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The Technical Expert in the Civil Service.

IN his presidential address, given on April 17, on the occasion of the annual meeting of the Institution of Professional Civil Servants, Sir Richard Redmayne dealt briefly with the work of the Institution, the annual report of which for the past year supplies an impressive review of the whole field of national activities. He made, at the same time, some interesting remarks on the present position of the technical expert in the Civil Service.

In the annual report in question, the Institution, it is stated, has long held the view that an adequate solution of the problems affecting the employment of specialist officers in the Civil Service will only be arrived at as the result of an independent public inquiry. The reason given for this view is that although the increase in the numbers and in the importance of the work of the professional, scientific, and technical classes has been very considerable in recent years, nevertheless the public departments are still entirely controlled by 'administrators,' who not only constitute a close caste, but also have been unable satisfactorily to adapt themselves to the changed conditions which have come into existence in the activities of the public service. The chief problem relating to the technical expert in the Civil Service is essentially one of status, and it is recognised that its solution is unquestionably an undertaking of the first magnitude.

Realising that, in order effectively to attain its objectives, the membership of the Institution should be thoroughly representative of the professional, scientific, and technical groups in the several government departments, one of the chief aims of its council has been, almost from the earliest days of the inception of the Institution, to persuade the numerous associations which have come into existence in government departments for the protection of the interests of the specialist officers since the termination of the War, to link up with the main body of their colleagues organised in the Institution. Sir Richard Redmayne was able to announce that the policy of the council in this matter had in recent years met with marked success ; he further indicated that the membership of the Institution, which at the end of 1925 numbered 3000, would within a few months exceed 5000.

The technical expert must, Sir Richard urged, be recognised as indispensable for the carrying on of the complex task of government in the modern

State, and be afforded full and free opportunity for rising to the highest offices the public service could offer. He emphasised the fact that the position of the technical expert in the Civil Service is at the present time far from being a satisfactory one. The subordination of the technical experts now threatened in the Scottish Boards by the Reorganisation of Offices (Scotland) Bill affords an example of the need for a proper reconsideration of the functions and status of the technical expert in relation to the administration.

The objectives of the Institution of Professional Civil Servants have, needless to say, a wider importance than that of merely serving the purely personal interests of its members; they aim, in fact, also at the attainment of true economy and increased efficiency in the public service. It is common knowledge that the present organisation of government departments and their procedure promote neither of these two very desirable ends; indeed, in some respects, they militate against the attainment of them. What is wanted to-day is the complete modernisation of government departments with the view of bringing about such changes that the affairs of the public service may be conducted on the model of a well-managed business.

The claim for an improvement in the status of the technical expert is really intimately bound up with the subject of a root and branch reorganisation of the government departments, for the issue raised thereby ultimately resolves itself into a question of making a better use than is the case at present of the knowledge and abilities of the specialist officers in the employment of the State. This can alone result by introducing radical changes in the present hierarchical system of the Civil Service and in the methods now adopted in dealing with scientific and technical work in government departments. The method in vogue at present, whereby scientific and professional matters are discussed in writing, sometimes at inordinate length, between non-technical and technical officers, in practice too often creates a situation in which technical officers are called upon to afford instruction in some branch or another of technology to non-technical officers by a process somewhat akin to that of the much-advertised 'correspondence course.' On the face of it, such a method of conducting business cannot, and in fact does not, conduce to the attainment of either economy or efficiency; apart from the delays caused in arriving at a decision on the matters under discussion, owing to the time consumed in carrying

on the correspondence, it will be evident that a larger number of non-technical and also technical officers must be employed by the State under these conditions than would be the case if a rational organisation existed in government departments. The spheres of responsibility of the administrative and technical branches should be so clearly laid down as to ensure in practice that the chief technical officer of a department should personally be solely responsible for the soundness of all technical projects and schemes prepared in his branch and submitted by him for the approval of the minister, as well as for the correctness of the advice on technical matters tendered by him.

The necessity for the modernisation of the organisation and the procedure of government departments is not a matter which rests on the views of those alone who are advocating the cause of the professional and technical groups in the public service. It is also made strikingly apparent in the reports issued during the past twenty years by numerous parliamentary and other official committees which have been called upon to investigate certain matters connected with some of the governmental activities, and, further, by the public speeches of ex-ministers delivered in recent years. These reports and speeches have made the public familiar with some of the unsatisfactory features connected with governmental enterprises of a technical nature; and, in particular cases, a need for a complete reorganisation of them has been stated in express terms.

The immediate question, then, is how to find an expeditious means for remedying a situation which unquestionably is prejudicial to the public interest. The members of the specialist groups in the Civil Service have very properly decided to act strictly on constitutional lines; this does not, of course, mean that they intend to fall into that state of pathetic contentment which is so disturbing to the mind of the ardent reformer. On the contrary, the majority constituting these groups have already organised themselves into regularly constituted associations and are gradually bringing about improvements in their separate organisations, and eventually, no doubt, the whole of the specialist officers in the Civil Service will be effectively organised, and ranged also under the banner of a central service institution. However, in view of the fact that government departments are controlled on traditional lines by a ruling caste whose inertia is proverbial, it seems improbable that the steps necessary for the modernisation of the public services and for securing a status for the scientific

and technical experts in the employment in the State compatible with the real needs of the situation will be set on foot by a movement for reform inaugurated within the public service.

The Institution of Professional Civil Servants has, it is true, played a considerable part in securing benefits on behalf of the professional and technical groups, owing to the large share it has taken in the work of the National Whitley Council; and it certainly has no intention of relaxing its efforts in this direction. However, the procedure of referring matters to the Industrial Court is cumbersome and dilatory. Moreover, the functions of the Industrial Court are strictly limited; it is not empowered to deal with the question of the modernisation of government departments, which is fundamental if the public services are to be placed on a sound footing. Indeed, even as regards matters now falling within the powers of the Industrial Court, the Institution of Professional Civil Servants is so far from satisfied with the existing arrangements that it has set up a special committee with the view of securing improvements of the arbitration and Whitley machinery. Further, it is certainly not in the interest of the State that improvements in the status of an important body of its officers should be won piecemeal and by slow degrees. A reform obtained in such a manner must in the long run prove costly to the nation.

The measures which have been taken by the specialist officers for bringing about the reforms so necessary in the organisation of government departments, and in their methods of conducting business, deserve the full support of the public; it seems to be a matter in which the leading professional and technical institutions can well take an initial step. These institutions now show a considerable interest in questions affecting the occupations covered by their members, and some of them have already intervened on behalf of the professional group in the Civil Service by making suitable representations to the Prime Minister on matters dealt with in the Report of the Anderson Committee (Report of Committee on Pay, etc., of State Servants, 1923. H.M.S.O. 6*d.* net). The prestige which these institutions enjoy, not only among professional men, but also in the eyes of the public generally, renders them very suitable bodies for taking up the cause of the specialist officers in the public service; moreover, in doing so, they would be performing a task of immense benefit to the nation. The first step would seem to be the preparation by them jointly of a memorandum

dealing with the whole subject of the status of the professional and technical officers; having taken this step, they could appropriately press for the appointment of a Royal Commission to inquire into the subject and to recommend remedial measures.

### The Artificial Silk Industry.

- (1) *The Manufacture of Artificial Silk: with Special Reference to the Viscose Process.* By E. Wheeler. (Monographs on Applied Chemistry, Vol. 1.) Pp. xv + 150 + 27 plates. (London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1928.) 12*s.* 6*d.* net.
- (2) *The Rayon Industry.* By Moïse H. Avram. Pp. xxi + 622. (New York: D. Van Nostrand Co.; London, Bombay and Sydney: Constable and Co., Ltd., 1927.) 42*s.* net.
- (3) *Acetate Silk and its Dyes.* By Chas. E. Mullin. Pp. 473. (London: Constable and Co., Ltd., 1928.) 26*s.* net.

ARTIFICIAL silk, despite its name, has not assumed the place of the product of the silkworm in the textile industries, for the visible output of natural silk is increasing, although much less rapidly than that of artificial silk, which now exceeds it in annual amount. It appears, therefore, that the new fibre has found a place of its own, unless in so far as it may have dispossessed the other natural fibres, and its designation by some other name would have conveniences; but the word 'rayon,' invented and adopted in the United States, has not found favour in Great Britain, though the Drapers' Chamber of Trade recently decided to recommend the adoption of the word instead of the misleading term 'art silk.' Such a replacement of the natural fibres by artificial silk cannot yet have gone very far, as the amount produced during 1928 is not expected to exceed two per cent. of the total amount produced of all the natural fibres.

The rate of increase in the production of the new material, exemplified by the 99,500 metric tons produced in 1926 being twice the amount produced in 1923, continues, however, to be high; and the future possibilities of the new industry must appear to be great when it is considered that, apart from the more purely scientific researches which may have a bearing on the industry, systematic technical investigations are in progress with the object of producing a fibre more suitable for use in clothing; the employment of other derivatives of cellulose than those now used may become practicable, or even the manufacture of artificial