

Extract from

**THE RT HON SIR JOHN MAJOR KG CH
ONE PEOPLE ORATION**

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THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF DEMOCRACY

The Civil Service is a fundamental engine of our democracy. It has an historic memory, which protects against the errors of the past. It is politically independent. It brings balance to our system of government. And yet, in the last 20 years, it has been undermined by its own masters.

When things have gone wrong, a small number of Ministers – against *all* past practice – have blamed the Civil Service for the failure – and not themselves. Political advisers have undermined civil servants and usurped their role. The Freedom of Information Act has hampered the dispassionate advice offered to Ministers.

Ministers may *decide* policy, but the Civil Service must *deliver* it. To do so, it trawls for ideas; delves deep into potential pitfalls; advises; cautions; and prepares legislation.

It is in our national interest that public service should remain a career that attracts some of the very best brains in our country. We should value it, not disparage it.

I hope Government will rethink recent practice on **special advisers**.

Ministers have a right to non-Civil Service advice. But, as advisers are paid from the public purse, they should be men and women of experience and ability. Many are – but not all. Their role needs redefining. Good special advisers, with expertise and political nous, can make for better government and better liaison with the civil service.

But, over the years, a handful of advisers have acquired unjustified power that has been misused. At times they have driven wedges between Ministers and their civil servants. Some have been used as attack dogs – on both their political opponents and their colleagues. The culprits were often protected by their Ministers, when they should have been dismissed without ceremony.

Some advisers – with intellect but little judgement – are easy prey for the media. They are flattered, wined and dined; and the naïve among them talk unguardedly, whilst the more unscrupulous leak stories that create feuds between senior Ministers, and complicate policy.

Any special advisers that behave in this fashion should go: a “one leak and you’re out” policy would be a worthwhile discipline for the Prime Minister to institute across all Government departments.