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FUNCTION OF CONTROLS IN INDUSTRY

THE eighth report of the Select Committee on National Expenditure for the session 1943-44 arose out of an inquiry into the chemical controls of the Ministry of Supply, and should remove certain widespread misapprehensions by making plain their functions and responsibilities. Although primarily concerned with the chemical controls, since these are only a part of the organization of the Ministry of Supply for dealing with the chemical industry, the inquiry could not be confined strictly to the activities for which the controllers and their staffs are responsible. In addition to the evidence of the controllers themselves and of the chairman of the Chemical Control Board, evidence was heard from the Ministry of Supply, including the Raw Materials Department and the Director-General of Scientific Research and Development, and the Ministry of Aircraft Production, including the Director-General of Materials Production and the Deputy Director of Research and Development (Technical Investigations). Memoranda were also submitted by trade associations and their firms. The report is accordingly a useful contribution to the present debate on the organization and control of post-war industry.

There are five chemical 'controls', dealing respectively with sulphuric acid, fertilizers, industrial ammonia, molasses and industrial alcohol, and plastics; the control of miscellaneous chemicals has recently been taken over by the headquarters of the Raw Materials Department of the Ministry of Supply. The controls thus form a group within the twenty-nine raw material controls administered by the Ministry, the five controllers constituting a board presided over by a chairman who is responsible for co-ordinating their activities. Describing first the responsibilities and functions of the controls, the report points out that in principle they are executive. The ultimate responsibility for the supply of essential raw materials lies with the Raw Materials Department of the Ministry of Supply; but the controls are the source of information and advice about the complex industries with which that Department has to deal. They thus perform an important advisory function in what may be called the semi-technical field of trade and industry. They are concerned with every kind of action which the Department may be required to take to ensure supplies and their proper distribution and use. In addition to a general supervision of the trade or industry with which it deals, a control may initiate arrangements for the import of supplies from abroad, the provision of new capacity in Great Britain, the distribution of material to the manufacturers or users, and the rationing of supplies to manufacturers and users; and it directs the purposes for which materials may be used and fixes the price of materials.

The importance of utilizing, in the administration of the controls, the knowledge and experience of the trades and industries concerned, has led to the appointment of staff mainly formerly employed in

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the relevant businesses, and the report details the over-riding principles which have been laid down to safeguard the public interest in making such appointments. There is no suggestion in the report that these safeguards have not proved adequate; but the report emphasizes that the advisory and information services should be a two-way function; in particular, in referring to the use of existing capacity, the Committee points to the need for giving more adequate explanation to manufacturers whose capacity cannot, for one reason or another, be fully employed. This is a particular illustration of the importance of the advisory committees of manufacturers and others which in some sections of the chemical industry, notably in the fertilizer industry, assist the control to settle both the programme and the way to execute it. So long as the controls remain it is of the utmost importance that they should retain the confidence of the industry, and the existence of an active advisory committee is an excellent means to that end. None the less, in view of the easing of the supply position and the decrease in work, the Committee recommends that the whole organization of the chemical controls should be reviewed and consideration given to the advantages of absorbing them into the headquarters of the Raw Materials Department.

While much of the criticism of the controls is attributed to ignorance of their true position, specific allegations regarding their operation relate to the use of existing capacity, the distribution of new capacity to firms, the allocation of contracts for research and development, and the concentration of production in the paint industry. With regard to the first, the Committee considers that furnishing more adequate explanations and using advisory committees, as already indicated, would have removed its substance. In regard to the second and third points, and particularly the development of methyl methacrylate sheeting or 'Perspex', the Select Committee queries the mode of following the usual policy and giving the whole of the additional capacity for making 'Perspex' to the one original manufacturer. The report suggests that progress might have been more rapid if other firms with the necessary technical facilities had been brought in. A fresh approach to the problems might have resulted in greater progress towards a satisfactory solution.

On the whole, the operation of the chemical controls has tended to strengthen rather than diminish the preponderance of the strongest interests in the chemical industry. This tendency, the Committee recognizes, may be to some extent inevitable in time of war, but in spite of the immense value to the national effort of the resources of the interests in question, there is danger that too much reliance may be placed on the strength of a single concern, making, for example, the control of costs by the Department difficult, since there is no standard of comparison and overheads are difficult to calculate.

Some concern is also expressed by the Committee whether considerable facilities for research and development have been neglected. It is pointed out that even if a firm should not have full confidence in the

integrity of the technical officers of the controls, this suspicious attitude should not necessarily prevent the acquisition of the information about its facilities for research and development required before a contract can be allotted. There are Government institutions, such as the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, the permanent position of which in the service of the State places their impartiality above suspicion, and precedents exist for the use of these bodies where a firm is disinclined to disclose information to the officers of a Department.

The most serious criticism of the report, however, is that of the treatment of the paint industry, and the Select Committee considers that the system of lists adopted was neither economical nor fair. If it was considered that redundant paint-making capacity should be closed, there should have been a proper scheme as provided in the White Paper on concentration of production, with safeguards for the preservation of the commercial existence of closed firms and for compensation. Abandonment forthwith of the lists prepared by the Miscellaneous Chemical Control of paint firms where labour is protected, and to which Government departments confine their direct orders, is recommended.

The report thus affords some justification for the general criticism of the whole system of controls advanced by G. D. N. Worswick in "The Raw Material Controls" (Fabian Tract Series, No. 257. 4d.). Mr. Worswick traces the weaknesses of the controls, particularly in planning and lack of foresight, to the staffing of the controls with those already fully conversant with the industry or trade concerned. He argues that the qualities required of a good controller are much the same as those required of a good Minister: intelligence, the ability to grasp quickly the nature of a problem, and the determination to carry out any policy that has been decided. The controller must, of course, have his advisory team of experts, industrial and technical; but what is above all essential in the controller is impartiality and independence of the traditional background of the particular industry and trade. Mr. Worswick argues further that the controls are an essential part of reconstruction, where they should form part of a new branch of government charged with the provision of all the principal industrial raw materials, and the production of substitutes if natural supplies are no longer available. For this purpose three principles are laid down for staffing the controls. First, the head of each control should have no past, present or probable future financial interest whatever in the material he is controlling. Secondly, the use of existing trade organizations as controls should be abolished altogether; and thirdly, the controller should be employed on a terminable contract, say, for five years. To secure the best men, Mr. Worswick suggests that it may be necessary to pay the controllers on the industrial rather than on the Civil Service scale.

In his emphasis on the question of staff and on policy, rather than on the exact nature of the organizational relation of government and industry, and even more on the ownership of industry, Mr. Worswick is

in line with the trend of a subsequent report by a Fabian Research Group "Government and Industry: A Framework for the Future" (Research Series, No. 83. Fabian Society. 6d.), though he does not lay the same stress on intelligence and information service as the latter report and that of the Select Committee. That function, however, is as vital as the question of staffing and the direction of policy. Unless the Ministry responsible for the controls is well informed, it will not be able either to give guidance on principles of policy which will be commonly applied over the whole field of industry, agriculture and commerce, or indeed to decide on those principles and secure their application.

The review of the war-time controls in this Fabian Research Group report emphasizes that through the controls the Government has gained a far greater knowledge of industry than it had before. This in itself is a valuable asset in devising economic policy, and the reference in the White Paper on Employment Policy to the need for exact quantitative information about current economic movements suggests that the Government is unlikely to throw this away, whatever further means of supplementing it are required. The general supervision by the Government over most of the larger industries established in war-time has proved its value, and has indicated a means by which public policy can make itself felt in the fields of new investment, location of factories, research and development, labour management and labour policy and export policy, independent of the question of private or public ownership. The equity and desirability of such public control has been recognized in numerous statements in the last two years, such as that of Nuffield College on "Employment Policy and Organization of Industry after the War". Recent criticism of the Government has, in fact, centred on the failure of the Board of Trade to give the guidance which industry requires to make its concrete plans for serving the ends of both public and private policy.

The specific proposals of the Fabian pamphlet on "Government and Industry" are simple. A single central authority, specializing in such subjects as cartels, monopolies and restrictive practices, and the location of industry, and building up gradually a body of knowledge and technique, will be an indispensable part of the Government machine. Accordingly, in addition to a permanent buying Ministry to organize the whole of the Government's purchases from, and orders to, industry, there should be a central department for industrial control. This suggested department should be provided with expert sections to supervise all the great industries, whether fully nationalized or not, and should have a series of specialist bodies attached. Thus reinforced, the Board of Trade or Ministry of Industry would act as the final authority on the location of industry, the policy of monopolies and large-scale economic units, management, research and so forth. Again, while trade associations have legitimate functions to perform, they should not be allowed to exercise restrictive powers—a conclusion also reached by the Organization of Industry Committee of the Federa-

tion of British Industries in its recent report on the organization of industry in Britain. The Government must therefore have an organization separate from the trade association, through which to control the development of an industry, and to ensure that essential tasks, such as research, standardization, reorganization, export marketing and so forth, are adequately performed.

For this purpose, the Fabian Society's report proposes a series of development boards, not themselves trading bodies, but attached to individual industries and responsible to the section of the Board of Trade concerned with the industry in question. The scheme presupposes a central planning authority in the monetary and financial field, and the report recognizes that a good deal of industrial and managerial skill will be required. The system would make the fullest use of technical men and of business men, its success depending on the extent to which the appropriate administrative ability, impartiality and initiative, rather than technical knowledge, could be recruited. These, as Mr. Worswick stresses, are the ultimate safeguards against bureaucracy and the assurance of positive rather than negative control.

To the Fabian Society's Group, it is true, control still seems to be an end in itself. The committee recognizes the fruitful partnership between the State and industry which we have seen in our war-time arrangements at their best; and the admission that policy and quality of staff rather than sweeping changes in the present ownership of industry are what is required should make possible a broad range of agreement on the methods and objectives of any necessary measure of Government intervention and planning from the centre. The emphasis, however, must be on the minimum of control and on its positiveness in character, as in the Prime Minister's statement in the House of Commons on November 16. It is within these limits that we should seek to discover the principles that should guide and inspire the Government's intervention in industry and decide its policy.

The report of the Select Committee, like that of the Fabian Society's Group, should at least help to get the right questions asked. Few have done more, in fact, than Mr. Herbert Morrison, who contributes a preface to the Fabian report, to clear away prejudices and stimulate constructive thinking on these questions of the relations between industry and the State, and the form which industrial organization must take after the War. None the less, it must be admitted that the idea of restrictionism is embedded as deeply in reports and proposals from the Left, such as the interim report of the Trade Union Congress on post-war reconstruction, as in parallel statements from the industrial side, and it is this idea of restriction, from whichever side, that constitutes the greatest danger to what is commonly implied in a policy of full employment and freedom from want.

The Prime Minister's statement on the continuance of the controls shows that the Government is fully cognizant of what is required, and should reassure

those who, while recognizing the necessity for continuing control, are concerned lest control may be continued for its own sake. Given the principle that control will only be continued where and for so long as the public interest demands, it is possible to evolve out of our war-time and earlier experience the type and kind of control to suit our purposes. These purposes and needs will vary from industry to industry and with the national situation, but there is no reason to doubt the ability of Great Britain to develop a framework of government and industry sufficiently flexible to serve those needs and to foster enterprise and efficiency while securing the essential measure of public control. That involves, as Mr. Morrison and others have indicated, experimenting with different types and degrees of State control over industry, varying from public ownership and operation to a limited degree of control of prices and practices exercised from outside. It involves an intelligence service—or liaison or public relations service, call it what you will—adequate to ensure that the control is always in touch with the local or specialized needs of industries or communities. The joint production committees represent only one aspect of the way in which such public relations work must develop, and no section of a ministry to which the controls are entrusted is likely to be more important than its public relations department. Undoubtedly it will also involve special attention to the questions of recruitment and training of staff.

For all this, the war-time controls can provide only a part of the basic experience required. Beyond such experiment lie the vital factors of policy and of men, as so clearly indicated in the reports mentioned above.

Whatever machinery is devised, there must be the clear enunciation of policy at the centre. The execution of that policy must be entrusted to men who, whether drawn from the Civil Service or from industry, possess the administrative ability and initiative, the imagination and vision, and the impartiality and integrity to ensure that the nation's purposes are fully served.

BIRDS AND THE CAMERA

Birds of the Day

By Eric J. Hosking and Cyril W. Newberry. Pp. 128 (78 plates). (London and Glasgow: Wm. Collins, Sons and Co., Ltd., 1944.) 12s. 6d. net.

THERE is a well-known saying that great things arise from small beginnings, and this is true of modern bird photography, which began in those seemingly remote days when a stand camera was the only instrument for all types of photography. There is some dispute as to who took the first wild-life photographs. The names of Riley Fortune, Oliver Lodge and C. J. King, of the Scilly Isles, are among those of the pioneers. They worked with their heads under a black cloth, and their plates were so slow that they could only give a really fast exposure under exceptionally good lighting conditions. Yet they achieved some remarkable results, and when the Kearton brothers perfected the system of working from a hide, nature photography, and in particular

the photography of birds, made rapid strides and attained wide popularity.

To-day those who practise bird photography and use their camera to record details of bird behaviour are beyond counting; but none of them has used his camera with better results than Mr. Eric Hosking, whose studies of birds are well known for their interest and beauty. Some of them are snapshots in the fullest sense of the word; for example, a picture in this, his latest book, of a marsh harrier alighting on its nest. The camera has caught it with wings raised in a pose as exquisite as that of a tern; while others are perfect portraits, models of exactness and of accurate rendering of every feather detail.

"Birds of the Day" is the joint work of Mr. Hosking and Mr. Cyril Newberry, the first named being responsible for the pictures of the forty or so species here dealt with, and the latter contributing much field work and descriptive matter. The descriptions vary from short paragraphs in the case of the blackbird and the song thrush to several pages in the case of the marsh harrier and the bittern, perhaps two of the most interesting birds found in Britain to-day. If this is termed a picture book we feel sure the authors will not cavil, for it is obvious the work of the pen is subsidiary to that of the camera.

The subjects are not treated in any special order or sequence, and are limited only to "Birds of the Day". Owls, we understand, are to be dealt with separately later on; however, an example of modern flashlight photography is given in this collection, namely, the portrait of a jackdaw at its nest in an old mill. The introduction of the soundless, odourless flash bulb has placed a most useful tool at the disposal of wild-life photographers. As examples of camera portraiture of birds the two very charming pictures of a male and female bearded tit, the latter with two dragonflies in her beak, perched on the reeds are indeed excellent, even if we long to see the cock depicted in all the beauty of his sandy-red and R.A.F. blue plumage, enhanced by the orange-yellow of his eye and beak, and set off by the black of his moustachial stripes. However, the extended use of colour photography in the ornithological field is coming fast.

For a useful record of bird-behaviour, combined with fine portraiture, the description of the greenshank carrying off hatched egg-shells from the nest and the accompanying illustration are particularly good. The authors tell us that a hiding tent had been in position beside the greenshank's nest for some days, but when the photographer arrived one morning he found the nest empty, only hatched shells remaining; however, he entered the tent and waited results. Before long "the hen greenshank came back, settled over the empty egg-shells, and began to rake them under her. Presently, in response to a soft call from the hen, the chicks came out of hiding in the grass and made their separate ways back to the nest, but the hen was preoccupied with the pieces of eggshell and paid more attention to them than to the chicks . . . she was restless and, after a little while, picked up a piece of shell with her bill and flew away, dropping it in flight . . . gradually all the shell was removed and the chicks came in for their full share of maternal devotion".

Seeing that greenshank chicks leave the nest within a short while of hatching, it is difficult to suggest what purpose, if any, there is in tidying up the nest. It is such observations as these that add value to the work of bird photography.

FRANCES PITT.