

The dangers of contemporaneous recording of thoughts

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In some ways it seems tedious, and almost unnecessary to record further assaults by Johnson's government on those instruments of power that provide the checks and balances within our unwritten constitution. And yet, at the same time, it seems to be absolutely essential to do so. If blogging has taught me anything it is that recording contemporaneous opinion has almost invariably useful, whilst giving little cause (as yet) cause for regret.

On this occasion there are two issues to note. One is the [departure of Sir Philip Rutnam from the Home Office](#). He has suggested that abuse, coming in a number of forms, gave him little option but do so, saying which it is also important to note that he refused a financial settlement to go quietly. Sir Philip is very clearly very angry. And he is clearly politically motivated, even if I very strongly suspect, not in a party political sense.

Let's not get too left/right righteous our about this for a moment. It is worth noting that civil servants are custodians, by and large of the conventional wisdom. And they are also exponents, in the main, of what has been done and the lessons learned from it. I do not knock either, by the way: the fact is that the vast majority of what any government does is perpetuate what is already in progress. That has to be the case: a few ministers cannot usually alter the course of massive organisations by that much, thankfully. And what this means is that the left will also have conflict with civil servants over policy, as much as the right do.

But Rutnam knew all this. Thirty three years in the civil service had taught him something. Including, I am fairly sure, how to advise, and to have that advice rejected, as I am sure had happened on many an occasion.

So what is this about? I think we should take it at face value. This dispute is about the abuse of power. It is about undermining the independence of the civil service. And it is about a civil servant saying that there are limits to the abuse a department must suffer when dealing with a minister who, along with many of her cabinet colleagues is on record for holding government itself, and all who work in it, in contempt.

And Rutnam has had enough. This could be seen as The Establishment fighting back. I stress, maybe it is. But even then the issue cannot be ignored because what The Establishment is upholding is that tradition which we call a constitution.

An independent civil service is part of that.

And actually, so too is respect for government.

And so too is respect for independent and contrary thinking, which brings me to my next point.

News that the government [blocked the appointment of Mary Beard as a trustee of the British Museum](#) because of her Remain views is equally worrying today. Few could doubt her qualities for this post. Except those who see adherence to 'the cause' as the new basis for all advancement. It would seem we do not need to spot political armbands any more to identify those who will advance or not; a cursory scan of their Twitter account will suffice to tell. The oppression of free-thinking is being advanced. The aim is deliberate: all those with ambition are meant to take note and toe the line Johnson and his government determine to be the one true way, whatever public role is now being considered.

And then take note of one final issue. The [Sunday Telegraph has noted that the government is planning divergence from European standards on human rights](#). No one is going to believe that is to ensure the UK might advance those rights. So they are to be undermined. Deviate at your peril is the message.

All of which is profoundly worrying.

Including for those who record their contemporaneous thoughts.