

SPECIAL ADVISERS

1. The First and Deputy First Ministers have already secured agreement that they should each have 3 special advisers. Each have appointed 2 and have yet to appoint a third, although Mr Trimble's third candidate is in process of appointment.
2. No thought has yet been given to the number of advisers each of the other Executive Committee members should have. Cabinet Ministers in London are restricted to 2 and therefore I would have thought that 2 each should be the maximum for Assembly Ministers. There would be much to be said for starting off with a proposal for 1 per Assembly Minister.
3. The issue is the control of the members and functions of special advisers. We could easily legislate in the Civil Service a prerogative order to restrict the number of political advisers and this could not be changed subsequently by the Assembly without the consent of the Secretary of State. But if we were to take such a step, we would have to consult in advance with Messrs Trimble and Mallon. They might welcome such a proposal, which might in due course ease that path with other Assembly Ministers, or they might feel that this was a matter for the Assembly Executive Committee and that they were not being trusted to manage the issue themselves.
4. Special Advisers have no executive authority, though obviously they can ask Private Offices to pursue issues for their Ministers. The First Minister has asked that David Campbell and David Kerr be designated as his Jonathan Powell and Alastair Campbell. In Whitehall, the Civil Service Order was amended to allow the Prime Minister to appoint 3

special advisers, who would be permitted to direct civil servants (as if they were senior civil servants). This has operated primarily within No 10, though Alastair Campbell does co-ordinate publicity for the Government as a whole.

5. Coincidence of Government and party offers opportunities to exercise No 10 co-ordination through these 2 advisers. The Prime Minister's authority in Government ^{and} or party lies behind their formal powers. The position here is quite different. The First Minister and his party are only one part of the Executive Committee; similar considerations apply to the Deputy First Minister. Their advisers cannot have a power to direct civil servants throughout the Civil Service. At most they could direct civil servants working within their own separate Private Offices and Information Offices.
6. I am concerned about the prospect of special advisers being empowered to direct civil servants. If the special advisers are given these powers, will similar powers not be sought by the Deputy First Minister and up to 10 other Ministers. Special advisers with powers of direction on this scale would constitute a significant politicisation of the NICS.
7. I am perhaps being too defensive. The Whitehall/HCS model may not be appropriate for a form of government which depends so much on political wheeling and dealing between parties in a non-voluntary coalition. Dublin, EU or USA models may be more appropriate.
8. Having reflected, I have concluded that, at least initially, the Whitehall/Dublin model probably remains appropriate (perhaps with an element of EU Cabinets thrown in). I think that this conclusion justifies a significant number of special advisers. They should work alongside and in partnership with civil servants. They should not be

injected into the Civil Service hierarchy at whatever level and given powers to direct the work of civil servants (other than their personal secretaries). Appointments and promotions within the Civil Service should continue to be on merit, although that merit may increasingly have to be tested through open competition.

JOHN SEMPLE

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