

The Political Neutrality of British Civil Servants

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Abstract

The term of political neutrality is used to clarify the duties and responsibilities of civil servants and their relationships with the incumbent administration. Generally speaking, the term is taken to mean impartiality, honesty, objectivity, or working for the long-term public interest. However, what does impartiality or objectivity really mean? Or, what kinds of conduct could be seen as neutral? These questions are quite controversial. In this essay, the author takes the British Civil Service as a case study and discusses the theory and practice of British conventions for the political neutrality of civil servants. No doubt the British Civil Service has an excellent reputation; however, there have been some potential conflicts within the British system. After the radical civil service reforms launched by the Conservatives since 1979, it seems that these traditional conventions have become increasingly difficult to maintain.

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