

# NATURE

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## RECRUITMENT AND EFFICIENCY IN THE CIVIL SERVICE

THE Prime Minister, in a statement on the Civil Service on June 24 in the House of Commons, paid a well-deserved tribute to the Service as a whole. This praise was timely, for much current criticism of the Civil Service has been both unfounded and unfair, and has been directed against officials when it should rightly have been directed against those responsible for the policies which the Civil Service is called upon to execute. Mr. Attlee was right to repudiate the fashion of slighting the Civil Service, and to point out that we shall neither get the best out of the Service nor be able to recruit to it the energetic and able young men and women it needs if the practice of depreciating its work continues.

Much less satisfactory, however, was that part of the statement dealing with the future plans for reducing the size of the Civil Service. The Prime Minister gave four main reasons for not expecting large reductions at the present time. There is still much work to be done arising out of war conditions, such as work on war damage and re-settlement. While shortages compel the retention of rationing and other controls, a considerable staff is required for such work, amounting to 44,000 of the Civil servants employed on temporary work. Then, measures approved by the House, such as those dealing with the social services, education and civil aviation, cannot be implemented without such staff; and finally, there are the large staffs who, without substantially changing their duties, will shortly be transferred from outside the Civil Service to the Ministries of Agriculture and of National Insurance.

Up to a point, these are valid reasons; but they make it the more imperative that there should be a radical reconsideration of the systems of controls and of the internal organisation of the Civil Service from the point of view of the most efficient use of available man-power. Apart from the efficiency of a particular system of control, there may come a point when retention of the control does not justify the expenditure of man-power on its continuance. The same man-power expended on productive purposes might, even where an imported commodity is concerned, more than offset the drawback of increased import to supply a reasonable demand and prevent scarcity. If it is to be accepted, as the Prime Minister said, that the size of the Civil Service depends mainly on the jobs it is given to do, it is an over-riding imperative in the present man-power situation that the Government should see that these jobs are held in such constant review that all non-essentials are eliminated as conditions change. It is equally important in such a review that the effect on the national efficiency and economy as a whole should be kept in mind. The Prime Minister's statement referred to the 258,000 out of a total of 722,000 non-industrial Civil servants who are in the Post Office. The repeated criticism of the recent curtailment of postal services suggests that the cutting down of staff has been dictated more by near-sighted economy than by a broad view of the importance and implications

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of an essential service. It is not too much to say that the restrictions have more than offset many of the improvements in speed of communication which applied science has brought, and given us in Britain to-day a postal service well below the standard of that of the nineties of last century.

Both these factors bear on the question of recruitment, to which the Prime Minister devoted the latter half of his statement. Unless a high standard of public service is maintained and administrative review continually eliminates redundant posts, the mere cessation of the attacks to which the Prime Minister referred will be of little avail. Recruits of the high standard required will neither be attracted to the Service nor remain with it unless they find in their work the satisfaction of genuine public service.

That was a point effectively made by Sir Oliver Franks in his lectures on "Central Planning and Control in War and Peace". The satisfaction of doing a job related in a direct and intelligible way to the national need should be an incentive which counts for more than a little in helping the Civil Service to recruit men and women of the type it needs. So far as recruitment to the Service is concerned, however, Sir Oliver did not discuss the aggregate size of the Service; he limited himself to insisting on the need for providing the Civil Service with more experts possessing both specialized training in the techniques of forecasting and estimating and knowledge of the world, and on the urgent need of relieving the chronic overwork of senior Civil servants, particularly those in departments dealing with economic affairs.

Sir Oliver made two suggestions here: first, the use of advisory groups of men drawn largely from industry and commerce, and secondly, the creation of additional posts of 'second secretary', free from departmental duties. From the point of view of organisation, it might well be argued that the latter suggestion does not go far enough, and that it would be sounder practice to separate the administrative and the planning or advisory responsibilities of the 'permanent secretaries' so that no one individual carries the responsibility for running a large department and for planning and advising the Minister on policy. The essence of both suggestions, however, is not merely to provide the senior Civil servant with that degree of leisure upon which sound judgment in planning depends, but still more the association with the Civil Service of men with a wider outlook, experience and training than at present.

This is one of the main points made in a recent broadsheet entitled "Recruiting Civil Servants" issued by Political and Economic Planning (No. 266, May 23, 1947). The main purpose of this broadsheet, which is a preliminary study prepared by the P.E.P. Manpower Group, is to examine the extent to which the principles and methods of recruitment and training affect the way in which jobs are done. It is pointed out that since the jobs entrusted to Civil servants are the result of policy decisions taken at the political level, it is only in the way they do the jobs given them that Civil servants can legitimately be criticized. The broadsheet considers in turn the main classes of the Home Civil Service and then the

Foreign and Colonial Services, but the administrative class is discussed at greatest length.

Hitherto, the administrative class has probably been weakest on questions of organisation and management, as was indicated in the Sixteenth Report from the Select Committee on National Expenditure for the Session 1941-42; and the report of the Assheton Committee on the Training of Civil Servants has since formed the basis for a serious effort to give Civil servants a systematized professional training. A director of training and education was appointed at the Treasury in January 1945, with responsibility, in association with the joint Whitley Council on Training, for exercising general control and guidance over training policy throughout the Service and for conducting training courses where this can be done better centrally than in each department. All the larger departments have now organised schemes of training, giving particular attention to making proper arrangements for receiving the new entrant and helping him to understand the enormous organisation he has joined.

The administrative class needs, however, a wider variety of talent than it has had in the past. The kind of men likely to improve defects in the organisation of the Service are those who would make good business executives: men of good intelligence and with outstanding qualities of personality—imagination, drive and balanced judgment. The P.E.P. Broadsheet urges that a proportion of the new entrants should be chosen primarily on these grounds. It is intended to restore the normal competitions not later than 1949. The majority of the entrants will then be selected by the pre-war method; but a proportion will be taken from people with at least a good second-class honours degree, who will be judged on their previous careers, coupled with an interview and a few written tests of a general character. This is a major change in the principle and method of recruitment to the administrative class, and if it is to be successful it is vital that the right qualities should be sought and that they should be satisfactorily assessed. Methods normally used by interview boards, and consequently the decisions reached, are not entirely reliable; and the experience of the armed forces in selecting officers during the War showed that better results were obtained when the interview was supplemented by practical 'situation' tests, particularly group tests. Further experiment and some modification of the methods may be required; but the technique undoubtedly offers one of the most promising approaches yet devised for assessing personal qualities, and should be adopted for selecting candidates who are to be chosen mainly on personality.

For all these encouraging signs of change, there are two features which suggest that the recommendations of the Select Committee on National Expenditure five years ago have as yet had little effect. The establishment work of the Civil Service still appears to compare most unfavourably with that of the best large firms; the re-allocation of staff lags far behind changes in the volume of work, and the allocation of individual officers often takes little

account of particular qualities or of personal preferences. Such failings will not be rectified until establishment work is regarded as of the first importance and is therefore assigned to officers of the highest ability. Courses of training in modern methods of personnel and business management would be a useful supplement, and in this field at least the suggested Administrative Staff College might well make a valuable contribution towards increasing the efficiency of the Civil Service.

On the professional, scientific and technical classes of the Civil Service, Political and Economic Planning in this broadsheet merely observes that the method of selection, designed primarily to assess a candidate's professional ability, seems to be adequate, and that conditions of service and salaries for scientific workers are now attracting many men and women who might otherwise have taken up academic appointments. So, too, of the Colonial Service, the broadsheet sees no reason to doubt that the courses of training, comprehensive and imaginative in scope, which have been entrusted to the universities, will be well conducted; and suggests that the Foreign Service should devote equal care to planning the training of new recruits, including suitable courses at universities in Great Britain and abroad. In particular, the six months training which it is already proposed should be spent in the study of economic, industrial and social questions will require very careful planning. It will not be enough for officers merely to tour Government departments and industrial concerns. Such visits should be the practical complement of an academic course.

The two final conclusions of this broadsheet bring us right back to the Prime Minister's statement. First, there is the warning against sacrificing training schemes to a desire to cut staff. Training makes for a more efficient staff, and an efficient staff can do the same amount of work with fewer workers than an inefficient one. Whatever decisions of policy the Government may take which affect the amount of work required of the Civil Service, the man-power of the country as a whole demands that the most efficient use shall be made of everyone who enters the Civil Service at whatever level, and that no one shall be retained who is unsuitable for his or her work or engaged in duties that are no longer indispensable.

For the same reason, the second conclusion is vital. Methods of recruitment and training should be reviewed from time to time in order that they may be adapted to changes in the national system of education and in the functions of the Civil Service. That, however, is only a small part of that long-neglected recommendation of the Tomlin Commission concerning surveys forming part of a systematic and periodic overhaul of the machinery of Government, to which the Select Committee directed attention. There is no suggestion in the Prime Minister's recent statement that any importance is attached to such efficiency audits at any level, and yet they are at least as essential as when the Select Committee reported in 1942.

It is idle for the Government to call so loudly for increased efficiency in production unless it insists on

its own departments, such as the Post Office, making serious efforts to relate the loss of productive efficiency in the country caused by delays in essential services with the man-power savings in the staff reductions that have been made. It may be that all the possibilities of re-organisation and other factors in the General Post Office have been considered and correctly weighed; but the public is entitled to be told, and all the more for the overwhelming amount of goodwill towards this department which was manifest in the recent debate. The existence of such goodwill is one vital factor in obtaining the right kind of staff in any part of the Civil Service, and in maintaining its keenness and efficiency when recruited. No amount of care expended on recruitment or training can compensate for mistakes in policy and administration by the Government itself, which dissipate public goodwill and also the incentive inside the Service coming from the satisfaction of a visible public need and its generous appreciation.

## BIOCHEMISTRY OF CANCER

### Biochemistry of Cancer

By Jesse P. Greenstein. Pp. viii+389. (New York: Academic Press, Inc.; London: H. K. Lewis and Co., Ltd., 1947.) 7.80 dollars.

THE deficiency in books on laboratory cancer research is particularly unfortunate since so many new workers are turning their attention to the problems of malignant disease. The present volume is therefore assured of a wide welcome, representing as it does a valuable, indeed indispensable, addition to the cancer literature. The fact that this book follows so soon after K. Stern and R. Willheim's "The Biochemistry of Malignant Tissues", which was published in New York in 1943, illustrates the great attention now being given to biochemistry in relation to cancer in the United States, where it is widely felt that the more dynamic approach to the problems of normal and malignant growth which biochemistry supplies should be fully developed to supplement and reinforce the well-tried methods of classical histology.

It is instructive to compare these two recent books, both of which are good of their kind though entirely different in content and in mode of thought. Stern and Willheim set out to write a conventionally planned systematic work of reference, classified under tissue components and seeking completeness, and therefore largely uncritical in the selection of data. Dr. Greenstein, on the other hand, has exercised much discrimination in what he includes, and the whole book is strongly flavoured with a vigorous and critical personality and a decidedly individual outlook. His choice of material will not please everyone, and the emphasis which he puts on very recent work (the book is fully up to date) sometimes leads to the exclusion of older and more basic investigations and may thus give some readers an unbalanced view of the subject. For this reason a combination of the study of these two books has much to recommend it. Dr. Greenstein's numerous tabulations of a wide variety of numerical data are particularly useful, and his method of approach undoubtedly possesses the great advantage of avoiding that tedious chronicle of confirmatory, and alas of contradictory, observations which are characteristic of most books on