
Editorial

"The Department for Enterprise"

The economic policy buzz word of the moment is "enterprise" — as reflected in the 40-page Government White Paper, *DTI — The Department for Enterprise*, published on January 12. This document graphically illustrates how far the culture of Whitehall has changed in the last few years. Once ministers rejoiced in their capacity to protect their departments from cuts, now they vie with one another to demonstrate the magnitude of their resolve to reduce expenditure. This White Paper notes proudly that the total size of the DTI budget has fallen by more than a quarter since 1979–80, largely as a consequence of the decline in spending on nationalised industries.

The two keynotes of future DTI policy are to be open markets (promoted through competition policy, privatisation, deregulation and international trade negotiations, many aspects of which entail less rather than more public expenditure) and the encouragement of individual initiative and self-help. Regional Development Grants are to be abolished. There is to be a range of new initiatives covering design, marketing, quality and

management of computer-aided manufacture, and further support for consultancy services to assist small and medium-size companies, especially in Development Areas and Urban Programme Areas. A facility will be provided for ten percent of school teachers to spend some of their holidays gaining industrial experience. On the legislative front, there are to be new powers for the Director General of Fair Trading (including a streamlined procedure to permit automatic clearance of straightforward merger proposals within four weeks). There will be "fundamental" changes to the Restrictive Trade Practices Act, to be discussed further via a Green Paper. Major changes to the Companies Act, the Consumer Credit Act and the Weights and Measures Act will be included in a deregulation White Paper, to be published in the summer.

All this is very much in harmony with past Conservative thinking, in the mould of Samuel Smiles and the self-help values of Victorian entrepreneurship. The shift from government/DTI "sponsorship" of big business towards the encouragement of "enterprise" among smaller firms is very much in the Thatcherite tradition. Meanwhile, new legislation means yet

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