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CIVIL SERVICE RECRUITMENT DURING THE RECONSTRUCTION PERIOD

THE report of the Committee of the Civil Service National Whitley Council on the staffing of the Civil Service during the reconstruction period, appointed in accordance with the Government's request as announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the House of Commons on February 17, 1944, and containing proposals agreed between the official side and the staff side of the Council, has now been published*, under cover of a statement by the Government. The report proceeds on the basis envisaged in the Chancellor's statement that recruitment to the permanent service should begin at the earliest possible moment after the end of hostilities in Europe, continuing steadily throughout the reconstruction period, to provide for the required intake by departments of appropriately qualified men and women, and for the smooth transfer into permanent employment of those selected, whether from the Fighting Forces or otherwise.

In the covering statement the Government expresses its belief that public opinion will endorse the conclusion that, at the end of a war during which we have had total mobilization of man-power, a proposal to reserve all vacancies in the Civil Service exclusively for ex-Service candidates would be unfair to the rest of the community. The Government, however, is satisfied that the Committee's recommendation that, of the vacancies available for the reconstruction competitions, not less than 75 per cent in the administrative class, 66½ per cent in the executive class, and 50 per cent in the clerical class should be filled by suitably qualified ex-service men, additional vacancies being reserved for ex-service women, constitutes the generous treatment that is essential, and the proposals in the report are commended to Parliament and to the public.

Like the Assheton Report on the training of Civil Servants, the recommendations of which have been accepted in principle by the Government, the present report is written almost entirely around the administrative, executive and clerical classes of the Civil Service. The importance of recruitment of well-qualified men and women to the professional, scientific and technical classes of the Civil Service is also recognized, and the Government states that departments employing these staffs are now engaged in formulating proposals for them which will, so far as possible, incorporate the principles already recommended for the general classes. It is expected that the matter will shortly be sufficiently advanced for discussion with the Civil Service staff representatives through the National Whitley Council. Meanwhile, the Government has decided to retain a central body of economists and statisticians, such as has been set up during the War in the Cabinet Offices. It is

* Recruitment to Established Posts in the Civil Service during the Reconstruction Period: Statement of Government Policy and Civil Service National Whitley Council Report. (Cmd. 6567.) Pp. 24. (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1944.) 4d. net.

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also stated that discussions are taking place in the National Whitley Council on problems that will arise on redundancy as the work of departments contracts, and on the question of any changes required in the main structure of the Service, such as the grades and classes, the methods of passing from one class to another, and the general arrangements to secure that the best use is made of all members of the staff. The flexibility of existing superannuation arrangements, the position of unestablished staff, and the effect of the new scheme of social insurance on the pensions of the public services have already received preliminary consideration.

The recommendations of the present report fall into two parts: those relating to "reconstruction competitions" and those relating to "normal competitions". The former are recommended primarily for those who have lost opportunities of competing for the Civil Service owing to the War, and the latter for those who reach the normal ages of entry as recruitment is re-opened.

The reconstruction competitions should extend over a period, so that the last man released from the Forces or other war service has as good a chance of competing as the first, and arrangements should be made to ensure that the late entrants suffer no disadvantage in pay. For vacancies accrued during the War by wastage and permanent expansion, the main source of recruits should be those who have missed their opportunity of competing for the Civil Service because of the interruption, that is, those within normal age limits plus the period of the War. Some of these vacancies should, however, be reserved for those above these limits but not older than thirty. In the administrative class there should be a common field of recruitment up to thirty years of age; in the executive, clerical and sub-clerical classes, one vacancy should be reserved for the older group of candidates for every four allotted to the younger group.

The reconstruction examinations should consist of written examinations in general subjects, plus an interview for the administrative and executive classes. Candidates should be required to possess certain minimum educational qualifications, namely, a university degree of at least second-class honours standard, or a year's continuous full-time university attendance and expectation of such a degree, for the administrative class; full-time education up to seventeen, or higher school certificate for the executive class; full-time education to sixteen or school certificate for the clerical class; full-time education up to fifteen for the sub-clerical class. Temporary Civil Servants should be subject to the same conditions as other candidates, with certain exceptions such as provision for the retention of specially selected senior temporary officers as principal, or analogous executive or departmental grades, or above, who are more than age thirty, and allotment of 15 per cent of the accrued vacancies in the basic executive and clerical grades to the best of the temporary officers in junior grades, above the age of thirty, who have at least two years of service (including any period of service with the Forces).

Established Civil Servants should be eligible for the reconstruction competitions, by which they may obtain promotion to a higher class. Very few of them will be able to comply with the minimum educational qualifications for the executive and administrative reconstruction competitions, and limited competitions should be provided against fixed quotas of vacancies in these classes, so as to restore their pre-war opportunities of sitting for the open competitions. All acting assistant principals promoted since the outbreak of war should be required to succeed in the limited competition before their promotions are confirmed.

Resumption of normal competitions is recommended concurrently with these reconstruction competitions, and candidates coming forward straight from school or university should be required to sit for a normal competition. These are proposed on the same lines as before the War, subject to the introduction of an interview for the executive class, a common examination for clerical assistants, typists and shorthand-typists, and, on an experimental basis, of a system of selection of a limited number of candidates for the administrative class mainly by interview by the Civil Service Commission. This last experiment is to be closely watched and reviewed after, say, ten years. Admission by this method should be confined to those who possess at least a good second-class honours degree.

These proposals, taken as a whole, seem eminently fair, in that they make provision for the entry into the Civil Service of those whose education has been interrupted by direction either to national service or the Fighting Services, and for the retention of those who have proved themselves, as temporary Civil Servants, to be exceptionally suited to their posts. The difficulties likely to arise through the necessity for spreading demobilization over a lengthy period are also foreseen. No guidance is given, however, on the precise methods of selection which are desirable, though no doubt the matter is under consideration; indeed, there is a hint to this effect in the suggestion that a certain number of candidates in normal competitions for the administrative class will be chosen mainly by interview.

The Civil Service Commissioners are facing a difficult task. Selection, in the main, will be by examination; but it does not follow that examinations of the stereotyped form will be adequate. There has been much criticism in the past few years of the methods and the personnel of the Civil Service: in particular, their devotion to precedence and the general lack, and even discouragement of, initiative, have been pilloried. To what extent the type of examination used to select candidates was responsible for the selection or development of this type of mind is difficult to assess, but there can be no question that the British Civil Servant of the future will need, in addition to the virtues which have been envied and admired by the corresponding services of other countries, a whole range of other abilities. As has been said repeatedly in these columns, he must be able to keep in touch with the feeling of the people

at large, he must have initiative, and, particularly in the administrative class, he must be able to interpret not only the letter but also the spirit of policy laid down by the Government. This, of course, raises the whole question of the status of the Civil Servant. The country will require for its administration the best brains available, and the Civil Service will have to attract, and hold, such ability in competition with industry and commerce. It is all to the good that this was so fully recognized in the House of Commons debate on December 14, when the report was warmly welcomed and endorsed.

THE TREE ROOT AND THE SOIL

Problems in Tree Nutrition

An Account of Researches concerned primarily with the Mycorrhizal Habit in relation to Forestry and with some Biological Aspects of Soil Fertility. By M. C. Rayner and W. Neilson-Jones. Pp. 184+27 plates. (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1944.) 12s. 6d. net.

ONE of the most difficult problems, either in botany as a pure science, or in forestry as applied biology, has always been, and still is, to assess the relationships which exist between the root of a tree and its environment in the soil. The reason for this lies, of course, in the fundamental difficulty of observing the root under natural conditions without, at the same time, destroying its environment, or at least changing this in some radical manner. A secondary source of difficulty is also to be found in the need for a specialist's knowledge in making accurate observation of the micro-flora and -fauna of the soil, which form so important a part of the natural environment of the root. The consequence of this is to be seen in the relative neglect in general works on plant ecology of that part of plant associations which occurs below the ground, notwithstanding its admitted very great importance. The book under notice is concerned with the study of a special aspect of this relatively neglected subterranean field. Its topical interest lies herein, and especially in view of the wide interest aroused in the effect of composting on soil fertility—that is, on the value of the soil for root development—by Sir Albert Howard and others during recent years. The book consists of a collection of papers which have appeared at various times since 1934. They are here brought together with little or no alteration or editing and, with a short but excellent introduction, form the chapters of the book. A list of references, a glossary and an index are appended, and there is also a large number of plates illustrating the various papers.

The research work, the accounts of which are here collected together, will be well known to many foresters and botanists. It was begun in connexion with the afforestation of heathland near Wareham in Dorset. Much of this infertile tract of land had proved refractory for the growth of trees, principally pines, which had been sown or planted on it. In many parts growth was so disastrously inadequate that the condition of the trees was obviously pathological and a matter for much concern. Dr. Rayner, who initiated this research, put forward the hypothesis that the cause of this condition lay in the biotic relationships which occurred in the soil rather than in the admittedly low nutrient status as measured

chemically; and that these relationships were expressed principally, so far as the trees were concerned, in the type of fungal association made by the root to form true or false mycorrhizas. Proceeding on this hypothesis, composts were prepared from materials such as hop waste and straw, and were added to the infertile Wareham soil. Conifer seedlings raised on such treated soil, whether in the forest or in the greenhouse, made normal vigorous growth and developed true mycorrhizas on their roots. Account had to be taken of the effect on growth of the nutrient salts added with the compost in order to distinguish between the effect of these and the organic matter. It was shown in a series of controlled experiments that the addition of equivalent amounts of nutrient salts by themselves to the heath soil failed to account in any adequate manner for the improvement in growth, both of shoot and root, obtained by composting. It was demonstrated that this improvement was related to the dominance in the soil of fungi such as *Boletus bovinus*, which form normal mycorrhizal associations; to a suppression of the fungi which form false mycorrhizal associations and to a marked increase in the number of short feeding roots. The differences between plants growing on treated and untreated soil and between normal and false mycorrhizas are well shown in the plates.

The biological aspects of soil fertility, in so far as they are illustrated by this work, are discussed in the interesting final paper. It is shown that the infertile heath soil contains a toxic substance, probably hydrogen sulphide, and that treatment which produces healthy growth results in the removal of this. The untreated soil is relatively inactive biotically, fungus activity being strongly depressed. Thus cellulose, such as filter paper, placed in it, shows very little tendency to decay. The reverse is true of soil treated with a suitable compost, in which fungi are very active. The toxic condition is worst in late winter: it is shown that this is correlated with high moisture content and not with low temperature.

This is a valuable and successful piece of work, the results of which are already being put to practical use. Its value is, perhaps, in no way greater than as a demonstration of the need of attempting to obtain a complete and unified view of the biotic association which is, in reality, being exploited in cultivation, and of which the crop plant is only a part, when trying to diagnose the factors responsible for any particular condition of growth. For fertility is the resultant of the interaction of all the factors of this association upon the crop plant. So far as forestry in particular is concerned, this work directs attention to the need for understanding the factors which determine the successful regeneration and maintenance of an adequate root system, especially during the first years after planting and also in the nursery. The rotation required to raise a utilizable forest crop may be lengthened very appreciably by slow unsatisfactory growth during early years. Technical measures for the alleviation of this state of affairs should be based on a knowledge of the adverse factors operating and not merely on guesswork, as has been too often the case in the past. Our knowledge of these matters at present is very slight, and it is highly desirable that further fundamental work should be encouraged. Much of this work will be concerned with the pathological rather than the normal development of plants, and not the least important aspect of the work under