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SOCIAL SCIENCES AND THE CIVIL SERVICE

THE future position of the Civil Service in Great Britain turns on two fundamental factors: first, the adequacy of the methods at present in use in the Civil Service for handling the new and wider range of problems with which it is called upon to deal in the discharge of a new and more positive conception of government, and what changes, if any, are required to enable it the better to discharge those functions; secondly, the capacity of its personnel to handle those problems constructively, imaginatively and efficiently, with its corollary, the consideration of methods of the recruitment, training and tradition of the Service. It is not, of course, possible to separate questions of methods and men in practice quite so sharply. The personnel of a Civil Service may be defective because of lack of inherent capacity, but the presence of competent or incompetent officers in the Service and their subsequent attainments are determined largely by the methods of recruitment and training employed, just as the tradition of the Service has a large influence on its attractiveness as a career for the ablest minds and finest characters in the community it serves. Equally, it is true that no perfection of administrative methods and machinery will ensure efficient functioning unless the Service attracts administrative ability as well as integrity.

No serious criticism of the Civil Service, however, can ignore the fact that the extension of Government activities has come to stay; the social service State, the implementation of a policy of full employment, calling for a more positive conception of government, will impose fresh demands on the whole machinery of government as well as on the men to whom the actual work of government is entrusted. Leaving on one side the question of machinery, we have to ask ourselves, first, whether we are getting into the service of the State a sufficiently representative sample of the highest ability available, and then, having recruited from all possible quarters the right material, whether we are making the most effective use of that material.

These are the questions with which in the main Dr. E. N. Gladden is concerned in his recent book*; but his contribution is disappointingly small. He recognizes that the War marks a great change in the social structure of our world and that to-morrow's needs will require a new Civil Service for their fulfilment. But while he asks the question whether our present administrative machine is flexible enough to meet these new needs, and contributes an admirably lucid account of the evolution of the national administration and of recent criticism of the Civil Service as well as of its development in Great Britain, his analysis scarcely seems to go deep enough. He says the right things about official integrity and detachment, the method of open competition, and the like without being platitudinous. His review of recruitment is eminently sound, with its pertinent reminder that while the interviewing methods adopted

* The Civil Service: Its Problems and Future. By E. N. Gladden. Pp. 164. (London: P. S. King and Staples, Ltd., 1945.) 10s. 6d. net.

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by the Civil Service Commission have been found satisfactory, it is doubtful whether the conditions of a short interview can have permitted a really high degree of objective accuracy to be attained.

Similarly, Dr. Gladden's review of training rightly emphasizes that normal methods of open competition pre-suppose a complete system of post-entry training; but while he admits that such training, especially that by encouragement, is largely absent, he gives little if any indication as to how this should be remedied. For a successful system, he points out, two changes would be essential: first, a new attitude by those in control; and, secondly, a Civil Service which would permit the advancement of the talented man more effectively than the present system. He criticizes the introduction of the training grade of the executive class as having too long a salary-scale and numbers too high in proportion to the higher grades of the class, and his discussion of promotion questions is likewise critical rather than constructive. It exposes the weaknesses in the assumptions upon which the use of a seniority list as the only basis of promotion rests, without indicating the measures which might be taken to increase the validity of those assumptions. Again, he points out that the qualities required for promotion, at least to supervisory posts, are not easily subjected to the examination process, and he recognizes the importance in a democracy of tapping the largest possible recruitment area.

Dr. Gladden's own proposals, to which the second part of the book is devoted, are designed to overcome some of these difficulties. The Civil Service organization must fulfil four requirements: it must be capable of meeting the functional aims for which it has been created; it must be synchronized at the recruitment stage with the school-leaving ages as prescribed by the different strata of the educational system; it must be able to meet the long-term changes postulated both by the alterations in the social environment and by the general development of administrative technique; and it must, while conforming to a centralized plan, be capable of meeting the various special demands of the separate departmental units. Briefly, Dr. Gladden proposes to secure this by constituting a new general clerical class to cover the present clerical-executive-departmental field, and by recruiting up to 50 per cent of the administrative class within the Service. The general clerical class would be divided into ten seniority or salary groups common to the whole Service, and for promotion purposes, group seniority would replace individual seniority. Recruitment from outside would be to the lowest three groups, the examination being cast on the present lines to obtain candidates from the primary plus stage, from the intermediate secondary stage and from the higher secondary stage. The scheme would provide for demotion, where necessary, for effective probation, and for transfers between Ministries to be arranged by a personnel organization board which would also control the staffing of new Ministries. A central training committee would be established and the study of public administration encouraged.

Without entering too deeply into the details of Dr. Gladden's proposals, and whether they are likely to secure all that he desires, it is clear that he recognizes the extent to which the chief problems of personnel organization reside in the management of the administrative rank and file, in the application of general rules to staff and in the selection therefrom of individuals for special tasks and positions. While his scheme may well ensure that the principles of objectivity in staff selection, both in recruitment and promotion, continue to be rigorously applied, it may be questioned whether they offer any real contribution towards the increase of flexibility of the Service where questions arise of taking into the sphere of government new institutions hitherto outside the State's orbit. Despite the wide range of his final chapter, with its clear recognition of the new and wider functions of government, of the necessity for new social incentives, the importance of individual efficiency and of the place both of expert and administrator in government—the only expert, he says pertinently, who bids fair to rule is the propagandist, without whose aid no dictator could rise to power, no government maintain its position, and no new programme gain the adherence of the crowd—Dr. Gladden is somewhat superficial. His conclusion that quite a modest measure of reform should suffice to fit the Civil Service to the superhuman tasks with which the nation's administration will be faced in the period of reconstruction is not altogether convincing.

Indeed, Dr. Gladden's book can be contrasted with a modest little study by Elizabeth Macadam*. Her brief review of the provision of training for the social services, to which Mr. S. W. Harris contributes a foreword, well illustrates the limitations of Dr. Gladden's book, although Miss Macadam is addressing herself specifically to a more limited problem, the importance of which was specially emphasized by Sir William Beveridge in his report on social insurance and allied services. The success of a social security policy will ultimately depend largely on efficient administration, and such administration in its turn depends not only on the efficiency of rank and file workers responsible for active work and personal contacts, but also on the quality of the numerically much smaller administrative staff responsible for direction and policy.

This aspect of the Civil Service has already attracted attention. It was ably discussed, for example, by Mrs. Joan S. Clarke in a chapter "The Staff Problem", contributed to the volume of essays entitled "Social Security" edited by Dr. W. A. Robson, and Mrs. Gertrude Williams has some pertinent observations in the final chapter of her study "The Price of Social Security". Mrs. Williams emphasizes the necessity of quantitative thinking by the administrator to supplement the principles of the use of powers conferred by law. For this, the Civil servant requires more knowledge of the workaday world, and the content of his mind as well as its quality is important. More and more it is required of the Civil Service administrator that he should be

* *The Social Servant in the Making*. By Elizabeth Macadam. Pp. 146. (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1945.) 6s.

not only more competent to deal with situations as they arise, but also that he should know how to create the situation by looking ahead and preparing for it. Well may Miss Macadam observe, of objections to proposals to recruit older men and women to the administrative class, that something must be wrong with the machine of government if a few years work outside Whitehall makes a man too old at thirty to acquire a knowledge of its technique.

Miss Macadam, recognizing that social services have now no hard and fast boundaries, strongly supports the plea originally advanced by Sir Ernest Barker that the higher administrative posts of the Civil Services should be opened to a maturer type of candidate than those who successfully pass a competitive examination at an early age. This, in her opinion, is an essential step towards a modernized and socialized Civil Service, and the Government's proposals already announced in the White Paper on recruitment during the reconstruction period are a move in this direction. Next, she considers the university as the appropriate centre for training, and holds that every university should have its school of social study, though not necessarily the same equipment or identical aims. Schools in great cities, for example, will tend to become centres of instruction and research on a large scale. Oxford has opportunities for the study of rural conditions from its centre at Barnett House, while Manchester, Glasgow and Leeds should become centres for training in industrial personnel and welfare.

All this, of course, would implement the provision and admission of economists, sociologists, psychologists and statisticians, which has been emphasized by Mrs. Joan Clarke as so important now that constructive long-term thinking and exercise of the newer mental disciplines have become a government function of the first importance. Again, if organized courses for junior Civil servants on the lines of the staff college idea are established, Miss Macadam suggests that they would be better held at universities than concentrated at a special institution. The modern university is not so segregated that courses of study for public service on the lines laid down in the British Association Committee's report would fail to attract many different types of candidates or to offer opportunities for very varied contacts.

Some of these suggestions of Miss Macadam clearly deserve closer consideration in planning the post-war development of the universities of Britain. The establishment by the universities of sub-centres of social study in areas out of reach of a university is more a matter for inter-university discussion than for independent action, as is also the specialized development of social study schools; while her reference to the need for a National Institute of Social Studies comparable with the Royal Institute of International Affairs points to a further problem in which co-operative planning will be required to avoid overlapping in research.

But there is a further reason for more deliberate planning and co-operation in this field. Unless the special fields of the social study schools of the universities are planned in co-operation in some such

way, there is danger that the individual schools will not receive a sufficient regular supply of students. Moreover, as Miss Macadam again points out, while the content of mind is important, quality is important also, and we shall not attract the best type of entrant unless we open up wider possibilities of promotion in the Civil Services for those who qualify in this way. More sources of financial help during training are also needed; but above all it is imperative to remove the deterrent of the relatively low salaries and limited opportunities of promotion at present available to those who enter the statutory social services. Nor should it be forgotten, as Miss Macadam reminds us, that this applies to the local government service also, where a socially trained administrative staff is equally important. Trained practitioners in the social sciences or in any other field of science may be ineffective if those under whom they serve have no conception of what social or scientific work means. There could be no more convincing demonstration of this than the difficulties which the proposals of the White Paper for a National Health Service have encountered through the well-founded distrust of the medical profession of local government administration. Had a sufficiency of administrators of the right outlook and training made their influence felt throughout that service, the whole reaction of the medical profession to the Government's scheme might have been fundamentally different.

Of the two books referred to above, Miss Macadam's appears to deal with the more fundamental issues in spite of its professedly narrower scope. She is more suggestive and her observations on the contribution of the university are a real contribution to the discussion of the place of the university in the modern world. Recognizing the grave danger of isolation in the teaching of particular aspects of social problems, especially those dealing with abnormalities and liable to fall completely out of focus when treated separately, she urges that university control provides a guarantee against the equally real danger of political or other forms of propaganda. The fact that social politics border so nearly on party politics is a strong reason why candidates for training should come under the influence of men and women who can be expected to preserve as impartial an attitude as possible. Both books draw freely on current reports and criticism of the Civil Service, though Miss Macadam's book might have been better documented, and Dr. Gladden's select bibliography unfortunately omits reference to the British Science Guild's report. While they make little fresh contribution to the discussion, they nevertheless disclose the fundamental principles which must be followed in moulding the Civil Service in Britain to meet the needs of the future. The type of personnel required is already becoming clear. The traditional integrity of the Service must be maintained, and its members, from the highest grade to the lowest, must approach their tasks in the knowledge that they are indeed servants of the community. In addition, they must be imbued with a spirit of endeavour, and able to recognize the needs of the swiftly changing character of the world in which we live.