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THE ODM'S WHITE PAPER

A Preliminary Comment by members of the Staff of ODI

The ODM's White Paper, *The Work in Hand*, is designed to meet Parliamentary questioning about what our Aid Programme really amounts to. It is in fact a catalogue of projects supported by the British Government, and is a welcome reminder of how extensively we are committed to assisting development programmes.

For the statistically minded this White Paper is in fact an agglomeration of the useful figures which are now published regularly in the survey, *British Aid Statistics*. It shows how the improvements begun since the ODM was set up have progressed, for instance in recruiting home based career agricultural officers, and in establishing an Institute of Development Studies in Sussex. All of this should satisfy those who wonder what the Ministry does with more than £200m.

But it is disappointing to find so little evidence of any Aid-for-Development policy emerging from all the details. The ODM was established to improve the management of British Aid and to produce an aid policy that would (in conjunction with our partners) really come to grips with World Poverty. This was the aim so well set out in the Ministry's first White Paper of August 1965.

The non-appearance of this policy in the current White Paper, combined with the disappearance of the Minister from the Cabinet, may seem to indicate that Britain is disengaging from the world wide war on poverty, though honourably retaining an expensive interest in our Colonial aftermath. The reason for this failure to pursue a positive policy is not far to seek; a positive creative policy would demand more funds, and Mr. Bottomley's last public act as a Cabinet Minister was to

announce that there would be less funds.

The White Paper makes clear that the current British programme of assistance, which is very largely the remnant of our Colonial heritage, can only just be financed by current funds available. To introduce any new pattern or to concentrate on the successful would demand dropping some other parts of the programme, or cutting off some countries almost completely. Rightly or wrongly the Government has decided to maintain the old programmes intact, and that, it is made clear, has used up all the funds available. Under the ceiling there is no room for new initiatives and, with the present Treasury clamp on overseas representation, it seems to have proved impossible to make any significant headway in improving the management of existing aid programmes.

Throughout the white Paper there are indications of frustration arising from insufficient and reduced funds, and there is fairly frank recognition that the modest goals of the Development Decade are not being reached (partly because the aid programmes of the rich countries as a whole are proving insufficient). But there is no facing of the fact that insufficient aid is the most wasteful form of aid.

The danger of this White Paper is that, by its exuberant account of tactical skirmishes won, attention will be distracted from the sombre reality of a general retreat on almost the whole Western front in its battle against world poverty. Of course Britain alone cannot reverse this trend, but in the multilateral field Britain could by her initiative play a decisive role.

A crucial decision must be taken in the next few months about an increase in our subscription to IDA. Many of the most promising attempts to improve the effectiveness of aid have been undertaken by

the IDA in association with bilateral donors such as Britain. In the previous White Paper, the British Government gave strong support to multilateral institutions. If we do not now take an initiative on this issue, then who will? If no attempt is made to build on the foundations that have been laid, it will be a sign - and will be read as such in the developing countries - that the whole rich world has lost the sense of purpose with which the Development Decade began.

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THE MANAGEMENT OF AID

(Chapter ten of the White Paper of August '65 on The Work of the New Ministry)

111. If Britain contributes substantially to the flow of aid, she has the right to ask that the resources transferred shall be used to the best effect. We cannot realistically suppose that there will never be failures; newly-independent countries will sometimes, like the countries assisting them, make choices which prove to have been mistaken. There are nevertheless many ways in which we can improve our management of British aid and reduce the possibilities of waste.

112. One of the Ministry's main purposes will be to combine the planning and administration of British financial aid and technical assistance so as to use to the best advantage the capital and skills which we can contribute. The first and most fundamental requirement for good management is clarity of objectives. Closely related to this is the question of initiative in putting forward projects which might be suitable for British aid. Until now this initiative has usually lain with the developing country itself. We intend, in future, to make a more deliberate effort to select, in agreement with the recipient country, the fields of activity or projects on which our aids should be concentrated.

113. The keynote of our efforts will be partnership with the recipient countries. Together with them we shall be more active in identifying particular opportunities for providing aid which may assist or, indeed, generate development either within or across national boundaries. In the close and continuous contacts which we expect to have with the governments concerned, we believe that, although the final choice must lie with them, they will give due weight to the views which we express on the value of particular schemes, and on the balance of financial aid and technical assistance needed for their planning and execution. The organisation of the Ministry described in Chapter V will enable it to discharge these responsibilities and to make closer studies of the economies and needs of the recipient countries and of the use of our aid.

114. We shall aim, wherever possible, to discuss with the Governments concerned their plans for a number of years ahead with a view to planning the help which we may be able to give. In this way we shall be better placed to organise the supply of aid and especially of technical assistance. The specially recruited expert missions which we plan to send to countries will help in this process of forward planning. Wherever necessary also teams from the Ministry will be sent out for the purpose of joint discussions.

LJ

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