

To: Bernard Wookey

From Sir Humphrey Appleby

REDUCTION IN CIVIL SERVICE MEMBERS

Thank you for your note. I understand your distress at the recent Budget announcement of cuts in the service, but I assure you that there is no need to distress yourself in any way. This has all happened before, and there is an established procedure for dealing with it. We simply follow the infallible seven-stage plan.

1: Welcome the announcement, praise the Chancellor and say that such a procedure is long overdue.

2: Set up an internal Manpower Reduction Unit. This unit will be responsible for identifying areas where reductions in personnel numbers should be sought. These areas will, of course, be those where reductions would cause the maximum press outrage and parliamentary embarrassment. This will, of course, entail a gratifying increase in the size of the Cabinet Office.

3: Arrange for each threatened department to set up an Informal Response Unit to show why any specific proposed cuts are, in fact, administratively impossible, legally inadmissible, financially unjustifiable or politically unacceptable; preferably all of these. Since these units are informal, there is no need to reveal their existence to the Cabinet.

4: When there is extreme pressure to show actual reductions, turn government units into independent trusts. This removes all personnel from the government payroll, but their salaries continue to be paid by means of a grant-in-aid. You will remember that this worked very well with Kew Gardens some years ago; the scam is still not worked out.

5: Where trusts are inappropriate, create agencies. Those, too, can have staff who are not on the government payroll, financed by fees for specific tasks.

6: If it starts to look as if there are too many trusts and agencies, encourage staff to leave and form small companies. These companies can then be awarded contracts for research, accounting services, data-processing, booklet production and the like, on which they are currently employed and which will secure their existing salaries, allowances and pension arrangements.

7: Turn full-time jobs into two part-time jobs. This will enable you to brief your minister to claim dramatic reductions in full-time posts.

This strategy has never failed us yet. Since our colleagues in the Treasury have already persuaded the Chancellor to spin the process out until 2008, we can be sure that, by then, there will be a new chancellor, a new prime minister and, quite possibly, a new government. At that point, the whole squalid business can be swept under the carpet. Until next time.

Humphrey Appleby

By Antony Jay and Jonathan Lynn , authors of *Yes, Minister* and *Yes, Prime Minister*, first published in *The Telegraph* on 20 March 2004