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RECONSTRUCTION IN THE CIVIL SERVICE

IN the debate which took place in the House of Commons on January 28, 1943, on the sixteenth report for the session 1941-42 of the Select Committee on National Expenditure, on "Organization and Control of the Civil Service", the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Kingsley Wood, welcoming the general tenor of the Committee's observations on the establishment of a Civil Service staff college, stated that he proposed to start at once an investigation into the general question of the training of Civil servants, including that of the establishment of a staff college, its form and character. A committee was appointed for this purpose in February 1943 under the chairmanship of the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, the Right Hon. Ralph Assheton, and its report was duly presented to Parliament in May last.

In the meantime, the importance of the question of training of Civil servants has steadily become more widely recognized. In the attention which has been given to the machinery of government by such bodies as Political and Economic Planning, the importance of men as well as the right methods has been repeatedly emphasized. The same question has been to the fore in current discussions on the reform of the Foreign Service and on proposals for a civil or economic general staff. Already education for the public services has been considered in a special report of the British Association Committee on Post-War University Education, while further discussion of the question has been stimulated not only by the White Paper on Education but also by subsequent papers on health services and employment. The proposals in the latter paper for a strong central economic staff were rightly stressed by the present Chancellor of the Exchequer and were warmly welcomed by many members of Parliament in the debate.

It has, in fact, become increasingly clear that in the successful execution of whatever plans we may make for our post-war reconstruction, much will depend on the calibre of the men to whom their execution must perforce be entrusted. It is, of course, above all in the technical field that complexities multiply; and the larger the part that science has to play in the ordering of our affairs, the greater the need for decisions and policy to be based impartially on scientifically ascertained facts. If the State is to discharge effectively its more active duties of planning and supervision, the more imperative is the need for the Civil Service to be trained for the job it has to do. The Assheton Report does not, it is true, pursue in detail the training of the professional and technical grades. That is not the special issue at present, except in so far as it is bound up with the general question of technical education in relation to industrial efficiency under the plans for educational reconstruction. What is at issue is that members of these classes should, as was most emphatically stated in more than one recent debate in Parliament, have fuller opportunities of transfer to the administrative class, when they show themselves to possess administrative ability. There must be much

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more adequate encouragement of a process of such direct value to the machinery of government, apart altogether from its indirect effect, through the higher status and wider prospects given to the scientific worker, in attracting to the service of the State a freer supply of men of outstanding scientific as well as administrative ability.

For this reason, as a preparatory step, recruits to the professional and technical classes might, as the Report suggests, usefully share in the reception arrangements and background training which are recommended for all Civil servants, so that they may be seized of the functions of the government machine generally and the procedure of their own departments in particular. Again, members of these grades, who are in certain respects analogous with the administrative class and with the higher levels of the executive class, should also be given, where appropriate, the same opportunities for acquiring wider experience by the study of outside methods and by other measures such as are recommended by the Report. Training, it is observed, cannot be considered in isolation; such matters as recruitment, allocation, probation, transfer and promotion are all involved. All indeed are considered by the Report in so far as they are factors in determining the character and extent of training, and the efficient performance of those functions which must fall to the lot of a Civil servant more and more concerned with the affairs of the community and acting as the servant of the State in numerous ways which involve contact between the government and the individual citizen.

The Report itself is in two parts. The first deals with general considerations and principles; the second indicates some of the ways in which they can be applied to the various grades that have come under review. Looking first at general principles, the Report recommends that the Treasury should exercise general control over training and should appoint a director of training and education. Within each department there should be a planned training scheme under the general control of the head of the department, with at least a part-time departmental training officer. The National Whitley Council should be associated with general training policy, and departments should invite the co-operation of staff representatives in working out departmental schemes. Not only should great care be taken in the selection of teachers, but also attention should be paid to the surroundings in which people work.

The reasons for these recommendations are cogently set forth in the Report. There can be no dissent from the Committee's view that training schemes will not prosper unless responsibility for their success is firmly placed on some individual. The Treasury's responsibilities for establishment work and the new development of the Organization and Methods Division make it logical that general responsibility for training should also be with the Treasury. Again, the element of staff co-operation is emphasized in a way which represents a break with tradition and a look forward to that closer integration of the service with the community, which is just as important as that of industry with the community, in order that the needs

of to-morrow may be served. The emphasis on personality in teaching and on environment equally betoken a forward-looking mind. Indeed, it cannot be too clearly emphasized that the Report is largely breaking new ground and that its recommendations are experimental; that, far more than shortcomings or defects of the past laid bare in the Report, is what matters, and what should ensure it a sympathetic reception and patient and full discussion.

The objects of the training to be given could, in fact, scarcely be better put than in this Report. Public confidence is essential if the Civil Service, however admirably trained for its more positive functions, is to discharge its new duties effectively. We may take for granted that training should endeavour to produce a Civil servant whose precision and clarity in the transaction of business are accepted. Equally we have no right to expect that the Civil servant will be attuned to the tasks he is called upon to perform in a changing world, or that he will be able continuously and boldly to adjust his outlook and methods to meet the new needs, unless we are prepared to support him with sympathy and understanding, and temper criticism with discernment.

It might well be observed in passing that the stress laid in this Report on the human aspect among the objects of training should do much to promote such understanding of 'the man at the other end', and a real integration of the Civil Service with the community it seeks to serve. Measures which prevent the Civil servant from becoming mechanized by making him aware of the wider setting of his work, by training him, not solely for the job which lies immediately to hand, but also to fit him for other duties and to develop, where appropriate, his capacity for higher work and greater responsibilities, all assist to that end, as does the attention to staff morale which is emphasized. In such matters as these, in its frank recognition of the human problem presented by routine work and mechanization, the Report is pointing to problems which industry, too, must face in increasing measure. They are indeed already being faced by many progressive firms, as well as by the joint production councils, but they must receive far greater and wider attention.

Returning to the general principles recommended in the Report, there is emphasis on a real period of probation which would facilitate the early elimination of misfits. Next, there should be a routine of training for all entrants under a responsible officer. Mobility in the early years of service, both from branch to branch and from headquarters to out-stations, and easier transfer from one department to another are also recommended. Clearly much will depend on the careful selection of supervisors and their training in the principles of supervision, as well as on the ability of establishment officers, who should study staff management and office organization.

Despite many unexceptionable recommendations, much of the interest of scientific workers in this general part of the Report centres in the considerations which lead the Committee to reject the proposal that the Government should associate itself with the establishment of a national administrative staff

college, though if such a college is set up some Civil servants might attend experimentally. In the first place, the Committee concludes that little or no centralized or institutional training is needed for the clerical, executive and professional grades: the necessary training is most readily and effectively given by departments. For the administrative officer, however, the Committee sees a real need for a central organization to give the appropriate teaching about the background and methods of Civil Service administration to recruits to this grade of all departments. Further, such an organization should serve a useful purpose in bringing together administrators at a later stage for discussion and investigation of common problems.

The Committee thus visualizes training primarily for new entrants and not, as in the staff colleges of the Armed Forces, for those selected as suitable for promotion after some years of experience. Again, while heartily in favour of encouraging contact between Civil servants and workers in other departments of life, especially in commerce and industry, the Committee does not think that these contacts can best be secured through a common course of instruction in administration. Both the lessons and the illustrative matter of Civil Service administration are regarded as too specialized to be made useful in a college of the kind suggested to the Committee. Further, from the evidence, the Committee thinks that there is a danger that such an institution would end by becoming a commercial college concerned with office methods, and that a real opportunity of assisting the Civil Service administrator to a rapid comprehension of the nature of his problems and of the lines of thought and action he should follow would be lost if such training were merged in a generalized administrative course for both business and the Services.

The Committee's own proposals are elaborated more fully in Part 2 of the Report, in considering the post-entry training of the administrative class. Here more than anywhere, the Report breaks new ground, and it is satisfactory to note that there is no suggestion that Civil servants should not receive their training in the universities or other institutions of similar rank in company with men and women destined for other careers. We can find nothing in the Report to warrant the anxiety expressed last year in these columns (*Nature*, 151, 512; 1943) that entry will be unduly restricted or the functions of the universities be adversely affected. It may, indeed, be argued that something more of the principles of administration might well be taught prior to entry to the service than the Committee is inclined to admit; but incontestably there is much training in internal methods and background that has hitherto not been given at all, or at best unsystematically, and which can only be given effectively after entry to the service.

The section of the Report in which the Committee's own ideas are outlined deserves careful attention, for if some of the proposals are admittedly experimental, the Report reveals an urgent need for action. Moreover, if as it appears the Committee has taken rather too narrow a view of its scope and under-estimated the potentialities of the staff college idea, it is to public

discussion that we must look for the corrective in the first instance.

As regards the administrative cadet, the Committee suggests a course of two to three months requiring an average attendance of about two days a week, the object of the course being to shorten the process by which the recruit forms his own administrative standards, and to inculcate from the beginning of his service a professional approach. As set forth in the Report, much of the syllabus appears to be of wider validity than the Committee is disposed to admit. The reference to training in methods of preparing and presenting statistics, and the logical principles underlying their interpretation, is welcome, and the Committee is on firm ground in urging that the close relation of such a course to a Civil servant's particular job might well increase its vitality and value. Moreover, from the comparatively modest beginnings outlined, the Committee visualizes the development of a centre which could serve as a clearing-house of ideas for Civil Service administrators and a repository of schemes, successful and unsuccessful, which have been tried out in practice. In fact, after rejecting the idea of a staff college, the Committee sees such a centre organizing refresher courses in which something resembling the methods of the military staff college could be attempted, officers of various departments meeting in study groups to work out hypothetical or actual administrative problems. Participation of representatives of commerce and industry and other organizations in such discussions is suggested, and the sharing of experience between business men and Civil servants is recognized as mutually valuable.

In recommending the fullest use of the centre for all these purposes, the Committee does not appear to be entirely consistent, despite its belief in the value of contacts between Civil servants and commerce and industry. Moreover, it must be admitted that the Committee does not seem to be sufficiently alive to the dangers of departmentalism, and however unexceptionable may be its further suggestions for training the recruit by discussions, visits, field-work and the like, some legitimate doubt may well be entertained of their effectiveness in dealing with an evil which is not confined to the Civil Service. Something of the same timidity characterizes the discussion of the training of those intended for positions of high administrative responsibility also.

Here the Committee accepts the general view that in the early thirties a complete change of environment or an opportunity to stand back from one's job and to shake oneself free from the daily routine is most desirable to gain a broader vision and some fresh experience. Without questioning the value of transfer within the Service from one department to another, or from headquarters to out-station, or vice versa, for refresher purposes or for widening experience, it rightly insists on the need for opportunity to get away for a time into a different atmosphere altogether, by a period of secondment elsewhere, for example, to outside business or a local authority. The former is regarded as of little value unless for a period of anything up to two years, so that the Civil servant could do a real job of work and be entrusted with real

responsibility. This method is therefore considered one for tentative experiment rather than definite recommendation. Seconding to, or interchange on a two-way basis with, a local authority is, however, a more promising and less difficult way in which the Civil servant should have opportunities for appreciating more readily the impact of action at the centre upon local government and upon the general public. The Committee recommends accordingly that departments such as the Ministry of Health and Board of Education should consider and report on such possibilities. Beyond this, the Committee suggests that selected Civil servants, say in the early thirties, should be granted a period of sabbatical leave to pursue an approved course or to undertake research, either in Great Britain or abroad. Such leave should be with pay and should count as service for purposes of pension.

The Committee is clearly in sympathy with the proposal of the recent British Association Committee on Post-War Education, but contemplates something beyond the social studies suggested by that report. Again, it takes up a suggestion emphasized in a Planning broadsheet, "A Civil General Staff", in commenting on the ignorance of Civil servants of the relevant experience of other countries, and strongly commends the idea of giving selected officials an opportunity of travelling abroad to study aspects of government or public administration likely to be of value. Study of the way in which problems of government are tackled abroad would be worth while in itself as a safeguard against insularity, as well as providing a stimulant which would be of great benefit to the Service.

The Committee does not overlook the current criticism that the Civil Service is not sufficiently alive to the possible effect of its actions upon business undertakings; and that its members, in those departments which come into daily contact with commerce and industry, should be equipped with a fuller understanding of their problems. This contact, it suggests, should be secured by visits and periods of observation, varying in duration from a week to a maximum of two or three months. By such arrangements it is believed that selected Civil servants might acquire a better insight into the methods and problems of the industrial and commercial world, while at the same time business men might gain a better understanding of the point of view of the Civil servant.

There can be no doubt that a number of these suggestions need to be explored seriously and thoroughly and with some urgency, whether or not the Committee is unduly optimistic as to the effect, particularly of this last suggestion. On the other hand, the Committee is assuredly correct in pointing out that the need for Civil servants to acquire the right attitude of consideration and sympathy towards the public should not lead us to forget that this attitude should be mutual. A spirit of service cannot be expected to flourish among public servants if they feel with reason that their efforts are being disparaged and their difficulties overlooked by those whom they are endeavouring to serve. A more generous appreciation by the public of the work of the Civil Service

would go far to ensure that such appreciation was increasingly deserved. It is somewhat surprising that the Report appears to overlook the influence which the considerable number of temporary Civil servants recruited for war purposes—estimated in a debate last year at some 300,000—might well exert in this respect; but the point is one which should not escape the public relations officers of the Service.

The Report must now be subjected to constructive and informed criticism, to ensure that full advantage is taken of any fresh experience acquired as a result of the experiments which the Committee suggests. Judgment may well be reserved on a number of points: some of the present defects may be more deeply embedded in the administrative system than the Report admits. Here, however, is positive and constructive criticism comparable with that which characterized the report of the Select Committee on National Expenditure. Defects are laid bare and weaknesses admitted, and it is unthinkable that the situation will remain as it is. Neither the Government nor the Civil Service can allow the charge of neglect of systematic post-entry staff training in peace-time to be levelled again. Whether or not the measures at present advocated are entirely adequate to attain the objectives so admirably stated, they should at least promote the ever-present consciousness of the importance of clarity of thought, directness of action, simplicity of expression, speed, initiative, considerateness and other virtues, in which Civil servants are often said to be deficient—and which are not always conspicuous in their detractors. The Report clearly believes that training and good staff management will do much to make these the keystones of daily practice in all ranks from the highest downwards, and the confidence it shows thereby in the essential qualities of the present Civil Service in Great Britain is in keeping with the whole spirit of the searching debate in the House of Commons which initiated the inquiry.

FARMING IN WORCESTERSHIRE, PAST AND PRESENT

A History of Worcestershire Agriculture and Rural Evolution

By R. C. Gaut. Pp. xvi+490. (Worcester: Littlebury and Co., Ltd., 1939.) n.p.

WORCESTERSHIRE is one of the smaller counties of England and is neither a tourist nor a holiday resort; but connoisseurs know it as one of our most interesting regions. Through it pass three peaceful and attractive rivers, the Severn, the Avon and the Teme; its scenery is varied by Bredon Hill, the Malverns, the Clent and Lickey Hills and by the Forest of Wyre. Some of the most intensive culture in England is to be found in the Vale of Evesham. The county is rich in archaeological interest, for the monastic movement played an important part there, and parts of the great Abbeys of Evesham and Pershore still survive in a setting enriched by interesting churches, attractive country houses and quiet, pleasing villages.

Mr. Gaut has had a long and honourable connexion with the county as its chief agricultural adviser, and