

NATURE

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RESPONSIBILITY IN NATIONALIZED INDUSTRIES

ALTHOUGH, as Mr. Wilfred Roberts did well to remind the House of Commons in the debate on nationalized industries on March 3, the public corporation is no new feature of the social and political life of Great Britain, public concern about the efficiency and accountability of such bodies has steadily grown with the execution of the Government's programme of nationalization. The debate on March 3, which was concerned mainly with the extent to which ministers could be held responsible and questioned in Parliament concerning the activities of such bodies, followed up an earlier debate in the House of Lords on December 2 on the problems of nationalized industry. Both Mr. H. R. G. Greaves in his recent book "The Civil Service in the Changing State", and Sir John Anderson in his Romanes Lecture on "The Machinery of Government" have considered some of the fundamental problems involved in this newer type of government organisation, and there have already been published at least two critical full-length appreciations of British experience in this field—notably the study of "Public Enterprise" edited by Dr. W. A. Robson in 1937, and Mr. T. H. O'Brien's book "British Experiments in Public Ownership and Control" of the same year.

The essential problems were, in fact, well displayed fully ten years ago, but neither debate in Parliament suggests that anything like full use has been made of that experience in determining the structure of the industries already nationalized. The Lord President of the Council has on several occasions admitted the importance of proceeding cautiously and not committing ourselves to any one form or type of organisation that would hinder changes which experience might indicate as desirable. He emphasized this point particularly in an address read before the Institute of Public Administration last autumn, and, both in that address and in his reply in the House of Commons debate on March 3, he showed that he is fully aware of the importance of taking account, not merely of the questions of efficiency, accountability and responsibility, but also of ensuring enterprise and of solving the problems of economic and industrial democracy involved in the association of all classes of workers, scientific and technical as well as operatives, in the conduct of the undertaking.

None the less, Mr. Morrison rejected Capt. Crookshank's very moderate suggestion for either informal discussions between representative members of the House or for a Select Committee to investigate and report on the best way of dealing with the specific aspect of ministerial responsibility and the limits of Parliamentary questions. The distinction between administration and management was clearly grasped on all sides of the House, and it was evident that there was a general realization of the importance of the Parliamentary question, the dangers of such procedure if not used with restraint, and the vital importance of the fullest possible information being available for Parliament and the general public. Efficiency, as Mr. Bowles rightly said, would be

promoted only by Parliamentary vigilance and interest, and the essential problem is to secure the appropriate balance which will ensure the continual review of institutions and yet not hamper day-to-day management or repress initiative and enterprise.

One of the many dangers, as Mr. Molson observed is that nationalized industry may be unwilling to move with the times or to admit that mistakes have been made; and on this point he suggested that the annual reports to be presented to Parliament should be examined by a Select Committee analogous to the Public Accounts Committee and assisted by a special permanent staff. A somewhat similar suggestion for an efficiency audit was made by Mr. Diamond; but both these constructive suggestions were dismissed by Mr. Morrison without any alternative proposal being made.

Sir John Anderson's part in the debate was limited to the elaboration of one only of the principles he had emphasized in his Romanes Lecture and earlier, before the Institute of Public Administration, as essential in determining the constitution of the authority to which a particular public task is to be entrusted and the relation of that authority to Ministers and to Parliament. Parliament, he insisted, must have adequate opportunity for inquiry, debate and public judgment; but he addressed himself more particularly to the question of the extent of ministerial control and the limits within which a Minister could be questioned in Parliament. Sir John appeared to suggest that, without interfering in day-to-day matters, a Minister should be willing to deal with questions on matters which might not strictly fall within his responsibility where the supply of information was obviously in the public interest.

The importance of that point was scarcely brought out sufficiently in either House, and Sir John himself did not refer to his own earlier comment that, where an annual report was laid before Parliament under statutory requirement, the report should be debatable. That procedure would go far, if properly implemented, to provide the opportunity for constructive criticism both inside and outside Parliament, and to ensure that there was at least an attempt to secure that, under changing conditions, public corporations could be relied upon to act with vigour, to show initiative and enterprise and to accept such risks as are normally taken by private enterprise. If we must rely on the vigilance of Parliament and the alertness of public opinion to avoid inertness, inefficiency or undue public suspicion, adequate information must be available, and whatever other means are provided, the annual report appears to be one invaluable, if not indispensable, means.

Much experience has clearly to be gained before Parliament can be satisfied that a reliable technique has been evolved, and the recent debates indicated doubts on all sides as to whether we are not being asked to move too quickly. Moreover, as Lord Lindsay pointed out, there is already a large body of common knowledge which should be used to the full both in determining the structure of nationalized industry and in its operation, and it should not be forgotten how powerful an instrument for efficiency

local patriotism can be. Conversely, wise decentralization can make a vital contribution not merely to the efficiency of the nationalized industries but also to the health of local government; and doubts may well be entertained as to whether the present organisation, for example, under the Transport Commission, sufficiently meets such criticism or even those of administrative theory.

The two things that stand out most clearly are, first, the necessity for self-restraint in the attitude of Parliament to the public corporations, and secondly, the need for self-restraint on the part of the Government in extending the sphere of nationalized industry before sufficient evidence is acquired that those already nationalized are working sufficiently well to encourage further steps in that direction. The most imperative need is, in fact, that the question should be taken out of the arena of party politics and examined objectively on a scientific plane. The additional and independent scrutiny of the work of nationalized industries demands information beyond that available in published reports and accounts, and if a proper public judgment of their efficiency is to be possible the boards must come into the open. Lord Knollys, for example, suggested that the chairman and other appropriate officers should be required to appear each year before the Select Committee on Estimates and the Public Accounts Committee; but Mr. Diamond, in making his own proposal, gave as one reason the opinion that such scrutiny lies, at least in part, outside the terms of reference of these two Committees. Whatever method may be adopted, however, the boards should anticipate questions by a generous disclosure of information about their plans and activities. If Parliament is to be expected to act with restraint and confine questions to matters for which Ministers are genuinely responsible, information of other kinds must be readily accessible from the corporations. The corporations must not display the resentment which has sometimes been shown, for example, by the governing body of the British Broadcasting Corporation, as a result of requests for public information; and enough should be made known as a matter of course for their progress and difficulties to be assessed accurately and promptly by outside and impartial observers. The boards are public servants and have no need of the reticence of private business in matters of finance; but they are not Civil servants, and they have a right and a duty to answer public criticism as vigorously and as independently as it is made.

That there is room for clear thinking and impartial study of the whole question is obvious from the recent debates, and it is by no means certain that the Government yet appreciates how, until the appropriate structure has been determined, the change from private to public ownership may increase the difficulties of good technical and economic management. There can be no doubt that in time independent investigation, and possibly studies by the British Institute of Management and like bodies or by the universities, as Prof. K. C. Wheare has suggested, may throw much light on the appropriate means of

securing accountability and, equally important, public support and understanding of the work of such national boards.

What must be recognized is that, if we are, as the Lord President of the Council admitted, developing a field as yet comparatively unexplored, it is the scientific method that can be our best guide. There must be dispassionate and objective inquiry, self-restraint, and a rigorous refusal to let either sectional or private interest or party dogma interfere with the determination of the appropriate instruments by which to secure that the change from private to public ownership is marked by enterprise, initiative, and the rigorous service of efficiency and of the welfare of the nation. In particular, the question of accountability and of Parliamentary question and control must not be allowed to obscure those equally important issues, to which Dr. W. A. Robson has directed attention, namely, the necessity and extent of centralized control, the relation between size and efficiency in these nationalized undertakings and the means by which we are to measure the efficiency of a public service. Even in private enterprise, too narrow a conception of efficiency may be unsound; in public enterprise, to think of it in rigid financial, mechanical or even economic terms, may be disastrous. Yet when we leave these spheres and enter that of social accountability, we may well find ourselves without reliable criteria or yardsticks. The devising and application of such yardsticks is one of the outstanding challenges for the student of social and economic science.

Questions of staffing cannot be entirely divorced from these questions of public responsibility, general and social efficiency and independence of pressure from sectional or private interests. Staff possessing the requisite qualities of initiative and enterprise, integrity, judgment and administrative ability will only become available when the service of the corporations is manifestly seen to encourage their exercise and to afford them ample scope as well as commensurate rewards.

INDUCTION OF TUMOURS BY CHEMICAL COMPOUNDS

Radiophysiology expérimentale, cancer et hormones.

6: Etude de la cancérisation par les substances chimiques exogènes

Par Antoine Lacassagne. (Actualités scientifiques et industrielles, 1026.) Pp. 150. (Paris: Hermann et Cie., 1947.) n.p.

IN the preceding monograph in this series, Prof. A. Lacassagne discussed the chemistry of experimental carcinogenesis. The present work deals with the biological aspect of the subject. The pathology of chemical carcinogenesis, including the transport of carcinogenic substances in the body, the effect of carcinogens on cells, and the action of substances which modify the carcinogenic process, are discussed.

The outstanding known facts about the transport of carcinogenic substances are that they are changed chemically and excreted as derivatives in bile. The details of the chemical transformations which carcino-

gens undergo are still uncertain, and it is not known with certainty whether chemical change of the carcinogenic substances in the tissues is necessary for them to exert their carcinogenic action. If 1:2:5:6-dibenzanthracene or 3:4-benzpyrene is injected into animals, the greater part of the material is excreted rapidly; but a small fraction appears to remain at the site of injection for many months. The slow nature of the carcinogenic process would suggest that it is the small amount of fixed material which is the cause of the carcinogenesis. The observation of R. R. Bensley and N. C. Hoer (1934) that injected benzpyrene becomes concentrated in the mitochondria of cells is perhaps of importance in the process.

The specific changes which carcinogens are known to produce, apart from the induction of cancer and inhibition of growth, seem rather unimportant. More is known of the factors capable of modifying carcinogenesis. The process of carcinogenesis can be markedly affected by diet. Thus the carcinogenic action of tar or hydrocarbons on the skin is greater in animals maintained on diets with high fat content, and the effect of azo compounds in producing hepatomas is reduced by giving animals diets with high protein and vitamin B content. The carcinogenic action of hydrocarbons in subcutaneous tissue is influenced to some extent by the nature of the solvent used to introduce the carcinogen. These effects do not help much, as yet, in the understanding of the underlying changes of carcinogenesis. A vast amount of work carried out on the modifying action of physical agents on carcinogenesis is reviewed by Prof. Lacassagne, with the conclusion that it is difficult to say whether physical and chemical carcinogenic agents act synergistically, independently or in antagonism.

Prof. Lacassagne describes the growth-inhibitory action of carcinogenic substances discovered by Prof. A. Haddow, and discusses the antagonistic effect of weak carcinogenic compounds on potent carcinogens, which has been largely investigated in the Paris laboratories. In a typical experiment showing the antagonism, carried out by Prof. A. Lacassagne and his colleagues, one group of mice was treated with methylcholanthrene, a potent carcinogen, while a second group was similarly treated with a mixture of methylcholanthrene and a weak carcinogen, 1:2:5:6-dibenzfluorene. Tumours appeared later and life was prolonged in the second group, so that the weak carcinogen appeared to have an anticarcinogenic action, possibly by a blocking or competing mechanism. Even the growth-inhibiting action of 1:2:5:6-dibenzanthracene is reduced by addition of the feebly carcinogenic 1:2:5:6-dibenzacridine. This last result indicates the close correspondence which exists between growth inhibition and carcinogenesis. The action of carcinogenic hydrocarbons is neutralized by agents other than feeble carcinogens, including vesicants and substances which can combine with sulphhydryl groups of amino-acids.

Theoretical chemistry has given to students of carcinogenesis a unifying hypothesis, which appears to be possibly more satisfactory than experimental work alone had been able to supply. The development of the theory by O. Schmidt, N. Swarholm and the French workers, R. Daudel, A. Pullman and B. Pullman, is described. Calculations of the distribution of free electrons in many series of polycyclic compounds indicate that there is often particularly high density of electrons about certain bonds between carbon atoms. In the polycyclic carcinogenic com-