



The National Archives

Embargoed until 00.01hrs Tuesday, 30 December

## **1978 revealed - new records show the beginning of the end for Callaghan's government**

The National Archives today (30 December 2008) releases over 5,000 government records from 1978, shining new light on James Callaghan's Cabinet in the run-up to the 'Winter of discontent'.

The release, one of the highest profile transfers of the year, includes documents from the very heart of the government - the Prime Minister's Office, Cabinet Office and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

A selection of the files is available to view, for free until the end of January, at [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk).

Key topics covered in the files include:

- The looming winter of discontent and the Cabinet's contingency plans when faced with the possibility of a strike by oil tank drivers. Codenamed 'Operation Drumstick', the plan was to use troops to take over from tanker drivers to ensure supplies did not run out (PREM 16/1707).
- The threat posed by the Soviet Union and concerns that the UK's defences would not be sufficient. The records paint a sober picture of the UK's defence capabilities and the country's need to maintain close ties with its allies to present a 'collective Alliance posture' (PREM 16/1563).

- Political manoeuvrings to keep Margaret Thatcher out of the Royal Box at a gala event to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of adult female suffrage (PREM 16/1685).

Mark Dunton, contemporary records specialist at The National Archives, said: 'In some ways 1978, up to the late summer, was a period of relative calm for James Callaghan's minority Labour government.

'However, we now know that 1978 was really the start of the unravelling of the post-war consensus, and the beginnings of a 'sea change' which resulted in the radical approach of Thatcherism.

'These files provide an opportunity to see into the thinking of the key decision-makers in Government as the country approached a pivotal moment in its recent history.'

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For interviews, images or further information please contact The National Archives' press office, 020 8392 5277 ([press@nationalarchives.gov.uk](mailto:press@nationalarchives.gov.uk))

### **Notes to Editors:**

**The National Archives, [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk) is a government department;** and also an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice. The National Archives brings together the Public Record Office, Historical Manuscripts Commission, the Office of Public Sector Information and Her Majesty's Stationary Office.

**The National Archives is at the heart of information policy** – setting standards and supporting innovation in information and records management across the UK, and providing a practical framework of best practice for opening up and encouraging the re-use of public sector information. This work helps inform today's decisions and ensure that they become tomorrow's permanent record.

**The National Archives is also the UK government's official archive**, containing 900 years of history from Domesday Book to the present, with records ranging from parchment and paper scrolls through to recently created digital files and archived websites. Increasingly, these records are being put online, making them universally accessible. For more information on The National Archives' work in guaranteeing the long-term survival of digital records, follow the links below:

- <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/preservation/digital.htm>
- <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/electronicrecords/>