

THE PILGRIMS
REFLECTIONS LECTURE BY LORD BUTLER OF BROCKWELL
12th MARCH 2013

Admiral Lord Boyce: My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to the Pilgrims' annual *Reflections* Lecture, the 16th of our annual lectures, and welcome to Goldman Sachs. I thank Pilgrim Raoul Fraser, who has made it possible for the Pilgrims to return to Goldman Sachs, where we have had lectures in the past. I give a special thank you to Goldman Sachs.

Ladies and Gentlemen, tonight we are really fortunate in having Lord Robin Butler to give our *Reflections* Lecture. He is no stranger to the Pilgrims. He has been a member of our society since 1994 and he delivered the Harry Brittain Memorial Lecture in 1993, which is a good record. Robin: we very much welcome you here this evening and it is good to have you at the podium again.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Robin Butler spent 37 years in the Civil Service after a distinguished academic and sporting time at Oxford University, finishing up as the most senior of all mandarins, the Head of the Civil Service. After leaving that appointment in 1998, a return to academe then happened as the Master of University College Oxford for ten admired years, whilst also, amongst other things, being non-executive director of HSBC Group. Amongst those other things, he chaired the Inquiry and the Butler Report into the use of intelligence into the lead-up to Iraqi war, as I know well, because I appeared in front of him. Robin joined the House of Lords in 1998 as a cross-bencher where we share, from time to time, the fight to get a seat in what is now an overcrowded House.

Robin's time in the Civil Service, as the title of tonight's lecture tells us, included service with five Prime Ministers. Robin, we are really agog to learn what you have to say about that particular experience!

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is my pleasure to introduce Lord Robin Butler.

Lord Butler of Brockwell: Well Michael, thank you for that very generous introduction. As you say, I have had the privilege of speaking to the Pilgrims before and I thank you and congratulate you for not making the mistake that Dean Rusk is said to have made when introducing Abba Eban, when he said "Those of you who haven't heard Abba Eban before will be looking forward to hearing him speak".

It is a great privilege to be asked again and to give this *Reflections* Lecture. The bad news from my point of view is that over the last few weeks my life has been ruined by people coming up to me, people whom I most admire and of whom I am most in awe, and saying "We are looking forward to coming and hearing you give this *Reflections* Lecture". The even worse news is, as I glance round the room tonight, it looks as if many of them have indeed come. Bob Worcester reminded me that apparently after the last time I spoke I said "If I had known how distinguished the audience was I would have taken more

trouble about preparing my remarks". No problem about that this time because I have been terrified, am terrified, but nonetheless flattered. But the good news is that I have been asked to speak for 25 minutes or so, which means five minutes for each Prime Minister just about, so I hope it won't be too painful for you. Could I just say if any of you think I might speak ill of any of the Prime Ministers I served tonight you will be disappointed. If I want you to go away with one thing from this reflection, it is that nobody rises to the top of the slippery pole of politics in our country without having, yes, a certain amount of luck, but also great qualities. All the Prime Ministers that I served did have great qualities, different ones, but nonetheless very considerable ones. I will try to bring out some of that this evening.

My first Prime Minister was Ted Heath in 1972. Since I am speaking to this Anglo-American audience, the first thing I would like to say is that my going to Downing Street as private secretary was delayed on that occasion by my being given time to go to the United States on the International Visitors Programme. I had never been to the United States before. I had become friendly with my Treasury opposite number in the US Embassy, the US Treasury representative, with whom I played golf. I remember to this day that we were standing on the 5th Tee of the Royal Mid Surrey golf course and he said to me "Robin, can you help me with a problem? I have just had a telegram instructing me to put forward five names, UK names, of up and coming people who have never been to the United States, for our International Visitors Programme". So I said "I can certainly help you with 20% of that task" and he did kindly put me forward, and the consequence was that Jill and I had a month on a magic carpet going round the United States. I had to choose a subject, and I chose the subject of the relations between federal, state and city government, which I thought gave me a pretty wide margin of choice. And we did go all round the United States, and everywhere we went, in each city that we arrived, the first thing that happened was a letter from the local volunteers who then entertained us, and entertained us with the motive of first of all wanting to do something for international relations, and secondly their pride in their locality that they wanted to show off. The consequence of this wonderful experience was that Jill and I developed an affection and admiration for the United States that has really coloured the whole of our lives. I just say this to you, the Pilgrims, that if you have any influence on maintaining the International Visitors Programme – because they didn't just do it for us, they did it for people from all over the world – it is wonderful and I hope you will maintain it.

Even so I was young, and becoming Private Secretary to Edward Heath was not an easy or comfortable matter. Those of you in the audience who had the responsibility of entertaining him will know that he was not particularly good at putting you at ease by social chit chat. I think his character in this respect was best illustrated by the story which Douglas Hurd told at his memorial service of how at an important Conservative Party lunch, Douglas, as his political secretary, looked up the table and saw Ted sitting at the head of the table, and two very dejected wives of important local chairmen sitting beside him, in complete silence. So Douglas took his menu and wrote on the back of it, "You must talk to the ladies on either side of you", and gave it to the waiter

to take up to him. He saw Ted take out his pen, and write down a couple of words and the menu came back with the two words "I have".

My experience of this was that I have a cousin who was in the Diplomatic Service and became the Consul General in Tokyo. It was his duty to meet Ted at the airport and go with him in the car into Tokyo on one occasion, and he knew that this would not be an easy passage. He tried to think up for himself what subject of conversation might occupy this journey and remembered that I, his cousin, had been Ted's private secretary. So when they got in the car and settled down, my cousin said to Ted, "I think my cousin, Robin Butler, was your private secretary". Ted rolled his eyes and said, "That fellow", and that was the end of that.

What I most remember was, as a junior private secretary, having to go up to the flat at the top of 10 Downing Street, when I was on duty in the evening, and to put issues to Ted, something that had come up on which his decision was needed, against the background of Wagner being played at what sounded to me like full pitch. I remember the first times that I did this I explained the issue and Ted just stared at me, and I supposed that he hadn't heard what I had said, understandably, because of the background, and so I started stumblingly again. I got through a couple of sentences, perhaps a few more than a couple of sentences, and Ted would answer the first point I had put to him. So I began to realise that the technique of dealing with him was to go in for long pauses between contributions to conversations. I got used to this and we used to have car journeys together and Ted would say something and I would deliberately not say anything for a bit and then I would say something and then there would be a long pause and then he'd say something, and this became actually quite a comfortable form of discourse.

The thing about Ted Heath was that, although he had this glazed way of looking at you most of the time, every three or four weeks suddenly the glaze would go back and he would look at you in a way that suggested that he not only liked you but needed you. I found this, as a young man, very beguiling. He really won my heart because it was my job to brief him for Parliamentary Questions but also to check *Hansard* afterwards. Quite early on while I was doing this job, Ted unwisely said in answer to a question – he was talking about people who were temporarily laid off in the unemployment statistics – "most of whom are on strike". I realised this was going to enrage the Labour Party, and indeed it did. So without any instructions or authorisation from Ted when I went up to check *Hansard* I improved the wording by leaving out "most of whom were on strike". But the opposition had noticed. There were points of order and on the following day Ted had to make a quite unnecessary trip to the House when the points of order were raised, to correct the record and to apologise. He didn't blame it on me, he apologised. I thought that my job was in danger and as we came out of the Chamber I said to him "Prime Minister I am terribly sorry to have put you in that embarrassing position". He looked at me and a glint of humour came into his eyes and he said "Don't do it again". And that was the end of the matter. Completely captivating. So I liked and I admired him, which became a small problem when I became Principal Private Secretary to Margaret Thatcher.

My second Prime Minister was Harold Wilson and you will remember that he became Prime Minister during the miners' strike, after an indecisive election when Ted Heath had tried to form a coalition. There were people outside in Downing Street – you could get into Downing Street in those days – chanting “Heath out” and the effort to form a coalition failed and Harold Wilson arrived. We private secretaries had been working 18 hours a day for Ted Heath trying to support the government in dealing with the miners' strike. Harold Wilson having denounced the handling of the miners' strike, we were in some anxiety about what would happen to us. But Harold had been a civil servant and he understood the conventions – this would be extraordinary, of course, to an American audience. He kept exactly the same team in Downing Street as Ted Heath had had, and that is the first time I really learned that I was a mercenary. It was my job to work for whomever the government had returned. I got on very well with Harold because he was very much more affable and we shared University College Oxford together. But the atmosphere in 10 Downing Street, you won't be surprised to hear, became completely different. Instead of serious purpose, the atmosphere was a good deal more excitable. There were a lot of people around of high and mischievous temperament. The atmosphere became conspiratorial, all of which I think Harold enjoyed enormously, and my theory was that this kept him in practice for dealing with the Labour Party.

It was Harold second time round, and he wasn't quite the man that he had been first time round, but nonetheless there were flashes of the old Harold and I will give just two. First of all the quickness of his humour. During the time that I was Private Secretary a body called the Crown Agents collapsed, having made some very unwise investments. Harold wrote on a piece of paper that came down in his box in the evening, “We need a really good accountant to look into this, I suggest Denis Compton”*. Now those of you who are British will realise my surprise at this because Denis Compton was famous for his prowess at cricket and indeed soccer, but not for his numerical ability. Indeed so poor was his numerical ability that when the MCC arranged a dinner to celebrate his 50th birthday, a dinner where the speeches were being shown on television, Denis's mother rang up to tell him he was in fact only 49. So I didn't think it likely that Harold meant Denis Compton. I scratched my head and decided that the person he was actually meaning was a man called Sir Edmund Compton** who was the Auditor General. So when Harold came down next morning I said to him “Prime Minister, you wrote Denis Compton on this, but I think probably you are thinking of Sir Edmund Compton. But actually an appointment has already been made. They have found a judge called Judge Fay to carry out this Inquiry”. “Excellent”, he said “We will have Fay Compton”***.

I did see direct evidence, on a more serious matter, of his extraordinary political footwork. This was over the 1975 Referendum about Britain's membership of the EU. You will remember that Harold had three objectives: although it wasn't apparent immediately, he wanted Britain's membership of the EEC to be maintained; he wanted the terms negotiated by the previous government to be improved in some respects, if that were possible, but most

of all he wanted to keep his deeply divided party together and his instrument for this was a referendum. It may sound slightly analogous to modern times and perhaps our present Prime Minister will be studying the methods that Harold used. I was on duty over the crucial weekend when the final negotiations were to be undertaken at the Dublin Council on the improvements of the terms of Britain's membership. Harold had kept his cards close to his chest, and he had said "I am not going to say which way I will invite the British people to vote until the outcome of these negotiations". On the weekend before the final Dublin summit he entertained Helmut Schmidt at Chequers and Patrick Wright (the former diplomat Lord Wright of Richmond) tells me that there was a record, but as far as I know no record was made. What was quite clear to me was that Harold Wilson and Helmut Schmidt reached a private deal about the improvements to the British terms that would be negotiated at Dublin, that the Germans were going to support. At the Cabinet on the Thursday Harold said to the Cabinet, "Unless I can get the following improvements in British terms ..." – which sounded very ambitious, almost unattainable – "... I am going to recommend that the British people vote to come out of the EEC". The anti-Euros in the Cabinet, Peter Shore, Michael Foot, Tony Benn, were absolutely delighted. The Dublin Council was on the Sunday. On the Saturday night Harold made a speech to a body called the London Society of Labour Mayors, who I am quite sure had no idea of the role that was being cast for them in this historic moment. He said, in this speech "If I can get these following terms of Britain's membership I am going to advise the British people to vote yes". I was the Private Secretary on duty over the weekend. Michael Foot, Peter Shore, Tony Benn rang up and said, "If the Prime Minister is going to say this, why didn't he tell the Cabinet on Thursday?" I said, "If you look at the Cabinet minutes he said that if he couldn't get these terms he would advise the British people to vote no. I think you will realise that one is a corollary of the other". He went to Dublin and, lo and behold, he got those improvements in the terms, advised the British people to vote yes, campaigned for a yes vote, and the rest is history. This was an amazing piece of political legerdemain and I enjoyed that enormously.

My third Prime Minister was of course Margaret Thatcher, after an interval, because I left and went back to the Treasury for seven years. Then Margaret Thatcher interviewed me to be her Principal Private Secretary. Now again, speaking to an American audience, people are very surprised that a civil servant can be the Principal Private Secretary to one head of government, and also to the head of government of a different party. British people will be more surprised that somebody can be Private Secretary to Ted Heath and then be Principal Private Secretary to Margaret Thatcher. When she interviewed me I did feel that honesty compelled me to say, "Prime Minister I do want you to realise that I very much admired Edward Heath and what he tried to do" and she said, "That is not what I hold against you". So I said "Well what is it that you hold against me?" and she said, "Before you became Ted Heath's private secretary, when you were in the Think Tank you came and gave a presentation to Chequers about the government's strategy and you said that inflation (which was then running at 7%) is endemic in the economy, it can't be eliminated and therefore the government's job is to protect

pensioners and others who lose from inflation". Margaret Thatcher had remembered this and she said, "It was the most terrible remark I have ever heard uttered by a young man. But since you were a young man I have decided to forgive you". And then she gave me the job. Of course I could tell many stories about Margaret Thatcher. I was tempted to talk about the Brighton Bomb. I was alone in the room with her in the Grand Hotel when the bomb went off. It was a moment when taken by surprise, politicians have to behave instinctively. I remember her first instinct was to see that her husband was all right in the bedroom next door. The next morning we knew for the first time that there had been fatalities and people were still being rescued – Norman Tebbit had been brought out badly injured, they were still looking for John Wakeham – and I had to tell her this. Without hesitation she said, "It is 8.00 am; the conference must begin on time at 9.00 am" and I was appalled. This terrible thing had happened. Her instincts were absolutely right. She said, "We have to show that terrorism can't defeat democracy". She was right and I was wrong.

But the story that I thought I would tell you, because it is an Anglo-American occasion, was her negotiating with Reagan the four principles of deterrence. When Ronald Reagan was looking at the Zero Zero option, Margaret Thatcher was terrified that he would rely on the SDI and concede to the Russians that they should give up all nuclear weapons on both sides. This was "Not a time to go wobbly, Ronnie" moment. So she wished to get her point across. We are talking about December 1984, Reagan had just been elected for the second time in November and the Foreign Office had had the idea that they wanted the Prime Minister to be the first visitor to him as the re-elected President of the United States. This is how it came about. Margaret Thatcher had to go to Hong Kong to sign the agreement with the Chinese over the future of Hong Kong. The Foreign Office tried to sell this by saying it would be very convenient to call on Ronald Reagan on the way back, because he was in the California White House. Their information was in fact wrong; he was in Washington. Not only was their information wrong, their geography was wrong because actually it is shorter to fly to California from London than it is from Hong Kong, but nonetheless this is the way it was fixed up. We discovered that he was in Washington and there was a 24-hour flight on a VC10, with a 12-hour time change, between Hong Kong and Washington. Charles Powell and I, who were accompanying her, decided that we would sleep. She announced that she wasn't going to sleep. She was going to take off at 9.00 am from Hong Kong and would be arriving 24 hours later at 9.00pm in Washington and she said she would occupy the whole 24 hours in studying the Antiballistic Missile Treaty and reading Cap Weinberger's speeches about the SDI. Indeed she did, with one break.

At 5.00 am local time we staged in Honolulu where we were met by an extremely sleepy 5-Star General and an Admiral who had been sent out just to shake her hand. She announced that since she was in Honolulu she would like to see Pearl Harbour. "Oh" they said "What a shame, you have to drive out of the air base, it is a long way round and I am afraid there is not time for you to do that". Then one of them made the fatal mistake, which I often saw

with men dealing with Margaret Thatcher, of saying one thing too much, and the thing they said too much was “It is such a shame because actually it is only the other side of the airfield”. She said “Wonderful, I have my torch” – she always carried a torch in her handbag after the Brighton bomb. “Let’s walk across the airfield and see it”. I have the unforgettable memory of the Prime Minister with this torch, in her high heels, with these two rather woebegone senior US officers, picking our way across the edge of the airfield, looking out onto Pearl Harbour and Arethusa, the only time I’ve ever seen them, as the dawn came up. It was a wonderful moment.

We went on to Washington, then up to Camp David. The team was Margaret Thatcher by herself – Geoffrey Howe wasn’t with her – John Kerr, Charles Powell and me. On the other side we were faced by Reagan, Shultz, Weinberger, Macfarlane and Perle, a pretty formidable team. Margaret Thatcher lectured Ronald Reagan on the perils of giving up the deterrent. While she was lecturing him Charles and John scribbled out four principles of deterrence, and she took this, passed it across the table to Ronald Reagan and said “There, what do you think of that?” and Reagan said “Well it looks all right to me”. Weinberger would have agreed. She then passed it to Schultz, who was too polite to say that he thought the President was conceding too much, and in that way the Four Principles of Deterrence were established and history was made. Again it illustrates some of the remarkable characteristics of Margaret Thatcher.

I knew John Major well because he had been Chief Secretary when I had been dealing with public expenditure in the Treasury and I was Cabinet Secretary when he became Prime Minister. He is often underrated but he was, of all the Prime Ministers I served, in my view the best negotiator. He was the best negotiator because he had the ability to put himself into the shoes of his interlocutor, to identify what the interlocutor wanted, to get the right trade-off, but not only that – to convince the interlocutor that he was doing the best for both of them. I think this was very successful and very winning. There are other people in the room who may have a different view of this but my view is that he got a better deal at Maastricht than Margaret Thatcher could have got.

The moment in which I most admired him, for which I think he deserves the greatest credit, was when we received the message, purportedly from Martin McGuinness of the IRA, although McGuinness has always denied it, saying “The conflict is over, but you must help us bring it to an end”. There were several strands of discussion that were going on with the IRA at that time. There had been a Peter Brooke initiative; there were talks between John Hume and Gerry Adams, and subsequently there was an initiative by the Taoiseach which eventually led to the Downing Street Declaration.

I want to dwell on this message “The conflict is over, you must help us resolve it” because it presented Major with an acute dilemma. It was absolutely the firm position of the British government that we did not negotiate with the IRA or other terrorists until they had renounced violence. Moreover other members of the Cabinet said to John Major “This is probably a trap and if you

respond to it they will blow the whistle on you". And John Major said "It may be a trap, but just suppose it isn't, and just suppose we have an opportunity here to save all the lives that could be saved by bringing an end to the violence" and he said "I am going to take the risk". So a response was sent. It was all very secret and of course one of the great fears was what the response of the Unionists would be if they discovered that this was going on. The other hero of this story is Jim Molyneaux, leader of the Ulster Unionists, whom Major took into his confidence and who stood by John Major and the government when the balloon went up. The exchange was interrupted by the Warrington bomb, but it crept on. In the autumn the IRA did indeed leak this exchange to the newspapers and Paddy Mayhew, who was by then Secretary of State, had to make a statement in Parliament. It was one of those surprising moments in politics when you think you have walked into a trap and you suddenly find all the parties, and Parliament, supported the response that had been made and believed that the government had done the right thing. But that couldn't have been predicted and it required a great deal of courage on John Major's part, so when I think of him, that is what I think of.

And finally Tony Blair. Of all the Prime Ministers that I served, I think that Tony Blair had the most developed skills in public political presentation. He was extraordinarily persuasive on a public platform, and I think that the speech that he made on 18 March ten years ago, in the lead-up to the Iraq War, when he persuaded a majority of his party to support the war against their inclinations, is one of the finest parliamentary speeches there has ever been.

But what he brought, what New Labour brought, was an entirely new approach to the handling of the media. They were very slick at it. It had always been our belief that when the government had an announcement to make the right thing to do, the integrity thing to do, was to give it to all the newspapers equally. Indeed it was the prudent thing to do because they would get cross if you didn't. But New Labour and Alistair Campbell spotted that the government were a monopoly provider of these stories and the media were fragmented consumers. So their technique for giving a government story was to call in a particular reporter, say "We are going to give you a scoop, this is exclusive for you, your editor is going to be very pleased with you and if you report it favourably there will be others in due course. If you don't, you can forget it, and there are lots of other people who will be glad of them". So everything came out by a leak and the leak often gave a favourable interpretation to the story, quite unlike what had been happening in previous times when the lobby used to stand in a circle in Downing Street and discuss what unfavourable spin they could put on a government announcement. So they were very skilled and that was new to me. Tony Blair was a very pleasant person to deal with.

I will finish with a comparison. When I retired as Cabinet Secretary I was interviewed on some television programme and I was asked the obvious question, "How would you compare the three Prime Ministers you served as Cabinet Secretary?" Now with my civil service experience it was the most obvious question in the world and I should have prepared an answer, but I

hadn't prepared an answer so I said the first thing that came into my head, which is usually disastrous. But in this very rare instance I didn't regret it. I said "If I, as Cabinet Secretary, said something critical to Margaret Thatcher about something the government had done, she would be affronted, 'What do you mean, how can you say that?' If you said something critical to John Major he would be disappointed, 'Oh do you really think we made such a mess of it?' and if you said something critical to Tony Blair he would say 'You are absolutely right, I completely agree with you', but you would never quite know whether he did."

So there I am going to stop and give you a chance to ask some questions. I hope I haven't gone on too long.

Mr Robert Conway: Could you give some anecdotes about your time as Master of University College?

Lord Butler: This absolutely leads to Kissinger's remark "Why are academic politics so brutal?" and the answer was "Because the stakes are so low". Presiding over the Fellows of University College, I found people much less willing to come to agreements than I had with my civil service colleagues, but actually being a civil servant was a good preparation for it. The thing I discovered about academics is that they love arguing, but they hate deciding.

They behaved perfectly during my first governing body meeting. During my second governing body meeting there was an argument about an academic who was coming from the United States where the academic year ended on 31 August, to join Oxford where the academic year started on 1 October. Not unreasonably this academic had written to the college saying "Since I will be preparing for my job at Oxford, would you mind paying me from the beginning of September, not October, the beginning of the academic year?" There were some Fellows who were sympathetic to this but others said "What's it to us that the American year ends on 31 August? If we set this precedent they will all be wanting it". Again an argument I was familiar with in the civil service. So this argument raged, and it was perfectly clear that we had to take a vote, to decide it one way or the other, and it wasn't much good making it 15 September. So we took a vote and to my consternation the votes on each side were equal and I had the casting vote. So I had to think very quickly and I thought of the parliamentary convention, which was unless there was a majority to change you vote for the status quo. Moreover, the Bursar had voted against making a change, and it is always a good principle to stick by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. So I voted for not conceding this, and I got various abusive letters afterwards. At a subsequent meeting another issue came up, and I found that once again the votes, which were by show of hands, were equal and I had again the casting vote. This came to a final head when the College had the opportunity to bid for an extra medical Fellow for the University. The medical Fellows were greatly in favour of this, argued very passionately in favour of it. Other Fellows were against it because if you had another medic you couldn't have something else. So we got to the end and I said we will have to decide this by a vote. I said "Those in favour of our having an extra medical Fellow please raise your hand" and not a single hand

went up. I said to the medics, "You argued for this, are you not going to vote for it?". "Well no, it would be a bit dog in a manger when other people oppose it." So I said, "Presumably the motion falls, so those against it show". Again not a single hand. By this time I had thoroughly smelt a rat and so I consulted my friend Terry Burns about what I should do about this. He said, "You made a great mistake announcing that, unless there was a majority for change, you would vote for the status quo. With academics you want to do it the other way round. Unless there is a majority for the status quo you are going to vote for change". So I announced this principle. I was never put in the position of having to give a casting vote again.

Mr John Fingleton: In your professional life as head of the civil service and Cabinet Secretary, do you think it is a good or bad step to separate the roles?

Lord Butler: I think it is a very bad step. I think it is already actually being shown to be a bad step. History is on the side of that because when there's been a separate head of the civil service, who hasn't been Cabinet Secretary, it hasn't worked. William Armstrong was the first, he was very bored by being head of the civil service, he had been head of the Treasury, he therefore got involved with Ted Heath and got into trouble because he got too involved and people thought he was doing more than a civil servant should do. Douglas Allen said it was the greatest mistake he ever made to accept appointment as head of the civil service, and then Ian Bancroft was appointed. Eventually the civil service department was disbanded by Margaret Thatcher and Ian Bancroft left. The reason why it doesn't work is that it is a great asset to the civil service to have the sort of access to the Prime Minister that the Cabinet Secretary has. To be honest, whatever their good intentions, busy politicians are not very interested about the management of the civil service, so it is very difficult for somebody who just has the job of head of the civil service to get access to the Prime Minister. They have now separated it again, and I think this is actually what is happening. The chap they have made head of the civil service sits in on Cabinet meetings but I don't think he gets much access or leverage with the Prime Minister. The other thing is leverage with your colleagues, the other Permanent Secretaries. If the other Permanent Secretaries think you can do things for them on policy then they are more obliging about management issues. So the two jobs are much better held together and I think the government has made a great mistake in separating them.

Baroness Bottomley: Robin, as the ultimate and most excellent model of the mandarin class, over the years, you will have seen the degree to which politicians constantly say civil servants don't have the energy, the drive, the ambition, they are not in it with their heart as well as their head and there is this great constant desire to bring in special advisers, quango chairs, maybe put people in the House of Lords, to bring in outside people who are really aligned with the energy and drive, sometimes it is put as the case that people who are actually operational, know how to achieve things. How do you read that, are we becoming more like the US?

Lord Butler: There is a danger that we might. I don't like to say this to Americans in the audience. I will just deal with why I don't think it would be a good idea to become like the US. As we all know, when the President changes, the five top levels of the administration change. Quite rightly, the Congress wants to keep some control of this, so they have hearings and these hearings take time. So it can take 18 months to put a US administration fully in place. A year before the end of the four-year term, there are people who are saying "What if the President isn't re-elected, perhaps I ought to be thinking about what other job I should take" and they look around Wall Street. So in the most powerful country in the world, the American system means that a large proportion of the most senior people are only firmly in place for 18 months out of a four-year term, and that doesn't seem to me to be satisfactory.

But to come back to us, I think that one of the difficulties that we have had is with the instant gratification, 24/7 media and so on, politicians are under much greater pressure than they ever were before, first of all to announce great initiatives. I am sorry to say that some of them succumb to the temptation of announcing great initiatives without really going into great depth about whether they can be achieved or not, as long as they take tomorrow's headlines and as long as the Secretary of State concerned will have moved onto another job before it is apparent that they haven't been delivered. Forgive me if this sounds a little cynical. Some of my colleagues use a very good phrase, "Building government policy like a wall which you build from the top row of bricks downwards" and so I think the public have got very disappointed. And I think politicians similarly have got disappointed because they think that, if something can't be delivered, then it is the incompetence of the civil servants, who are the people charged with delivering it, and sometimes it is. So I think this division has grown and it is rather serious actually.

There was a wonderful programme by Gus O'Donnell (Lord O'Donnell, also Cabinet Secretary to three Prime Ministers) on Radio 4 this morning in defence of bureaucracy, and he spoke up very strongly for the civil service. I think there are ways in which the civil service management can be improved but I do think that a professional impartial non-political civil service has been a great asset to this country for the last 150 years, I regard our relationship with politicians as being a professional relationship, it is like a barrister with a client, or a doctor with a patient, and the fact that you don't share the same ideology shouldn't restrict the commitment with which you try to do your duty for the elected government. I think most civil servants take that view. So I hope the answer to that is we will not go down the American route.

Mr Simon Barrow: I wonder if you were planning to see, perhaps you have already seen, *The Audience*?

Lord Butler: I saw it last night.

Mr Simon Barrow: In which case, I would be fascinated to know whether you think the playwright has captured your five Prime Ministers, who undoubtedly appeared in the programme, with the exception I think of Tony Blair?

Lord Butler: And Ted Heath. Tony Blair and Ted Heath didn't appear. The answer is emphatically no. I thought it was a wonderful performance by Helen Mirren. I thought some of the representation of the Prime Ministers was quite amusing, some of them looked similar, but I couldn't imagine any of them talking to The Queen in the way they were represented as doing on the stage. Some of the things that were put into their mouths were not only unhistorical but very, very unkind and untrue. And so I think it is a brilliant piece of theatre, but it is actually quite a dilemma. We went last night with Robert and Jane Fellowes. Robert had been Private Secretary to The Queen, and we went for old times' sake because, when these audiences went on, the Principal Private Secretary to the Prime Minister sat downstairs with the Private Secretary to The Queen, waited for the Prime Minister to come out and then tried to winkle out of the Prime Minister something of what had passed between the two. So for old times' sake we went together. And we both agreed the problem is people will see the play and think some of the things that are represented there are true. So what do you do about "faction", when some of it was very hurtful? For example, at one point The Queen says "Prince Philip couldn't stand Tony Blair you know", on the stage. I don't know whether that is true or not true, I doubt whether it is true, but I am certain The Queen would never have said it and I think that that sort of thing is untrue and damaging. So it is entertainment, but I think it is quite damaging really.

Sir Peter Bottomley: Robin asked me why he was invited. I said because he was one of the few people who would fill this auditorium. The real truth is it's my wife's birthday and "If you are coming to a Pilgrims' evening who do you want to listen to?" and she said "Robin Butler" and she said Robin Butler because it is ever important that the most talented and principled people come into our public service. And as a second way of putting it to Robin, I think it was while he was Master of University College Oxford, that there was a resurgence of applications of some of the most talented people to come and join his successors, so I thank Robin for coming to speak to us for a second time, and ask him to accept the traditional Pilgrims' presents, which is the modern Pilgrims' tie and the History of the Pilgrims, which was written about the time when you last spoke to us. If I can just add one small bit of almost contemporary history, I had been a junior minister in Northern Ireland. I went with Virginia to a dinner with Nick Lyell in Bedfordshire. The then Minister of State for the Northern Ireland Office, Michael Ancram, rang up and said "If you are asked to do any media this weekend just say yes". Coming back at midnight from a good dinner Sky rang up saying would I come and I said yes and they said "We haven't asked you what for yet". I turn up at Osterley at 6.00am on the Sunday and they say "What's your reaction to the news that there's been a channel of communication with the IRA". I said "Not much, there is no negotiation that we know of but if your listeners thought there wasn't a channel of communication I hope they would hold each successive government to account". I did about six radio and television interviews that day and on the Tuesday morning all the newspaper editorials said this was perfectly sensible and, as Robin indicated, Patrick Mayhew and the Prime Minister's positions were not undermined, they were actually supported in what they were trying to do. That struck me, I might have had a part in it, of

people being able to keep secrets to a certain extent and to manage things afterwards in a way which is for the public good. Robin has done that in his professional service, he has done it afterwards in the other roles he has had, and he has done it this evening for us. Robin, thank you very much.

Note on *Denis Compton: see

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Denis_Compton

Note on **Sir Edmund Compton: see

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edmund_Compton

Note on ***Fay Compton: see

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fay_Compton

For Comptons in the New World: see

<http://www.houseofnames.com/compton-family-crest>

which includes settlers arriving 1623-37