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## Editorial

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### Good Government — Better Business

There has been an increasing tendency for government, particularly since the advent of Mrs Thatcher's administration, to judge the efficiency and effectiveness of its own performance in accordance with "business" criteria. Public servants have become accustomed to working in a disciplined regime of cash limits and devolved budgeting. Parts of the public sector have been privatised, and exposed to the cold winds of the market place.

Government has absorbed, in some contexts more appropriately than in others (the distinction between the *cost* and the *value* of a public service is all too easily lost sight of), important lessons from Marks and Spencer. It is doubtful whether Marks and Spencer, flattered though it may be by Mrs Thatcher's support for the nostrums devised by Lord Rayner's efficiency unit, has much to learn *from* government — but this does not mean that the way in which government works, or fails to work, is of no interest to the commercial sector. The weaknesses of government, and the shortcomings of the constitution, can be major impediments to business efficiency in a mixed economy where public and

private sectors are closely and extensively interlinked.

This is the thinking behind a "Good Government: Better Business" campaign recently launched by the Constitutional Reform Centre (60 Chandos Place, London WC2N 4HG), under the chairmanship of Sir Peter Parker. The leaflet issued to launch the campaign begins by asking a rhetorical question: "would you run your company the way that governments run the country?", and then goes on to outline major deficiencies in our present constitutional framework. Cabinet government (as most of those who have taken any interest in the Westland saga will be all too well aware) is too secretive and fails to think far enough ahead. The House of Commons "has become a byword for the worst sort of adversarial politics", too much legislation "is hasty and ill-conceived, and the parliamentary response to it ill-informed and over-simplified". As for the civil service, "Whitehall has too many characteristics of a closed caste, hiding its decision-making processes and out of touch with the realities of industry and commerce". The campaign elaborates these views, and others, in a series of briefing papers, available (free)

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