubly sure, that I expected Frank to have copies of all the papers that are given to me.

Bernard seemed surprised. ‘All?’

‘All,’ I said.

Sir Humphrey agreed immediately. ‘It shall be done – all the appropriate papers.’

In my opinion, these civil servants are not nearly so hard to deal with as people say. They are mostly very co-operative, and, even if not initially, always jump to it when spoken to firmly. I think I’m getting somewhere at last.

October 28th

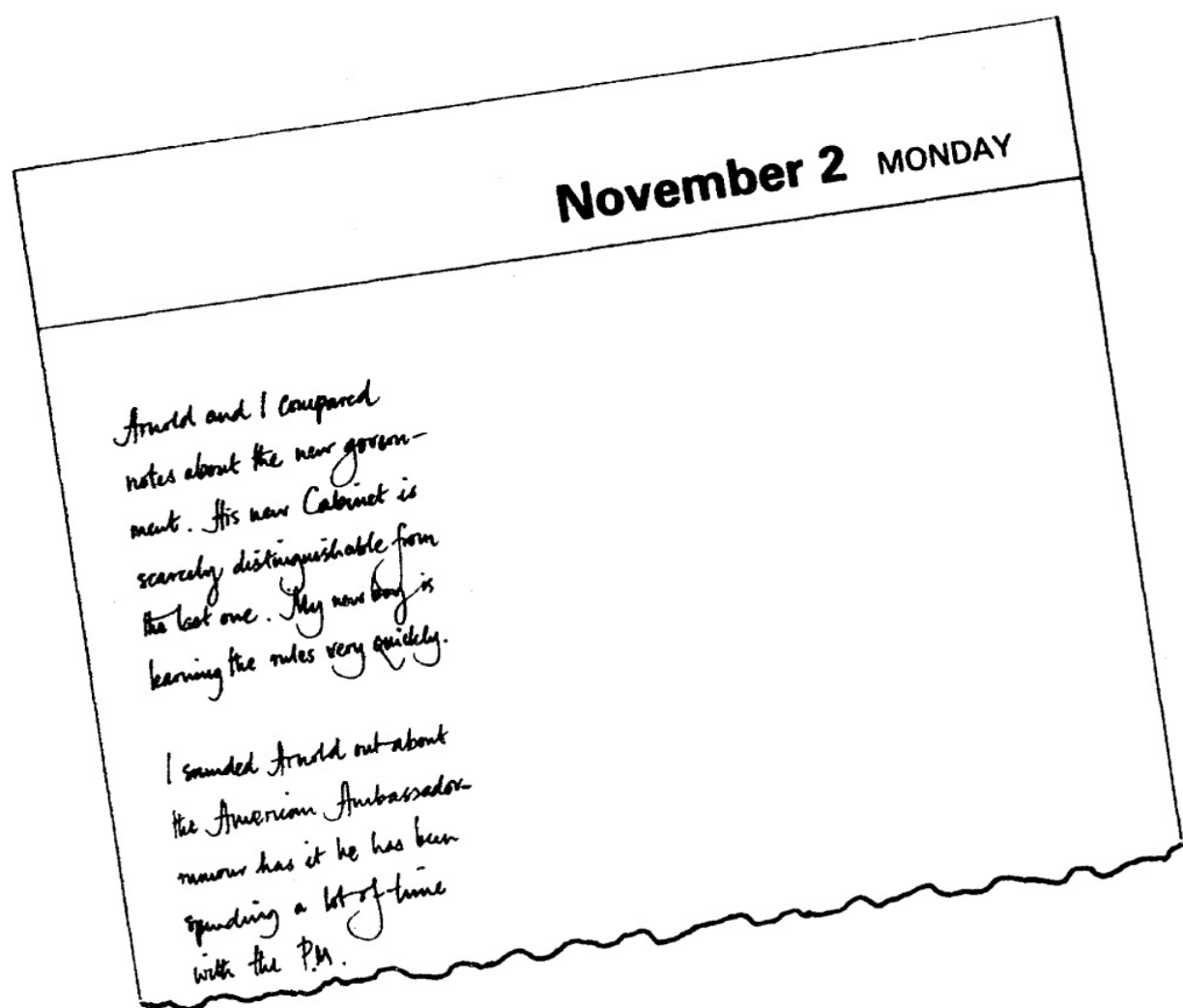
After the last hectic four days, I have a little time to reflect – for posterity – on my first days in office.

First, I am impressed by the thorough grasp the officials at the DAA have of every situation. Second, how they are willing to co-operate fully, albeit under pressure, with Frank Weisel.

Thirdly, I am most struck by my dependence on these civil servants. I, like virtually all our new administration, knew nothing of the workings of Whitehall except what I’d learned second-hand. Because we have been so long in opposition, only three members of the government, including the PM, have ever held office before. I had never seen the inside of a red box, never met a Permanent Secretary, and had no idea how things were really done. [*This situation is similar to the one in which the Labour Government of 1964 found*

itself - Harold Wilson, the PM, was the only member of Cabinet who had previously been a Cabinet Minister - Ed.] This makes us more dependent on our officials than most new governments. Thank goodness they are behaving honourably.

[The following Monday, Sir Humphrey Appleby met Sir Arnold Robinson, Secretary to the Cabinet, at The Reform Club in Pall Mall. Sir Humphrey made a note about the meeting in his private diary.]



[It is interesting to observe that senior civil servants, perhaps because they have spent thirty years writing notes

in the margin of a memo or minute, only write in the margin even if there is nothing else on the page – Ed.]

Arnold and I compared notes [on 2 November] about the new government. His new Cabinet is scarcely distinguishable from the last one. My new boy is learning the rules very quickly.

I sounded Arnold out about the American Ambassador – rumour has it he has been spending a lot of time with the PM.

Arnold confirmed this. But was unwilling to say whether it was about defence or trade. He is anxious about a leak – therefore it is imperative that the Cabinet doesn't hear about it yet.

I concluded, correctly, that it is defence *and* trade, i.e. the new aerospace systems contract.

The aerospace contract would be a considerable coup for the PM, less than two weeks after the election. Of course, it's been in the pipeline for months, but the new PM will obviously take the credit.

It will mean four and a half billion dollars, and many new jobs in the Midlands and North-West. All in marginal seats, too – what a coincidence!

This is valuable information. I gathered from Arnold that it would, therefore, be a grave embarrassment to the PM if a hypothetical Minister were to rock the Anglo-American boat. Man overboard. The end of a promising new Ministerial career, in fact.

Therefore, I have ensured that the Weasel^{[fn2](#)} receives a copy of the invoice for the new American addressing machines. Naturally he has not received it, because it is sensitive. But I think that this is the right moment.

I instructed my secretary to ensure that the Weasel find the invoice near the bottom of a pile. Let the man feel he has achieved something.

[Bernard Woolley joined Sir Humphrey and Sir Arnold at the club, for an after-dinner coffee while they drank their after-dinner brandy - Ed.]

I asked young Bernard what he makes of our new Minister. Bernard is happy. So am I. Hacker swallowed the whole diary in one gulp and apparently did his boxes like a lamb last Saturday and Sunday. He'll be house-trained in no time.

All we have to do is head him off this Open Government nonsense, I remarked to Bernard. Bernard said that he thought that we were in favour of Open Government. I hope I have not over-promoted young Bernard. He still has an awful lot to learn.

I explained that we are calling the White Paper *Open Government* because you always dispose of the difficult bit in the title. It does less harm there than on the statute books.

It is the law of Inverse Relevance: the less you intend to do about something, the more you have to keep talking about it.

Bernard asked us, 'What's wrong with Open Government?' I could hardly believe my ears. Arnold thought he was joking. Sometimes I wonder if Bernard really is a flyer, or whether we shouldn't just send him off to a career at the War Graves Commission.

Arnold pointed out, with great clarity, that Open Government is a contradiction in terms. You can be open - or you can have government.

Bernard claims that the citizens of a democracy have a right to know. We explained that, in fact, they have a right to be ignorant. Knowledge only means complicity and guilt. Ignorance has a certain dignity.

Bernard then said: 'The Minister wants Open Government.' Years of training seem to have had no effect on Bernard sometimes.

I remarked that one does not just give people what they want, if it's not good for them. One does not, for instance,

give whisky to an alcoholic.

Arnold rightly added that if people do not know what you're doing, they don't know what you're doing *wrong*.

This is not just a defence mechanism for officials, of course. Bernard must understand that he would not be serving his Minister by helping him to make a fool of himself. Every Minister we have would have been a laughing-stock within his first three weeks in office if it had not been for the most rigid and impenetrable secrecy about what he was up to.

Bernard is a Private Secretary. I am a Permanent Under-Secretary of State. The very word Secretary means one who can keep a secret.

Bernard asked me what I proposed to do. Naturally I did not inform him of my plans for the Weasel to make a great discovery. This would be putting too great a strain on Bernard's loyalty to Hacker.

I asked Bernard if he could keep a secret. He said he could. I replied that *I* could, too. [*Appleby Papers 14/QLI/9a*]

[Hacker was, of course, in complete ignorance of the meeting described above - Ed.]

November 5th

Guy Fawkes Day. Fireworks inside the office too. A fitting day on which to enforce the supremacy of parliament and HMG.

Frank Weisel came bursting into my office, waving a document, 'Have you seen this?' he enquired at four thousand decibels.

I was delighted that the civil servants were giving him all the papers now. I said so.

'They're not,' he said derisively. 'Not the *real* papers.'

'Which real papers aren't you getting?' I wanted to know.

'How do I know, if I'm not getting them?'

This is, of course, absolutely true. And I don't know what he can do about it. [*This, of course, is an example of what*

management consultants call the Light-in-the-Refrigerator Syndrome, i.e. is the light on when the door is shut? The only way to find out is to open the door – in which case the door is not shut any more – Ed.]

But Frank did not want to discuss his problems in getting necessary information out of the officials.

‘They think they’re sending me the rubbish. But look what I’ve found – oho, we’ve got them, we’ve got them by the short and curlies.’

I still didn’t know what he was talking about. Frank explained further.

‘We’ve got Sir Humphrey-Bloody-Appleby and Mr Toffee-Nose-Private-Secretary-Snooty-Woolley just where we want them.’

He brandished a sheaf of papers under my nose. I *still* didn’t know what he was talking about, but I do think he has a wonderful line in invective – perhaps I should let him write the draft of my conference speech next year.

I made Frank sit down, and explain calmly. He has found some ordinary office invoices that have tremendous political significance. The DAA has apparently bought one thousand computer video display terminals, at ten thousand pounds each. Ten million pounds of the taxpayers’ money. And they are made in Pittsburgh!

This is shocking. Humphrey’s been keeping very quiet about this. And I’m not surprised. We make computer peripherals in my constituency, Birmingham East. And we have rising unemployment. It is a scandal that the Civil Service is not buying British.

I sent for Humphrey. He was in meetings all day, but Frank and I will confront him with this tomorrow. I am deeply grateful to Frank. Sir Humphrey is going to be very surprised indeed that we have found out about this so fast.

November 6th

The meeting with Humphrey was a total success.

I showed him the invoices for the computer display terminals. He admitted that the DAA has purchased this brand for the whole of Whitehall.

‘But they’re not British,’ I pointed out.

‘That is unfortunately true,’ he agreed, somewhat shamefaced.

‘We make these machines in Birmingham East.’

‘Not of the same quality,’ he said.

This is very probably true, but naturally I can’t admit it even if it is.

‘They are better quality,’ I said firmly. ‘They come from my constituency.’ I told Humphrey to cancel the contract.

He responded that it was beyond his power to do so, and that it could only be cancelled by the Treasury. He said it would be a major change of policy for the Civil Service to cancel contracts freely entered into. Especially with overseas suppliers.

He suggested (a trifle impertinently, I thought) that I should take it up in Cabinet. ‘Perhaps they would postpone the discussion on the Middle East, or nuclear disarmament, to talk about office equipment.’

I could see that this was out of the question. I was faced with a dilemma. If it couldn’t be cancelled, how was I to face my constituency party?

‘Why need they know?’ asked Sir Humphrey. ‘Why need *anybody* know? We can see that it never gets out.’

I was staggered. Couldn’t Humphrey see that to keep it quiet was directly contrary to our new policy of Open Government, to which he was as firmly committed as I?

Frank spelled out the only alternative. ‘If the order can’t be cancelled, it must be published.’

Humphrey asked why. For a moment I couldn’t quite think of the answer. But Frank saw it at once. ‘Two reasons,’ he explained. ‘First, it’s a manifesto commitment. Second, it’ll make the last Minister look like a traitor.’

Two unanswerable reasons. I really am very grateful to Frank. And he is running rings around Sir Humphrey. Perhaps Sir Humphrey is not as clever as I first thought.

Humphrey seemed very anxious about the idea of publication. 'But surely,' he said to Frank, 'you're not suggesting that the Minister should make a positive reference to this confidential transaction in a speech?'

'A speech!' said Frank. 'Of course! That's the answer.'

This is a superb idea of Frank's. My speech to the Union of Office Employees will deal with this scandalous contract. And we will release it to the press in advance.

I said as much to Humphrey. Frank said, 'There. Who's running the country now?' I felt his glee was a little juvenile, but quite understandable.

Sir Humphrey seemed even more worried. I asked him for his advice, which was totally predictable. 'I think it might be regrettable if we upset the Americans.'

Predictable, and laughable. I pointed out to Humphrey, in no uncertain terms, that it is high time that someone jolted the Americans out of their commercial complacency. We should be thinking about the British poor, not the American rich!

Humphrey said, 'Minister, if that is your express wish the Department will back you. Up to the hilt.' This was very loyal. One must give credit where it's due.

I said that indeed it was my express wish. Bernard then said he would circulate the speech, as soon as it was written, for clearance.

This is new to me. I've never heard of 'clearance'. More bureaucracy and pointless paperwork. This matter has nothing to do with any other department. And if another department disagrees, they can say so publicly. That's what Open Government is all about.

Humphrey pleaded with me to circulate the speech, if only for information. At first I opposed this, but he argued – quite convincingly, I thought – that Open Government demands

that we should inform our colleagues in government as well as our friends in Fleet Street.

My final word to Humphrey, as the meeting concluded, was to see that the speech went straight to the press.

‘Minister,’ he said, ‘we shall obviously serve your best interests.’

A notable victory by Frank and me, in the cause of Open Government.

[A typescript of Hacker’s speech has been found in the files of the DAA. It is annotated with suggestions by Frank Weisel and Bernard Woolley, with comments from Hacker - Ed.]



**DEPARTMENT OF
ADMINISTRATIVE AFFAIRS**

SPEECH TO THE UNION OF OFFICE EMPLOYEES

As you know, we have made a pledge to the people about Open Government. So let's begin as we mean to go on. The people have a right to know what I know. And I have discovered that only last month the previous government signed a contract to import ten million pounds worth of office equipment from America for use by the Service.

Civil Service
bureaucracy
Frank
YES-GOOD!
J.H.

And yet an identical product - a better product - is made in Britain. By British workers. In British factories. So we are being fobbed off with second-rate American junk by high-pressure smart-alec salesmen from Pittsburgh while British factories stand idle and British workers queue up for the dole.

Unemployment
benefit?
B.W.

DOLE!
J.H.

Well, if the Americans are going to take us for a ride, at least the British people have a right to know about it. And we will fight them on the beaches, we will fight them

/over