

NATURE

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DISTRIBUTION OF INDUSTRY IN BRITAIN

CRITICISM of the Distribution of Industry Bill of the Coalition Government of 1945 centred mainly on the two points: whether the Government had a central policy in regard to the location of industry, with all that such a policy implies in regard to the control of the use of land, town and country planning, agriculture, building and amenities; and whether the Board of Trade was, or would be, staffed with the type of Civil servant qualified by training, outlook and experience to deal with these positive functions of government with imagination, decision and courage. No central independent tribunal had then been established to consider the national position as a whole, as recommended in the report of the Barlow Commission, nor has the present Government taken such action.

The paper on "Distribution in Industry" just issued by the Board of Trade* once again indicates the seriousness of the omission. The immediate occasion for the paper is the duty placed by the Act on the Board of Trade jointly with the Secretary of State for Scotland of reviewing the boundaries of the Development Areas from the passing of the Act. The paper examines in some detail the results which have followed, partly from war-time developments, and partly from the operation of the policy adopted, not only in the Development Areas, as the old Special Areas have been designated, where they are most apparent, but also in the rest of Great Britain. On the negative side, the Government has restricted new industrial development in parts which were already congested with industry; and on the positive side, it has, with the co-operation of many industrialists, assisted the Development Areas and other parts which needed more industrial employment.

The situation in the Development Areas has changed for the better, both absolutely, and relatively to other parts of Britain. Employment in these areas is much greater than before the War, while unemployment is now much smaller; and when the programme of industrial growth at present only half completed is fulfilled, there should no longer be a special danger of heavy localized unemployment in most parts of the Areas. There will be more of the industries which have been less liable to depression than some of the basic industries in which the greatest proportion of workers in those Areas was previously engaged. The existence of a wider range of industries will also mean that a recession in any one of them will have less effect on the economy as a whole. Nevertheless, the White Paper argues that it is too soon to remove the whole or part of any of the present Development Areas from the first schedule of the Act. On the contrary, it recommends the addition of two new Areas: Merseyside, and a district to serve as an industrial nucleus for the Highlands of Scotland.

The policy on the distribution of industry pursued by the Board of Trade has as its purpose the pro-

* Distribution in Industry. (Cmd. 7540.) Pp. ii+52. (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1948.) 1s. net.

vision of regular work for the greatest possible number of those seeking it in all parts of Great Britain, especially in those parts which are known as the Development Areas, and so helping to raise the number in work and the nation's total output to the highest possible level. Now, although the White Paper admits that sometimes there have been sound economic reasons why movement of particular enterprises to the Development Areas was impracticable, such a purpose, the natural development of the policy evolved in the late thirties, fails to take adequate account of the new situation. What were the 'depressed' industries are now those that most need labour. Furthermore, Britain's economic recovery depends on capital reconstruction and equipment being concentrated in those industries where it will increase exports or save imports.

These are the principles against which we must judge the fact that about half the new factory-building since the War has been in the Development Areas, which have only 2,500,000 of the country's workers. The weakness of the White Paper is that it fails to take account of, and clearly distinguish, the social and the economic aspects of the policy it describes. The White Paper, in fact, is exclusively concerned with the first—the prevention of widespread unemployment—and so much ignores the second that it does not stop to consider whether, measured by the numbers placed in employment, the experiment in directing new industries to the Areas has been very costly. Nor is there shown any awareness that the attraction of a particular enterprise to the Areas may increase the cost of its products. For example, it is probable that location of the British Nylon Spinners, Ltd., mill at Pontypool, instead of at Banbury, may, owing to the double haulage of the polymer and the spun yarn necessitated, involve in effect a small continuing levy on nylon sales.

Under pre-war conditions, it might still have been worth while, from the national point of view, to locate this industry in Monmouthshire. Under post-war conditions and with the present insistence on exports, where costs are becoming increasingly important, particular instances must be judged by the same criteria as the general policy: are resources being directed into the Development Areas which could from the national point of view be better employed elsewhere, and is the movement of labour from those Areas to other districts urgently needing men being prevented? We cannot continue to build factories for unimportant industries while industries where development is essential are unable to get new buildings and equipment. On these issues the White Paper is silent. Nor does it consider the social implications of the present policy of encouraging in those Areas the lighter industries providing consumers' goods. Quite apart from the question of which type of industry should be encouraged from the point of view of economic recovery, the demand for export goods is much more likely to be sustained than that for the consumer goods coming from the light industries.

The dominant impression left by this White Paper is, in fact, the lack of clear thinking. There is no evidence that policy is governed by explicit principles

about the distribution of industry. The slightness of the reference to the report of the Barlow Commission indicates the absence of such a coherent policy, and it would not be unfair to conclude that the influence of pressure groups has deflected the Board from paying attention to the essential price that has to be paid for social security—mobility of labour. This is not a matter of directing men and women to the factories rather than, so far as possible, bringing the factories to the workers. Security and enterprise are uneasy bedfellows, but both are essential in any economic system; and enterprise is a quality not to be restricted to the management or employer. It is true that the State must now ensure that there are certain minimum social and economic standards below which no one can fall, in order to forestall the threats of insecurity to the efficiency of its industrial and economic life. It is equally true that, under modern conditions, the workers cannot enjoy the higher standards of living which mechanical advance has put within their reach unless they themselves show enterprise, initiative and adaptability to the changing conditions.

The most hopeful section of this White Paper is that which deals with research for the future. For all its shortcomings, it recognizes that wise conduct of the distribution of industry demands constant study and examination of the needs and resources of every part of Britain, and that the future of the Development Areas is bound up with that of world trade and our share in it, and with that of certain basic industries such as coal, steel and ship-building. Among the functions which the Barlow Commission recommended that a central authority should discharge was the organisation of research, and it was recognized that to provide a sure basis for action under the Development of Industry Act it was essential that the Government should establish a research organisation capable of studying the many problems of industrial location in greater detail than had hitherto been possible.

Regional research units have been set up jointly by the Board of Trade, the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Town and Country Planning, and, in Scotland, the Department of Health. This policy of decentralization has already borne much fruit; thus the plan for the West Midlands region recently produced by Sir Patrick Abercrombie and Mr. Herbert Jackson at the behest of Mr. Silkin is one example. Small research staffs, however, are maintained at headquarters to direct and co-ordinate the work in the regions, to provide basic data of a national character and to study particular problems which can be most effectively studied at the centre. An extensive programme of research has been undertaken to assist the regional offices of government departments concerned in the execution of the distribution of industry. General surveys of all the regions and sub-regions throughout the country have furnished knowledge about such matters as variations in the industrial structure of regions and sub-regions and their causes, difference in industrial specialization and diversification, divergences in the degree of vulnerability to structural and localized unemployment as

between areas, industrial facilities and basic services, the constitution and geographical distribution of industrial population, labour supplies, industrial sites, the availability of factory premises, housing and general amenities.

The administration of the Distribution of Industry Act has revealed some problems requiring special investigations of particular areas or towns, and the possible uses in peace-time of war-time government factories. It is also stated that the development of physical planning, the drive to increase production in the textile and other industries, and the necessity for concentration upon the manufacture of goods to meet the export target, have all led to further research; though, as already indicated, the White Paper does not elsewhere indicate much awareness on the part of the Board of Trade of this point where the Development Areas are concerned. In addition to the maintenance of comprehensive records of what has been done or is planned, the fullest measure of co-operation exists with the research officers of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning, as well as with the staffs of local planning authorities, to ensure that research on distribution of industry problems is properly related to all developments in town and country planning.

Most of the activities described in this section of the White Paper admittedly relate to current issues and short-term problems; and in this account more reference might well have been made to the contributions from other bodies such as the West Midland Group and the Northern Industrial Group. The study of long-term problems, however, has also been undertaken, and here it is recognized that there are certain fundamental problems which are best investigated by the universities. To ensure that these problems will receive attention, the Board of Trade set up early in 1947 an informal committee, with Sir Henry Clay as chairman, consisting of members of the economic and statistical departments of several universities, to consider how the assistance of the universities might be secured.

This account of the research activities of the Board of Trade in the field of the location of industry, set against the general trend of the whole report, conveys the main impression that failure to implement the proposals of the Barlow Commission has been due to ineffective co-ordination, duplication of effort and the absence of any authority competent to choose the right subjects of research and ensure that the results of research are used. Unified research into the problem of distribution on a national scale is embryonic; there is no unified plan of development based on such research, and no effective control meanwhile of such changes as must continue to take place in the interests of trade. We are no nearer than when the Distribution of Industry Act was passed to the effective relation of schemes for industrial development to those for hydro-electric development, water supply, the building of new towns and the like.

The absence of that high standard of ministerial statesmanship which Gertrude Williams, in her book, "The Price of Social Security", showed to be the essential foundation of successful government control

of any communal activity effectively prevents the formulation of a national policy. Piecemeal developments and yielding to sectional interests make the objectives professed in this White Paper as farcical as the continued encroachment on national park areas or Nature reserves by unco-ordinated demands from the Services and other interests make the nominal profession of the Government of supporting the idea of Nature reserves or national parks. This White Paper shows little sign of the imagination, vigour and statesmanship which could reverse these trends, and give Great Britain a genuine national policy for land use in which the claims of defence, amenities, industry and culture are fairly balanced, apportioned and reconciled.

THE LIFE AND WORK OF CHARLES DARWIN

Charles Darwin

Par Jean Rostand. (Collection 'Leurs figures'.) Pp. 244+4 plates. (Paris: Libr. Gallimard, 1947.) 220 francs.

THIS book is easily readable. It deals in a pleasant manner with Darwin not only as a man of science but also as an individual. It mentions, but does not stress, the shocking state of health in which Darwin carried out all his work after he returned from the voyage with the *Beagle*. The fact that, during the years 1837-59, while Darwin was collecting together his material for the "Origin", he carried out and published all the geological results of the *Beagle* expedition and, at the same time, produced a monograph on the barnacles which is still the standard work on this group can only be appreciated when it is remembered that he could only work at his desk for relatively short periods and was continually bound to lie down and rest after these short periods of exertion.

The book, however, cannot be said to throw any new light on Darwin. It is written in the modern Neo-Mendelian idiom. One sentence (p. 144) gives away the author's attitude. He maintains that one of the greatest originalities of Darwin was to have seen in the variation of domestic animals the image of the phenomenon of evolution. To a Neo-Mendelian this may make sense, but, of course, it begs the question. Then, again, the author states definitely that we now know that acquired characters are not inherited. Whatever view one may take as to Lamarck's theory—a theory which, the author rightly points out, was always misunderstood by Darwin—it has certainly never been established scientifically and probably never will be that acquired characters *cannot* be inherited. Surely it is a fact that recently one of our leading Neo-Mendelians published an account of a mechanism based on the conception of the gene complex whereby acquired characters *could* be inherited. They cannot have it both ways!

It is a pity that the author does not stress the fact that in the title of the book "On the Origin of Species" there are two inaccuracies: the word 'origin' should really have been 'establishment' after the species had originated, and then the word 'species' is not defined; and Darwin pointed out in a letter to Hooker "to define a species is to wish to define the indefinable".

H. GRAHAM CANNON