

NATURE

No. 3897 SATURDAY, JULY 8, 1944 Vol. 154

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THE APPROACH TO FULL EMPLOYMENT

THE publication of the White Paper on Employment Policy almost on the eve of the launching of the invasion to liberate the peoples of occupied Europe was an imaginative stroke. It has both strengthened confidence in the determination of the Government to pursue resolutely a policy which will effectively implement its declared aim of maintaining a high and stable level of employment after the War, and fortified the nation for whatever may be demanded of it in the weeks that lie immediately ahead. More, it represents not merely a new departure in Government policy and an example of real leadership, but also, in some respects, the shaping of policy in accordance with scientific principles. To the fundamental statements and principles set forth in the report there can be little or no exception. Opinions may indeed differ as to the methods by which particular points of policy are to be implemented, and as to whether those which the Government proposes to use in the first instance are likely to be effective enough, or put into practice with sufficient firmness. Beyond this, however, a great merit of the statement is that it makes unmistakably plain, while acknowledging the Government's responsibilities in the matter of policy and decision, that there are limits beyond which Government action cannot go, and that the success of an employment policy must depend very largely on the understanding and support of the community as a whole. Whether or not the Government could do more than is indicated in this statement to promote a rising standard of industrial efficiency, such action could not be effective without corresponding efforts from both employers and workers. Without such co-operation, even measures already proposed by the Government may be frustrated of their purpose.

If for nothing else, this statement therefore is to be welcomed for its educational value. In the problems of the transition from war to peace—such as demobilization, the necessity for continuing war-time controls, the transfer of workers, their re-training and other measures to increase their mobility—the position is lucidly explained and reasons are given which should go far to assist in gaining public assent and co-operation in proposals which may to some extent be unpalatable and involve a break with professional or trade custom or practice. The necessity of explaining policy and measures in advance has been repeatedly urged in connexion with demobilization and like problems, notably in a valuable report, "The Organization of Employment in the Transition from War to Peace", submitted to the International Labour Conference at Philadelphia, and the White Paper is fully in keeping with the recommendations and spirit of that report. Any demobilization scheme finally agreed upon should be clearly understood by the people and the interests affected by it. If, as the report observes, the scheme is widely discussed, and if, after discussion, it is accepted as fair and reasonable, then some of the pressures apt to cause disorderly mobilization can be relieved or abolished.

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T. G. Scott & Son, Ltd., Talbot House, 9 Arundel Street, London, W.C.2

Telephone : Temple Bar 1942

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Again, not only is it a matter of winning public approval of what is involved in policy. The Government also recognizes that, in its proposals for extending State control over the volume of employment, it is entering a field where theory can only be applied to practical issues with confidence and certainty when experience accumulates and experiment extends over untried ground. It is intended, therefore, to establish on a permanent basis a small central staff qualified to measure and analyse economic trends, and to submit appreciations of those trends to the Ministers concerned. It is also vital for the Government to obtain, more fully and much more quickly than in the past, exact quantitative information about current economic movements, and the Government appeals to industry for co-operation in this task. Only industry can provide the statistical information required, and only a central authority can classify and analyse information drawn from the country as a whole.

In this respect the White Paper points out that the efficient operation of an employment policy will require statistics of employment and unemployment, including quarterly or monthly statements of present and prospective employment in the main industries and areas of Great Britain, based on returns from employers, as well as regular information relating to savings, projected capital expenditure by public authorities, and, so far as possible, by private industry. An annual census of production showing the structure of the main groups of industries in the preceding year, including, *inter alia*, details of the quantity and value of output, stocks, and work in progress, together with monthly figures of production, consumption and stocks, and, if possible, figures of orders on hand, based on sample returns obtained periodically throughout the year from large firms, trade associations and public institutions, must also be provided. The Government has already repeatedly affirmed its intention of extending the provision of official statistics after the War, and it is now stated that the annual White Paper on National Income and Expenditure is to be developed by providing a much more complete analysis of the constituent parts of the country's total expenditure.

This central analysis of our financial position, which will be subject to continuous review and adjustment throughout the year, will serve as a basis for determining what measures are required to maintain employment and secure a rising standard of living. Parallel studies, at every stage, of the manpower situation will be undertaken by the Ministry of Labour and National Service, and these surveys will indicate the probable supply of labour over the coming period, the prospective changes in employment in the different industries, and the effects upon employment of Government projects designed to modify the volume of investment or expenditure. The correlation of these complementary budgets—for total expenditure and for man-power—will play a vital part in the formulation of Government policy for the maintenance of employment.

The debates on the Budget will in future provide an annual opportunity for Parliament to review the

financial and economic health of Great Britain as a whole, and to consider the prospects for the coming year. This step may be regarded as part of the programme of educating the country as to what is required in a policy of employment which at the same time aims at securing for the nation the most effective use both of its man-power and of its material resources. Measures to increase total expenditure at the onset of a depression will no doubt be welcome; but the restraining measures appropriate to a boom may meet with opposition unless they are seen and understood as part of a continuing policy for maintaining employment, and accepted as the price that must be paid for the success of that policy over a long period.

It is right that we should turn first to the measures by which the Government seeks to provide itself with the instruments for giving effect to policy in this field, for unless the appropriate instruments are available and the basic data accumulated in readiness, the right decisions and the appropriate policy may not be determined or effectively put into operation. The White Paper, however, shows that in breaking new ground in regard to policy, the Government is providing itself with exactly the instruments required for the formulation of policy for which scientific workers have long pressed. No point, in fact, was more strongly urged in the Barlow Report, for example, than the necessity for more fact-finding machinery in regard to the location of industry and the natural resources that might be affected by industrial location, and the Commission was unanimous in recommending that the functions of the new national authority proposed should include the collection and co-ordination of such information.

Whether the instruments proposed by the Government will in fact prove adequate remains to be seen, and can scarcely be judged until the fuller proposals on particular points are made known. In regard to the collection of statistics, some further organization more on the lines of that recommended by the Council of the Royal Statistical Society in its Memorandum on Official Statistics (see *Nature*, 153, 88; 1944) may prove necessary; this may indeed be contemplated by the Government, although it is not explicitly mentioned in the White Paper. The provision of statistics cannot be left to returns supplied by industry itself alone, however important the co-operation of industry may be. Nevertheless, it is clear that we have something more of a scientific approach to questions of public policy.

Turning now to the question of policy, the White Paper visualizes some ten different methods by which the Government may influence employment in furtherance of its objective. First, there is the action to be taken in the period of transition from war to peace, to avoid the threefold danger that patches of unemployment may develop where the industrial system fails to adapt itself quickly enough to peacetime production; that demand may outrun supply and create an inflationary rise in prices; and that civilian production, when it is resumed, may concentrate on the wrong things from the point of view of national needs. It is clear from the White Paper

that the Government is fully alive to these dangers ; it will be recalled that the report presented to the Philadelphia Conference directed attention to them, as did also an admirable study issued last year by the League of Nations Delegation on Economic Depressions (see *Nature*, 152, 365 ; 1943). In regard to the first, plans are being worked out to promote the orderly expansion of peace-time industries throughout the transition period by assisting firms to switch over their capacity to peace-time production as quickly as possible, by finding out in advance where the skilled labour which will gradually become available will be most urgently required, and by arranging, so far as war conditions permit, that labour and raw materials will be forthcoming for urgent civilian work. Steps are being taken to ensure that the machinery of allocation devised in war-time will be adaptable to the special conditions likely to obtain after the end of the War in Europe. Curtailments of munitions production will be made first in areas where the capacity and labour can be used for civilian products of high priority. The disposal of surplus Government stocks will not be allowed to prejudice the re-establishment and development of the normal trade channels for producing and distributing similar goods ; and the disposal of Government factories will be regulated so as to help towards the early restoration of employment.

In regard to the second danger, the White Paper insists on the need for public support for such measures as the continuance of rationing and a measure of price control ; but it is emphasized that there is no intention of maintaining war-time restrictions for restriction's sake. Some controls there must be ; the habit of saving must still be encouraged, though, as Lieut.-Colonel K. E. Edgeworth points out in his book, "Unemployment Can Be Cured" (see p. 40 of this issue), the vital question is how much saving : over-saving can create unemployment. There must be discipline and imagination in peace no less than in war, and nothing will so speedily ensure that the peace is lost as the same craving for indulgence in an easy peace that we yielded to in 1918-20. Again, to avert the third danger it will be necessary to establish certain broad priorities, and to enforce them for a time by means of the issue of licences, the allocation of raw materials and a measure of control over the labour and staff required for industry.

The reasons for all these measures are well put in the White Paper, and this is equally true of the second field, namely, those concerned with the expansion of our external trade, by the creation, through collaboration with other nations, of the conditions of international trade which will make it possible for all countries to pursue policies of full employment to their mutual advantage. Here again the White Paper emphasizes that it is with industry that the responsibility and initiative must rest for making the most of opportunities to recover export markets and to find fresh outlets for products. While this is true, there is a slight tendency to discount the full measure of Government responsibility for securing the conditions in which such expansion can best be promoted,

and a like comment might be made on the White Paper's observations on the promotion of industrial efficiency. There is a disposition to regard recent taxation concessions in regard to research and obsolescence as a sufficient contribution ; more may well be expected of the Government in this respect than is indicated. The promotion of industrial efficiency is a matter of paramount importance that must be kept under constant review, and further measures will almost certainly be required.

A whole chapter of the White Paper is devoted to the fourth series of measures, namely, those designed to secure the balanced distribution of industry and labour ; and this has already been the subject of a debate in the House of Commons, in which attention was once again directed to the Barlow Report. Dealing first with the problems of local unemployment as presented in the 'distressed' or 'special' areas, Mr. Dalton, president of the Board of Trade, said that it is proposed to discontinue the use of these terms ; these areas will in future be known as 'development areas'. The Government proposes to attack these problems in three ways : first, by so influencing the location of new enterprises as to diversify the industrial composition of areas which are particularly vulnerable to unemployment ; secondly, by removing obstacles to the transfer of workers from one area to another, and from one occupation to another ; and thirdly, by providing training facilities to fit workers from declining industries for jobs in expanding industries.

Mr. Dalton's speech showed that the Government's policy for the location of industry goes a good deal further than is indicated in the White Paper itself. Mr. Dalton stated that the Government has now explicitly accepted the two main ideas of the Barlow Report, namely, the spreading out of the very congested areas over wider areas, and the encouragement of a reasonable balance of industrial development as between the various regions in Great Britain and the suitable diversification of industry within each region. Mr. Dalton was at pains to point out that the Government is already in possession of powers to enable it to exercise a substantial influence over the location of new industrial development, both to prohibit the establishment of a new factory in a district where serious disadvantage would arise from further industrial development, and to steer new factory development into areas which call most urgently for further industrial diversification. It is clear, however, from the debate, that Mr. Dalton was unable to convince the House of Commons that the Government is in earnest in this matter, or that without new powers, it is able to implement the policy disclosed even in the White Paper.

Sufficient reason for such scepticism may well be found in the simple fact that the fundamental recommendation of the Barlow Report—the establishment of a central planning authority, whether advisory as recommended by the majority, or executive as recommended by the minority—is ignored. Mr. Dalton, in indicating his support of the minority proposal, suggested that the required department exists in the Ministry of Town and Country Planning. This

suggestion will satisfy no one who appreciates the importance of a definite policy for the utilization of the land. The location of industry cannot be guided without planning the use of land. The Ministry of Town and Country Planning is neither equipped nor authorized to carry out the function of the central planning authority visualized unanimously by the Barlow Commission as extending far beyond the powers of any Government department then existing, and extending to "continued and further redevelopment of congested urban areas where necessary; decentralization or dispersal, both of industries and industrial population, from such areas; and encouragement of a reasonable balance of industrial development—coupled with appropriate diversification of industry in each division or region throughout the country". The Ministry, it should be remembered, represents not an accretion of new departmental power, but an aggregation of powers and functions from existing departments, and we need look no further than to the history of the Butlin proposal to establish a holiday camp on the Lleyn peninsula for an apt illustration of the limitations of its present powers.

The same chapter of the White Paper covers a further method which the Government also intends to use. The mobility of labour is an important factor both in reducing the dislocation which arises from changes in technique and fluctuations in market conditions, and also in ensuring that the expansion of new industries under the stimulus of a high level of demand is not hampered by a shortage of skilled labour. Such mobility is an essential feature of a full employment policy, but it by no means involves of necessity the large-scale transfer of population, and it seems clear from the White Paper and from the debate that such transference is not contemplated by the Government. Some geographical flexibility and mobility there must be, but much more important is mobility of skill, and the readiness and capacity to transfer from one occupation to another. That was the point on which Mr. G. H. D. Cole insisted in his Mather Lecture to the Textile Institute, and the acquisition of at any rate two kinds of skills should be an objective in the policy of technical education which, in view of its bearing on industrial efficiency, must be a counterpart to any employment policy.

These five methods directly concern many scientific workers. The remaining five, though more of indirect interest, may well prove even more important in ensuring the success of an employment policy. Put briefly, they may be described as the stabilization of private investment, public works, the maintenance of consumer purchasing power, the stabilization of prices and wages, and the discouragement of restrictive practices. In regard to the maintenance of total expenditure the White Paper sets forth as the guiding principles of the Government's policy, first an increase in exports; secondly, the limitation, so far as possible, of dangerous savings in expenditure on private investment; thirdly, the careful planning of public investment both in timing and in volume to offset unavoidable fluctuations in private investment; and lastly, readiness to check and reverse the decline in

expenditure on consumers' goods which normally follows as a secondary reaction to a decline in private investment.

One scheme contemplated by the Government when the abnormal conditions of the immediate post-war years have disappeared is for varying social insurance contributions in accordance with a forecast of the average level of unemployment, the rate of contribution actually levied increasing when unemployment falls below the estimated average level and decreasing when unemployment exceeds that level.

In regard to restrictive practices, the White Paper contains warnings both to employers and to workers. An undue increase in prices due to causes other than increased wages might frustrate action taken by the Government to maintain employment; for example, if additional money made available by the Government to maintain employment were absorbed in increased profit margins through the formation of a ring by the manufacturers in a particular industry for the purpose of raising prices, and no increase in employment resulted. Trade union practices and customs may equally constitute a serious impediment to an expansionist economy and so defeat the object of a full employment programme; and they, too, must be examined by workers themselves. There is a note struck here which professional associations of scientific workers will do well to heed, for no professional association long remains altogether free from a restrictionist outlook, which may be at issue with the public interest. Nothing is healthier in the White Paper than this appeal to put the public interest before sectional interest or advantage, and to tolerate no arrangements which obstruct or impede public policy. It is on the response to this appeal that we may best found our hopes of the success of an employment policy.

Critics have already pointed out that the policy outlined in the White Paper is not, except perhaps so far as the transition period from war to peace is concerned, a policy of full employment. It does not propose positive steps to provide jobs at all times for all workers by ensuring that the real needs of the people for housing, health, education and good living are met continuously, to the exclusion, if need be, of demands for less essential things. Much will depend on the other measures in the Government's reconstruction programme, notably on the social security proposals and those for dealing with the use of the land, and the problems of compensation and betterment considered by the Uthwatt Committee.

None the less, the welcome given to the Government's proposal in the three-day debate in the House of Commons to create an economic general staff is a sign of a new approach to the problem of employment and of a realization of the importance of a factual basis for policy. The criticism launched at the White Paper in the debate should dispel any false ideas or extravagant hopes: the means by which rising wages are to be linked with increased productivity are yet to be delineated. The emphasis was placed on the promotion of industrial efficiency, and Sir John Anderson stressed the need for

developing a new technique of control to cover both privately and publicly owned industry.

The White Paper thus outlines a policy which merits the serious attention not merely of the specialist but also of the ordinary citizen, as a further step towards a scientific approach to some of our major economic problems. But no measures put into operation to implement that policy will have their full effect without the co-operation and intelligent support of the whole community. This can come only through full debate and discussion, whereby the country can be fully educated as to the magnitude of the issues and the extent to which co-operation and acceptance of restraints may be required of every individual.

SCIENCE AND BROADCASTING

Reshaping Man's Heritage

Biography in the Service of Man. By J. S. Huxley, H. G. Wells, J. B. S. Haldane, W. G. Ogg, J. C. Drummond and W. F. Crick, J. W. Munro and J. Fisher, W. H. Kauntze, L. J. Witts, Major P. G. Edge, J. M. Mackintosh, Sir E. V. Appleton. Pp. 96+7 plates. (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1944.) 5s. net.

"RESHAPING MAN'S HERITAGE" comprises a series of talks which were broadcast round the theme that, by the use of science, man is achieving greater freedom as well as surer control of his heritage. The series was introduced by H. G. Wells, who spoke about man's accomplishments, opportunities and pitfalls. The other contributors are specified under the title-heading above and their talks included such subjects as man's food, the good earth, reshaping plants and animals, the conquest of the germ, the banishment of pain, and preventive medicine.

Of the talks themselves little need be said. The subjects were chosen carefully, the whole group was well co-ordinated, and the names of the distinguished persons who gave the talks lent sufficient appeal to attract the mass of listeners for whom they were intended. Further, the language used by the speakers was sufficiently clear and non-technical to make the presentation one that should not have taxed any listener unversed in science.

Yet this group of broadcasts raises a problem which will need close attention by men of science. The present writer was privileged to arrange the series as material for an army listening group. The men and women who attended were mostly of a fair standard of education and intelligence, and, although their knowledge of science was limited, attended the broadcasts voluntarily. What were their reactions? It cannot be said that the interest of the Service men and women was aroused to any extent or that they were highly stimulated. In the main the talks were borne patiently, and little animation developed. It was difficult to find out why the majority of talks did not attract, but experience with other army groups may help to throw some light on the matter.

Since the War-Time Army Education Scheme was introduced in 1940, many thousands of talks and lectures have been given to troops on all kinds of 'educational' topics. Those which have been outstandingly successful have been derived from personal

experiences of the speaker—travel, exploration, particular employment, etc. (The talk in this series on the control of rats reminds one of the broadcast some months ago by a Cockney rat-catcher on how to trap rats. His methods may not necessarily have been the most successful ones, but troops are still discussing the talk.) Talks which have met with least response have been those which the audiences consider to be academic and detached from their lives. Here lies the crux of the problem.

If we wish to interest the masses in the impact of science on society—we assume that the person who arranged this series of elementary talks wished to interest as many listeners as possible—we must first recognize that the ordinary man and woman only too often regard science as academic and aloof, and are not infrequently a little afraid of it. It is essential, therefore, when planning a programme of popular science talks, to ensure that the subjects chosen fall within the daily interest of the listener. On this score alone, the series under discussion could have been little improved upon. The fault, if fault there be, lay with the presentation.

The time is long overdue when men of science, among others, began to learn of the effect which their discoveries have made, and are making, on the masses of the people. One shilling will produce a comfortable seat 'at the pictures' where education can be absorbed pleasantly and without physical and mental exertion. A third of a shilling will produce a weekly journal where the many photographs are seductively displayed and unencumbered by much wearisome reading matter. These—and others—are the educative rods which inventive man has made for his own back.

How can these opiate effects be combated? It is not enough merely to say that we must raise the standard of films or give John Citizen more information on how or what to read. We must also use the weapons available now and help John Citizen to want to raise the standards himself. Broadcasting is one of the tools. But we must attend to presentation. In this connexion we may take a hint from the Schools Broadcasting Department. When a particular broadcast is being prepared, as much time is given to the way in which a topic is to be 'put over' as to the subject-matter itself. Straight talks, even of fifteen minutes duration, are seldom given. The appeal of different voices has been recognized and the question-answer or discussion method between two or more people is frequently used. (Of the twelve broadcasts under the heading of "Reshaping Man's Heritage", ten were straight talks; two consisted of dialogue conversation.) Again, when a straight talk is given, much more attention is paid to the speaker's degree of 'mike-worthiness' than is the case with the Adults Talks Department of the B.B.C. That a man or woman is an authority on a particular subject is not enough to make him a good broadcaster. He should have a microphone manner which will appeal to the largest body of listeners and make them want to listen again to the broadcast of a related subject. With the exception of two, and possibly three, of the speakers in "Reshaping Man's Heritage", how many succeeded in making the listeners anxious to obtain further information about these all-important issues?

It may rightly be argued that there are few men—and less women—who are expert in a particular field and yet naturally have a microphone personality which is acceptable to the majority of listeners.