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THE PERSONNEL AND PROBLEMS OF THE HIGHER CIVIL SERVICE

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THE PERSONNEL AND PROBLEMS OF THE HIGHER CIVIL SERVICE

THE Higher Civil Service is not an entity legally or officially recognized, clearly defined, and sharply distinguished from other related entities; the phrase conveys a meaning, but rather vaguely. I must therefore inflict on you a little of those tedious processes, definition, enumeration, and exclusion, to make it clear about whom and what I am speaking. The Higher Civil Service, as I use the phrase, means the relatively few officials, usually at or near the summit of their Departments, who are in a position to exercise a real and direct influence upon government policy in important matters: a rough criterion of a place in this *élite* is personal contact, sometimes infrequent, sometimes daily and almost hourly, with the Parliamentary chiefs of the Department. For the purpose of this lecture I exclude two important groups of high officials: the legal and other specialists, because so far as I know no great question arises on their personnel, its character, recruitment, and so forth; and the Foreign Office, because in history, tradition, and the nature of its work it differs widely from other Departments. This difference has recently been confirmed by Mr. Eden's announcement that the new 'Foreign Service', which includes the Foreign Office, will be entirely separated from the Home Civil Service, and will be treated as a self-contained and distinct service of the Crown.

Before the war the Higher Civil Service, as I have defined and limited it, numbered about 480—slightly more than one-third of the Administrative Class, but a tiny proportion, less than one-half of 1 per cent. of the whole Service, even if we exclude more than 300,000 civil servants engaged in industrial and manipulative work and in ancillary occupations as messengers, porters, and charwomen. Of this small number about 80, or one-sixth, appeared in what may be called the 'department Cabinets' of Ministers. At the head of this *élite* of an *élite* were some 25 potentates—the chiefs of the great Departments, the Second Secretary to the Treasury, and four or five other high officials, such as the Secretary to the Cabinet. More than two-thirds of these dignitaries had entered the Service by the ordinary examination for the Administrative Class. Although quite the same proportion may not have held for the lower ranks, nevertheless it is certain that before the war the Higher Civil Service was predominantly composed—predominantly both in number and in the tenure of the highest offices—of men who entered the Service from the

University about the age of twenty-three by way of the Administrative Class examination; and it is probable that after the war that predominance will continue, at least for a period as long as most of us need contemplate. Broadly speaking, it is men of this category who govern the Service and set its tone; when we generalize about the Service, either in praise or blame, it is to them that the praise or blame is primarily addressed.

Neither before nor during the war has the Civil Service had on the whole a good press and a good public, although a few voices have been raised to defend it. In time of peace, this is a quite ordinary phenomenon. Aunt Sallies are a necessary part of the equipment of British democracy, and the Civil Service is one obvious candidate for that office. As a writer in a popular newspaper recently observed, with admirable candour, 'It is one of the major British pastimes to throw brickbats at the settled population of Whitehall. I have indulged in it frequently myself, and I propose to continue to do so. I am not going to give up one of the few unrationed pleasures left to me.' In time of war, again, the vast and rapid changes suffered by the life of the whole community naturally include, when things go badly, the minor metamorphosis of Aunt Sally into scapegoat. The Civil Service recognizes the position, and accepts with calm the useful, if lowly, functions it is called on to discharge. I propose to consider the past and the present mainly with reference to the future: I shall therefore offer only one remark on the justice of assigning to the permanent Civil Service the war-time office of scapegoat, and drawing general inferences accordingly. From such figures as have been published, it appears a fair conjecture that at this moment the persons employed in Government Departments, excluding industrial employees and the Post Office, are two-thirds of them 'temporaries', taken in just before or since the war began. This war-time scapegoat is a composite animal, of which only one-third is permanent official.

I have indicated that I propose to consider principally the future. In normal times it is a reasonable assumption that the work of government and administration in this country, and consequently the qualities demanded of the Higher Civil Service, will only alter gradually: it would have been quite proper, if there had been no war, to take the conditions of 1939 as the basis on which to examine the question where the Higher Civil Service, not being inhumanly perfect, falls short of complete adequacy to its work, and what remedies are possible. But there *is* a war, and after it there may be changes in British methods of government and administration. The qualities required of the high permanent official after the war manifestly depend on what he is asked to do,

and the conditions in which he is asked to do it. Some assumptions concerning the future are therefore necessary; and though all that can safely be expected of it is that it will contain a large element of the unexpected, I offer the following hypotheses (emphatically *not* predictions) for (say) the twenty years after the war. You will perceive that in general they anticipate a reversion to the pre-war system of politics and government. If on that account they seem conservative, prosaic, and uninspiring, I can only shelter myself behind Bishop Butler's tautology 'Things and actions are what they are, and the consequences of them will be what they will be; why then should we desire to be deceived?'

First, there will be no violent political revolution here: the British electorate and the House of Commons will remain the supreme authorities.

Second, the House of Commons will reassert its supreme and jealous control of government and administration.

Third, the party system will reappear in politics, and soon.

Fourth, the British electorate will retain among its fundamental sentiments a strong feeling for personal liberty. One short extract from Miss Dorothy Sayers's admirable lecture on *The Mysterious English* will explain what I mean by this phrase in this context: 'To understand the point at which the English patience breaks we have only, I think, to remind ourselves what is the phrase most often heard in the English home. And that is "Leave it alone!" "Tommy, leave the cat alone!" "Leave your little sister alone, can't you?" "Oh leave the boy alone, he'll grow out of it." "Leave the young people alone to fight their own battles." And then "Curse these Government Departments, why can't they leave us alone?" '

If these four hypotheses are approximately correct, what changes are probable after the war, as compared with 1937 or 1938, in the nature of the work falling on the Higher Civil Service, and in the conditions under which it has to be done? I answer, 'No striking change of nature or conditions; some, perhaps a large, increase of volume, especially on the executive side as distinct from the political—political being here the adjective of policy, not politics.' Time does not permit me to explain and defend this answer in detail, as I should wish: but before I pass on I may offer two remarks on this possibility of large additions to the executive functions of the Civil Service as such.

First, I myself feel some doubt whether these additions will be so great as is sometimes prophesied: is it not likely that for many of them a now popular and well-known device of British Government will be adopted—the statutory corporation, such as the B.B.C. and the London Passenger Transport Board, of which

the members are nominated by the Government and carry out a policy prescribed to them, but which enjoys a high degree of autonomy, and in particular appoints, pays, and controls its own staff? In that case the staff will not be even nominally civil servants. Secondly, while I myself support the use of the device, at the same time I think one of the principal arguments sometimes urged in its favour is without foundation. The permanent Civil Service is often attacked as an inert bureaucracy, incapable of conducting a great business, ignorant of modern developments in 'the technique of administration', and the rest of it. I am unable to understand how such accusations can be thrown about, with one great fact staring everybody in the face—the Post Office. Here is a vast business, one of the largest employers in the country, normally staffed by permanent civil servants from top to bottom except for two Parliamentary chiefs; it touches every one of us; we all deal with it in some way or another on most days of our lives, and many of us every day. Of course mistakes are made; it is staffed by human beings. But nevertheless anyone who considers the enormous volume and variety of the work of the Post Office, and the smoothness, speed, and precision with which ninety-nine-hundredths of it is performed, will require much more than general and *a priori* assertion to convince him that permanent civil servants are and will be unable to operate a great business to the satisfaction of the community they serve.

But the really important work of most high permanent officials is not executive: it is political, in a wide sense of the word. It is conditioned ultimately by the existence and character of the House of Commons. I have postulated that after the war the House will reassert its supreme and jealous control, and that the party system will revive. If we are to understand the Higher Civil Service, its work, and the qualities it requires and creates, it is essential to grasp the consequences proceeding directly from those postulates.

Let us suppose that the Chairman of a great commercial or industrial undertaking, e.g. the L.M.S. Railway or I.C.I., were suddenly told: 'In future you and your colleagues on the Board of Directors will conduct all the Company's business under the supreme control of a Committee of two hundred elected shareholders (including yourselves), of whom eighty will be bitterly opposed to you and your policy, and will be perpetually endeavouring to turn you out and substitute a Chairman and Board chosen from among themselves. Any fairly large section will be able to raise a set debate on any part of the Company's business, or on any transaction they may select. The leaders of the eighty members opposed to you will be at liberty, whenever they think you have made a mistake at all serious, to propose that the Board, or at least the Director responsible for the mistake, shall be reprimanded; and if the proposal is carried, that Director, and perhaps the whole Board, will have to resign at once. Any member of the Committee will be entitled at any time to ask any question he chooses about any matter of the Company's business, from issues of broad policy down to the last detail, and to have a full and accurate reply within a few hours or at the most within two or three days. Finally, the Committee, with these rights and powers, will sit at the Company's head-quarters for several hours a day, on five days a week, for eight months of the year.' Do you not think that when the Chairman had been revived from his first stupor, he would gasp out: 'This is madness: no great business can be carried on like that, and I won't try'? But suppose that he is forced to accept the new conditions; then what will be the effects on the work and character of the Directors and of their principal subordinates?

First, they will be worked much harder than before.

Second, the business of the Committee will normally take precedence of everything else.

Third, two fresh qualities will be required by the Directors from their chief officials; judgement of the Committee's probable attitude towards new acts and proposals, and skill in marshalling justificatory facts and arguments.

Fourth, business will sometimes go more slowly; for a good official will submit to a Director many things in themselves trivial, because they are likely to provoke discussion in the Committee. It is not that the official doubts the wisdom of his own views or is afraid to act on them; it is much more the feeling of fair play: 'This may mean a row, and my chief, not I, will have to face it; it is not fair to him to run him in for it without giving him a chance of objecting.'

Fifth, both Directors and their subordinates will become less willing to take large risks in their enterprises—the subordinates from loyalty to the Directors, the Directors because their offices and their careers depend on the avoidance of mistakes. The ultimate reason is simple. An assembly meeting day after day deals with current affairs as they occur. When Directors have to face only an Annual General Meeting, they are judged on the whole record of the year; failures can be covered up or set off by successes. But with a supreme Committee meeting nearly every day for months together, a big mistake is taken by itself—it is the hot event of the day and a heaven-sent chance for the opposition party, invective is concentrated on it, and appeals to successes gained months before in quite different fields have little persuasive force. Even if the Directors as a body survive attack, there will be a bad mark against the particular Director responsible.

Sixth, for a similar reason both Directors and officials will be strongly inclined to follow regulations and precedents approved by the Committee, even when they are embarrassing. Defence is then easy.

Seventh, full records, always quickly available, will be required.

I have just given a rough but not, I think, unfair representation of some of the principal conditions under which Government Departments normally conduct their affairs, and of some of the main effects inevitably produced by those conditions on the work and character of the high official. Two principal conclusions are to be drawn.

Such conditions are unsuitable to a great executive business with an enormous mass of practical detail needing immediate decision. The Post Office, and other Departments such as the Inland Revenue, are not really examples to the contrary. They are old institutions with which party politics, and consequently to a large extent the House of Commons, have long ceased to concern themselves vigorously; they have little discretionary power; their policy (so far as they require one) and the regulations governing their work are laid down for them, sometimes minutely, by Act of Parliament or by the Treasury. But it would be very different with a new Ministry, established not by general agreement but after bitter controversy, to take over a national service formerly left to private enterprise—particularly if the service were such that it could not be worked without much liberty of individual discretion in details. The early history of an institution like the B.B.C. affords, I believe, but a faint idea of the difficulties and embarrassments, the frequent debates and multitudinous questions, which could and would be raised in Parliament by a party eager to obstruct and discredit the new Ministry. I do not say that it is absolutely impossible to carry on a large business under these conditions: I do say that they ought not to be imposed upon it.

It follows, in the second place, that the failings commonly imputed to the Higher Civil Service are not its true failings. The charges are mostly imaginative exaggerations of good and necessary qualities; where the failings are there, they arise from an excess of those qualities. Timidity, rigidity, slowness of decision and action, red tape, evasiveness, fear of responsibility—such imputations are the convex, so to speak, of the concave represented by close obedience to law and to the will of Parliament, loyalty to Ministers, prudence, moderation, impartiality, skill and discretion in speech and writing, the desire to meet the varying demands of the public and the House of Commons. These necessary virtues may of course sometimes go beyond the golden mean and pass into vices; the safeguards are natural energy and common sense. I have

known many high permanent officials, some of them very well; I have not observed that they have been generally deficient in these two antiseptic qualities. If in a great Department whose work lay within the battle-fields of party politics the higher staff were suddenly and entirely replaced by men of 'push and go' imported from commerce or industry, I would wager a modest sum that within three years some would have transferred themselves or been transferred elsewhere, and the others would have developed the very characteristics to which many critics of the Service point with lofty contempt.

What then are the true failings of the Higher Civil Service, and what are the tendencies which ought to be arrested? Intellectual ability of one kind or another, integrity, and industry are nearly universal throughout the small body of men and women with whom we are concerned, and the juniors from whom it is mainly recruited; and there are no signs that the supply is diminishing. But I do not think that quite the same can be said of the qualities required for success in the practical as opposed to the contemplative life. If I am asked to what I refer in particular, I recall a story I have read somewhere of an eminent judge who, being asked by a budding barrister what three qualities he thought most conducive to success at the Bar, replied, 'First, animal spirits; second, animal spirits; third, animal spirits'. The judge was no doubt exaggerating, and coarsening; but his words suggest a truth, old and considerable. Self-confidence, vigour, resolution, willingness to take responsibility and the power to bear it lightly, the ability to impress and lead others—these are more important than learning or intellect for any practical profession; and they are seldom found apart from vitality, or (if you prefer the phrase) nervous energy—not always associated with what doctors call a strong constitution, but sometimes with a frail and sickly body. A high official without some measure of this endowment, whatever his knowledge and his intellectual power, is not likely to be effective either in public or in the private conversations and small committees where most decisions of gravity are really taken. His opinion among his colleagues, his advice to his Minister, will not carry the weight they might carry in a world governed by pure reason, because they have little personal force behind them. Nor is he likely to be quick, ingenious, and bold in meeting sudden emergencies.

Rightly or wrongly, I think I have perceived another deficiency in an appreciable and increasing number of the Higher Civil Service and of the younger men from whom it is mainly chosen; a deficiency in understanding of the outside world and its affairs, including the habits, tastes, prejudices, and code of conduct of

classes and professions other than their own. I will illustrate what I mean by a short quotation from a letter written to me about a year ago by a civil servant of long and varied experience, distinguished both in the Service and by achievements outside it. These are his words: 'I should think myself from my own observation that what the young man who enters through examination at twenty-three needed was a general knowledge of the way in which the ordinary human being looks at things', and he goes on to suggest that the young man would benefit from some association with people 'whose conversation was more inclined to run on the probable winner of the Derby than on the eternal verities'.

These two failings—a certain feebleness of vitality, and a certain want of general understanding of men and affairs—are the main defects; but before I pass on to consider their causes I am anxious to make it clear that I do not think them to be at present universal, or even very common in the Higher Civil Service, least of all in the highest ranks. What I suggest is something quite different, viz. that that small body, and the juniors from whom it is mainly recruited, include an appreciable and growing number of men who suffer from one or both of them. Such men are not likely to attain to the highest offices; but when they are industrious, upright, and intellectually capable (as are nearly all of them) they are almost sure to reach a grade which connotes functions quite important, and, what is even more important, is also the natural field of selection for the greater offices. A diminution in the fertility and excellence of that field is not a trifling matter in its ultimate effects. The causes of these imperfections are deep-rooted and complex; but they may be generally comprehended in one phrase—the material rewards and prospects offered by the Administrative Class and the method of entry into it, taken in conjunction with the economic, social, and educational systems of the country. You may naturally expect me to translate this rather abstract phrase into something more concrete.

For many years past, those rewards and prospects have been such as to attract strongly boys and young men who have to make their way in the world without the help of well-to-do parents, influential relations and friends, and an assured social position. They have included a commencing salary on which a young man without expensive tastes can live in London comfortably; a practical certainty of reaching before he retires a salary of £1,100 a year, a high probability of £1,400–£1,500, a chance of £3,000 and a title; security in illness and old age; and security of tenure throughout. In two words, these conditions mean at the least economic safety; and they may mean far more, a considerable ascent on the economic and social ladder. Is it surprising if, for

this reason alone and apart from less material attractions, entry into the Administrative Class sometimes becomes a prime object of desire to an intelligent boy who can rely on nothing but his own exertions, who is perhaps one of three or four children of parents carrying on a struggling business in a London suburb or of a clerk in a bank or insurance company, or whose father is dead and his mother a widow living on a small annuity? Even if he himself does not grasp the situation at an early age, it is not obscure to parents and teachers ambitious on his behalf.

Such boys and youths are generally subject to two grave disadvantages—one only to be abolished by large changes in the economic and social system, the other not so deep-rooted but nevertheless difficult to remove.

The first is simply the circumstances of their parentage and upbringing. The qualities, the very valuable qualities, usually associated with a strong vitality are found in every class; but are they not less likely to develop in the children of parents with small incomes, with no assured economic security, and no assured social position based on that security, than in young people born and brought up in more favourable circumstances? And when the less fortunate become conscious of the difference, as they sometimes do, and remember their own scholastic efforts and attainments, they become liable to suffer from a certain falsity in their estimates of other people, and a certain uneasiness of personal relations with them, which are further impediments to their fitness for high office.

The second disadvantage to which a youth of this origin is subject is the long-continued tyranny of examinations. As we all know, entrance into the Administrative Class is achieved by defeating the great majority of the numerous competitors in an open examination, designed with reference to University studies, taken about the age of twenty-three, and mostly conducted by set papers of considerable severity. But this is only the last hurdle, though it is the highest. From the age of twelve or thirteen onwards a boy for whom his parents can do nothing beyond allowing him to remain at school must perpetually exert himself at the least to qualify, at the most to defeat other competitors, for the free places and scholarships required to carry him forward on the track that leads to the University and the Civil Service. Is it not certain that such a strain continued for so long at such an age must often have serious effects on brain and nerve? A few boys with exceptional ability or constitution may come out none the worse, or even toughened; but for many the pressure of the examination system impairs permanently the elastic and enduring vitality which is of no less value in the Higher Civil Service than in other professions.

There is even some ground for thinking that this burden will in the future be laid on still more of our young people. The satisfaction of the demand for what is known as 'equality of opportunity' means, I take it, in terms of education, that more children of parents with small incomes will be helped, presumably after some kind of test, to pass to places of higher education, culminating in the University. On the hypothesis that the Administrative Class retains its attractions for such young people, the consequence seems obvious—fiercer competition, and an increase, perhaps a rapid increase, in the number of candidates who enter it only after a long race over stiff hurdles.

The second failing which I have imputed to a growing number of the Higher Civil Service, and of the juniors from whom it is mainly recruited, is a certain lack of familiarity with and understanding of that vague entity 'the world', including particularly in this context human nature as it appears in the masses of the ordinary Briton. 'No man is a hypocrite in his pleasures', and I venture to offer a slightly frivolous illustration from British amusements. The majority of high officials, mature and budding, have probably seen the Derby, the University boat race, and some big cricket matches; but I doubt whether many have been in the crowd at a Cup Final or at a big greyhound race meeting, or (outside the Post Office and the Home Office) are acquainted with more than the name of football pools. Yet surely no one can be said to know much about the habits and tastes of the 'common man' in London, for instance, who connects the name of Woolwich Arsenal only with munitions, or Chelsea only with artists. It would be easy to provide examples from more serious, if not more characteristic, manifestations of popular tastes and habits. And similar remarks apply, though perhaps in a less degree, to the acquaintance or lack of acquaintance of the less well-to-do with the habits and ways of thought of their more fortunate fellow citizens.

These two imperfections seem to me the fundamental problems of the Higher Civil Service; far more fundamental than, for example, the question whether the Treasury should or should not retain its establishment functions. Men are more important than machinery in the Service as in other walks of life. If we can be sure of filling the high administrative posts, including the Treasury, with men of the right abilities and character, other questions will be settled without great trouble so far as their settlement depends on the civil servant.

I do not think that any immediate and complete solution can be expected for either of the two problems. On the special difficulty of the first—the tyranny of examinations—I speak with hesitation;

my audience must include some who, both as teachers and examiners, have gained an experience which I cannot claim. But speaking as an amateur, and on the assumption that the clever son of poor parents must undergo periodical tests (some of them competitive) on his way to the Administrative Class, I suggest that three principal questions arise. Can the number and frequency of these tests be reduced? Can their character be modified so as to give more weight to desirable qualities not usually to be detected and assessed from written replies to examination papers? And, lastly, if such modifications can be devised, will they leave the tests above any serious suspicion of unfairness in the eyes of competitors, parents, and public alike? The first two questions are beyond both my own capacity and the scope of this lecture: they are for experts in education and psychology. A satisfactory answer to the last is manifestly essential in the case of prizes offered from public money, particularly of the greatest prize of all, selection into the Administrative Class. In spite of the growing use of the interview (introduced years ago into the Civil Service examination) and of candidates' records, I feel a little uneasy lest any system that gives great weight either to the 'viva' before a special Board, or to the testimony of candidates' own teachers, may sink under accusations of favouritism, class prejudice, and the like, which could not be rebutted by appeals to objective fact. Here I must leave this subject, adding only that if from Oxford there can proceed suggestions which will be generally accepted as fairly meeting the difficulties, the University will have done not the least of its services to the Government and the nation.

The second imperfection I have ascribed to the Higher Civil Service and its apprentices, so to call them—the growing number of men who lack 'knowledge of the world'—arises mainly from causes even more deep-rooted than that with which I have just dealt; it arises from the economic and social divisions, subtle yet sharp, created by the character and history of the English people. Fortunately, some of these are disappearing before our eyes; and, moreover, the events of the last three or four years have led us to consider possibilities of post-war organization which will continue that process, or at least prevent its reversal—for instance, a period of compulsory national service, not necessarily military, to be spent under similar conditions by all young men without distinction of social or economic rank. It may be a mistake to expect too much from measures of this kind; enforced contact does not always breed mutual liking. But they should at least mitigate the inclination of every class to generalize about other classes, as though they were permanent aggregations of identical atoms instead of shifting multitudes of diverse persons. Again, the more widespread

continuance of education to a later age should soften some of the visible and audible differences, debated not long ago in the House of Lords, which mark and sharpen class distinctions. Finally, the mixture of classes in the great schools and in the Universities, already considerable, is clearly destined to increase; and I have no doubt that the governing authorities of such institutions do and will do all that authority can do, which perhaps is not very much, to discourage the natural tendency of like to segregate itself with like. The association of scholar and 'blood' (if this latter species still exists) is not always unconstrained, and sometimes produces odd and difficult collocations; but from my own experience, which I admit is now much antiquated, I should say that it is good for both.

Turning to the Higher Civil Service specifically, I can only offer two suggestions. The first I fear is Utopian, viz. that the burden of work falling on its members, and especially on the men at the top, should somehow be lightened so as to leave them more time and energy for life outside Whitehall and Westminster. The second is that members of the Administrative Class should be granted during their service two Sabbatical years, or at least half-years—the first to be taken at the age of about thirty, and to be spent in this country but in an occupation and environment totally dissimilar to anything they have known before; the second at the age of about forty-five, to be spent as a rule abroad. I have expounded these suggestions elsewhere, and cannot dwell on them now.

Hitherto I have dealt mainly with problems connected with the personal qualities of members of the Administrative Class; as I have already said, these are fundamental—much more so than questions of post-entry training, of organization, or of promotion. In all occupations the occupation itself is the best and indispensable training; in all of them organization is secondary to personnel; in all of them, whatever the system of promotion or lack of system, power tends naturally to go to strength and ability. But nevertheless these questions, if not fundamental, are important. There are three such matters closely affecting the future of the Higher Civil Service which cannot be passed over in silence. They are the proposal of a Civil Service Staff College, the method of selection for the highest posts, and the rewards attached to those posts.

The Civil Service Staff College, as explained in a recent Report of the Select Committee on National Expenditure, is to receive picked members of the administrative and professional grades, as well as promising members of the executive and clerical grades, after a few years' service. The syllabus might include courses in public administration and in modern developments in trade and

industry, economics, social services, &c.; the courses would be practical as well as theoretical; and, in addition, provision should be made for short refresher courses to meet individual needs. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has promised a special inquiry into this proposal, and meanwhile criticism may seem premature. But taking it as now presented, I do see certain difficulties and objections which ought to be fairly considered. I do not doubt that courses of the kind proposed would be of some immediate interest and value to some of the younger civil servants; but it is another question whether they would retain any substantial value by the time, fifteen or twenty years afterwards, that those young men had reached the higher ranks. I hope I do not underrate the importance of the juniors of the Administrative Class in themselves, of their work, and of training them to do it well; but nevertheless on a long view their main importance is as a field of selection for higher posts and ultimately for posts at the summit of the Service. In nearly all great organizations, the higher a man rises the less matters his technical knowledge and the more important become his general qualities of mind and character. Permanent Secretaries and Deputy Secretaries have little need of knowledge and skill that can properly be called technical, other than skill in their peculiar art of detailed government under the conditions of British Parliamentary democracy. In that art practice is the only teacher, and no Staff College can take its place. Nor can any Staff College do much to develop the personal qualities most necessary to a high official; so far as I know, not even American Universities offer short or refresher courses in sagacity, prudence, and common sense. Again, on really technical questions, of trade, industry, or economics for instance, a Government Department can command if it chooses the advice of able men who have spent their whole working lives in the theoretical or practical study of the subject; a Permanent Secretary or Deputy Secretary is not likely to be either so foolish as not to obtain such advice when it is wanted, or so stupid that he cannot understand it. It is not then clear what purpose exactly would have been served if twenty years before he had taken a short course in the then modern developments of those subjects. Finally, it is to be remembered that the practice of transferring men, particularly the higher officials, from one Department to another must depreciate all training and all knowledge that are not valuable everywhere in the Service.

But if a Staff College is established, I think there should be one important change in its character: it should not be limited to civil servants, or even to them plus the staffs of Local Authorities. It ought to be open to suitable members of the staffs of large and reputable business organizations, such as banks and railways, if

they desired to be admitted. Anything that tends to bring civil servants into contact with men of other professions or businesses is to be encouraged, and anything with the contrary tendency is a mistake. For this among other reasons, I suggest that if a case is ultimately made out for some kind of organized courses for junior civil servants, they would be better held at Universities than concentrated at a special institution. The analogies of the Naval and Military Staff Colleges are quite fallacious.

I turn now to the subject of promotion in the Higher Civil Service, with which are connected the much debated questions of the title 'Head of the Civil Service' and of the compulsory retirement, at a relatively early age, of men judged 'unfit for heavy responsibilities'. Whatever the historical or constitutional merits, the title by itself is of little importance; the real point is that it may be taken to mark and support the position of the Secretary to the Treasury as the principal and final adviser of the Prime Minister on promotion to the highest offices of the Service. It is inevitable and right that on such appointments the Treasury should have much influence. Alone among Departments it deals often and closely with nearly all other Departments. Its staff naturally acquire a personal knowledge of all their principal colleagues throughout the Service, and when a high office becomes vacant they should usually be better able than anyone else to compare the merits of all the possible candidates from within the Service. But for several reasons I do not think that this natural influence should be transmuted into anything approaching a decisive power. I have stated these reasons elsewhere, and I have seen no ground for altering the opinion to which they led me a year or two ago. Selection for the highest appointments should be in the hands of a small *ad hoc* committee, which would include representatives of other departments as well as one or two representatives of the Treasury, and would have as Chairman the Minister for the Department where the vacancy to be filled has arisen.

The proposal that the power of compulsory retirement on pension before the age of sixty should be more freely exercised to remove men judged unfit for heavy responsibilities has obvious attractions; but nevertheless there are strong arguments against it. The first is personal hardship. To remove a man in middle life from the Civil Service on such a ground is a very different thing from retiring naval and military officers because by a certain age they have not reached a certain rank; it marks him definitely as a failure, not as the victim of bad luck. And the Civil Service is the only business of its kind in the country. If a man is 'retired' from a great commercial or industrial firm—well, there are other firms where he may get a second chance, particularly if there is ground

for thinking that he has been hardly treated; but there is no other Home Civil Service. Secondly, and much more important, the independence of the Service *vis-à-vis* Ministers must be weakened, and its status lowered. Politicians have their likes and dislikes, sometimes unreasoning, as much as other men; and they do not all receive with calm and good temper impartial criticism of their party's and their own favourite schemes from their permanent officials. The power to get rid of an 'awkward' Secretary or Deputy Secretary may well be a great temptation to a Minister of decided views and autocratic disposition, even though the official is only doing his duty and is doing it well. The knowledge that the power exists must reinforce the influences, already strong, which make the modern civil servant inclined to agree with his Minister, and disinclined to argue his case vigorously when they disagree. Again, a Minister's power to remove a high official will be naturally combined with the determination that the vacancy shall be filled by a man who, he knows, will be acceptable to him. The consequent effects on the impartiality and independence of the Higher Civil Service may well be most serious in a time of great political strife and turmoil, when those qualities are most needed. Whatever may be the merits of the proposal for the Foreign Service, I suggest that for the Home Service it ought to be adopted, if at all, only with strong safeguards against abuse.

The last question on which I propose to say a few sentences may seem slightly sordid, but it is and will be of importance unless human nature after the war is different from what it used to be; it is the professional rewards of the high official, and in particular their disparity with the rewards of success in other professions, including 'business'. If after the war we see more Boards or Commissions established by the State to control large undertakings for the benefit of the community, and if, as I should expect, a civil servant is sometimes chosen to be Chairman or a whole-time member of Boards composed mainly of business men from commerce and industry, that disparity must become even more obvious and disquieting. It is not only, or perhaps mainly, a question of money, though that may be not unimportant even in the post-war world. After a year or two the ex-official appointed to a Board of this nature is sure to be far more his own master, and is likely to have far less work, and far less harassing work, than in his old Department, with the Minister close at hand and the House of Commons not far off. For years before the war there were manifest signs of the operation of such comparisons among the Higher Civil Service; after the war they may well operate even more strongly, with consequences which can hardly be thought satisfactory to the Service as such. The remedy for the disparity of monetary rewards

is obvious, though it may not be politically feasible; I can see none for the disparity of other conditions. The burden on the high official, like that on Ministers, is created by the character of the British people, the British Constitution, and the House of Commons.

You will have gathered from this lecture that in my opinion, as dispassionate as I can make it, on the whole that burden is borne skilfully and stoutly. Remember the saying of a wise man, experienced and eminent in British politics, 'Government is a very rough business, and you must be content with very imperfect results'; compare our government and administration, not with the ideal Government which never has existed on this earth and never will, but with any Government, past or present, of a community of forty millions or more. Errors are made; the British Government and Civil Service are human; the price of efficiency is eternal vigilance. Vigilance is not entirely lacking inside the Service; and certainly not lacking outside it, where reign a free Parliament and a free press. Most civil servants have sense enough to welcome and respect criticism when it is reasonable, and is guided by knowledge of what they really do and of the conditions in which they do it. A proper vigilance and a fair criticism can be directed to nothing more vital to the whole Service than the mind and character of the few hundred men at and near its summit. If they are what they should be, what on the whole they have been since the Service assumed its modern form, then the country will be able to encounter the problems of the future with some confidence in at least one group of its counsellors and agents.