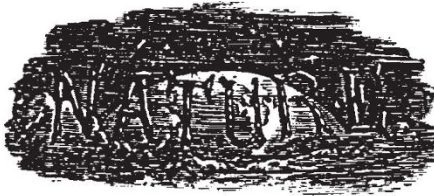


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## SPECIALISM, DEPARTMENTALISM AND PUBLIC SERVICE

IT has long been an argument against the admission of the scientific worker to administrative responsibility that the specialist is too immersed in his own particular subject to be capable of taking the wide and detached views involved in administrative decisions, and that he does not possess either the wider vision or sense of values required. Even in scientific work excessive specialization is to-day an admitted evil, and the team work necessary in the attack on many modern problems, whether in pure or in applied science, is already tending to break down such isolation and stimulate contacts between workers in different fields, to their mutual advantage.

While, however, this charge is still freely levied against the technical or scientific expert, it is strange that the analogy of this tendency with what may be termed 'departmentalism' is usually overlooked. The departmental mind, which limits its range to the efficiency or welfare of one particular department without regard to the efficiency of the whole, is one of the commonest causes of weakness in industrial firms and one of the greatest obstacles to the introduction of new ideas and new methods. Nor is the trouble confined to industry. How serious it can be in great Departments of State is well shown by Sir Arthur Salter in one of the most suggestive passages in his recent book, "Security: Can We Retrieve It?" Even the most efficient department tends to be innately conservative and unresponsive or unreceptive to new ideas, which are rarely fostered in accordance with their deserts, either in regard to staff or to finance.

This tendency is all the stronger if the specialized

character of the department takes on the professional type and is reinforced by the characteristic conservatism of the professions. Only a detached administrator, possessing both knowledge, vision and judgment, as well as the requisite authority, can hope to override such professional departmentalism and prevent the prestige and ideas inherited from the past from blocking the effective development of new ideas. Nor is this indeed purely a technical or professional question. As Sir Arthur Salter points out in a further illuminating chapter on the personal equation, even in the administrator there is a grave tendency to adopt a purely defensive attitude, and to be occupied solely with the immediate need.

The question of executive administration and leadership to-day is indeed only partly a question of securing the effective utilization of technical knowledge. It is at least as much a question of finding and training men free from the departmental mind and outlook, who, while imbued with all the highest ideals of professionalism in respect of service and competency, are willing to accept responsibility, to face new issues frankly, to explore new methods, to accept criticism and to try bold measures when required. This is true of leadership and administrators alike in national affairs as in local government.

It is to the question of national leadership that Sir Arthur Salter directs attention; but the question of local government has been raised from this point of view almost simultaneously in an admirable broadsheet, "The Mechanism of Local Government", issued by P E P (Political and Economic Planning) and by G. M. Harris in his study of the practice

of local government in ten of the largest British centres ("Municipal Self-Government in Britain", by G. M. Harris. P. S. King and Sons). These two publications set forth very clearly the problems and issues involved both in the complexities of local government and the provision of councillors and officers of the requisite calibre for their service.

In local government, as in national government, there are three basic problems: the efficient development of each particular service; smooth co-ordination of different services to ensure the reconciliation of conflicting claims within each area; and the education of the citizen to create and maintain a vital and healthy community life, through both official and unofficial channels. The stress which in recent years has been laid on the efficient development of particular services has already shown that the attainment of a certain level of efficiency by arbitrary or bureaucratic methods may obstruct rather than help the general raising of standards. It may stifle personal initiative and judgment and encourage attitudes incompatible with the spread of a sense of responsibility. Local and sectional efficiency threaten at times to strengthen departmentalism and thus to hinder the development of the community as a whole.

This factor, as well as the growing complexity of central and local government, calls for councillors and administrators of the highest intellectual capacity, and above all of the constructive type who see possibilities and opportunities rather than difficulties and dangers, and who possess creative ability and the capacity to promote energetic and far-reaching projects. Technical factors in possibly half a dozen or more fields have to be assessed, and the indirect as well as the direct effects of the proposed action or policy have to be considered. Even if the administrator himself possesses the high capacity and foresight to determine the policy which will give the maximum social result or efficiency, he may still have to convince a council or cabinet of the soundness of his judgment and proposal.

Mr. Harris's inquiry into local government provides disturbing evidence that we are not getting men and women of the requisite intellectual calibre on our local or municipal councils. The increasing demands of time alone in such service deter many of the ablest industrial leaders from taking office, apart from their frequent reluctance to engage in the small politics of local elections. An analysis of the occupation of councillors will readily demonstrate the reluctance of professional

men to take up such work, and the absence of intellectual leadership is accentuated by the deliberate or indirect discouragement from engaging in local or national politics given by many large organizations to their employees.

The position is in fact equally serious from the point of view of elected representatives and permanent staff. The large problem now confronting us is that of achieving further co-ordination between the efforts of public services in different areas and between the effort of all the different services operating within the same area. Such co-ordination raises many issues. Even from a purely technical or business angle, a high order of administrative capacity and advanced techniques are required to determine the most efficient units and areas of operation of many different services and for keeping their development in step according to a balanced programme to be realized over a long period of years. Even when coupled with dictatorial powers, such a task could not be performed satisfactorily without a clear grasp of principle, knowledge of the essential potentialities and limitations of different services, foresight and flexibility of outlook, and a keen eye for local conditions.

What complicates the situation is, of course, the fact that the representative bodies which control the administrative officers are at the same time expected to serve as a large-scale experiment in adult education. However firmly convinced we may be of the value of this system of responsible self-government, we cannot in the face of the demands and dangers of to-day ignore its weaknesses as exposed in practice. Ways and means must be found of delegating the discussion of administrative detail on purely technical matters on which expert advice is available, and ensuring that long-term issues and broad questions of principle receive adequate attention from the representative bodies. This means that, on one hand, some attempt must be made to give the average citizen some fuller insight into the functioning of democratic methods, their method of use and appropriate fields of application, and on the other hand to ensure that the recruitment of staff by local authorities is not limited by local resources but secures the ablest and most promising talent available.

Considerations of this kind of themselves may determine the size of areas of local government. If the unit of administration is too small or poverty-stricken, it may be impossible to staff it

with administrators and experts who are really competent to advise the local councillors. The methods of recruiting the most efficient staff and particularly the senior administrative officers become all the more important if they are to co-ordinate a number of large departments. Even if the size of an area is satisfactory and the authority has able officials and far-sighted councillors, efficiency will not be attained if the local government machine is faulty. Apart from the difficulties which inevitably arise in the co-ordination of departments, the traditional system of committee rule has aggravated the situation, and without a delicate adjustment of the machinery and co-ordination of committees, departmentalism may be further encouraged.

While, however, as the P E P broadsheet points out, the present internal machinery of local government can be criticized from the point of view of its ability to secure the working of a consistent long-term policy applicable to all spheres of the work of a council, this does not imply that the committee system is a failure. A committee may be efficient as a representative body, bringing with it local acceptance, or as an executive body carrying out or directing the administration, or more rarely as both. The danger is that in seeking to combine the two we fashion an instrument efficient for neither purpose. Unless clear thinking and vigorous leadership can secure the integration of objectives throughout local services, a co-ordinating body may in practice prove no more than another committee in a committee-ridden world.

It should, of course, be remembered that already regional developments in such fields as national defence, transport, power supply or the water catchment areas are beginning to modify both the sphere and character of local government. Some of the new bodies are appointed, not elected. While this may make for efficiency on the part of the full-time officers and draw into public service a considerable body of qualified people who would not stand for public election, these developments raise questions of some importance, whether from the point of view of efficiency or of self-government. The overlapping of functions of local authorities and independently appointed *ad hoc* bodies merits close consideration in the light of scientific management, as well for national as for local welfare.

The dangers of the present situation are indicated both by the P E P broadsheet and by

Mr. Harris's book, and there can be no doubt as to the urgency of the problem. While the complexity of the problems of government increase, plans for improving its efficiency in a democratic society are much slower to develop. One factor in this is obviously the necessity for the education of public opinion as to the imperativeness of reform. Only under the pressure of enlightened public opinion can we hope to remedy effectively some of the weaknesses in our present system and stimulate the best brains and ablest administrators to take their place in the local and national council chambers. Much the same stimulus will be required to implement proposals already detailed for the more efficient utilization of the university graduate in local government, and for improved methods of recruiting and promoting staff. It is only simultaneously with the improvement in the recruitment of the permanent staff and the attraction of the best brains of the community to the council chamber that we can hope for the vision and leadership which will promote the constructive integration of services and administration so seriously needed. Meanwhile there is a wide field open for investigation into the size of administrative units, the comparative merits and value of different methods or techniques for their administration, apart from the exploration of such ideas as the staff college in reference to training and selection for the higher administrative posts in the permanent staff of industrial or local government or the civil service, and the much more difficult question of personal competence or qualification for executive responsibility in positions at present filled primarily on grounds of election and influence. Moreover, as the self-interest or profit motive in large-scale industry is replaced by a basis of service and team work, the problem of industrial management and leadership becomes closely allied to that of leadership and administration in public affairs. Here at least is an opportunity which should not be neglected by scientific workers any more than the responsibilities which they must accept as citizens for participating in the educational work required and in contributing their own share of service in the work of local and national government. Only as such opportunities are voluntarily seized can we expect that the services of the scientific or technical expert will be more wisely and effectively used, and the scientific administrator take the place in government which his administrative abilities as well as his scientific outlook both merit and demand.