

Ministers and the Civil Service



Read and précis chapter 8 of 'The Essentials of UK Politics' by Andrew Heywood.

Ground Rules

- Raise your hand before you speak
- No food/drink
- Turn off mobiles

Ministers

- What is the difference between a Cabinet minister and minister of state?
- The responsibilities of a minister are:
 - Policy leadership
 - Representing departmental interests
 - Departmental management
 - Relations with Parliament

Ministers

- Ministers still have the same demands on them like other MPs, but these will be heavier due to the seniority Ministers holds. What could these demands be?

Individual Ministerial Responsibility

- When should a minister resign?
 - Mistakes made within departments. This hasn't happened for a while...can you think of when a minister **should** have resigned for this reason?
 - Policy failure. Also increasingly rare...what is the difference between this reason and the above one? Example?

Individual Ministerial Responsibility

- Political Pressure This reason is much more common. Comes from sustained pressure from party/Parliament/media. Why did Stephen Byers go?
- Personal Misconduct. Sleaze? Who can you think of?
- Collective Responsibility. Also rare but occurred recently re: Iraq.



Individual Ministerial Responsibility

- When should a minister resign?
- Can/should a minister be responsible for all the goes on in his/her department?
- Using articles provided consider different case studies and whether the minister should have resigned.

Civil Servants

- The staff that work in the departments of government.
- There are about 500,000 civil servants (UK's largest employer) but about 3,500 senior civil servants.
- There are also special advisors to ministers. Are these the same as civil servants? They give policy/communications advice.

Civil Servant Characteristics

- Supposedly the civil service are

1. **Anonymous**
2. **Permanent**
3. **Politically Neutral**

Are they really neutral? Both the political left and the political right have accused them of bias.

Information control/expertise/experience

Break into Pressure Groups

- Discuss and then explain to class:
- (1) The role of civil servants and the activities they undertake.
- (2) Who has most influence in decision/policy making senior civil servants or ministers?
- (3) The logic behind the Thatcher/ Blair reforms.

Role of Senior Civil Servants

- Policy advice eg what is practical/affordable etc. Less so since introduction of special advisors
- Policy consultation expected to liaise with relevant interest groups eg businesses, TUs etc
- Policy implementation drawing up legislation
- Departmental administration day-to-day running of department

Does this give the civil service a lot of power?

Yes, Minister (episode: Big Brother)

Watch the episode and answer the questions on the separate document.

How has this situation changed? (The Thick of It)