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## HUMAN PROBLEMS IN THE DISPERSAL OF INDUSTRY

IN the White Paper on Employment Policy, as one method of dealing with the problems of local employment and securing a balanced distribution of industry and labour, the Government proposal is to exercise a substantial measure of control over the location of new industrial development, as is contemplated in the Barlow Report. The importance of such measures has been repeatedly emphasized in various connexions, particularly with reference to such regional proposals as the Greater London plan recently prepared by Sir L. P. Abercrombie, of which a limited working edition has been released to the Press and to the local authorities. Nevertheless, it is clear that so far there are no powers for giving effect to such regional plans; nor, if and when such powers are forthcoming, is the regional planning machinery adequate for the purpose. Furthermore, it is by no means certain that public opinion is yet prepared to accept the limitations on personal freedom and initiative implied in any large-scale measure of regional or national planning.

It is this last point that may well prove a crucial difficulty. The agitation against controls in general, and the extravagant form which the recent protest against the transfer of Civil Servants involved in the proposed location of the Ministry of National Insurance at Newcastle-on-Tyne took, are pointers to which the planners must pay full attention. No blueprints or plans, on the regional, the national or the local scale, will have their full effect or be tolerated for long by the community, save in so far as they give expression and satisfaction to the hopes and needs of individual men and women, and secure the integration, and not the suppression, of the individual, with the purposes and needs of the community as a whole.

This individual and personal point of view is commonly overlooked in planning, and yet it is the one that is most vital if the plans are to be accepted and executed by the community and for the community. The report of the Social and Industrial Commission of the Church Assembly, in "The Church and the Planning of Britain", has commented on the failure of the most recent housing developments to provide adequate facilities for a natural community life, and on the social disintegration involved in enforced migration. The County of London Plan, for example, was prepared on the general assumption of the removal of about half a million people from the London County Council area, and the Greater London plan involves the resettlement of roughly a million people altogether from the County and from the first two rings—"suburban" and "green-belt"—around it. A quarter of those, it is suggested, should go to existing towns, and nearly 400,000 to eight entirely new satellite towns, mainly in the 'outer county' ring; a further quarter of a million should go right off the map beyond the orbit of the plan; while 125,000 would be accounted for by existing immediate housing schemes.

Population movements of this scale are quite impossible without a parallel and co-ordinated decentralization of industry; and in the Greater London plan great care has been taken to select the new sites with full reference to their industrial suitability. The choice of brand new towns as the main reception areas for decentralization is a bold feature of the plan; but the experience of the trading estates and of the Commissioners for the Special Areas shows how difficult it is to attract both industry and workers to new rather than to existing centres. Moreover, the experience of the compulsory uprooting involved in decentralization and dispersal from London under the emergency of war does not encourage excessive optimism as to the welcome which further uprooting and dispersal would receive generally. Willing acceptance will mean the clear and painstaking explanation and demonstration of the benefits to efficiency and welfare of firms and workers which will result.

The vital importance of such educational work clearly emerges from the important study of dispersal made by the National Council of Social Service at the request of the Bank of England, which has now been published\*. This inquiry was concerned with the location of clerical and administrative staffs of considerable size, whether attached to industrial organizations or not. It is not concerned with industrial location as such, but this attempt to analyse the social advantages and disadvantages of dispersal as a permanent arrangement clearly has a close bearing on the centralization or decentralization of large scientific and technical organizations such as research institutions, as well as head-office administrative staff in the usual sense. The study covers the general national interest, the interests of the organization concerned and of the reception areas as well as of those vacated, but is of special importance for the prominence given to the point of view and interests of the staff affected, hitherto largely neglected in such discussions. To this the longest two chapters of the report are devoted, for that on educational and health services is essentially a further elaboration of a subject of special importance from the point of view of the staff.

So far as war-time experience is concerned, the Committee, of which the Right Hon. Walter Elliott was chairman, is convinced that dispersal is both desirable and possible. To secure a happier social life generally, the sundering of the family by the ever-lengthening daily journeys of its units and the growing concentration of population in and around a few large cities must be arrested. The war-time evacuation took place under unfavourable conditions, and many of the elements of the planning that was essential to full success were absent. It is the more important to see that the lessons to be learned are applied in preparing the basis of permanent schemes.

From the conflicting evidence, the Committee derives the impression that, of the reception areas,

fairly large towns of 40,000-100,000 inhabitants, with good cultural facilities, usually gave most satisfaction. Except for a few quite small staffs, evacuation to villages or to large houses in open countryside has been unpopular. It allayed unrest if at least one director or other highly placed official lived on the spot; and it helped immensely to be within easy reach of the home city, and to have facilities for occasional visits to it.

While it is now proved that dispersal is a practical possibility, given sufficient incentive, it seems clear that the majority of heads of organizations regard evacuation as a war-time expedient and intend to return as soon as the War ends. There is little doubt that the majority of the evacuated staffs, too, would vote for a return after the War to London or whichever other city they left. It is something, however, that a substantial minority of the workers should no longer yearn for the city; and this minority may be an important factor in the success of that planned dispersal which is so overwhelmingly desirable in the national interest.

The selection of the town for dispersal is only the first factor requiring consideration, and in this selection regard should be had not only to the town as it now is, but rather to its future possibilities. Closely related is the question of re-housing, and here the report suggests the formation of a housing association to avoid the objections to company houses and to municipal houses. Again, it is pointed out that there is a strong case for widening the powers of borough councils under the Housing Acts already in existence.

Scarcely less important is the question of educational provision. Here the report notes that while under the Education Act a considerable improvement in the unequal distribution of the main types of educational provision may be expected, there may be a difficult transition period during which the most prudent selection of reception towns will be necessary in order to relieve the apprehensions of many employees with regard to education—and to medical and health services also. Many towns of moderate size offer satisfactory provision to parents of moderate means; but the town needs to be selected with care, and the most important consideration at present is that the local authority should be progressive and generous. Similarly with regard to medical and health services, disadvantages compared with the great cities need not be serious so far as most of the minor ills are concerned, but the existence of a well-managed hospital, with a number of private beds at a reasonable cost, is a matter of great importance. Fairly easy access to a great city or university town where there are medical schools and special facilities is also important.

Provision for the use of leisure is of great importance also, though here it is clear there are certain misconceptions and misunderstandings to remove. Facilities for indoor recreation are usually much better and much dearer in great cities than in small and medium-sized towns. For outdoor recreation the reverse is generally true. Here the report, stressing the importance of good public libraries, urges the

\* Dispersal: an Inquiry into the Advantages and Feasibility of the Permanent Settlement Out of London and other Great Cities of Offices and Clerical and Administrative Staffs. Made by the National Council of Social Service. Pp. x+96. (London, New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1944.) 3s. 6d. net.

value of the greater opportunity for participation in communal and municipal life in the medium-sized town. This is regarded not merely as affording a way of self-expression and integration with the community; it is urged on employers that the scope provided in this way for young people to take an active part in the civic and social affairs of their neighbourhood will bring them experience which may enhance their qualifications as future managers and directors.

The relative advantages of provincial towns in this connexion, as compared with large cities, require further exploration before this argument can be used in favour of dispersal; but here, as elsewhere, the report indicates the factors which have to be taken into account and also some of the fallacies responsible for present preferences. This indeed is the main value of the report, which never suggests that the experience gained in the evacuation of the 200,000 or more employees with which it is directly concerned is all that is relevant. On the contrary, it points to other recent migrations, such as that into the Home Counties during the years 1927-39, the settlement of coal-miners in the new Kentish coal-field, the growth of new housing estates such as Becontree, and the settlement and development of Corby, which although not strictly parallel, represent experience from which, with due care, useful inferences can be drawn.

Assuming that dispersal is agreed upon as a policy, there are three phases to be distinguished: the first period of transition, possibly a year or more, when the actual transfer from the old to the new location is made; a second period, ending only when the generation of those transferred has passed; and the final settled period, when the staffs, or the overwhelming majority of them, had been recruited to serve in that locality. Only then will the considerable social stresses involved in dispersal disappear; and it is the existence of such inevitable social stress that gives enhanced importance to such questions as salaries and hours of work, and generous treatment in regard to removal expenses and housing, and prospects of promotion.

Finally, the report emphasizes the overwhelming case in the national interest for some measure of dispersal so far as London is concerned, and urges that the Government should assist by making it clear that it is in favour of such a policy and participating whole-heartedly in any general movement in respect of its own staffs. It should use its influence with large organizations to induce them to disperse. It should request local authorities to give all possible help in reception areas, and if local authorities need new powers to enable them to play their part adequately, as for example, in housing, the Government should see that the necessary legislation is introduced. Parliament may reasonably be asked to give financial assistance to local authorities to enable them to play their part.

As already indicated, it is as a stimulus to the further examination of the problems involved and for its welcome emphasis on the personnel factor that this report is most valuable. It never claims too

much, but it does demonstrate that dispersal is practicable, and that it could be made a success if those concerned will give the necessary attention to the all-important details of planning, and above all to what may be best described as digging the channels of assent. Government support is essential, not the least because the full implementation of its expressed intentions as to the development of education, medical and health services and social insurance are vital factors in promoting mobility, while its powers with regard to building and other priorities could also be used constructively to give positive assistance to a dispersal policy and programme. The integration of the individual citizen affected into a new community, giving him or her full satisfaction, will never be achieved by direction from the top alone; the difficulties of personnel so lucidly outlined in the second appendix to this report must also be handled with sympathetic insight, with wisdom, courage and vigour. The support and co-operation of the staffs concerned must be secured by putting before them clearly and convincingly the national and communal reasons which make dispersal to-day imperative.

## THE VAGABOND LIFE

### Gypsies of Britain

An Introduction to their History. By Brian Vesey-FitzGerald. Pp. xvi+204. (London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1944.) 15s. net.

READERS of *Nature* are probably familiar with Mr. Vesey-FitzGerald's name as a prominent naturalist and a distinguished chiropterist (he even shelters young bats inside his vest, feeding them with gentles held in his mouth). They may know further that he was for long the natural history editor, and is now editor, of *The Field*. But few know him as a writer of one brilliant story dealing with the episode of Sisera and Jael, and still fewer, until this year, knew that he is as much of a gipsy as anyone other than a pure Romany can be. Now he has given us a most interesting book on the gypsies of Britain. For the accuracy of this book I can vouch, because in the course of a medical experience of more than fifty years I, too, have studied gypsies and doctored all who came my way, in all sorts of conditions, from the heaths of West Cornwall to the open fairs of East London.

That the book is thorough no one opening its pages and looking at its table of contents could question. I have spoken of its accuracy. Its ultra-modesty is perhaps its only flaw. In his prefatory remarks, the author "acknowledges his indebtedness" to dozens of persons, not one quarter of whom could hold a candle as authorities to Mr. Vesey-FitzGerald himself. I am inclined to think that he has been rather taken in by fictitious pundits as to the nature of the Romany language, though he, himself, correctly uses and pronounces several words known to all true Romanies. I like him best when he talks really first-hand. He first read "Lavengro", that half-fictitious classic, when he was sixteen; but, he says, "I first knew a Gypsy when I was seven or thereabout. Then an itinerant harper came through the little country town where we lived. Father liked the harp and he liked characters too, and for several days the man came and played his harp outside our house. Father