

NATURE

No. 4008 SATURDAY, AUGUST 24, 1946 Vol. 158

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MACMILLAN & CO., LTD.,

ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON, W.C.2.

Telephone Number : Whitehall 8831

Telegrams : Phusis Lesquare London

Advertisements should be addressed to

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

Telephone : Temple Bar 1942

The annual subscription rate is £4 10 0, payable in advance, Inland or Abroad

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MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT

IN addressing the Joint Research Council in Manchester last September, Sir John Anderson disassociated himself from the proposal to establish a Minister or Ministry of Science, and in his address at the Federation of British Industries Conference on Industry and Research last March, he indicated more specifically why he regarded that as a mistaken conception. Most departments of State, he pointed out, in some part of their work have recourse to science, and should be free to develop their own organisation. There are also scientific problems beyond the scope of departmental responsibilities in which the Government should take a hand, and for that purpose some one Minister should be designated and equipped with the necessary staff, which need not be large but should be of the highest quality. The obvious Minister for this purpose, Sir John suggested, is the Lord President of the Council, who is already responsible for the three main extra-departmental scientific organisations.

These ideas Sir John Anderson has since developed more fully in his Romanes Lecture at Oxford on May 14, "The Machinery of Government". In this lecture*, Sir John begins with some discussion of our system of Cabinet government and the way in which developing responsibilities of the central government have led to a steady growth in the size of the Cabinet and in the machinery of the central government becoming unwieldy. Rejecting the idea of supervising ministers co-ordinating the work of departments, he advocates the development of a series of Cabinet committees, the functions of which he proceeds to illustrate more particularly by reference to the fields of economics and of science.

It is somewhat surprising to find that Sir John, in discussing the changes which took place during the First World War and afterwards, and which Lord Hankey discussed more particularly in the Lees Knowles Lectures "Government Control in War", makes no reference to the Haldane Report, though that is presumably what he had in mind in rejecting the idea of a supervising minister as likely to break down in practice, and as inconsistent with the parliamentary responsibilities of departmental ministers and with departmental control. Authority over departments, he rightly says, must be undivided and unquestionable, and a supervising minister would mean, in practice, a supervising staff with endless possibilities of friction and clash.

What the Haldane Report recommended, however, was, not placing responsible ministers under a super-minister, but the consolidation or grouping of departments into a small number of super-ministries with one responsible minister for each. The obvious danger here is not friction, as Sir John suggests, but that of creating a bottleneck at the top, which might outweigh the advantage of the effective co-ordination of the work of ministers and departments handling different aspects of the same subject, and the lighter

* The Machinery of Government. By the Right Hon. Sir John Anderson. (The Romanes Lecture delivered in the Sheldonian Theatre, May 14, 1946.) Pp. 32. (Oxford: Clarendon Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1946.) 2s. net.

burden on the Prime Minister and the central organ of government thereby secured. The great merit of the alternative system of standing Cabinet committees which Sir John suggests is its flexibility. While the number and scope of the committees might vary from time to time to suit the actual situation, he visualizes some six committees which in effect would be subsidiary cabinets, covering, for example, defence, economic relations, external affairs, social services, with two others reviewing all proposals for legislation and questions of national economic development, respectively.

The chairman of each committee, Sir John suggests, might be either a non-departmental minister or a departmental minister with a dominant interest in the matters comprised within the particular group, but it should be clear that the chairman of such a committee would have no supervisory powers. Further, as a consequence, only the more important and difficult matters would be remitted to the full Cabinet; and in addition to reducing the Cabinet burden in this way, the necessity for a Cabinet of unwieldy size would be avoided. Such a system, however, requires for its successful functioning two conditions: the doctrine of the collective responsibility of the Cabinet as a whole must be fully maintained; and, secondly, the Cabinet committees must have available the services of a highly competent central staff.

The most important part of Sir John Anderson's lecture is that in which he deals more specifically with the functions of the Cabinet secretariat as an instrument for providing the Cabinet with the expert research and intelligence service which is an indispensable element in government to-day. Sir John may have done something less than justice to the proposals of the Haldane Committee, but what he says about the necessity of providing each department, within its own organisation, with the expert advice required for the efficient discharge of its day-to-day business, and also of providing the central government as a whole with more authoritative guidance in technical matters than any individual department could provide, is endorsed by every recent study of this subject, including the reports of the Select Committee on National Expenditure and two P.E.P. broadsheets. He is primarily concerned, however, to avoid in this connexion infringement of the principle of ministerial doctrine by even the appearance of setting up any independent source of authority, such as is implied by conceptions like an economic general staff or a scientific general staff.

Sir John Anderson points out that the functions of the recently created Economic Section of the Cabinet secretariat were settled after a careful review of the experience of the past. There has been, he said, a substantial measure of agreement that the main contribution to be made by economists to the work of the Government should continue to be made in the departments themselves. The functions of the Central Economic Section are conceived as the reception of all economic intelligence collected by various government agencies, covering by its own researches any gaps in that intelligence; making or procuring specific studies in spheres not covered by

any one department; appraising economic intelligence, and presenting co-ordinated and objective pictures of the economic situation as a whole and the economic aspects of projected government policies. It should also be open to the Section to commission, where appropriate, special studies from universities or other institutions. Economic advice would be provided to particular departments, as well as to the Cabinet or Cabinet committees, on departmental matters on broader lines than are possible for the departments themselves; and in working closely with the departments, it is considered that the Section would facilitate contacts with, and exchange of views among, all economists in the Government service.

Similarly, Sir John conceives of the functions of a Central Statistical Office, organised as part of the Cabinet secretariat, as producing and maintaining a body of statistical information general in character, and presented in a form which would be regarded as authoritative by all departments, and with which the more detailed statistics provided by the departments themselves would comply. The same general model is advocated for scientific services. While the idea of a joint scientific staff on the lines of the Joint Planning Staff is rejected, Sir John hopes that a section of the Cabinet secretariat will be organised to assist the Lord President of the Council as the minister responsible for the general aspects of scientific investigation, and that thereby provision will be made, without prejudice to the work of departmental scientific staffs, for enlisting scientific advice on the highest level for the guidance of ministers.

Sir John Anderson did not pursue this matter further on the ground that the whole subject is at present under the consideration of a Government committee, though whether this is the Cabinet Committee on the Machinery of Government which was set up under the Coalition Government is not clear. At least it is to be hoped that the report and findings of any such committee will be published in full, for as Sir Ernest Barker has emphasized, this general problem of relating the expert's knowledge to the function of government is a key difficulty in democratic government. No more fruitful subject for research and study could well be conceived, for example, either for the British Institute of Management or the Administrative Staff College, both of which include research among their aims and functions.

That is well brought out in the final part of Sir John Anderson's lecture, when he passes to the consideration of the problems of administration which will arise in the phase of government ownership or control to which Great Britain is being increasingly committed by the present policy of nationalization. It is generally agreed that we here require organisation essentially different from the normal departmental organisation governed by Civil Service traditions. Whether we are being asked to move too rapidly in this matter is, as Sir John rightly indicates, a matter of personal opinion, but there is much to be said for his view that the problem is unlikely to be solved satisfactorily except by a process of experiment. Caution and a gradual approach as well as clear

thinking are required, and it is not unreasonable to suggest that only the gravest urgency from other points of view should lead to the tempo of the programme of nationalization being such as to give inadequate opportunity for such study, experiment and thought.

The special feature of the problem is that of devising organisation which can be relied upon under changing conditions to act with vigour, to exhibit in a high degree initiative and enterprise, to accept freely such risks as are taken every day by private enterprise, and to engage wherever necessary in competitive activity. In all this the public interest must be safeguarded to the satisfaction of Parliament as the ultimate authority, and having thus defined the problem, Sir John indicates certain guiding principles which must be served. For the constitution of the responsible authority, some form of council, committee or board will usually be indicated, and he strongly advocates a part-time rather than a whole-time basis as the most likely way to find people with the necessary breadth of experience, freshness of outlook and a reasonable measure of independence. While due regard should be had to the inclusion of different types of experience, representation of interests as such should be avoided. What may be termed the 'consumers' interest' should be left to the care of ministers and Parliament, and it is to the vigilance of Parliament and an alert public opinion that we must look to avoid undue political influence in the appointment of personnel.

As regards the relations of ministers and Parliament to this type of organisation, Parliament, as the ultimate authority, must have adequate opportunity for inquiry, for debate, and for passing judgment. Sir John suggests that the extent of ministerial control should be defined as clearly as possible in the instrument constituting the authority; but while he recognizes that within the field so defined the minister would be liable to be questioned in Parliament in the usual way, he does not really face the initial issue of the bearing of the Parliamentary question on the problem of ensuring initiative and enterprise. That may well be one of the matters in which much experience has yet to be gained before Parliament can be convinced that a satisfactory technique has been evolved.

What needs to be remembered, moreover, is that the problem is something more than one of devising machinery which serves the principles of departmental and collective responsibility. In a real sense, as Dr. J. T. MacCurdy and Dr. K. E. Barlow have pointed out, it is a complex biological problem, especially on the intelligence side. It is this biological aspect and the consequent need to give time for the evolution of the appropriate intelligence system which is probably one of the strongest reasons for 'hastening slowly' in matters involving a drastic change of policy. Sir John Anderson's lecture should stimulate further thought on a problem which has its bearing on almost every aspect of national life. On the more mechanical side of organisation with which

he is chiefly concerned, he gives as clear warning as Sir Ernest Barker of the need for experiment, for a scientific approach and for critical and impartial examination of the alternatives. That can only be possible if time is allowed; and this plea for caution and for time for the accumulation and examination of experience is reinforced by all those biological and sociological considerations which Dr. MacCurdy and Dr. Barlow have emphasized in their writings. Disregard of these factors constitutes in reality one of the gravest threats to the stability and indeed existence of civilization.

THE UNDERGRADUATE'S FIRST YEAR

First Year at the University

A Freshman's Guide. By Bruce Truscot. Pp. 111. (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1946.) 4s. 6d. net.

THIS book is not ephemeral: it is in the perennial class. It will appeal to many in every generation of students and should be included in every 'sixth form' library. It puts first things last, but perhaps that is no disadvantage, for the less important matters dealt with in the earlier chapters are of primary concern to the university student in the 'professional' sense and will have for him the most immediate appeal. The fact that the advice given about them is sound and acceptable will give weight to that offered later on more fundamental aspects of life. To each individual reader, especially to those who are older and look back across the years, different portions of the book will appeal according to his experience, his limitations and his tastes. The appeal for "unobtrusive courtesy founded on a sense of mutual obligation" is perhaps the book's most valuable phrase, and might be directed as much, in these distracting days, to the more senior half of university society. The essay on concentration has the same universal appeal, but, to us seniors, with more than a suspicion of regret for opportunities missed. So many things that matter in university administration are not tied to an obvious time limit and are thus in danger of neglect.

The stressing of the importance of the 'society' for the amateur in all branches of university study is one of the author's more constructive contributions. This is one of the thoughts it is particularly to be hoped will be translated into action by undergraduates of the future who are readers of the book. There are few things more necessary for the full development of undergraduate society and few things more difficult to bring about. Such a development must come from students themselves, and the student of to-day is more obsessed with the professional or specialist aspect of his studies than his predecessors were in more leisurely days.

The only concept with which I take issue is not essential to the purpose of the book. It needs comment, however, because it is placed in the forefront of the argument. In my view, teaching *is* an essential function of the university to-day. It is foolish to contend that, because of the origin of universities, it is not. It necessarily became an *essential* function before the end of the working lives of the first generation of the Socii to whom the author refers in his opening chapter. If we do not recognize this develop-