

BARNETT HOUSE PAPERS

No. 29

THE EXPERIENCE
OF A
UNIVERSITY TEACHER
IN THE
CIVIL SERVICE

BY

SIR OLIVER SHEWELL FRANKS

K.C.B., C.B.E.

Provost of the Queen's College

SIDNEY BALL LECTURE

May 9th, 1947

LONDON

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

GEOFFREY CUMBERLEGE

Price Two Shillings and Sixpence

BARNETT HOUSE, OXFORD

President of the Association:

PROFESSOR W. G. S. ADAMS

Vice-President:

PROFESSOR D. H. MACGREGOR.

Hon. Secretary:

MR. E. S. CARTWRIGHT.

Hon. Treasurer:

MISS G. THORNEYCROFT.

Auditor:

A. W. H. B. KING, F.L.A.A., 16 Beaumont Street, Oxford.

Bankers:

BARCLAYS BANK LTD., 92 High Street, Oxford.

COUNCIL:

PROF. W. G. S. ADAMS.

THE MASTER OF BALLIOL.

MISS C. V. BUTLER.

E. S. CARTWRIGHT.

PROFESSOR G. D. H. COLE.

G. D. A. MACDOUGALL.

R. C. K. ENSOR.

J. S. FULTON.

SIR HUBERT HENDERSON.

THE PRINCIPAL OF JESUS COLLEGE.

M. A. LOWER.

PROF. D. H. MACGREGOR.

THE WARDEN OF NUFFIELD COLLEGE.

DR. C. S. ORWIN.

A. L. PEACOCK.

HARRY PLOWMAN.

THE PRINCIPAL OF ST. EDMUND HALL.

SAM SMITH, J.P.

THE PRINCIPAL OF ST. ANNE'S SOCIETY.

MISS G. THORNEYCROFT.

THE WARDEN OF TOYNBEE HALL.

G. WALLIS.

PROF. K. C. WHEARE.

C. H. WILSON.

Librarian and General Secretary:

MRS. M. WAGNER.

THE EXPERIENCE OF A UNIVERSITY TEACHER IN THE CIVIL SERVICE

I WAS a temporary civil servant from September 1939 to June 1946. My experience of the Civil Service is therefore limited to the period of the war and its immediate aftermath. In this respect it is similar to that of many university teachers who became temporary civil servants during the war and afterwards returned to their universities. Some have stayed on in the Civil Service and are acquiring further experience of the Civil Service in peace. For the rest of us the limitation is important. Anyone who has read the admirable book by Mr. H. L. Dale on the Higher Civil Service and can contrast the picture drawn there with his own war-time experience recognizes how great the differences are. No doubt life and work in the Civil Service will not be the same after the war as they were before it, but these differences are bound to be less than those which mark off the period of the war if only for one reason, the relative absence of dilution. University teachers formed a tiny part of the host of temporary civil servants which Departments had to assimilate during the war. Absolute numbers and the proportion of temporary to permanent civil servants varied greatly from Department to Department according to the degree of expansion of responsibilities and work which the war brought. My own Department, the Ministry of Supply, may serve to illustrate the point as an extreme instance. At the time of its greatest expansion the staff of the Ministry of Supply numbered 414,504. Of these 346,008 were industrial employees. The non-industrial staff, that is, civil servants in the sense in which the term is commonly used, were 68,496. Of this great number only 5,090 were permanent civil servants: the rest, 63,406, were temporaries. They outnumbered their permanent colleagues by 12 to 1. The Ministry of Supply is, as I said, an extreme instance, but most Departments found that the war increased the quantity and pressure of work and were therefore compelled to increase their staffs by the recruitment of temporary civil servants. It is obvious that the irruption of considerable numbers of new staff without any knowledge of the Civil Service, its work, or its methods, but bringing with them experience, ideas, and techniques drawn from many walks of life, made the war-time Civil Service a special experience for permanent and temporary civil servants alike. It is unsafe to generalize at all freely from it to the normal life and work of the Civil Service.

My experience has another sort of limitation. During the whole of my service I occupied posts in the administrative grade at the

headquarters of the Ministry of Supply. I doubt whether the fact that I remained throughout in the same Department is a very serious disadvantage. The daily round of work involved meeting officials from most of the Whitehall Departments frequently and it was not difficult to gather the ways in which work differed in the different Departments or the types of work which in this or that Department acquired a volume and importance noticeably different from that which they had in the Ministry of Supply. Again, I do not think that continuous service in the administrative grade constituted a serious hindrance to the formation of general impressions. It is true that the great majority of the headquarters staff of the Ministry of Supply belonged to the executive and clerical grades. The headquarters staff was about 17,000 strong and I should not think there were more than about 200 administrative civil servants, taking permanent and temporary together. But in daily life we were all mixed up together and an administrative civil servant spent at least as much of his time with members of other grades as he did with his own. Three-quarters, however, of the staff of the Ministry were not at headquarters. There were 51,000 civil servants working in the outstations of the Ministry and overseas. Most of them were attached to research and development establishments, royal ordnance factories, the Inspection departments, or the establishments of the Raw Materials department. I was not able to visit these outstations of the Ministry as often as I should or should have liked but I saw enough of them to notice two things. First, there were great differences in the general conditions of life and work as well as in the job to be done at different outstations. It was one thing to be a scientist attached to a small research station hidden away in the remotest parts of the country and quite another to be a member of the office staff at a royal ordnance factory with a total employment of 25,000. Secondly, however great these differences, they were not greater than the general difference between life and work at headquarters and at outstations. I regret that my experience does not allow me to deal in any satisfactory way with the great volume of work which is carried out by civil servants outside the headquarters of the Department. Much of it is of great importance and vital to the execution of major policies of Government. I regret it the more because it is this work with which the general public comes in contact, not perhaps in the case of the Ministry of Supply, but through the regional and district offices of a number of other Departments. The experience of the general public at employment exchanges, food offices, post offices, when returning from abroad or when paying Income Tax, plays a very large part in forming current views of the Civil Service and of the good and bad points of civil servants. I am not sure that the

extent to which this is so is always sufficiently appreciated at the headquarters of Departments. Yet it largely conditions and colours the popular view of the Civil Service as a whole and therefore of Whitehall.

Many university teachers who became temporary civil servants had a different experience of the Civil Service from mine because direct use was made of their specialist knowledge. This applies generally to scientists, mathematicians, engineers, and lawyers from the universities, and, with a good deal of qualification, to economists. I suppose that the scientists formed easily the largest single group of university teachers in the Civil Service. For the most part they worked at government research and development establishments and were not often seen by those of us whose job was at headquarters. The description of their experience falls outside the range of my knowledge and I must content myself with recording my belief that the scientists who became temporary civil servants collectively made the most important and the most distinguished contribution of any group of university teachers in the wartime Civil Service. Sometimes their contribution took the form of pioneering in development where every step forward had immediate relevance to the conduct of operations at sea, on land, or in the air: this was the case, for instance, with the work of the Telecommunications Research Establishment of the Ministry of Aircraft Production which had a number of brilliant scientists from the universities on its staff. Sometimes the work was of a longer-term nature, less spectacular but not less important in its application to the general conduct of the war: this would hold, for instance, of the Establishment of the Chief Superintendent of Armament Research in the Ministry of Supply, where again there was a group of distinguished scientists from the universities. The case of the economists was rather different. A few occupied posts in the normal administrative hierarchy and therefore had experiences similar to my own. The majority, whether serving in the Departments or in the Economic Section attached to the offices of the Lord President, advised on the economic aspects of government policy. Their advice depended for its soundness on a clear understanding of economic principles but it could not be formulated solely through the continuation or application of academic studies: consideration was also required of non-economic factors of importance in the situations in which they were asked for advice. The experience of the majority of economists therefore differed from that of most university teachers in the arts faculties who became civil servants in that they were relieved from the pressures of the daily round of administration and were more able to concentrate their attention on matters of general policy.

This variety of experience among university teachers in the Civil Service and the limitations of my own knowledge have led me to conclude that the subject of the present lecture is not susceptible of generalized treatment. I propose, therefore, to offer some account of the impressions left in my mind by my own period of service and then say something about a reflection which I think has relevance to the post-war conditions of work in the Civil Service. I hope my impressions may not prove very different from those formed in the minds of other university teachers who served in the administrative grade. They are at least not influenced by preconceived ideas. When I entered the Civil Service in 1939 I walked into a Whitehall Department for the first time in my life.

The work of my Ministry fell into two main divisions, the production of war supplies and the provision of raw materials for the finishing industries. It was therefore organized in two great departments, the Production department and the Raw Materials department. Perhaps the deepest impression it made on me was of the part played by Government in the economic war effort, a part at once positive, constructive, and complex. It was illustrated and exemplified by the functions of both sides of the Ministry.

In the general direction of the war supreme directives issued from time to time from the Defence Committee or from the Cabinet itself. Because, as the war developed, man-power was the principal limiting factor of the war effort, it also became the main standard of measurement between competing claims and was used as the chief instrument for regulating and co-ordinating the different phases of the total effort. The first stage in giving effect to a supreme directive was a corresponding allocation of man-power between the main claimants, the armed forces, war supplies, and the essential needs of the civilian population. The second stage was to determine how the directive affected the roles of the several armed forces and consequently the duties of the Departments which supplied them. This led to a further act of allocation in which man-power was allocated between the Navy, Army, and Air Force and between the several Supply Departments. Within the Ministry of Supply yet another allocation of man-power was made between its two departments.

The tasks of the production side of the Ministry then took shape within the general plans. By reason of the origin of the Ministry of Supply the main responsibility of the Production department was to supply against War Office programmes of requirements which covered the entire range of munitions and warlike stores and a vast assortment of ancillary stores such as uniforms and medical supplies. It also acted as a supplier of certain common stores to all three Fighting Services, for example, small-arms ammunition,

wheeled vehicles, and machine tools; and as the general production authority for certain types of product the manufacture of which it was necessary to plan and control closely to ensure that all users, and, in particular, users for direct war purposes, received their appropriate share of what was made. The framing of production programmes which would give effect to the programmes of requirements received from the ordering Departments had to take account of other shortages besides the dominant shortage of man-power: many kinds of manufacturing capacity were short and also materials. The main production programmes had themselves to be broken down into more specialized programmes which became the responsibility of the production directorates composing the Production department. The directorates in turn, as they planned their production, competed with one another for man-power, materials, and capacity and made yet another stage of allocation necessary. Finally the different programmes were planned and phased and orders for the products required were placed with manufacturing firms or with the royal ordnance factories of the Ministry. Through these successive stages of planning and allocation the general purposes of Government were worked out in ever greater detail until the final co-ordinated plans could be put into effect and the desired results achieved. The whole process, whether carried on within or without the Ministry, expressed a continuous and deliberate effort to reconstruct the activities of the national economy in the balance thought best designed to win the war. It was a major essay in management.

The Raw Materials department of the Ministry had a different function. Its responsibility was to ensure a sufficient supply of raw materials for the war effort and essential civilian needs. The shortage of manpower was by no means the only shortage with which it had to contend. At times or in relation to particular commodities other shortages were equally or more important. A great part of the raw materials consumed in this country has to be imported and there were frequent shortages of materials at source or, when they were available, of shipping to carry them. After the entry of the United States into the war a planning and allocating body, the Combined Raw Materials Board, was set up in Washington to deal with the most important materials in short supply. The decisions of the Board, which reviewed the needs of the whole non-Axis world, provided a framework within which the Raw Materials department could acquire or arrange for the acquisition of raw materials to be imported into the United Kingdom. Shortage of shipping also caused the emergence of a planning and allocating body, the Shipping Committee, which weighed the competing demands of the Ministry of Food and the Raw Materials department

for the tonnage left over after operational needs had been satisfied, and made a periodic allocation of tonnage to the claimants. This again provided a framework within which the Raw Materials department could make plans and programmes. Many raw materials have to be processed before they can be used by finishing industries. In between the acquisition of raw materials and their distribution to users the Raw Materials department found itself compelled to control and often to plan the production of whole industries which were occupied in converting raw materials in the literal sense into the intermediate products which form the materials of the finishing trades. The iron and steel industry, a great part of the heavy chemicals industries, cotton and wool spinning and weaving, the tanning industry, illustrate the range of industries controlled by the department. It was here that labour shortage and the allocation of labour mattered. In the course of the war more general policies made it necessary heavily to reduce the labour forces of the cotton and wool industries: they also dictated increases of man-power in certain trades, for example drop forging and domestic iron-ore production.

Anyone looking at the general working of the Raw Materials department might be tempted to conclude that, though it moved within a framework of planning and allocation similar in broad outline to that of the Production department of the Ministry, its purposes were negative rather than positive, restrictive rather than constructive. As the war went on, the import programme of raw materials was heavily reduced. Of the many Orders issued by the department all, or almost all, were couched in negative terms, for instance, forbidding the acquisition or distribution of a commodity except under licence. Yet this would be a mistaken view. The essential activities of the department were not less positive and constructive than those of the Production department. Within the limitations imposed by the varying phases of the war, they were designed to carry out the general policies of Government in a particular field and ensure that the materials available were converted and used in the qualities and quantities best fitted to advance the total effort of the country. Such things as the cutting down of the import programme or the movement of labour from the wool industry to filling factories were incidental to this continuous and constructive purpose.

A second general impression was of the different sorts of expert knowledge needed for this type of work and of the way in which the organization of the Ministry reflected their complementary character. In essentials the position was the same in the Production department and the Raw Materials department, despite variations in nomenclature. On the production side the whole busi-

ness of planning and securing production was the responsibility of a series of specialized technical directorates, the production directorates of the Ministry. Each was under the charge of a Director-General who normally was a temporary civil servant on loan from an industrial firm. The work of these Directors-General was co-ordinated by the Controller-General of Munitions Production. On the Raw Materials side there was a Director-General of Controls and a series of Controllers, each in charge of an organization controlling the acquisition, conversion, and distribution of raw materials. These men were also almost all temporary civil servants drawn from industry or commerce.

Alongside these large executive organizations on each side of the Ministry was a much smaller organization divided into divisions and branches and run by administrative civil servants. On each side it was headed by a Second Secretary. The two Second Secretaries and the officials working under them had two main responsibilities. The first was to provide common services needed by the executive organizations. For example, there was a legal division which dealt *inter alia* with the acquisition of land and the requisition, lease, or purchase of buildings; there was a labour division which negotiated with the Ministry of Labour on labour supply and questions of deferment; there was a welfare division which was responsible with the help of experts for matters affecting hostels, canteens, the provision of labour managers and factory medical officers in the royal ordnance factories, and the general conduct of negotiations with trade unions. The second responsibility was the more important. It was to hold the Ministry together, make it act as a unified Department, and transmit, or, if need be, originate, its general policies. In the Raw Materials department, for instance, the formulation at regular intervals of the general import programme, agreement to the terms of bulk purchase of a commodity, price-fixing arrangements with a trade were responsibilities of administrative officials. On the production side the reception, acceptance, or rejection of major requirements, negotiations on allocation or priorities, and arrangements for the production of munitions overseas were dealt with on behalf of the Ministry by administrative officials.

On both sides of the Ministry therefore there was in effect a sort of diarchy between administrative and executive officials. It is easy to attach too much importance to the words 'administrative' and 'executive'. In any ordinary meaning of administration the duties of at least the senior executive officers of the Ministry were purely administrative. They carried heavy responsibilities for the management of the large-scale affairs of a very large organization. The difference between the administrative official and the executive

was really one of administrative function. Both functions were necessary to the efficient working of the Ministry and the adequate discharge of each required expert knowledge. The expert knowledge was in each case a knowledge of how to get things done. The executive official required technical knowledge in the broad sense: a knowledge of how to set about the production of certain types of manufactured product and of how to carry out the successive stages of production. Since this meant enlisting the ready co-operation of the managements of a large number of undertakings, it involved a fresh and lively appreciation of the preoccupations and problems of industry and the ability to win and keep the respect of the firms working on the Ministry's programmes. Or the technical knowledge might be of a different sort: in the case of the Controller of a Raw Materials Control it might be a knowledge of when, where, and how to buy a commodity, how to appraise its qualities and grades, how it was distributed, and what were its various uses. The administrative official on the other hand required an expert knowledge of the general organization and machinery of Government, of the responsibilities of the Department to Parliament, to Ministers and, in particular, to the Minister of the Department, and of the procedures by which decisions could be secured on matters affecting more than one Department.

From this difference of expert knowledge flowed the complementary functions of the parallel administrative and executive organizations. Both were essential to the survival of the Ministry and neither could be subordinated to the other. The administrative official was not in a position to tell the executive how to do his job or vice versa. I do not think an attempt was ever made to define the duties which flowed from each function. The relationship was left to evolve through experience and experiment. As the years of the war succeeded one another, both administrative and executive officials learnt a lot from each other and acquired familiarity with each other's problems. The precise points at which one left off and the other began varied a little from time to time largely as the outcome of the interplay of personalities and the distribution of pressure of work. This degree of flexibility was valuable and in my experience disputes about the position of boundary fences were rare and unimportant. The point, however, which I wish to emphasize is that Government could not have carried out its war-time policies without the accession of specialized strength derived from the many leaders of industry and commerce who became temporary civil servants. When the policies of Government entail, as they did for a Supply Department in the war, direct, continuous, and detailed intervention and control over large sections of the industry and commerce of the nation, administra-

tive civil servants alone cannot effectively carry out these policies. And I doubt whether a strong team of permanent administrative and executive officials would not experience grave difficulties since the executive officials in proportion to the length of their service would almost inevitably be to some extent out of living touch with the fluctuating conditions of industry and the changing attitudes and opinions of industrialists.

What was the daily life of an administrative civil servant in this Ministry like? My main impressions are these. It was extremely hard work. My day at the office began soon after 9 a.m. and ended well after 7 p.m. and as often as not there were two or three hours of work after dinner on papers taken home from the office. The length of the working day was fixed partly by general practice and the pressure of work and partly by the fact that everyone found by experience that over a period there was a limit to the hours of effective work in the office. I tended to reach my limit some time after 7 p.m.: after that I could notice the longer time and greater effort expended in making up my mind and a tendency to substitute reading or discussion for decision. The greater part of the day's business was transacted by word of mouth. A glance at the engagement book would show that for two or three days ahead most of the time between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. was booked for meetings of varying length. There would be a number of individual visitors at twenty-minute intervals or less, and a number of visits to be paid to other offices in the Ministry or to other Departments. There would be some larger meetings which might take an hour or two hours, including Departmental and Interdepartmental committees. All these meetings normally had one characteristic in common: somebody wanted something, a decision on policy or on action, and those attending the meeting were concerned with the decision. Most meetings, whether of two individuals or of a group, were severely, even bluntly, practical in character and involved consequent action to give effect to the decisions made. Many of the decisions were difficult to take and a succession of meetings in which one was either pleading a case or judging the case made, often in circumstances of real urgency and importance, was an exhausting process. In addition, in one's own office the telephone rang incessantly between 10 and 6 o'clock, interrupting every meeting, and a succession of callers without appointments appeared, a proportion of whom on score of importance or the urgency of their business could neither be sent away nor deferred. There was a constant stream of correspondence to be answered and of files to be read or minuted. The only time for this was before 10 or after 6 when the telephone rang less often and meetings were infrequent. Any lengthy piece of work which required uninterrupted attention,

a considered letter or minute or a decision on a difficult case with a long history, had to be put in the bag and taken home. Such a way of living and working was reasonable in the war but, if continued in peace, it would be to the disadvantage of the Civil Service. If so much time and energy were continuously given to public business there would be little left over for the rest of life. There would be hardly any leisure for general reading or general conversation, for keeping informed about current affairs or pursuing a hobby. There would be little opportunity for recreation, or for meeting men and women with interests different from those encountered in the course of public business. The life of the administrative civil servant would be narrowed and his judgement on the broader aspects of his work made less sound.

If my work was hard, it was also very varied. I do not mean that at intervals I was posted to different work, though this happened. I mean rather that in any of the posts I occupied the day's work was full of variety and therefore most interesting. For example, when I was in the labour division a day's work might easily include the following meetings, apart from the contents of the post-bag, teleprinter messages from the regional offices of the Ministry, and telephone calls. Meetings with two Directors-General or members of the staff of their directorates about shortages of skilled labour which were cutting down production in their contractors' works. A meeting with the Raw Materials department about the extent to which a shortage of unskilled labour in the fertilizer industry was the main cause in delaying programmes of delivery agreed with the Ministry of Agriculture. A summons to see the Minister to explain the nature of a dispute which was holding up vital production at a particular factory. A meeting of the Labour Co-ordinating Committee at the Ministry of Labour where all the Departments that were direct employers of labour or were claimants on the Ministry of Labour for supplies of labour met together with that Ministry to consider issues of general policy. Meetings at the Ministry of Labour with particular officials of that Ministry to explain the needs of the Director-General of Filling Factories for female labour at one of his factories and the needs of the drop forging industry for a rapid increase in recruitment if their production was not to fall short, at the same time making clear to the Ministry of Labour what priority within its own demands the Ministry of Supply would assign to each of these claims. A visit from a trade-union official to raise a point about wage-rates for certain workers in the royal ordnance factories. This would not have been an abnormal day and the list takes no account of informal consultations of short duration. Over a relatively short period in the labour division one gained a perspective view of most of the operations

of the Ministry and met a very large number of people of various types, both within the Ministry and outside. My experience was not different when I was moved to the Raw Materials department and I think it was the common experience of most administrative civil servants in the Ministry.

Most of my time was spent in talking or listening rather than writing whereas in advance of experience I should have guessed it would be the other way about. It was, however, necessary to write for three purposes. The first was communication at a distance. A striking example was the interchange of hundreds of cables a week between the Raw Materials department and the British Raw Materials Mission in Washington. It was not easy to write a good cable which combined economy of words with a clear exposition of the policy or action desired, and the reasons for it, so that the recipient felt adequately briefed when talking to the American Departments and Agencies. The second was to record, and this for two reasons. It is common sense in business to record agreements made, offers received, and transactions done; also the action agreed at meetings and who will be responsible for seeing that it happens. But the business of Government Departments is scrutinized by Parliament in a different way from that in which the share-holders or the public judge the operations of an industrial or commercial firm. In the latter case the net financial outcome of all the operations of the undertaking over a period is judged. Parliament may scrutinize any single operation conducted by a Government Department and it often does so at a considerable remove in time from the occurrence. Detailed records are necessary to meet the requirements of parliamentary control. Lastly, writing was used to clarify thought on any matter of importance where a situation had to be analysed and proposals for action put forward in the light of the analysis. The contents of official files would be found to fall almost wholly into these three categories.

I was impressed by the closeness of the link between policy and execution. One sometimes hears it said that administrative civil servants are concerned with policy but leave its execution to others. At best this is a dangerous half-truth. I should think that nearly all the meetings I attended which could be judged unsuccessful were unsuccessful, apart from failure by the chairman to keep the meeting to its business, for one of two reasons. The meeting might be fairly clear about what it thought should be done but gave insufficient attention to how it was going to be done and who could do it, or, escaping this error, made another and failed explicitly to allocate responsibility for initiating action among those present at the meeting. In either case the purpose of the meeting was frustrated: nothing happened. In the first case what was decided

could not be executed because the possibilities and limitations of the situation in which the action would have to take place had not been assessed. In the second, provision was not made for the vital step by which policy passes over into execution. Every administrative official in the war-time Ministry of Supply, if he was to pull his weight in the management of the affairs of the Ministry, had to take some executive responsibility for the policies he devised or received from his superiors. Once he was clear about what in general was desirable he would normally go on to find out, through inquiry, consultations, and meetings with experts, what was practicable in the circumstances, establishing the main heads of a workable scheme and identifying the agents, whether members of the Civil Service or of the public, who must carry out the several parts of the scheme. He would then call a meeting of all these people and go through the plans, explaining the policy and the steps worked out to realize it, to make sure that each main agent knew his part and its general context and was convinced that his part and the whole scheme was practicable. Having thus established agreement based on understanding, he would give the word to start operations, satisfied at least that action would not be held up by failures of will or intelligence. Even so, he would arrange for progress reports so that difficulties or delays could be ascertained and dealt with before they grew to proportions which would wreck the scheme or its timing and relevance to wider plans. The administrative civil servant therefore needed, to make a success of his job, much more than analytic power and the ability to make proposals based on an analysis of the situation. He had to take a line, expound it, persuade, and convince. He had to have a keen sense of what was practicable and of timing. He had to have the strength of will to take responsibility and not lay it down until finally policies and plans had been translated into facts. The point may perhaps be put in other words by saying that when, as in the war, Government has positive and constructive policies in the sphere of economic affairs, an administrative civil servant in a Department dealing with economic affairs has managerial responsibilities which reach over beyond policy into execution.

Within the administrative hierarchy the point which impressed me most was the reality and extent of delegation. The extent was no doubt in part due to the at times almost overwhelming pressure of work. But I do not think this was the main factor. The main factor seemed to me to be the tradition and accepted methods of the Administrative Civil Service. There was a general disposition to leave one alone to get on with the job. The presupposition seemed to be that one was competent to do the work and would know when something too important, too awkward, or too ramifying to

be settled at one's own level turned up. Very few rules were laid down in advance which limited the authority or freedom of action of the junior grades. And if senior officials were quick to help when asked, they were slow to intervene, unasked. As a result Principals and Assistant Principals had considerable responsibility and frequently negotiated on behalf of the Department. This practice seemed to me in marked contrast to that of most business firms. There delegation of matters of importance was unusual. In most cases the number of members of a business who could say 'Yes' or 'No' on behalf of the business to a Government Department seemed very small indeed, often not more than two or three in a large industrial concern. In my experience the habit of senior officials was to push work and responsibility away and down whenever they could. It had the effect of making their juniors feel that they had a real job to do and, therefore, that their work was important and interesting.

Two things struck me about the relation of a Minister to his Department. They are at first sight a little incongruous. The first was how limited in number, in a large Department like the Ministry of Supply, were the topics on which a Minister could keep himself regularly informed and take the important decisions. It was not a question of energy or will. All the Ministers under whom I served worked long hours and worked hard. It was the result of the sheer volume of business and the extreme variety of the matters it concerned. In consequence while the Minister was responsible for all that was done, most things were done without his knowledge. Secondly the effect of a change of Minister on headquarters was considerable. It went beyond the circle of those who advised the Minister. The two phenomena are connected. No man's tastes and methods of work are identical with another's. Precisely because the Minister knew of and decided relatively few of the matters for which he was responsible, it was important that the officials who made decisions on his behalf should know his mind and conduct their business in that knowledge. The speed with which the wishes and views of an incoming Minister became known reflects the desire of the good official to construct the necessary concept of the Minister's mind on his business.

Even in war, when the executive was so strong, the reality of parliamentary control was an impressive fact. It was exercised through visits and letters from members of Parliament, parliamentary questions, and the investigations of the Select Committee on National Expenditure and of the Public Accounts Committee. No matter what the state of the war or the urgency of business the drafting of replies to letters or parliamentary questions or of memoranda at the request of one or other committee was given a

considerable degree of priority. High standards of thoroughness and accuracy were observed and a considerable amount of the time of many officials was diverted from their ordinary work. The influence of these manifestations of parliamentary control went far beyond the particular subjects on which inquiries or investigations were made. It amounted to a continuous element of discipline in the minds of officials. The knowledge that any transaction might become the subject of parliamentary scrutiny gradually sank into the minds of temporary civil servants until it became as habitual to them as to their permanent colleagues. It made necessary the keeping of records of what was done in detail otherwise unnecessary. But more importantly it made an official in the moment of decision almost automatically ask himself how he would justify it to Parliament if called upon directly or through his superiors. The salutary effects of this discipline are obvious. There may also be disadvantages. In a Department like the war-time Ministry of Supply engaged, in the pursuit of general policies, on innumerable transactions which involve the expenditure of public money, opportunities must be grasped and reasonable risks run, if the best results are to be achieved. If so, over a series of operations, successful in total result, there will almost inevitably be one or two failures. The discipline of parliamentary control exercises a constant pressure not to grasp opportunities which entail risks because the particular operation might not turn out well and become individually subjected to parliamentary scrutiny. It may breed over-caution, except in resolute minds. It tends to exalt inaction over action.

In conclusion I wish to say something about a reflection which has arisen in my mind as a result of this experience, particularly that part of it which belongs to the months after the end of the war. During the war Government assumed, and was expected by the public to assume, very wide responsibilities for managing and directing the affairs of the nation. My experience of this was mainly in relation to economic activities. In this sphere it seems likely that Government in peace-time will continue to assume responsibilities which, though much less than in war and carried out to a large extent by different methods, will be much greater than those previously assumed in peace. It appears to be taken for granted at the present time that the problems of the balance of payments on foreign account and the difficulties they engender are an active responsibility of Government. So is the maintenance of a high level of employment, not only nationally but in particular regions and even in individual towns and districts. The same is true of the redistribution of incomes. The annual budget has become a most powerful weapon of economic policy if only because

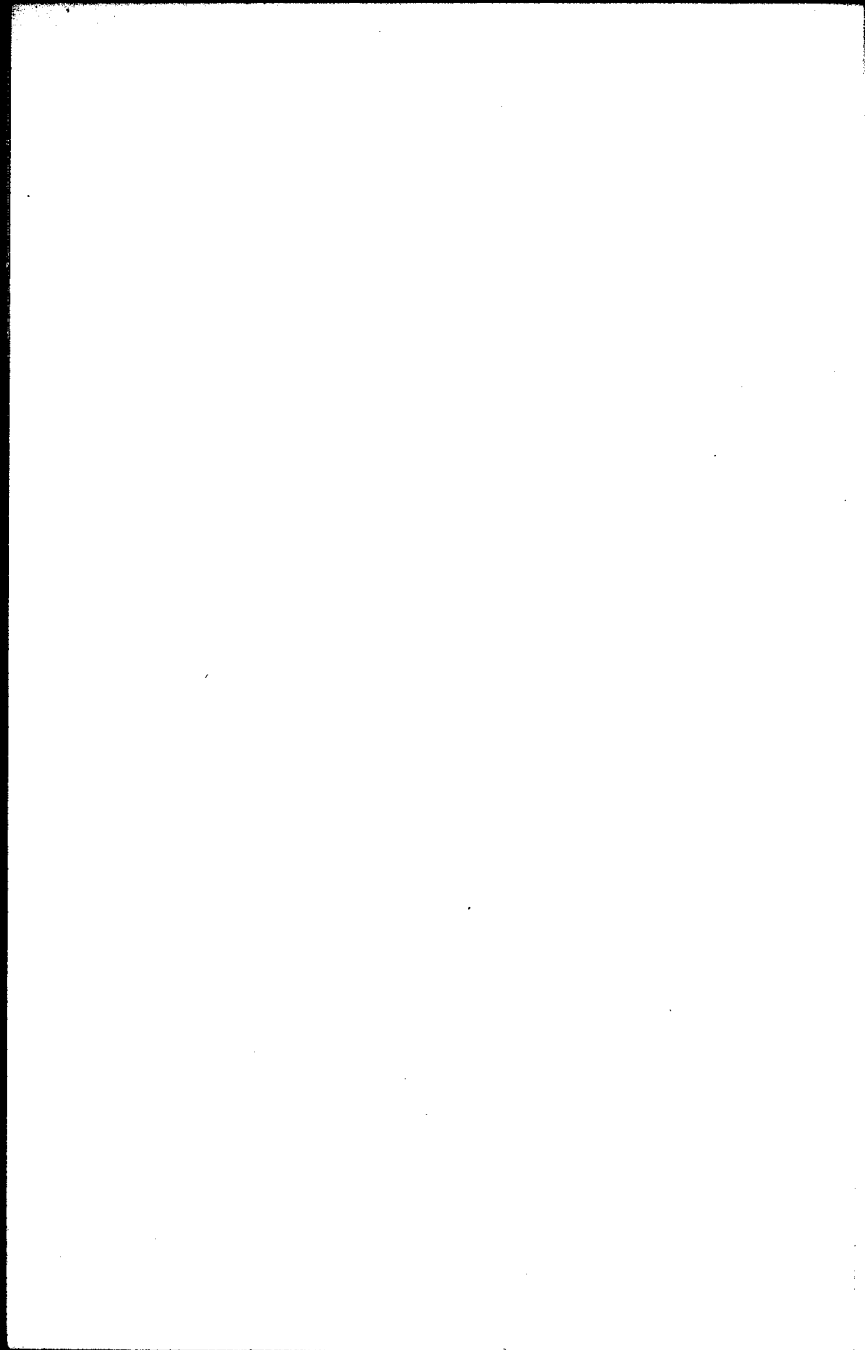
it settles the ways in which so large a proportion of the national income shall be applied. The assumption of these responsibilities, as compared with before the war, is not in itself new, but their extent and depth represent a major change in the attitude of Government and of the public. Government expects and is expected to formulate policies, initiate action, and see that it is carried out on a much wider and more intensive scale. This trend, combined with the radical alteration of the economic situation of the country caused by the war, makes additional demands on the capacity of administrative civil servants in departments concerned with economic affairs.

One of the great traditions of the Administrative Civil Service is that though every official is a man under authority and acts with authority he uses the methods of authority only as a last resort in the conduct of business. He relies instead on the methods of reason to secure the co-operation he needs from his fellow officials or from members of the public. Rational exposition and discussion, persuasion through explanation of policy and the grounds for it, are his chosen weapons. He regards it as a failure or at least a misfortune when it is necessary to compel. This living tradition in the Public Service is based on the belief that the human reason is competent to deal with public affairs. It is a part of our democratic heritage and a main pillar of the working structure of democracy in this country to-day. It was most noticeable during the war. The permanent officials who were our mentors showed no lust for power. They were prone, if anything, to put off issuing an Order under the Defence Regulations almost beyond the moment when circumstances rendered it obviously necessary. They never, despite what is sometimes suggested, looked for occasions to compel. The fact that Government was involved in a great effort of positive management and direction multiplied their duties and the need to explain what was to be done to those who had to help to do it. But in war there were certain alleviations. In the first place the country was united behind the Government's policy. There was no doubt about what the main policy was nor any disagreement. This enormously simplified the difficulties of explaining and commending particular plans to those of the public concerned. Secondly, the inevitable precautions about secrecy meant that many things could not be explained and had to be taken on trust. This was generally understood and accepted. And thirdly, a great part of the relations of Government Departments like the Ministry of Supply to the world outside were taken over by the temporary civil servants from industry and commerce who served as Directors-General or Controllers or as members of the staff of Controls or Production Directorates. They acted for the Ministry

in much of the business which arose with firms under contract to the Ministry or with industries and trades under its control.

In the months after the end of the war the importance of these alleviations was emphasized as they disappeared. The unity of the nation on matters of main policy dissolved. The temporary civil servants from industry and commerce began to return in increasing numbers to their normal work. War-time rules on secrecy were relaxed. Yet, apart from the termination of war contracts, the relations with industry and commerce of the Government Departments dealing with economic affairs remained continuous, varied, and important. The responsibilities assumed by Government led inevitably to this result. Civil Servants had continually to meet and negotiate with representatives of industry and commerce in order to enlist their co-operation in carrying out the general plans of Government. It is perhaps only since leaving the Civil Service that I have appreciated how extensive and detailed a knowledge of Government policy forms the background against which the administrative civil servant sees any particular project or plan. This background is almost automatically acquired from daily contacts and the Government papers and digests that are circulated. The average intelligent member of the public is in a very different position. It is true that a great many facts and figures relevant to the policies of Government are available in official publications. But it takes a deliberate effort to secure copies of these publications, and, when secured, a further deliberate effort to understand them. What comes naturally to the civil servant takes time and a good deal of trouble on the part of the public. The result is a considerable difference in background when it comes to the discussion of the ways in which a particular aspect of government policy may be carried out. If the civil servant is successful to use the methods of reason he must use his imagination as well. His explanations must make explicit and communicable what is implicit in his thoughts and he must gauge the extent to which he must carry the description of background if he is to secure intelligent agreement. He must be able to put himself into his hearer's position and not take for granted what otherwise he would take for granted himself. Rational persuasion depends on this process. It is an art and a difficult art, to the mastery of which civil servants are committed by their traditions and the tendency of Government to intervene positively and extensively in economic affairs. I venture to think that a good deal turns on the point. Unless the abstract and often quantitatively expressed generalities in which Government economic policy is contained can be effectively interpreted and communicated to those who have to help if the policy is to be carried out, then the methods of reason may break down.

Clearly the chief responsibility must rest with Ministers: they must put their policies over to the public. But a responsibility rests on civil servants in their many dealings with members of the public: it must often depend on how they expound the policy behind a particular proposal to a member of the public whether he goes away conscious of what 'They' have ordained rather than of what 'We' are committed to carry through.



BARNETT HOUSE PAPERS

Already Published

- No. 2. 'Development of the Education of Wage-Earners.' By SPURLEY HEY, Director of Education, Manchester.
- No. 5. 'The Industrial Section of the League of Nations.' By the Right Hon. G. N. BARNES, P.C., M.P.
- No. 6. 'Oxford and the Rural Problem.' By the Right Hon. Sir HORACE PLUNKETT, P.C., F.R.S.
- No. 9. 'Natural Instinct the Basis of Social Institutions.' By Lord HUGH CECIL.
- No. 10. 'The Statistical Verification of Social and Economic Theory.' By Sir JOSIAH STAMP, G.B.E., D.Sc., F.B.A.
- No. 11. 'The English Poor Law: Will it Endure?' By Mrs. SIDNEY WEBB.
- No. 12. 'The Functions of Economic Analysis.' By Prof. A. C. PIGOU, M.A., F.B.A.
- No. 13. 'The Past and Present of Unemployment Insurance.' By Sir WILLIAM BEVERIDGE, K.C.B. Price Two Shillings.
- No. 14. 'Foreign Policy.' By Lord D'ABERNON.
- No. 15. 'Balance of Trade Delusions.' By EDWIN CANNAN. Price One Shilling and Sixpence.
- No. 16. 'The Machinery of Government.' By the Right Hon. VISCOUNT CECIL OF CHELWOOD, K.C., D.C.L., LL.D. Price One Shilling and Sixpence.
- No. 17. 'Juvenile Employment and Education.' By R. H. TAWNEY. Price One Shilling and Sixpence.
- No. 18. 'Man: The Master or the Slave of Material Things?' By the Right Hon. HERBERT MORRISON, J.P., L.C.C.
- No. 19. 'The New Aspects of Industrial Combination.' By Professor Dr. HERMANN LEVY.
- No. 20. 'The Borderland between Public and Voluntary Action in the Social Services.' By Sir HUBERT LLEWELLYN SMITH, G.C.B.
- No. 21. 'Treatment of Crime.' By Sir ALEXANDER MAXWELL, K.B.E., C.B.
- No. 22. 'The Average and the Individual.' By ARTHUR L. BOWLEY, C.B.E., Sc.D., F.B.A.
- No. 27. 'The British Commonwealth and World Order.' By Sir WALTER LAYTON. Price Sixpence.
- No. 28. 'War and Unemployment.' By Sir HENRY CLAY, M.A. Price Two Shillings.

Nos. 1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 23, 24, 25, and 26 are out of print.

Price One Shilling except where otherwise stated.

BARNETT HOUSE OXFORD

BARNETT HOUSE, established in Oxford as a memorial to the late Canon Barnett and incorporated as an Association on March 17, 1916, has three main objects in view:

1. To advance the systematic study of social and economic questions. A reference library of modern social and economic literature is open to all those interested in the study of such subjects; public lectures and conferences are arranged and papers are issued from time to time on subjects of social inquiry.

2. To advise and train men and women who wish to take up social work, either under the State or in Settlements or other Voluntary Organizations.

3. In close co-operation with the W.E.A., the University Tutorial Classes, and other bodies interested, to assist in promoting Adult Education, especially in relation to the problems of citizenship.

The Association of Barnett House is open to all who are interested in social and economic questions. Associates will have all the privileges of the House and of its membership; they will receive the assistance which can be given by a bureau of information which endeavours not only to give access to published materials but to bring into touch persons engaged on similar work; and they will obtain the publications of the House.

Minimum Subscription for Ordinary Associates, £1 per annum; Minimum Subscription for Life Associates, £5 per annum for five years, or a single donation of £25.